GRAFT IN RUSSIA.

Empire's Fate Now Hanging in the Balance.

THE PERIL NOT FROM JAPAN

Corruption at Home May Cause a Revolution.

Growing Indignation Against the Grand Ducal Cabal, Who Are the Real Rulers of Russia—Vast Corruption Charged Against Them—The Four Men Accused of Using an Empire to Enrich Themselves—Will Other Assassinations Follow That of De Plehve—Benevolent Theory and Practical Working of the Russian Autocracy—The Czar a Weakling Unable to Cope With His Difficulties—The Reactionary Programme.

ST. PETERSBURG, Aug. 31.—It is but natural that the world's attention should be engrossed by the stirring campaign in the Far East and that comparatively little thought should be given to the equally dramatic and more important crisis in the life of the Russian Empire which has developed in its capital city.

Here in St Petersburg the fate of Russia is hanging in the balance. The war with Japan might close to-morrow, and Russia's destiny would be but little affected by the episode. All the real elements in the crisis are here, and here will be decided the momentous question of the rise or fall of the present dynasty and Government.

The words are ominous. They seem to imply pending revolution, but revolution in the form of popular revolt will not come. In no country on earth are the precautions against rebellion so complete, and nowhere else would its attempt be so hopeless. But Governments are sometimes overthrown from the top; and this danger is never absent in an autocracy which is presided over by a weak and vacillating monarch.

The Western world has been told many times during the past few months that the real rulers of Russia are a group of nobles, who, by one means or another, control the Emperor and dominate the policy of the empire. No one has attemped to point out who are these mysterious individuals and what are their motives and methods.

The late M. de Plehve was merely their representative, and a very able executor he was of their stern and inexorable policy. His tragic and well deserved fate has produced a temporary confusion and uncertainty in the plans of his masters. The uncertainty is not due to any relenting in the tyrannical designs of the real oppressors of Russia, but instead to some natural reluctance on the part of the Czar to sanction still sterner measures of repression.

The people of a free country can have little conception of the peril to which this unhappy man would expose himself in a serious rupture with his mentors. Let it be remembered that the assassins of his grandfather were not Nihilists, as Russia gave the world to suppose, but the agents of his own entourage, who took this means of frustrating the Czar's intention to grant a constitution to his people.

But it is necessary, in order to understand something of the silent life and death struggle of an empire, now at its crisis in Peterhof and St. Petersburg, to breathe the atmosphere of Russian institutions and to seek to place one's self in the Russian point of view. So I ask the reader to glance for a moment at everyday life in this capital, and see wherein it differs from that of an English or American city.

There is nothing in the outward aspect of St. Petersburg to suggest the existence of the most pitiless despotism of modern times.

The stranger is astonished at the absence of nearly all signs of authority. No uniformed police patrol the streets of the Russian capital.

But the streets, nevertheless, swarm with police. If you stop to examine the photographs of the imperial family and of prominent officials in a shop window, the chances are you will soon be under the keen scrutiny of three or four pairs of eyes, and if your interest should be persistent, you may be sure your footsteps will be dogged unobtrusively until your identity is established.

There is nothing offensive in the treatment of foreigners by the Russian police system. They may live with the same freedom—unless, unhappily, they have Semitic blood in their veins—as in any other land, the only restriction being that they must give a day's notice to the porter at their hotel or to the concierge at their lodgings of any intended change of domicile, temporary or otherwise. Then the intricate machinery of passports comes into operation.

The Russian passport system is the most effective safeguard against crime known to modern institutions. Its rules are stringent and they are strictly enforced.

No person may remain away from his ordinary domicile more than one night without the fact being reported to the police by the householder, concierge or other person in control of the building. The arrival of any person for a similar length of time must likewise be reported.

One effect of this surveillance, combined with the severe punishments inflicted, is that larceny, embezzlements and all minor offences are far more rare in Russia than in any country on earth. Escape is practically impossible, once a crime is discovered.

Employers are secure in the enforced fidelity of their servants. The domestic servant problem, for instance, does not exist in Russia. Thieving and absconding servants are unknown. A cook who left her place without notice would be promptly lodged in jail.

So it comes about that Russia is honest in the non-criminal sense of the word. It is an honesty of compulsion, perhaps, but this form of Russian "tyranny" is just and equitable. Only in its public service is the country hopelessly corrupt, and there the corruption exists by tacit consent, and it is willingly universal.

You may rob the State with impunity, but private property is sacred. That seems to be in practice if not in theory the Russian code. The Admiral who buys coal for his ships in a foreign port secures as vouchers through a middleman receipts for a much larger sum than the actual price, and he and certain of his subordinates pocket the difference. Almost every contractor who furnishes supplies must pay tribute to officials amounting to the full actual value of the goods or even more, and the price to the Government is increased accordingly.

There is apparently a peculiar moral differentiation between swindling and direct theft. Thus such operations as those just mentioned are considered quite *comme il faut*. But a minor official who embezzles from public funds in his charge runs great danger of severe punishment on detection.

Even the boldest of such crimes, however, often go unpunished. The last great robbery of the publicly subscribed Red Cross funds, one of the most detestable national scandals of the time, has brought no retribution to the high placed thieves. These thefts, according to common report, amounted to no less than 75 per cent. of the whole sum contributed in Russia and abroad.

As it is in high places, so it is in low. Every minor official must have his bit. His methods are different, for in most cases he has no opportunity to plunder indirectly the public purse. If he is included in the general machine that draws dividends from the payment of contracts, he gets a proportion of the graft, according to his position. If his duties have to do with the enforcement of laws and regulations, then he blackmails the public precisely in accordance with the system of Tammany in its worst days.

A single instance will illustrate the whole procedure. A dog ran from its house into the street the other day without its muzzle. Its owner the next day was fined $1.50. There is no trial and no appeal in such cases; the offender is simply notified to pay. Within a few hours the dog owner in question received calls from three or four individuals, each of whom politely intimated that if the matter was made right with him the annoyance of a fine would not occur again.

Another every day incident which came under my observation this week shows the wonderful thoroughness of the passport system and the motives which underlie its strict enforcement.

A Russian clerk having an apartment in the city took a room in the suburbs for a few weeks and duly notified the police that he intended to spend his nights in this temporary abode. It happened that he was detained in town late on a stormy evening, and he went for the night to his old lodging.

A day or two later he was summoned by the passport officials to explain this procedure. He was told very sternly that he had violated the regulations and that he could not be registered in two domiciles at the same time without special permission.

Being a wise Russian, he slipped a three-ruble note into the official's hand, escaped a ten-ruble fine and was graciously informed that in future he might sleep in whichever lodging he pleased.

It should be borne in mind that St. Petersburg is and has been for years under martial law, but its operation, aside from the stringent regulations of the passport system, places no restrictions upon the liberty of its inhabitants. No law abiding Petersburger is fettered in any way in his business or in his amusements.

On the contrary, it is impossible to withhold a strong tribute of admiration which is compelled by the businesslike administration of this clean, well ordered, splendidly built city. There are lessons to be learned here by the urban dwellers of the American democracy, and it cannot be said that an irresponsible autocracy is a failure in its application to municipal government.

There fell into my hands a few days ago a curious book, which was compiled and published in English privately by the Czar's direction about ten years ago. Its object was to present to the young Empress a general view of Russian government and institutions from the Russian standpoint.

It is entitled "The Statesman's Handbook for Russia," and it is "edited by the Chancery of the Committee of Ministers." Some of its utterances are so ingenuous and withal so enlightening that I cannot refrain from quoting a few sentences. What, for instance, could match this attempt to place an autocracy in a favorable light before democratic eyes?

The Russian Emperor is called autocratic to distinguish him from constitutional monarchs, as he does not share his sovereign rights with any institutions or class in the State. Consequently the Government of the Russian empire rests upon a firm foundation of law, proceeding from the autocratic power.

"This fact gives to the whole order of the state in Russia a lawful character, which thereby differentiates it from arbitrary forms. It implies that in Russia the law alone determines both the rights of power and the obligations of subjects. Such a rule is in no way opposed to the principle of autocracy, as it always lies in the sovereign power of the Emperor to abrogate this or that law.

Greater authority and power than that which is thus ascribed to the Russian Emperor it is impossible to imagine. It is further indicated in the personal control of the administration of justice, which is set forth in this extract:

Though the duty of justice consists exclusively in the exact applicaton under his Majesty's authority (by ukase) of the acting laws in separate cases, nevertheless the monarch confirms the verdicts of the courts of law, as far as regards the deprivation of the rights of nobility, officials, church functionaries and all persons possessing orders or badges of distinction; as no subordinate power can enforce deprivation of what has been granted by the sovereign power.

Not only is the Czar himself free from the trammels of the law in governing his empire, but he extends the same exemption to his Ministers. This extension of authority is described thus:

Ministers in cases not admitting of delay may exceed the limits of their legal authority and are only bound subsequently to prove the urgency of the measures adopted. The legislation of recent years has more and more frequently left it to Ministers to issue orders not only for the fulfilment of existing laws, but also for their amplification, as the law determines only general principles and necessitates the elaboration of details by means of ministerial circulars. * * * In principle, Ministers may not try any person or impose punishment, but in detail this rule is subject to certain material exceptions.

As a matter of fact, the prisons of St. Petersburg, especially the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, are crowded to-day with prisoners, held without trial by administrative order.

It is obvious that an autocracy of the character indicated in this curious handbook can be maintained only by the coöperation of an immense and on the whole loyal personnel. It likewise goes without saying that unless the head of the State is a man of commanding force of character his entourage will be honeycombed by rivalries and intrigue.

As soon as inquiry is directed to the vast machinery of the civil service the secret of the policy adopted for safeguarding the Russian aristocracy is disclosed.

The great majority of public servants are simply useless parasites upon the body politic. In no other country has the bureaucracy developed into such an immense burden upon the State. Nowhere else has every public function been reduced to such an involved and absurd system of circumlocution.

There are two methods of dealing with individuals or groups whom the Government may regard as dangerous. One is repression in some form—banishment to Siberia or a distant province; the other is to add them to its own ranks, as feeders from the public crib.

The latter plan has been followed to an extent that is almost beyond belief. Department, after department has been created, hive after hive of great office buildings has been built in St. Petersburg for this purpose. It is said to be literally true, for instance, that there are as many clerks upon the pay roll of the office for dog licenses in St. Petersburg as there are dogs in the capital.

Tammany in its most audacious days never dreamed of such a system of graft as exists here. It has grown into such an octopus that the nation is at its mercy. Nothing but a revolution could destroy it.

Moreover, it continues to grow. Another important addition will be created at the end of the year, when the Government will establish a system of public life insurance. Minor extensions of the civil service are constantly being added in the older departments. It is probably true that a considerable majority of the population of nearly a million inhabitants of St. Petersburg exist upon funds drawn directly or indirectly from the imperial treasury.

It needs no argument to demonstrate that sooner or later this evil alone must force a crisis in Russian destinies. No man in Russia, reformer or otherwise, dares to grapple seriously with the problem. The bureaucracy and the Church are throttling the prosperity of Russia, and it is an open question which will bring first the inevitable disaster.

It is necessary in the interests of truth to speak in the frankest terms of the influence of the Greek Church upon Russian life. It is a subject of the utmost practical importance, for it is the Church more than the Government, more indeed than any other obstacle, which has held back the march of progress in Russia.

To mention first what may seem a trifling matter, it is the Church which insists upon the retention of the Russian calendar, which is thirteen days slower than the true record. It may be imagined that religious tradition and conservatism account for the opposition to such an obvious reform. Not so. The real reason is that the change would confuse the arrangement of the calendar of religious holidays and would operate to abolish many of them.

We must go still deeper for the underlying motive. Last week the Czar received a heavy petition from southern Russia, praying him as head of the Church as well as head of the State to cancel some of the compulsory holidays which now restrict the energies of his subjects. This suggestion will be earnestly and probably successfully opposed by all the influence which the Greek Church can bring to bear.

Will it be believed that there are in the Russian calendar some eighty secular days in each year when ordinary labor is prohibited? It must be obvious that a heavy handicap is thus imposed upon the prosperity of a nation.

It means that no less than 25 per cent. of ordinary labor-productive opportunity is cancelled. In other words, a livelihood for 365 days must be gained by 233 days' work.

Here lies the secret of the hard struggle of the Russian masses with poverty. No nation under the freest political institutions could prosper under such conditions.

Russia is an agricultural country. A smaller proportion of her population live in cities than in any other civilized nation. The imposition of enforced idleness upon the peasant farmers is peculiarly onerous.

Before the emancipation of the serfs, the manifold holiday system was a welcome boon to them. They cared little for the material prosperity of their masters. Now their livelihood depends upon their own exertions.

They cannot win enough from the soil for themselves and their families unless they are permitted to make full use of their powers. Hence we have in Russia to-day a social phenomenon never known elsewhere—an agitation by toilers themselves in favor of the abolition of holidays.

The Church will not, if it can avoid it, yield a single one of its compulsory saint days. Why? Simply because on every such day the people go at least once to church, and each attendance, means a contribution of a few kopecks or more to the priest's coffers.

The treasure of the Church in money and jewels amounts to a fabulous sum. It is, in fact, unless well informed Russians are deceived, better able to supply the sinews of war in the present struggle in the Far East than the imperial treasury itself.

Your drosky driver industriously crosses himself every time he passes a church. So do the lower classes upon the streets. But the attitude of the people toward the priesthood—all priests are called popes—is one of contempt more than of respect.

This is due to the dissolute habits and the grasping covetousness of a large proportion of those who wear the livery of the Church. Every religious function which a priest performs for an individual is first the subject of sharp bargaining. Even then if the possibility of further extortion presents itself, it is usually attempted.

A woman was dying in an apartment on the fourth floor of a building where I happened to be calling the other day, and a priest had been sent for. He came—as far as the second landing.

Then a messenger was sent up the remaining flights to say that the pope was tired and wanted another 50 rubles. The man of God was engaged in an angry altercation with the family of the sufferer when I passed the group on the stairs. It is no uncommon thing, by the way, to see a priest drunk in the streets of St. Petersburg.

The Church is responsible also for grave social evils in Russia. It permits no marriages between the faithful and those outside its ranks, and it prohibits divorce. But Russia comprises many races and many religions, and so it happens that nowhere are illegal unions so numerous and illegitimacy so common. The evil is so widespread that it excites no comment and carries no disgrace.

It has been important to enter into this discussion of social and political conditions in Russia in order to deal intelligently with the grave problem of the immediate situation.

It may well be asked how it is in the power of any monarch, however autocratic, to cope with the difficulties which I have barely outlined and with many others of lesser magnitude. It should always be remembered in criticising the Czar's administration that he is not responsible for most of the evils which he is called upon to combat.

The most serious of them came to him with his crown. They had flourished under far stronger Czars, who were helpless to control them. It is the misfortune and not the fault of the present ruler that in his reign they have reached such proportions that they threaten to destroy the whole fabric of the State.

Neither is it his fault that he is able to offer a much feebler resistance to the internal enemies of Russia than some of his predecessors. One shrinks from the thankless task of criticising an unhappy sovereign for failing to show capacity for statecraft which he does not possess.

Condemned by the accident of birth to the most terrible task that could be assigned to man, it cannot be wondered at that from the first he quailed before his responsibilities. It was in the awful moment of his grandfather's assassination that he first rebelled against fate.

Then but a child, he wept bitterly, not only in grief, but in self-commiseration, and he protested vehemently against his destiny. Never since that day, it is said, have his exalted position and his power brought him satisfaction and happiness.

His bitterness is increased by a keen realization of his limitations and incapacity. More than once he has expressed an earnest desire to abdicate his throne. A strong sense of duty, the knowledge that his retirement would place the sceptre in still weaker hands than his own, have kept him at his post.

Let it be said without reservation that it is the Emperor's sincere desire to be at peace with all the world, to infringe no rights of other nations, and to defend and foster in every way the best interests of his people. It would seem to be impossible to reconcile this attitude with Russia's perfidy toward the Powers in her ante-bellum policy in Manchuria and with the flagrant violation of his coronation oath in his recent treatment of the people of Finland. How has he been persuaded that the Russian course in these two matters is consistent with honor?

The judicial faculty is sadly lacking in him. A clever pleader usually succeeds in impressing upon him one side of a question as comprising the whole question. The Czar's logic is so defective that it often fails to supply him with the opposite and perhaps stronger arguments.

If the other side be subsequently presented to him he readily alters his point of view and his opinion—hence the common saying in St. Petersburg that the Czar's views are those of the last man with whom he has conversed. The matter has become a by-word, and sad it is for Russia that this thing should be true.

It is related as a recent instance that a few weeks ago a Minister submitted a certain feature of policy for the Emperor's approval. The project was fully explained from the Minister's point of view, and the Czar indorsed the paper in the usual form, "Let this be done."

The matter, as it happened, involved another department as well as the one in which it originated. The head of the second department—for there is little coöperation and often keen rivalry between members of the Cabinet—appeared before the Emperor and earnestly opposed the measure which his colleague had presented.

He argued to such good purpose that he finally went away with his project indorsed "Let this be done" above the imperial signature. Of course, confusion followed, and the rival Ministers appeared in turn before the Emperor. There was more vacillation, until at the end Nicholas wrote upon one of the papers, it does not matter which, "Let this finally be done."

The control of the Church over the Emperor is easily maintained. He is not only intensely religious, but superstitious to an appalling degree. The influence of signs, dreams, soothsayers, clairvoyants and other occult pretenders has sometimes been pernicious and dangerous, especially during the past year or two.

We have now gained perhaps some idea of the conditions under which Russian policy must be formulated and administered. If the Emperor possessed the rare knowledge of human nature of his uncle, King Edward, and the capacity to select men of ability and trust as his chief lieutenants, Russia might still prosper despite his own shortcomings in statecraft. The latter faculty is not entirely absent in him, but unfortunately it is not impossible to undermine his confidence in his ablest assistants.

It is inevitable, even in an autocracy, that men of influence should be divided between two rival political policies. There are not two parties in Russia, for such a definite division of political opinion is not permitted to exist. Two ill defined groups is a better designation, and they may be roughly defined as liberal and reactionary.

M. de Witte may be named as the best representative of liberal ideas, and Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovitch, holding the new post of Minister of Commerce, is certainly the leader of the repressive policy which has recently controlled the Czar and Russia.

The struggle between these two sets of opinions has been silently waged since the liberation of the serfs. The three latest Emperors—Alexander II., Alexander III. and Nicholas until recently—have been liberal at heart and inclined to grant a larger measure of liberty to the Russian people. The first opposed the policy of the reactionaries at the cost of his life. The second, although by no means lacking in courage, refrained from making himself a martyr to the same cause. The third knows full well that he is at the mercy of those who would keep Russia under the heel of oppression, and he has yielded almost unreservedly to their demands.

Fortunately, the victims of Russian tyranny—the tyranny only nominally of the Czar—understand his helplessness. No bomb from the same source as that which killed De Plehve will ever be directed against the Emperor. Danger of his assassination may arise, it may already exist, but it will come from quite another direction.

The reactionary group in Russia has never given to the world any explanation of its views and policy. It is typical of their entire attitude that they have scorned to do so.

Yet from their own point of view their position is not without logic. To them the world is Russia and Russian traditions.

They regard the cardinal principles of democracy as false to the point of absurdity. The doctrine of equality seems to them subversive of human society.

To educate the masses is but to breed discontent. The vast majority, in Russia at all events, must live by tilling the soil. It is the reverse of kindness to create in them appetites which cannot be satisfied, ambitions which cannot be realized.

They see in the history of republican institutions the proof of their ideas. They expect America to furnish the earliest demonstration of the truth of their beliefs.

They are confident that the great republic is rushing toward anarchy, ruin and, as the result, a primitive despotism. Education of the laboring classes has bred insubordination. Labor combinations, strikes, riots, increasing lawlessness will certainly culminate in civil war more awful than any struggle the world has known.

It is from such a fate that the reactionary nobles would save Russia. Some of them would be glad to see serfdom reestablished in some form, but I doubt if any of them have any practical scheme in mind with that object in view.

I put forward these arguments of reactionary Russians with some emphasis because, although they are repugnant to the democratic mind, it is but fair to present the case from the Russian standpoint, and because they have a certain basis in the natural laws of social economy which cannot be ignored by the most ardent advocates of liberty and free education.

It is not sufficient for their refutation to point to the miseries of the Russian peasantry. I have failed in my preliminary presentations of Russian conditions if I have not made it clear that peasant suffering is due not so much to ignorance and the form of government as it is to corruption, overtaxation and the false economic restrictions imposed by Church influence. It is quite possible that the Russian masses might be fairly prosperous and enjoy a good share of human happiness under an autocracy honestly administered and free from religious intolerance.

Liberal Russia has no definite programme. It cannot have under existing circumstances, for all agitation and political organization is prohibited. It hopes for a constitution and for the creation of a representative national legislature. It believes in the building of railways, in the encouragement of internal commerce, in the extensive development of manufacturing industries, in the improved treatment of natural resources, in a freer education—in a word, in national progress as understood by Western nations.

These ideas need no elaboration for enlightened readers. In Russia they scarcely penetrate to the masses of the people and they are by no means a living issue in the body politic. They spell sedition in the minds of the ruling classes and nothing short of a revolution can bring them within the area of practical politics.

The present relentless application of iron heeled oppression throughout Russia and in Finland is largely due to the alarm among the nobles caused by the introduction of the liberal policy of M. de Witte. It must not be inferred that this enlightened statesman advocates for Russia reforms which would bring her within range of Western ideas of progress. He is far too wise to place himself in such a position.

He has not sought to disturb existing institutions. His influence has been confined strictly to commercial, financial and economic problems. So far from condemning, he has not hesitated to make use of the severest weapons of the autocracy.

A well known incident during the term of his financial ministry will illustrate this. A St. Petersburg banker, exasperated by one of M. de Witte's measures, exclaimed angrily in conversation with some friends on the steps of the Bourse:

"De Witte is a damned swine."

That afternoon the banker disappeared. His friends ascertained by dint of energetic inquiry some days later that he was in jail by administrative order. They brought every possible influence to bear and finally gained the concession of the unfortunate man's release, but his bank ceased to exist from that time.

M. de Witte, nevertheless, is the ablest and most progressive public man in Russia. His enemies, who have deprived him of much of his power, and who would destroy him if they could, are unable to do so, because his services are almost indispensable to the country in dealing with the financial problems of the war.

The story of his overthrow is the record of the triumph of the Grand Ducal régime, which now controls Russia and which is responsible for the present situation.

The Grand Dukes gained their ascendancy over the Emperor but gradually. Neither De Witte nor Lamsdorff is an expert courtier, and they were not able to spend much time in sycophancy or in safeguarding the Emperor's confidence in themselves. They were undermined with elaborate and insidious skill.

Their danger first became apparent when the Czar created the post of Minister of Commerce for Grand Duke Alexander. De Witte vigorously opposed the project, and, having failed, he was indiscreet enough to make difficulties in the financing of the new department.

Alexander soon demonstrated his superior influence at court, and the decline of the De Witte policy was rapid. It became the aim of the Grand Ducal group to throw all possible political power into the hands of De Plehve and Alexieff. In this they succeeded completely.

De Plehve won his position by sheer ability and force of character. He was the ideal executor of the reactionary policy. He was honest, broad and implacable. He was also cruel, merciless and mistaken.

He filled the prisons, massacred the Jews, sacrificed the liberty of the Finns, and finally incited the only retaliation available against tyrrany in Russia—assassination. The wonder is that a man of his intelligence should have brought upon himself so inevitable a fate.

But those who supported him are still unshaken in their policy. That they are determined and unscrupulous men goes without saying.

It must not be inferred that their motives are altogether corrupt. Some of them are so. The well known story of the Yalu timber conspiracy, which is largely responsible for the present war, is sufficient proof of the greed and dishonesty which largely prevail among the Russian aristocracy.

Alexieff's retention in power, by the way, is a mystery which excites no surprise in Russia. The explanation so generally accepted that it almost amounts to common knowledge is to the effect that the Asiatic Viceroy is the son of Alexander II. by an Armenian mother, and therefore the natural uncle of the Czar. It is quite the custom in Russia to provide liberally for the "left-hand side" of the family.

There is plenty of honest support of a reactionary policy among the Russian nobles. They have not robbed the Government and they do not seek to do so. They believe, for reasons already described, that the safety and future wellbeing of Russia can only be secured by the firm, strong hand of authority. Their influence, combined with that of the personally ambitious and dishonest conspirators, dominates the present situation.

But the Grand Ducal policy has already been carried too far. The murder of Plehve was not an isolated protest, it was one of the signs that the limit of endurance has been reached.

The mad recklessness of a policy which has plunged the country into a war for which it was utterly unprepared, which has driven its most prosperous province to the verge of rebellion and has alienated the sympathy of the entire world, is bitterly resented even by many who are opposed to Witte's liberalism. The war is intensely unpopular outside the official classes.

Open resistance to the prevailing policy is hopeless. Passive resistance is exercised to an extent which Russia is striving to conceal from the outside world.

The orders for reserve troops to join the colors are entirely ignored in whole provinces, and the Government has not force enough to compel obedience. The Czar's attempt to arouse a patriotic response by his public appeals during his recent tour was a complete failure. His name is openly reviled daily in the streets and cafés of Odessa. Throughout southern Russia his prestige is gone and loyalty has disappeared.

But a people without arms cannot rebel. Authority is maintained in each district by troops drafted from some distant province usually unsympathetic by reason of racial or other differences with the people whom they are assigned to control. The danger of a refusal of the soldiers to fire upon a mob is thus obviated.

Intelligent Russia is learning, fortunately, to analyze the evil influences of which the Emperor is the victim. Honest reactionaries are becoming thoroughly alarmed by the crimes and corruption of the small group who have brought the empire to the verge of ruin. These plunderers of Russia are all members of the imperial family, near relatives of the Czar. They are:

Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovitch, who married the Emperor's favorite sister, Grand Duchess Xenia.

Grand Dukes Vladimir, Alexis and Serge, the brothers of Alexander III.

These are the men whom the Autocrat of All the Russias permits to wield his sceptre.

The domination of their will over the Emperor is no new thing. All his life Nicholas has been accustomed to subordinate himself to his uncles, and his accession to the throne made no difference. For the past year or two the influence of the brother-in-law has increased above that of the uncles, but there has been no rivalry in policy among them.

Tall, dark, with aquiline features and strikingly handsome is Alexander Michaelovitch. He is 44, eight years the senior of the Emperor. He is the fourth son of the Grand Duke Michael and grandson of Nicholas I. His mother was a Princess of Baden, who was probably not wholly royal by blood, as the Russians put it.

Alexander's upbringing was neither very happy nor very luxurious. His father was a strict disciplinarian, who had a large family but a very moderate fortune. He married, when quite young, the Emperor's sister.

They have six children and enjoy the distinction of being almost the only Grand Ducal couple who live on terms of loyalty to each other. Their home is at Peterhof, near the palace of the Czar, and they are in his company every day.

Alexander's first appointment was that of Vice-Admiral-in-Chief, under his uncle, Grand Duke Alexis. He resigned this post after a short time, but he has now resumed it in addition to his Cabinet place.

The resignation followed on a quarrel arising from the foundering of a Russian battleship in the Baltic about ten years ago. Certain naval officers declared that the vessel was unseaworthy and that her watertight bulkheads were shams, and they induced Alexander to procure the Emperor's consent to a general inspection of other ships.

The result was complete proof that Alexis and his friends had been diverting shipbuilding money to their own pockets and that the whole fleet suffered from inferior equipment. The highly placed thieves whom he had helped to expose soon made Alexander's place too hot to hold him, and he left the navy for a few years. In his retirement he made up his mind to leave hornets' nests alone in future, and to-day "help yourself" is the recognized system in both the departments with which he is connected.

During recent years money has become more and more important to Alexander. He has no private fortune; he has a large family, and he is on the wrong side of the throne. Under such circumstances the adventurer Bezobrazoff found him an easily enlisted co-conspirator when he wanted an imperial charter for the Yalu Timber Company, and the Grand Duke was soon in the thick of the whole Manchurian gamble.

Voronzoff-Dashkoff, the head of the Czar's household, and Avelan, acting Minister of Marine, joined in the petition for the charter. They became the nucleus of the war party. That part of the story has been fully told by the St. Petersburg correspondent of THE SUN and it need not be repeated here.

A year ago Alexander induced the Emperor to create for him the Department of Commercial Navigation, which was undoubtedly intended to assist his speculations in the Far East. Witte's opposition, as has been explained, brought about the latter's downfall.

In character, Alexander is narrow, opinionated, arrogant and unscrupulous. He was solely responsible for the raid upon neutral shipping by the volunteer fleet, and it is an open question whether his real object was not to embroil the Powers.

Fortunately, Lamsdorff was able to make the consequences so clear to the Czar's mind that he drew back. There is no sign, however, that Alexander's recklessness has lessened his influence with the Emperor.

Vladimir is a man of wholly different stamp. It is difficult to understand by what means he maintains his influence over the Emperor, unless it be that he is the eldest of the uncles to whom he has always been accustomed to look as his seniors in knowledge of the world.

Vladimir and his two sons, Cyril and Boris, have established notorious records by their profligate and dissolute lives. Their habits approximate closely those of the detested group of Austrian Grand Dukes whom Emperor Francis Joseph has removed from the line of succession, and who have been driven from Vienna by the decent sense of their countrymen, noble and humble alike.

Alexis, the head of the fleet, is a much quieter man. He has succeeded in keeping matrimonial bonds out of his morganatic alliances, which are his chief preoccupation.

Some of the actresses at the French theatre are much bejewelled by him. It was one of his mistresses who recently acted as go-between in Paris in a deal for the purchase of certain foreign ships for Russia. She succeeded in collecting a cash commission of $300,000, and then the deal fell through.

Serge, the youngest of the three, is military governor of Moscow. He is the leading Jewbaiter of the family, and he will not allow a Jew to pass the night in the city of Moscow.

All three, but Vladimir more especially, are thieves of public money and private subscriptions. Money for the army, for the navy, for the hospital funds, has to pay toll in millions of rubles as it passes through their hands. Their hangers on, whose name is legion, copy them with zeal.

The very church, built on the scene of the assassination of the reforming Czar Alexander II., whose death was undoubtedly ordered by his reactionary relatives, stands uncompleted, although it was begun twenty-two years ago, and the money was subscribed several times over by the Russian people. No one expects that it will be completed in this generation. It is the murdered Czar's sons, the three Grand Dukes above named, who are the treasurers.

It would seem conclusive to Western judgment that in the situation which has been described Russia finds herself face to face with an imminent and perilous crisis of all her destinies. A political convulsion, more or less violent and far reaching, appears to be more than probable.

But it must not be forgotten that cause and effect are separated by greater distance in Russia than in Western lands. He would be the most foolish of prophets who attempted to forecast with any definiteness the outcome of this crisis.

Anything may happen in Russia; it is usually the unexpected thing. The uncertainty is intensified by the present interregnum in the internal administration. The appointment of de Plehve's successor, which may be made before this letter is published, will be of momentous importance, as indicating the latest attitude of the Emperor.

Should it become apparent that the Grand Ducal cabal still controls the imperial policy, then the immediate outlook for Russia will indeed be critical. Unhappily, there are no indications that this sinister influence is waning.

But Russia is great in men and in patriotism, as well as in natural resources. The conspiracy against her is becoming daily more clearly defined and better understood by Russians of high degree, who love their country and who would rescue her from plunderers and from impending disaster. It is becoming more and more evident that only drastic remedies can accomplish her salvation. Courage to apply them is necessary and is not lacking, but the difficulties in the way are almost insuperable.

The dissatisfaction in high places is greater in the provinces than in St. Petersburg. The army is by no means free from it.

Certain provincial Governors deplore the existing régime, and their power in the sections over which they preside is supreme. Is coöperation feasible between them and some of the military authorities and other disaffected leaders and nobles in the capital? If so, then a coup d'état might succeed.

But espionage in Russia has been reduced to such an exact science that a widespread plot of this nature would be exceedingly dangerous, if not certain of detection. The peculiarly Russian weapon of assassination is more likely to be tried first.

There is no doubt that this danger already exists for Alexander, if not for the other Grand Dukes who have been named. M. de Witte remarked cynically the other day that De Plehve's successor, if a reactionary, would not be allowed to live six months. The blow, however, would not be aimed at him alone.

On the other hand, what would happen if the Emperor should experience a change of heart and should repudiate the Grand Ducal cabal and all its works? This is quite too much to expect from a man of his character in the present situation. He is much more likely to seek a policy of impossible compromise.

Open revolt against his present mentors would involve him in direst personal peril, for they are men who scruple at nothing. He would be swept away, and one of the Grand Dukes, not the younger brother of the Emperor, would attempt to usurp the throne under the form of a regency. The infant Czarevitch might or might not live to wear the crown.

Is it surprising that many true Russians, seeing no other hope for their country, are praying for a few more salutary assassinations?

H. R. C.

THE AUTOCRAT OF ALL THE RUSSIAS, AND HIS MASTERS—THE GRAND DUCAL CABAL