

THE LAST AUTOCRAT OF RUSSIA—CZAR NICHOLAS II.

Intimate Story of the Life and Reign of the Emperor of Russia—The Simple Surroundings of His Boyhood at Gatchina Result of Reactionary Tendencies of His Father—His Youth Marked by Dissipation and His Education Neglected—Important Consequences of Japanese Fanatic's Attack on Future Emperor—Marriage of Nicholas II



CZAR in his STUDY in the SUMMER PALACE in the CRIMEA

The following intimate and authoritative study of the life and character of the Czar of Russia was written by a Russian statesman who is a member of the Emperor's entourage. His name is known to THE SUN, but is suppressed for obvious reasons.

was hidden from the future Emperor, it is surprising that the truth of life was withheld in the walls of the palace? "While you are still a Crown Prince, you had better avail yourself of the opportunity to hear the truth. When you will be Emperor, it will be too late!" Mr. Heath, the English instructor.

WHEN Emperor Alexander II. was assassinated on March 1, 1881, and Alexander III. ascended the Russian throne Nicholas, the present Czar of the Russian Empire, was a boy of 12. The Emperor was assassinated a few hours before the time when he was expected to give his sanction to a proclamation which was to grant to the Russian people a semblance of a constitutional form of government. The assassination of the Czar filled the reactionaries with new hope, and through the efforts of Pobedonostseff and others the proclamation which the new Czar was ready to sign was not issued. Pobedonostseff delivered a speech in the Council of the empire, which was a masterpiece of oratorical hypocrisy and falsehood, and the words of the clever, unprincipled and dishonest bureaucrat persuaded the new Emperor, who was not inclined to a constitutional form of government. Nicholas was at that time a weak boy of 12—too young to understand fully what was going on about him. But the first strong impressions of his youth were these bloody pages of Russian history. But at that time no one paid much attention to the fate of the boy in the plain sailor suit with the thin neck and pretty eyes which he had inherited from his mother. As for the Czar himself he was apparently disinterested with his rôle at the centre of the Government. Even St. Petersburg itself was disagreeable to

In his childhood days the first place was given to sports of all kinds. Nicholas was good at jumping, shooting and fishing. None of the children of Alexander III. showed any inclination for art or music, and the work done by Nicholas and Olga in water colors marked distinctly their want of any talent. No one made any attempt to explain to Nicholas the importance of his future rôle, but he vaguely realized it himself. When the old, handsome English gentleman appeared for the first time at the dinner table Nicholas greeted him very coldly. After dinner, when the English tutor tried to gain the confidence of the young Czarovich and started to play with him, Nicholas assumed a haughty pose which was unbecoming his modest little figure and said: "How can I play with you? I am a Grand Duke, while you are only an ordinary old man!" The wise old man caught the Grand Duke in his arms, and a minute later the Czarovich was laughing uproariously, endeavoring to defend himself against the fly which Mr. Heath was representing. George, Alexander's second son, was more reserved than Nicholas. Misha, the youngest of the three, was a strong, red-cheeked, lively boy, the favorite of the Emperor. Once, while many people were sitting on the terrace surrounded with flowers, Misha was playing in the sand on the lawn. Taking up a water sprinkler which lay near by, The Emperor shouted:



CZAR NICHOLAS II.



CZAR as a CHILD and his MOTHER, THE EMPRESS DOWAGER



NICHOLAS II (then Czarovich) and PRINCESS ALICE on the EVE of their WEDDING.

him because of the recollections associated with it; he was afraid of its broad prospects and squares where the annoying revolutionaries were so often conspiring against the life of the Czar. The Russian court was removed to Gatchina. Since the days of Paul I., Gatchina has borne the stamp of barracks. All is gray and dull there. The family virtues of Alexander harmonized splendidly with his modest mode of life. The childhood years of Nicholas and of his brothers passed amid surroundings from which the love intrigues characteristic of the Russian court were absent. There the children could get a proper education, but Alexander, who had received only a meagre education himself, who was weakened by alcoholism and by his earlier mode of life, did not concern himself with the education of the Crown Prince. Mr. Heath, an Englishman, called in Russia Karl Oslpovich, was the tutor of Nicholas and his brothers. An idealist, well educated, a splendid artist and a sportsman, Mr. Heath brought with him to the palace his great devotion to the Czar's family. But neither the forty years he had spent in Russia nor his meetings and discussions with Russians gave him any real knowledge of the Russian land, the Russian people or its history. Therefore his influence was limited only to the walls of the nursery. In early childhood the influence of the English tutor manifested itself in the fact that the English language almost crowded out the Russian language at the Imperial court. And even many years later, when Nicholas had become Czar, his Russian speeches, when not prepared for him by some one else, were literal translations of English phrases.

"Eh, Misha, come over here!" Misha stationed himself near the terrace below and his father sprinkled some water on him. Everybody laughed. They were about to send the boy to his room to have his clothes changed, when he demanded that his father take his place below the terrace. Alexander went down and stationed himself below the terrace, while Misha, seizing the sprinkler, poured out all the water upon the glossy bald head of the Emperor. Then both father and son had to change their clothes. All this would have been idyllic if together with this simple life at home the children had received a good education. But Nicholas received the education of the average officer of the Guards, with all its limitations and characteristics. His instructors had been badly chosen, and those who could have said something of value to the future Emperor were afraid of their general supervisor, Pobedonostseff, and of General Danilovich, a dull, ignorant man who had not the slightest conception of what the education of a Crown Prince should be. Besides, the priests, the church ceremonies, parades, manœuvres, uniforms—these almost monopolized the attention of the young man. By a strange irony of fate the educators of the Russian emperors kept sinking to an ever lower and lower level. Alexander I. was educated by Lagarpe and Nicholas by an insignificant Swiss theologian, Alexander II. was educated by Zhukovsky, and Nicholas II. by Gen. Danilovich. The young Pobedonostseff was the instructor of Alexander III. and the same Pobedonostseff was the teacher of the present Emperor. Thus, since the truth of knowledge

often told this to Nicholas. But Mr. Heath himself did not know this truth. The first important event in the life of Nicholas was his trip around the world. The mission of the Crown Prince, aside from its educational value, was to maintain Russia's international relations, and to strengthen Russia's relations with the powers in the Far East; also to show the grandeur and glory of Russia. But at the time Nicholas was starting on his trip around the world the Russian court had already been completely cleared of the enlightened contemporaries of Alexander II., and the reins of the government were in the hands of simple people like Cherevichin, who divided his time between his duties in court and wine drinking, or Gen. Richter, the estate owner, and suspicious even in Gatchina. The Grand Duke started on his journey accompanied by his comrades of the Preobrazhensky and the Hussar regiments. The only man in his suite who possessed some intelligence was Prince E. Ukhtomsky, the chronicler of the Czarovich's journey. The general supervisor of the expedition was the old half blind Gen. Prince Baryatinsky, who was known for his lack of judgment, even in Gatchina. One after another the European and exotic countries passed before the indifferently eyes of the royal travellers. The Crown Prince and his suite saw beauties of nature they had never seen before. They crossed seas and oceans, they rode into the interior of foreign lands on the backs of elephants, on camels and in express trains. But all seemed to them as the scenery in the ballet "The Sleeping Beauty," the only difference being that instead of a sleepy kingdom

this was a drunken kingdom. Wine was streaming forth daily to such an extent that the travellers were intoxicated most of the time. The Grand Duke Nicholas and George kept up with the members of the suite. The administrators of the Governments they were visiting noticed the inclinations of the travellers and the educational value of the journey disappeared completely. Idleness and orgies on the steamers led in the end to all sorts of disputes, and finally also to blows. During one of these fights, started half in earnest, half in jest, Grand Duke George Alexandrovich fell down a stairway, hurting his chest, thereby hastening the disease of his lungs. He had to be sent back to Russia from the nearest port. He was ill for several years and died in Abas-Tuman, one of the mountain resorts of Caucasus. Nicholas continued his trip. He shot tigers and crocodiles, he indulged in all forbidden pleasures and at last reached Japan, whose tragic rôle in his life he was of course could not foresee at that time. Owing partly to tactlessness, partly to ignorance, the Russian visitors at the very outset irritated the Japanese common people by their behavior in the temples, in front of the images of Buddha. Then came a fanatic who avenged one of the idols; Nicholas almost died from the blow of the sword with which the Japanese struck him on the head. A second blow was warded off by the Greek Crown Prince George, who stood near by. The Japanese was caught and the entire company hurried off to the steamer to dress the first wound inflicted upon Russia by Japan. No one could foresee the consequences of this sad incident, but a feeling of

bitterness remained in Nicholas's soul against the country that manifested its hospitality in so peculiar a manner. The wound proved to be more serious than the physicians had thought at first. Although his brain was not affected at the time, the slight fracture in his skull caused a slow growth of bone. The process continued for a long time, and Nicholas always feels a certain pressure on the left side of his brain, which must necessarily also affect his psychic functions. In the course of many years this defect has led to a substantial change in the Czar's intellect and may still upset his psychic equilibrium. In a country where the personal politics of the Emperor play an important rôle and where the functionaries know how to avail themselves of each and every weakness of their ruler such a condition of the Emperor could not remain without its consequences to the nation. The incident did not produce a strong impression at the time. The people remained quite indifferent, remembering what sufferings they had endured during the reign of Alexander III., remembering that his reign had brought them famine, pauperism and death and always left them helpless at critical moments. It should be added that the proverbial devotion of the Russian people to the autocrat is just as much a myth as their devotion to the church. "God is high up in the skies and the Czar is far away," says the Russian peasant as he humbly lies down under the knout or he gives a bribe to some functionary. The intelligent classes in Russia were displeased with the conduct of the Czarovich, foreseeing a new, insignificant reign. In the court sphere all kinds of gossip and impossible stories were told while the royal travellers were returning home. The journey brought nothing new into the life of Nicholas, and upon his return he became again absorbed in the life of his regiment. Only from time to time he attended his lectures or the meetings of the council concerning the construction of the Siberian railroad. The routine made itself felt everywhere. Alexander was not fond of military service, yet he did not make any attempt to influence his son in that direction. Having directed his own attention and all his efforts to suppressing revolutionary activities in the Russian land and oppressing the people at the same time, he neglected the education of the successor to the Russian throne. Nicholas knew practically nothing about the internal affairs of the country, and when he became Czar all who needed it made use of his ignorance. When Nicholas was in command of his company of guards the life of the officers of his regiment was in no way different from the life of high society in St. Petersburg. Balls, amateur theatricals, orgies—these constituted their

chief occupation. They paid little attention to their duties as officers, and the lesson taught by the Russo-Turkish war led only to a change of uniform for the officers. The custom of appointing Grand Dukes to the command of regiments was most injurious to the army. Even if they had no intentions of doing it, they demoralized the officers by their wealth, by their habits and by the system of favoritism which they introduced. Among the officers in Nicholas's regiment were numerous alcoholics; one of the most prominent of these was Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevitch, commander of the Hussar regiment. The officers at that time often spent the whole day drinking. One night they were so intoxicated that the Grand Duke declared to his comrades that they were not human beings at all, but were wolves. They undressed and ran out into the deserted streets of Czarokoye Selo, crawling on all fours, their heads lifted to the sky as they kept howling for some time. The old man in charge of the wine cellar brought out a large bowl filled with vodka and champagne, and the officers, still crawling on all fours, came over to the bowl, licked the wine with their tongues, howled and bit one another. Such scenes soon became known throughout the town for it was impossible to conceal things in that small place, yet no one was reprimanded. Several times the intoxicated Grand Duke, the commander of the regiment of the Hussars, had to be taken down from the roof of his house, where he was serenading in the moonlight but partly dressed. It was amid such surroundings as this that the best years of the present Czar of Russia were passed. His complexion had already turned yellow from dissipation, yet no one paid any attention to it. Aside from these orgies Nicholas spent a considerable period of his youth with the ballet dancer Kehesinskaya. His relations with the Polish dancer might have been dangerous to Russia if Kehesinskaya had been patriotic, for she could easily have played the part of a Judith. But the Polish dancer did not inspire the present Czar even with a sense of justice to her compatriots. All his policies toward Poland are now dictated by indifference and by a desire to please the European neighbors, rather than by a desire to be fair to one of the most cultured elements of the empire. Many of the officers who were participating in the wild orgies while Nicholas was with them are now Governors of important provinces. Modest in his habits, bashful in his conversations with strangers, kind to his children and very simple in his relations with people he knew well, Alexander III. never paid any attention to his health. He even ignored the advice of the famous Moscow physician, Prof. Zacharin, who found his condition hopeless. Acting against his advice he attended to his duties and reviewed various parades on horseback. Finally the Emperor broke down. He was removed to Livadia, in the Crimea, where he died. The prolonged suffering and the death of the Emperor called forth a great deal of sympathy among the people. The Russian people had not been accustomed to losing their Emperors under such patriarchal surroundings. They had grown accustomed to the death of their Czars by violence, in court revolutions, in mystery. Even the activities of the revolutionists were stopped during the prolonged agony of the Emperor. In the meantime painful scenes were enacted in the palace. Different influences were combating one another near the bedside of the dying Emperor. Nor was the religious element lacking. The imperial confessor, Yanishew, despised and feared the notorious Father John of Cronstadt, and there was a conflict between these two as to which should have the honor of conducting the funeral services. The court confessor spoke to the dying Emperor softly on religious themes, while Father John tried to make an impression by violent exclamations while blessing the Emperor. The dispute between the two priests assumed still greater proportions when the Emperor died, and they even aired their arguments in the press. While these religious discussions were going on the Emperor shortly before his death had several dramatic conversations with his sons. Rumors had reached Alexander III. that Nicholas was stubbornly declining the throne, fearing the throne in his path. But as George himself was dying at the time and Misha was too young and the Czar did not want Grand Duke Vladimir to succeed him Nicholas was appealed to, and the present Czar signed before his father died the manifesto proclaiming his ascension to the throne. On October 20, 1894, Alexander died in his armchair. The thirteen years of his reign will remain associated in the memory of the Russian people with one of the most reactionary periods in Russian history. But as that period marked also the growth of imperialism in almost all European countries, and as the period of reaction in Russia had found sympathy among certain classes of the Russian people that had been irritated by the assassination of Alexander II., it was

difficult to estimate properly the reactionary activities at the time. Nicholas married when he was 28 years old, much later than it is customary for crown princes to marry. His wedding took place under peculiar conditions. A day after the funeral of his father he led Princess Alice to the nuptial canopy. Princess Alice was not a stranger at the Russian court. Several years before that her father had brought her to Russia. Her elder sister was the wife of the Grand Duke Sergius, the uncle of Nicholas. Notwithstanding her beauty the candidate for the hand of the Czarovich met with no success. The Dowager Empress, mother of Nicholas, did not like her cold and reserved character, while Nicholas was comparing her with the lively ballet dancer he loved. Maria Feodorovna expressed her dislike for the Princess Alice and the Princess returned to her native Darmstadt. Alice bore the offence in silence. On the eve of the death of Alexander III., however, Nicholas made her an official proposal and she accepted him. The choice between comparative poverty in a small German duchy and splendor at the Russian court was not difficult, and shortly afterward the Princess with a small suite and very little baggage came back again to Russian soil, which, however, never became her own land. Princess Alice was received kindly by the people. The traditional festivals which mark the engagements and the weddings of the Czars were dispensed with because the Russian court was in mourning and this modest haste somehow won for Nicholas a great deal of sympathy among the people; they entertained the fond hope that he would be a progressive monarch. The people gave him a stormy and welcome reception on November 14. These naive hopes have been characteristic of the Russian people upon the occasion of every new ascension to the throne, but as every new year brings only new hopes and a new calendar and the same old cares, illnesses and miseries, so every new Czar takes a new place in the prayers of the priests, permitting the ever greedy functionaries to cause the people the same old oppression. A slave among his own subjects, the autocrat of Russia is powerless to do anything without consulting his advisers, who exercise a power which does not belong to them. The new régime of Czar Nicholas was marked at first by a change in the court camarilla. For the most part the officers who had been the companions of the Czar now became his advisers and his favorites and high officials. By his choice of advisers the Czar could be judged. Thus during the reign of Alexander II. strong and able Germans were at the helm of the Russian Government, and there were also Russians who combined love intrigues with progressive ideas. But the Emperor demanded honesty above all. Although the reactionaries triumphed after all during his reign, there was still a growing wave of liberal reforms. Alexander III. selected as his advisers simple, uncouth people like himself, not particularly wealthy nor particularly distinguished in any direction. He was fond of their company, but such insignificant officers as Cherevichin, Richter, Vannovsky could not exert any great influence upon the course of events in the empire. The suite and advisers of the new Czar, Nicholas, were even worse than those of his father. His lack of experience, his desire to please his former friends and comrades, who were just as inexperienced as he was, opened the doors of the Russian palace for all kinds of suspicious and dishonest people. Among these we may mention Von Wall, the dishonest former Prefect of St. Petersburg; Peter Durnovo, known by the nickname of Brazil because he had stolen documents from the desk of the Ambassador of Brazil; Von Kleigels, another ex-Prefect of St. Petersburg, who was also guilty of theft. When the old Gen. Tshertkov once made a remark to the Czar about the doubtful character of his suite the Czar answered dryly that he wanted no one to interfere with his personal choice. The more decent members of Nicholas's suite left St. Petersburg under various pretexts, and those that remained grouped themselves about the Russian throne. Among the addresses submitted to the new Czar during the first two months of his reign was one from the senators, in which they asked him to introduce reforms in Russian life. On January 17, 1895, when Nicholas was to receive the deputations of the nobility, the zemstvo and the Cossacks he was for some reason convinced that certain revolutionaries were plotting against his life. The deputations were gathered in the large hall of the Antichkin Palace. European rulers upon important occasions read their speeches or toasts. The entire world is listening to these speeches uttered by the monarchs, and they are discussed by the cleverest statesmen everywhere. But in Russia, where the Czar is supposed to reign by divine right and where God is supposed to guide the Czar against any errors, it was always regarded as unbecoming an Emperor to read his speech from a manuscript which