

Memoirs of the Royals of 'Russia Abroad';  
Benevolent Autocracy Unrepented

by

Lindsay Kent, B.A.

A thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts.

Department of History  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, Ontario  
May 8, 2002

©2002, Lindsay Kent



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-79640-X

Canada


The undersigned recommend to the Faculty of Graduate  
Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis

**Memoirs of the Royals of 'Russia Abroad';  
Benevolent Autocracy Unrepented**

submitted by


Lindsay S. Kent, B.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts



---

Thesis Supervisor



---

Chair, Department of History

Carleton University

May 23, 2002

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the memoirs of four Grand Dukes and Duchesses of the Russian House of Romanov written during their exile following the Revolutions of 1917. Their recollections of childhood and education are examined to determine the origin of ideologies and values that guided them through their adult years. Grand ducal roles are observed to determine if they had any influence on the Tsar. The Romanovs' recollections of the important personages of their time, and of their experiences of revolution, are documented. Their opinions of the USSR and their visions of Russia's post-Soviet future are also explored. The study reveals the Romanovs were well-meaning, but not educated in a fashion enabling them to govern effectively; they were out of touch with Russia's needs and in any case, the grand ducal role was impotent. Despite the revolutions and their forced exile, the Romanovs maintained an essentially autocratic outlook concerning Russia.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Professor Larry Black for bringing the memoirs to my attention in the first place and for agreeing to supervise my semi-colons. His patience, insight and humour were greatly appreciated.

Thank you to Professor David Dean and Professor Jennifer Evans, who lightened the load in face of deadlines and who made T.A.-ing a very welcome distraction. Help with the photocopier was always appreciated.

Thank you to Professor Corinne Gaudin for her input, her dedication, and for making the time to be involved with this thesis in the first place.

Thank you to Professor Carter Elwood for his advice and encouragement, and for pointing out some invaluable sources.

Thank you to Professor Bruce Elliott for his suggestions and perspectives on this study.

Thank you to Joan White for never rolling her eyes when I walked into her office, even though I gave her sufficient cause.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Andrew Donskov, a constant source of encouragement and support, whose genuine enthusiasm for research inspired my decision to pursue graduate studies.

Thank you to Elaine and Garey Stitt, for not minding the mess of books on my bedroom floor.

Thank you to Diana Watson, M.A., who never quit answering her phone and patiently answered every "When you wrote your thesis, did you...?"

Thanks to Mikolaj Grodzki, whose computer program made so many footnotes possible, and whose positive attitude finally started to rub off.

Thanks to my Dad, Brian Kent, for listening to me complain, and to my brother, Justin Kent, for providing hours of entertainment on the phone, making me laugh at myself when I wanted to kick something.

To the Brysonnaires: my Mom Suzanne Meilleur, Allan Normandeau and Dandy Normandeau, my very special thanks for the coffee maker, the office in the basement, funny suggestions for "alternative endings," Gilly-Duck the thesis mascot, tremendous amounts of patience and all the confidence in the world.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Illustrations	v
Illustrations	vi-xi
Genealogy of the Imperial Family	xii
Preface	xiii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: <i>Imperial Childhood</i>	12
Chapter Two: <i>The Supporting Cast: Grand Ducal Roles in Russia</i>	33
Chapter Three: <i>People and Personae</i>	44
Chapter Four: <i>Warnings Unheeded; The Fall of the Third Rome</i>	64
Chapter Five: <i>Romanovs, Revolution, Revolutionaries</i>	86
Chapter Six: <i>The Soviet Union and Beyond: Restoration or Republic?</i>	120
Conclusion	137
Bibliography	145

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Grand Duke Kirill	vi
Grand Duke Alexander	vii
Grand Duchess Olga	viii
Grand Duchess Marie and Grand Duke Dmitri	ix
Tsar Nicholas II	x
Tsarina Alexandra	xi



H.I.H. THE LATE GRAND DUKE CYRIL OF RUSSIA

Reprinted from Grand Duke Cyril, *My Life in Russia's Service—Then and Now* (London, 1939).





GRAND DUKE ALEXANDER DURING THE WAR WHEN COMMANDER-  
IN-CHIEF OF THE RUSSIAN AIR FORCES.

Reprinted from Grand Duke Alexander, *Once A Grand Duke* (New York, 1932).



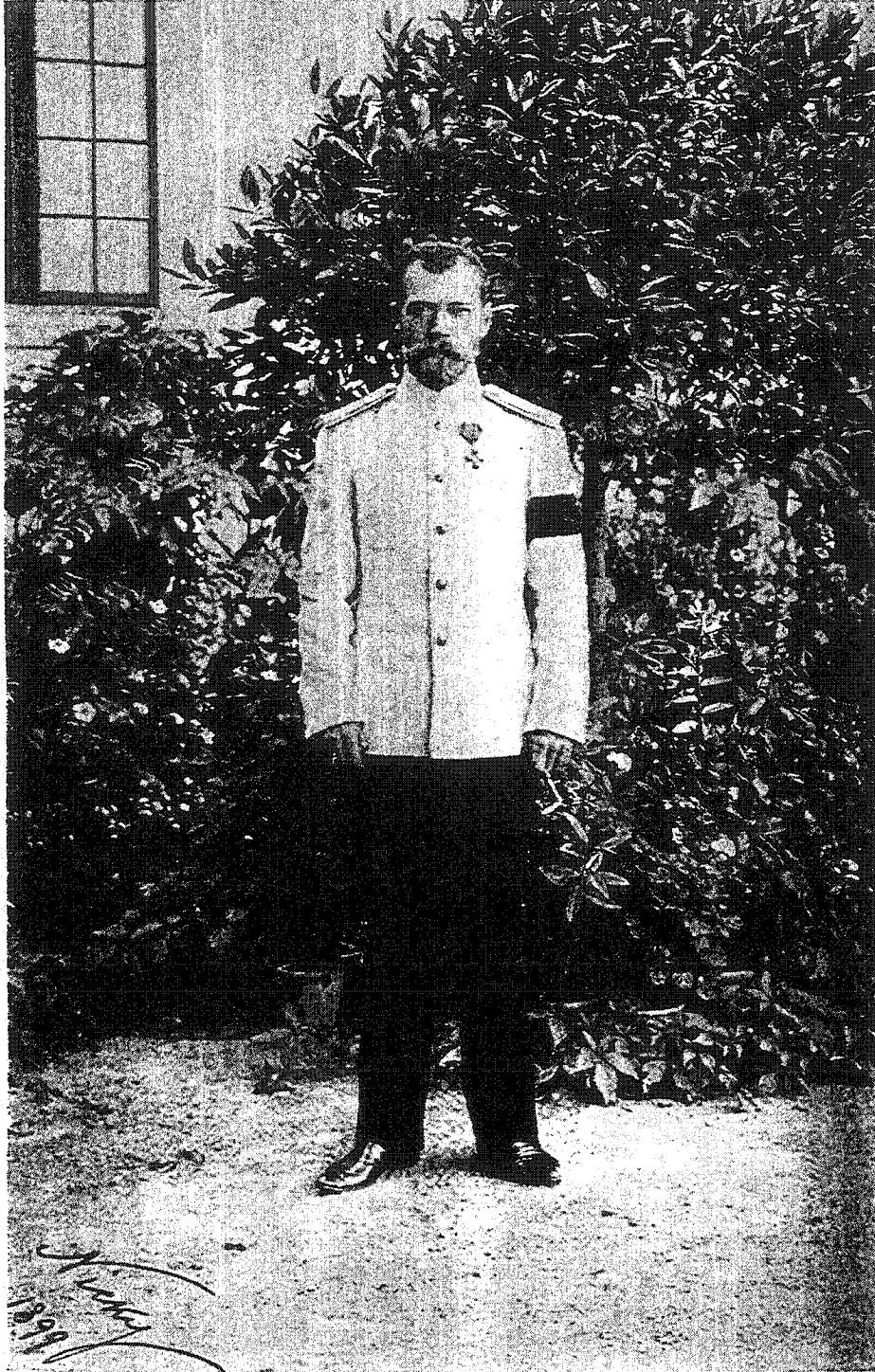
GRAND DUCHESS OLGA, YOUNGEST SISTER OF THE LAST CZAR AND SISTER-IN-LAW OF GRAND DUKE ALEXANDER, DURING THE WAR WHEN IN CHARGE OF HER HOSPITAL IN KIEFF.

Reprinted from Grand Duke Alexander, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932).



GRAND DUKE DIMITRI and GRAND DUCHESS MARIE

Reprinted from David Chavchavadze, *The Grand Dukes* (New York, 1990).



CZAR NICHOLAS II IN 1899.

Reprinted from Grand Duke Alexander, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932).

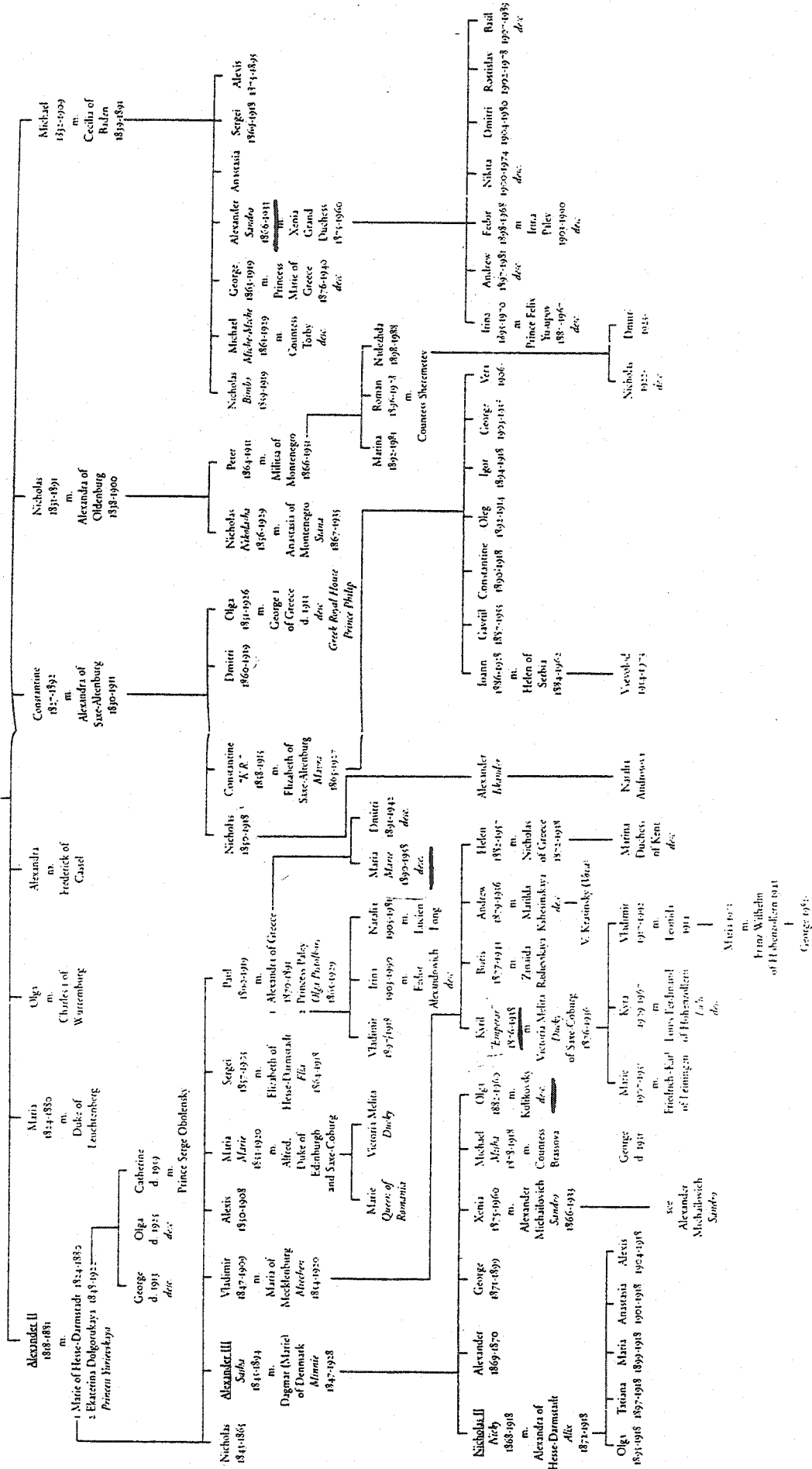


THE LAST CZARINA IN 1899.

Reprinted from Grand Duke Alexander, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932).

THE ROMANOV DYNASTY  
ABBREVIATED

Nicholas I  
*The Tsar*  
1825-1895



## A NOTE ON DATES AND TRANSLITERATION

Before embarking on this adventure, the reader should be cautioned as regards names and dates. Born before the Revolution, the authors lived through two calendar systems: the Julian, or "Russian", calendar fell 12 days behind the Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century and 13 days in the twentieth. In the text, where possible, dates according to the "old style" calendar will be denoted by (O.S.) and the current calendar, implemented by the Bolsheviki, will be referred to as (N.S.). The memoirs are rather haphazard about dates, and move back and forth between the systems depending on the event in question. The most important dates are verifiable through other sources and will be clarified in the text where necessary.

Transliteration and spelling are another matter entirely. No two Romanovs decided to spell family names in the same manner in the English language. When in quotation marks, spelling will be reproduced in a manner faithful to the original, but in the text the most common forms used in the memoirs will be adopted (i.e. Nicholas Mikhailovich, rather than Nicholas Michaelovich; Tsar rather than Czar). The same criterion will be applied to place names. The terms "Tsar" and "Emperor" will be used interchangeably, as they are in the memoirs. The reader will notice the easy style in which the memoirs are written. It must be said that these originals were not translations; the Romanovs spoke and wrote English as a first or second language. They chose to write their memoirs in a language that would allow both a breadth of expression and attract the greatest audience.

*For my grandparents,  
Gilbert and Clarice Meilleur  
and  
Olive and Ernie Kent,  
who would have been proud.*



## INTRODUCTION

After three hundred and four years of autocratic rule under the Romanov dynasty, 1917 was a year of fast-paced change in Russia's governmental system and ruling elite. In February (by the Russian calendar), the Emperor's sovereignty was impeached by a Provisional Government. In March, Emperor Nicholas II abdicated both on his own behalf and on that of his son in favour of his brother, who never acted upon this legacy. For the first time since 1613, there was no Romanov autocrat at the head of the Russian state.

In his study of Nicholas II and the crisis of Russian autocracy, Andrew M. Verner states "in theory, autocracy represented the concentration and monopolization of all political power and authority in the hands of one person, the autocrat."<sup>1</sup> In practice, the Tsar (or Emperor) was not the only representative of Imperial power in Russia. His relatives, forming the dynasty of the House of Romanov, were visible symbols of the Imperial caste. Children, nephews and nieces, cousins and grandchildren of a reigning tsar were known as Grand Dukes and Duchesses. With Nicholas' abdication, these symbols of Russia's autocratic tradition were forced from their ivory towers as well.

Following the events of February/March 1917, fear reigned in Russia. In October, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks feared a counter-revolution and hunted their opponents with ruthlessness and violence in subsequent months. Eventually, the entire territory of Russia was caught up in violence. The rich battled poor, Christians fought Jews, the cities were pitted against the countryside as the "Whites" fought the "Reds." The former ruling castes, the nobility and

---

<sup>1</sup> Andrew M. Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy; Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 72-73.

then the members of the Provisional Government, feared falling victim to that persecution. The Imperial family of the House of Romanov had the greatest reason to fear for its safety as one by one the Grand Dukes in Petrograd and the surrounding areas were rounded up and incarcerated. Other Romanovs were taken from their homes and sent to Siberia. Another two branches of the family found themselves under house arrest in the Crimea, pending orders from Lenin in Petrograd deciding their fate. To the Romanovs who escaped incarceration, it seemed prudent to leave the country. In this they showed sound judgement; the four Grand Dukes held in the St. Peter and Paul Fortress in Petrograd would be shot in January 1919. Of the two groups sent to Siberia, Nicholas II, Empress Alexandra and their children would be shot in Ekaterinburg in July 1918. The other group, composed of Grand Dukes, Grand Duchesses and princes of the blood, would be thrown down a mineshaft in Alpaevsk. When the Germans occupied the Crimea near the end of World War I, the Romanovs held in the Crimea were set free. They lost no time in leaving the country, taking with them only what few possessions they could carry. Fellow Russians from all walks of life, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, would follow the Romanovs. This exodus from Russia would be one of the largest forced political emigrations the world had witnessed, a community in exile Marc Raeff has called "Russia Abroad."<sup>2</sup>

Out of the Romanov Grand Dukes and Duchesses who survived Bolshevik persecution to live abroad, four wrote memoirs. Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich (b.1876-d.1938), fourth in line to the throne and first cousin to Nicholas II, published *My Life in Russia's Service—Then and Now* in 1939. Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna (b.1882-d.1960), Nicholas II's sister, dictated her memoirs to Ian Vorres and they were

---

<sup>2</sup> Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad; A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration; 1919-1939* (New York, 1990).

published posthumously in 1964 under the title *The Last Grand-Duchess*. Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich (b.1866-d.1933), Nicholas II's cousin, wrote several books, including two volumes of memoirs, *Once a Grand Duke* and *Always a Grand Duke*, published in 1932 and 1933 respectively. The Tsar's cousin, Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna (b.1890-d.1958), the youngest of this group, also published two volumes of memoirs, in 1931 and 1932: *Education of a Princess* and *Princess in Exile*. These four sets of reminiscences will be the focus of this study.

The Russian émigré memoirs in general are interesting, revealing the rigours of life in exile, the psychological impact of being forced to flee one's homeland, and of hoping for a return to one's native land long after such a hope seemed unjustified. These Romanov memoirs have another dimension that gives them quite a different historical significance. The authors all had been part of the ruling dynasty of Russia. They were party to—or at least witness to—decisions made on policy, they were involved in cares of state, they met the important people of their time and moved in the highest circles of society and information. As such, the memoirs are not merely relics of a by-gone age of Empire. They offer a rare glimpse into that world through the eyes of the ruling dynasty itself.

One might question the value of examining the waning years and downfall of the Russian Empire through the reminiscences of the "losers" of history who fulfilled a largely symbolic and ceremonial role in the Russian régime, rather than through the memoirs of the more politically active members of the Duma or State Council. The justification for studying the Romanov memoirs is threefold: in the first place, memoirs of political figures such as Kerensky, Miliukov or Witte have already been subject to intensive study. Although the Romanov memoirs have been used as reference sources in

several scholarly works, they have not yet been analysed for themselves, as a collective body of historical insight. Secondly, political memoirs were written to present their authors' cases. The Romanov memoirs were written to explain their lives, perhaps as much to their authors as to their readers. Oddly, perhaps, politics play a surprisingly small role in the Romanov memoirs on the whole. Thirdly, one must remember that Russia was an autocracy, the last of its kind, where political bodies such as the State Council were largely consultative and controlled by the Tsar with no recourse against his decisions. The Grand Dukes and Duchesses, on the other hand, were part of the actual institution of the autocracy by virtue of their birth, and therefore a study of their memoirs has merit, as the authors are unwitting examples of the character of Russia's ruling elite.

In addition to being set apart from other sources by dint of the standing of their authors, the memoirs are important because of the context in which they were written. In the years following their ouster from power, the Romanovs were demonized in Russia. Soviet history vilified the Romanov dynasty, in a formula that can be reduced to "they were autocrats, therefore they were evil." The frenzied and spontaneous destruction of Imperial emblems, flags and statues following the Revolution demonstrates that many Russian people felt the same way. The Romanovs found little sympathy in Western Europe either. In fact, the Romanovs had become fashionable in the "West" as recently as by 1907, after Russia, Britain and France became allies. Only long after their deaths were attempts made to redeem the Romanovs by non-partisan Western writers, such as that of Robert K. Massie in *Nicholas and Alexandra*, published in 1967. The memoirs of our four Romanovs in exile attempted to reverse their demonization, which they could not really comprehend. In addition, living in exile in Allied countries that applauded the demise of the last bastion of "despotism," they were confronted with certain negative

visions of Russia which they felt it their mission to correct, and wrote their memoirs largely in response to these dual visions. These memoirs are the Romanovs' attempt to redeem, or at least justify, the House of Romanov in the eyes of the world.

The memoirs also respond to the royalty craze that resulted from the sudden abundance of titled exiles in Europe and the Americas following the wars and revolutions of the period. Despite their unpopularity on the political scale, the Romanovs quickly became objects of personal curiosity. Americans in particular were infatuated with all things royal, and books such as these often hit the best-seller list—Grand Duchess Marie's *Education of a Princess* was one of them. Royals were invited on lecture tours and made guest appearances at public functions. Pretenders and imposters emerged world-wide to share this glory. One need only recall the myth of Anastasia to see the fascination with the Romanovs in emigration. In this climate, our memoirists could profit by writing their memoirs, either by reaping financial benefits from a best-seller, or by taking the opportunity to set the record straight, from their point of view.

As Dominic Lieven states in his *Russia's Rulers*, "in my view an impressionistic, detailed use of biography is uniquely able to give the reader an imaginative feel for the subject, without which no amount of scientific method can hope to convey a true sense of the past's reality."<sup>3</sup> These memoirs, though by no means scholarly biographies, are ideally suited to the creation of an impressionistic composite history of Russian Grand Duchess and Dukedom. The Romanovs record their world as they recalled it—that is, the world of Russia's ruling elite—and the memoirists recreate the atmosphere of that world through their reminiscences, opinions, values and attitudes. In examining these memoirs, I wanted to see if there are patterns that run throughout their recollections, whether

---

<sup>3</sup> Dominic Lieven, *Russia's Rulers Under the Old Regime* (New Haven and London, 1989), p. xii.

commonalities or contradictions predominate, and what the Romanovs felt was most important to be recorded for posterity concerning their lives and milieu. What did they feel it was important for us to understand?

Detailed studies of the Russian autocracy and its decline exist elsewhere; what is important to this study are the memoirists' impressions of their lives and those people who played an important role in them, their thoughts on their role in Russia's society and political system, their interpretations of why the régime fell, and their hopes for Russia's future. Fresh in the memory of the authors, such impressions matter because the world the Romanovs lived in vanished—almost overnight. They and what they were said to represent were reviled, and their circles were demonized. They had lost their very identity. The attempt to resolve these issues inspired several questions that will be addressed below.

The Romanovs' perceptions of their position in life were partly defined by their upbringing and education. As rulers of an autocracy, the Romanovs reigned—even after 1905—without the need to look outside themselves for approval or consent. Were the Romanovs raised in a manner that equipped them for such self-sufficiency? Grand Dukes and Duchesses held important posts in the military and society—did they believe their education had adequately prepared them for such tasks? What were they taught about the autocracy and Russia? How did this shape their values concerning their role in the régime?

Once educated and considered "of age," the Romanovs were expected to undertake some sort of service to the state. What was the grand ducal role in Russia's system of governance? Did their positions carry any authority, or were they merely titular and symbolic? Did Grand Dukes and Duchesses have any influence over the

Tsar's policies and decisions? Did they see themselves governing by whimsy, or for the good of Russia?

Additionally, the years between their hasty departure from Russia and the writing of their memoirs gave the four Romanovs ample time to reflect upon "what ifs" and "if onlys." It will be interesting to discover which factors they felt contributed most strongly to the collapse of the Tsarist régime. Did they understand the fundamental contradictions and problems involved in modernizing an autocracy, such as granting popular representation within a system where only the autocrat was entitled to hold power by law? If they had been able to identify these problems even in Russia, had they or their parents used their positions in any way to warn the Tsar of what might lie ahead if he did not rethink his policies? Did the Romanovs feel that they themselves, as a family, had contributed to Imperial Russia's problems and hastened her demise? Were they aware of the discrepancies between their own views of their role in Russia and the views of their contemporaries?

The Grand Dukes and Duchesses whose memoirs are the focus of this study were also able to observe the figures who most shaped their time, such as: Alexander III, Nicholas II, Empress Alexandra, and Rasputin. How did the memoirists feel towards these people who played such significant roles in Russian history? Were their views uniform? What do their perceptions of these figures reveal about the Romanovs' perceptions of the Tsar's role?

Another intriguing avenue of inquiry addresses the Romanovs and the Revolutions of 1917. How did they react to the Tsar's abdication? Did they have a realistic grasp of the situation it engendered? Did they understand who was behind the

revolt? How did they experience the Revolutions themselves? Did they have any contact with revolutionaries?

Lastly, a study of the royals of 'Russia Abroad' raises the question of how they viewed the Soviet Union and what visions they had of its future. Did the Romanovs envision a restoration in the future, or were they willing to accept that they were outcast permanently? Did their political attitudes change over time? How do memoirs written decades after the fact inform our understanding of the Romanovs' political attitudes before the Revolution?

The Romanov memoirs have not yet been examined collectively. While quotations from them appear often in secondary sources on other aspects of the Romanov tragedy, the memoirs themselves have not been the focus of scholarly research. Historiography has been impoverished by a lack of study of the Imperial family, other than of the ill-fated Nicholas and Alexandra. The other Romanovs formed a very active and large cast of supporting characters, and as representatives of a system of government where all power resided in the hands of an autocrat subject to informal court politics and the influence of his family, their involvement in the Emperor's life and reign deserves more than passing mention. Recently, several collections of primary documents, such as diary entries and correspondence have been published. The best of these are Andrei Maylunas' and Sergei Mironenko's volume *A Lifelong Passion. Nicholas and Alexandra: Their Own Story* and Mark D Steinberg's and Vladimir M. Khrustalëv's *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution*. Their focus again is Nicholas and Alexandra, but Maylunas' and Mironenko's edited collection is particularly useful for its excerpts from diaries and correspondence of a wide range of members of the Imperial family. Arranged chronologically, the editors intend for the



diary entries, letters, and miscellaneous excerpts to demonstrate the profound love between the Emperor and Empress lasted all their lives. Arguing that these documents allow the reader almost total access to the Romanovs' personalities, values, and outer and inner world, Maylunas and Mironenko wish to present the ill-fated monarchs as the subject of a Greek tragedy, claiming all characteristics are present to elevate the Romanov family "from document to myth; from non-fiction to fiction."<sup>4</sup>

The volume edited by Steinberg and Khrustal'ev is also an edited collection of archival documents, though interspersed with a much greater degree of editorial commentary. They argue that a critical reading of these archival documents will reveal that the facts surrounding the historical events involving the Nicholas, Alexandra and the Revolution are not as straightforward as they might seem. The editors feel the advantage of presenting a collection of documents with analyses, rather than an analysis sprinkled with archival documents is the ability it offers its readers to absorb more than facts; "these texts reveal a great deal about the ideas, values, perceptions, and sentiments with which the facts were intertwined."<sup>5</sup> The present study works intensively with the text of the memoirs themselves for the same reasons.

A detailed study on the Romanovs' lives in exile has been published by John Curtis Perry and Constantine Pleshakov, *The Flight of the Romanovs; A Family Saga*. This monograph reads like a collective family biography and has been well-researched. However, sources are listed in a way that sometimes calls its scholarship into question. Perry and Pleshakov ask what role the Grand Dukes and Duchesses played in the events that led to the Empire's collapse, and proceeding from the contention that the Romanovs'

---

<sup>4</sup> Andrei Maylunas and Sergei Mironenko, *A Lifelong Passion. Nicholas and Alexandra: Their Own Story* (London, 1997), p. xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Mark D Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustal'ev's, *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution* (New Haven & London, 1995), p. 2.

misspent lives brought about this tragedy, they explore the family dynamic, particularly the relationship between the Tsars and the Grand Dukes, beginning from 1860. They round out their study by tracing the lives of the Romanovs and their ancestors in exile up to the present day.<sup>6</sup>

Only one biography of the Grand Dukes exists that is of note, and it omits the lives of the Grand Duchesses. Written by David Chavchavadze, *The Grand Dukes* draws in part on the memoirs and on personal family papers and interviews to document the lives of the author's ancestors.<sup>7</sup>

The present study, therefore, has something to add to the existing historiography for the simple reason that, rather than analysing private records left by the Romanovs, or others' evaluations and impressions of the Imperial family, it analyses what the Romanovs—at least these four—had to say about themselves. It does so in order to better understand the values of Russia's most distinguished political elite. Unlike previous works that incorporate passages of the memoirs into their studies in support of their arguments, they are the sole focus of this study.

Memoirs are a difficult medium to work with. They are neither autobiography, nor quite history, yet they manage to incorporate the two. The historian must keep in mind the fallibility of memory and the possibility of exaggeration, nostalgia, or alteration of certain facts for personal motives. In addition, memoirs tend to be very subjective, in that they discuss what the author feels was important rather than what the researcher might wish to uncover. In this study, the memoirs are more highly valued precisely because of their subjectiveness. In fact, sometimes what the memoirists chose to omit is

---

<sup>6</sup> John Curtis Perry and Constantine Pleshakov, *The Flight of the Romanovs; A Family Saga* (New York, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> David Chavchavadze, *The Grand Dukes* (New York, 1990).

as important as what they included. To understand the Romanovs, one must first comprehend what they felt was most worthy of posterity. This study is not intended to be a theoretical study of memoir literature; it draws on the contents of the grand ducal memoirs to learn more about their authors.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Imperial Childhood*

In 1877, during the Russo-Turkish war, the eleven-year-old Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich had his first interaction with the common people of his native city of Tbilisi (Tiflis). With their father, Grand Duke Michael Nikolaevich, away at the front, young Sandro (as Alexander was called by his family) and his brothers took advantage of the relaxed discipline in his absence to tour the city, visiting hospitals and speaking with people they met in the streets. In his memoirs, the Grand Duke recorded their distress at the realization that poverty was so rampant and in such close proximity to them. Sandro felt ashamed of the richness of his clothing when faced with ragged children who had neither boots nor, in many cases, adequate food. Uneasiness followed an offhand remark made by one of these children, "It's pretty soft for you, the sons of a grand duke...you have everything, you are living in luxury." The young grand dukes puzzled over the meaning of this, wondering: "What was luxury? Could it be true that while we had everything, these others have nothing?"<sup>1</sup> Here was a classic case of two solitudes, one of them unwitting.

At first glance, Grand Duke Alexander's observations may seem oddly ignorant, suggesting that members of his class believed "luxury" to be the norm. His reminiscences certainly intimate that Russian royalty was raised in an atmosphere that kept its members oblivious of the conditions prevailing outside of its small social circle. However, it is important to remember that such ignorance would not be the fault of the children. It is quite possible that he, or any of the other Grand Dukes and Duchesses in this study, could not relate the term "luxury" to the Spartan and emotionally repressive

---

<sup>1</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932), pp. 35-36.

environment to which they were accustomed. Although popular perceptions of a monarchy may conjure up images of children spoiled by opulence and the granting of their every whim, the descriptions of childhood years as written in the memoirs of Grand Dukes Alexander and Kirill, and Grand Duchesses Olga and Marie, reveal they remembered their early years as being quite different from this common perception.

Grand Duchess Marie summed up this paradox by stating, in the introduction to the first volume of her memoirs, "The same fate that placed me in a setting so curious and magnificent deprived me of a normal upbringing."<sup>2</sup> The traditions of the court were sacrosanct. Since the time of Catherine the Great, etiquette remained essentially unchanged; furniture was arranged in the same way, servants wore the same livery, dishes were presented in the same way at mealtimes.<sup>3</sup> Adherence to tradition extended to child rearing. Even aboard ship during his naval career, Grand Duke Kirill found himself still "following my family tradition of sleeping on camp beds, as my ancestors had done since my great grandfather Nicholas I...."<sup>4</sup> This custom prevailed in other family branches and, for Alexander, it would later pose some problems: "I remember that even in later years, after my marriage, I could not become accustomed to the luxury of a large bed with double mattresses and linen sheets, and ordered my old hard bunk to be put next to it."<sup>5</sup> Since the Romanov men were expected to hold positions of authority (or at least, titular authority) in Russia's armed forces, it is not surprising that the daily regimen of the children's upbringing seems quite militaristic in its discipline and organization.

Alexander wrote, "We were called every morning at six o'clock. We had to jump out of

---

<sup>2</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education of a Princess: A Memoir* (New York, 1931), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, *The Flight of the Romanovs*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, *My Life in Russia's Service—Then and Now* (London, 1939), p. 117. He is referred to as "Kirill" in all texts, but bibliographical references are under the name "Cyril".

<sup>5</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once a Grand Duke*, p. 15. Girls were no exception. In Grand Duchess Olga's memoirs, the description of the children's quarters states "they slept on camp-beds, with one hard flat pillow and a very thin mattress." See Ian Vorres, *The Last Grand-Duchess* (London, 1964), p. 23.

our beds immediately, for a severe punishment swiftly followed an attempt to sleep 'just five minutes more.'" After this cheerful beginning, "kneeling in a row in front of the three ikons, we said our prayers, then took a cold bath. Our breakfast consisted of tea, bread and butter. Any other ingredients had been strictly forbidden, lest we should develop a taste for a luxurious life."<sup>6</sup>

Such abstinence in the dining room was common to other members of the Imperial family. Grand Duchess Olga, sister of Nicholas II, related that they had been raised on a "very plain diet." Regular teatime fare was bread or biscuits with butter or jam. Porridge was served at breakfast. "Mutton cutlets with peas and baked potatoes seems to have been our staple dinner, or else roast beef." That did not mean the entire family enjoyed this particular meal; it simply meant that "we ate whatever we were given."<sup>7</sup> After the excesses associated in popular history with the reigns of Empresses Elizabeth, Anna, and Catherine II, such simplicity in the opulent surroundings of the Winter Palace, Gatchina, or Tsarskoe Selo is quite surprising. It is doubtful that anyone unfamiliar with the traditions of the Imperial family would have imagined that children of the Tsar could actually go relatively hungry (many peasants were lucky to eat meat twice a year) on a fairly regular basis. Once they were considered old enough to take their meals in the presence of parents and guests, Imperial children were exposed to a slightly more varied diet. However, rules of etiquette prescribed that the Tsar and Tsarina be served first, followed by the guests, and only then the children, in the descending order of their ages. Since the meal ended when the sovereigns had finished, Michael and Olga, the youngest, had often only just been served when the entourage got up from the table. It was deemed impolite for the children to rush through their meal, so often they simply

---

<sup>6</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Vorres, *The Last Grand-Duchess*, p. 27.

remained hungry. Sneaking into the pantry for snacks between meals "would have been one of those things which was not done," thanks to the strict etiquette of the household. Olga even remembered one time when her brother, "Nicky," was so hungry that he committed a sacrilege by eating the wax center of his gold baptismal cross which supposedly contained a small piece of the True Cross. Though the future Tsar Nicholas II was ashamed, he admitted "that it had tasted 'immorally good'." Needless to say, their parents were never told, and "immorally good" became a secret code of approval used between the children to praise a dish they particularly liked.<sup>8</sup>

Being introduced to the grown-ups' table at meal times meant more than the chance of leaving the table still hungry. The Imperial children's table manners had to be faultless.<sup>9</sup> Children were to speak only if addressed by the guests, and could not participate in the general conversation. "Between the courses we were supposed to place the tips of our fingers upon the edge of the table and sit very straight; if we forgot to do this, we were immediately reminded of it. It was: 'Marie, your back,' or 'Dmitri, take your elbows from the table'." In addition, children were expected to be good conversationalists, in case the guests did ask them questions that required a response more involved than "yes" or "no." Failure to distinguish themselves in this manner was grounds for reprimand or punishment in the household of Grand Duke Serge, Marie's guardian.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, if the child's responses strayed outside the scope of polite, predictable answers, which even the guest who formed the question usually anticipated,

---

<sup>8</sup> Vorres, pp. 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> Queen Olga of Württemberg, however, remembered scenes of Alexander III's family throwing food at the table, and was horrified at the decline in the manners of the Imperial family since the days of her father, Nicholas I. See Lieven, *Nicholas II, Emperor of all the Russias* (London, 1993), p. 26. Alexander III's and his brother Vladimir's less formal characters likely explains why Olga and Kirill remember warmer childhoods than Marie and Alexander.

<sup>10</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education of a Princess*, pp. 36, 26. Marie was raised by her uncle Sergei and Aunt "Ella" (Grand Duchess Elizabeth, Alexandra's sister) after her father, Grand Duke Paul, was exiled for his morganatic marriage to a divorcée, Olga Piskors, later Princess Palei.

small penalties were again imposed. As Grand Duke Alexander pointed out, when told by a guest that nothing could be better for him than to follow in the footsteps of his father's military career, it was impossible to voice a contrary opinion while "twelve pairs of eyes of my teachers were glaring straight into my face...." His brother George learned this lesson the hard way. One evening at table, George happened "to confess his inclination for portrait painting. He was greeted with the ominous silence of all parties assembled at the table, and understood his mistake shortly afterward, when the majestic tower of cherry and vanilla ice-cream glided past his place without a stop."<sup>11</sup> Punishment was less for contradicting a guest's suppositions about a young grand duke's future than for failing in his duty to profess a desire for a career in the service of the state.

If it strikes the reader as slightly ludicrous that such tales are categorized by the memoirists as belonging to a strict childhood replete with punishments for misdeeds, and even hunger, particularly since the grand ducal upbringing resembled that of elite social circles in Russia and elsewhere, two possibilities should be considered. The first is that in writing for a Western audience, several countries of which had no royal traditions of their own, the Romanovs were trying to dispel myths of spoiled imperious children living in idleness and luxury while being fawned over by servants and lackeys. Secondly, the Romanovs' recollections suggest a lack of awareness of exactly how privileged their youth was in comparison to the majority of their subjects, as Alexander's first exposure to Tbilisi suggests. Or, perhaps the Romanovs were simply ignorant of the fact that such a childhood and upbringing were not uncommon in noble, and even upper class, society.

Discipline and etiquette were not the sole focus of our memoirists' childhood reminiscences. Especially in their younger years, recreation was included in their daily

---

<sup>11</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 17-18.



routine, and formed a happy part of the collection of memories. The Romanov children contented themselves with simple activities: hide and seek, nature walks in the park, sports, war games, and skiing and tobogganing in the winter.<sup>12</sup> Regimented though their childhood was, these Grand Dukes and Duchesses were still high-spirited children, not above playing the odd prank on the servants or their tutors. While recovering from skin troubles at a spa in Estonia, Grand Duke Kirill and his siblings were given the duty of raising the flag located outside their house; to the horror of a sailor standing nearby, one morning the young grand dukes decided to hoist their sister Helen instead of the flag.<sup>13</sup> However, when their education began, the children would have less time for leisure pursuits.

The importance of education in the House of Romanov cannot be over-emphasized. As members of the ruling dynasty, groomed to hold positions of authority, or at least influence, the suitability of their training for their station in life becomes a very interesting issue. Since the time of Peter the Great, Russians were instilled with a sense of duty to be of use to the Russian state and autocrat, and the nobility in particular was educated for the purpose of service. It is not coincidental that Kirill's memoirs are titled *My Life in Russia's Service*. Whether it was through exposure to the military or simply through the guidance of tutors, parents, and spiritual advisors, concepts of duty and service to Russia—however they defined it—were ingrained in the Romanovs. This was done in a rather exclusive environment. Obviously, these children could not attend a regular school; tutors would have to be engaged. In most cases, the effectiveness of these

---

<sup>12</sup> Vorres, pp. 24, 39, Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 42, Grand Duke Cyril, *My Life in Russia's Service*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 26-7.

tutors not only determined the degree of preparedness for their pupil's future, but also the pupil's attitude toward education as a whole.

The first educational experience for Kirill, Marie and Olga came in the form of an English nurse, in keeping with the rather Victorian values of royal houses at the time. As Kirill points out, it was thanks to this influence that the first language of this generation of imperial children was English.<sup>14</sup> Marie's governess was "horrified to find that I spoke no Russian, and as to my English I dropped my *h*'s left and right, just as my nurses did."<sup>15</sup> Formal education was introduced to the young grand dukes and duchesses at the age of seven. "And from then to the age of fifteen my education resembled the training in a regiment," attested Grand Duke Alexander. Lessons were from eight to eleven, and then again from two until six. The breadth of subjects was impressive, as Alexander recollected:

...lessons in religion (Old and New Testament, Divine Service, history of the Greek Orthodox Church, comparative history of other churches), Russian grammar and literature, foreign literature, history of Russia, history of Europe, history of America, history of Asiatic countries, geography, mathematics (which covered arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry), natural history, French, German, English, calligraphy and music. On top of that we were taught the handling of all sorts of firearms, riding, fencing, and bayonet fighting. My eldest brothers Nicholas and Michael had to learn Latin and Greek as well, but we, the youngest three, were fortunately relieved of that nonsensical torture.<sup>16</sup>

However, there was a sharp gender divide in terms of education. After fifteen, the men were educated and trained for the purpose of pursuing a military career. The women did not have a specific goal to work towards, and their attitude towards their lessons suffered because of it. Out of all the subjects she was taught—English, French, Russian, geography, arithmetic, drawing, dancing, and history—Olga enjoyed only drawing and

<sup>14</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 15.

Russian history, which she viewed as "something like a part of our real lives—all intimate family matters—and we could enter into it without the least effort."<sup>17</sup> Marie's memoir mentions lessons in Russian, piano lessons, catechism, dancing, as well as sewing, embroidery, and knitting.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately for those attempting to determine how the Romanovs' ideology was formed, none of the memoirs list the texts from which they learned about their country. We do know that Nicholas II studied European history from D. Ilovaiskii's textbook, widely used in Russian schools. He began studying Russian history (at the age of 14!) from Sergei Solov'ev's *Uchebnaya kniga russkoi istorii*, likewise common for Russian students.<sup>19</sup> Since Nicholas' education closely resembled that of other grand dukes until the heir turned 17, there is no reason to suppose his relations would have studied from different texts.

Perusing Russian history texts, it is not difficult to understand why the Romanovs adhered so strongly to the ideology of autocracy even when it seemed impractical, and why they viewed the Romanovs and Russia as being inseparable. The history textbooks mentioned above repeated the old myths linking the Romanovs to ancient Varangian princes, and claimed Moscow to be the "Third Rome," God's last city on earth. They still treated the Russian autocrat as holder of divine authority in an era when the concept of the 'Divine Right of Kings' had long since faded away from the European monarchies.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Vorres, pp. 34-41.

<sup>18</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp.36-41; *A Princess in Exile* (Toronto, 1932), p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy*, p. 21. If Olga, like her brother, enjoyed Russian history because it presented itself as a family affair, Solov'ev's textbook certainly reinforced this sentiment, as its analysis was organized chronologically by reign, rather than some of the more thematic approaches we are familiar with today. See Sergei Solov'ev, *Uchebnaya kniga russkoi istorii* (Moscow, 1880, eighth edition). The first edition came out in 1859. Ilovaiskii also published a Russian history textbook that was widely used in Russian schools: D. Ilovaiskii, *Kratkie ocherki russkoi istorii; kurs' starshago vozrasta* (Moscow, 1880, nineteenth edition).

<sup>20</sup> Other examples are the textbooks of V. A. Abaza, *Istoriia Rossii. Narodnoe Izdanie* (St. Petersburg, 1885) and *Rukovodstvo k otechestvennoi istorii* (St. Petersburg, 1889). Both were dedicated to the Imperial

Subjected to these teachings at every turn, the Romanovs did not simply believe the Tsar was truly God's representative on earth, they *knew* it. Raised as they were, they could not have known otherwise.

Unfortunately, no textbooks for any other discipline are listed in the memoirs. However, it is necessary to mention that their education would have been influenced, if indirectly, by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod and chief advisor to Tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II. Pobedonostsev tutored Alexander III and his brothers, and instilled them with his beliefs of the inviolability of the autocracy, of the mystical union between Tsar and people through the Orthodox religion,<sup>21</sup> and the dominance of faith or reason and rationalism. Whether our four grand dukes and duchesses knew it or not, this statesman, a reactionary and ultra-conservative "obscurantist"<sup>22</sup> who feared anything resembling liberalism, shaped the world-view they would acquire during their education. "Reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion" were "the only necessary forms of learning," Pobedonostsev felt, and he warned against "the dangers to society posed by over-educated intellectuals who were prone to taking up with liberalism and atheism."<sup>23</sup> Patriotism and Orthodoxy were all the qualities needed to love Russia and be divinely inspired to govern her properly. Yet the elemental nature of such an education instilled in the children the ideals and values of autocracy without equipping them to play a construction role within the autocratic system.

---

Family, granting them divine status. To reinforce this point, full page pictures of the future Nicholas II surrounded by cherubs and other religious imagery were reprinted in those two texts.

<sup>21</sup> Despite the important role of religion to both the concept of Russia's autocracy and to the Romanovs, questions of religion will not be examined fully in this study. The issue of religion in the memoirs and on their authors' world view is simply too weighty an issue to be discussed here without interrupting the flow of the paper, and lies outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>22</sup> See Konstantin P. Pobedonostsev, *Reflections of a Russian Statesman* (Ann Arbor, 1965). The foreword by Murray Polner provides a short intellectual biography and overview of his career.

<sup>23</sup> J. L. Black, *Citizens for the Fatherland; Education, Educators, and Pedagogical Ideals in Eighteenth Century Russia* (New York, 1979), p. 175.

In fact, the learning milieu to which these young aristocrats were subjected seems to have come full circle since Catherine the Great's introduction of a textbook for training good citizens (*grazhdanin*—a word later banned by Nicholas I) in the 1780s. The role of educational institutions, both then and in our memoirists' time, was to "produce a passive and strongly religious citizenry, whose males would be content with their lot in life, and whose females would stay at home where they belonged."<sup>24</sup>

The Imperial children deemed the result of Pobedonostsev's emphasis on a most basic education unsatisfactory. Of all the accounts studied herein, Marie's seems to demonstrate the most aimless education—and the one closest to Pobedonostsev's ideal—which she explained by stating that "education, in the eyes of my teachers, was of little importance as compared with religious and moral instruction."<sup>25</sup> The importance of these teachers becomes apparent upon examination of their pupils' feelings towards their professors.

None of these Imperial Highnesses were satisfied with their tutors. Even Olga, who seemed unconcerned by matters of education, remembered a geography teacher who irked her and her brothers with his pomposity and lack of humour. Her brother, Grand Duke George, loved to deflate his ego with polite but pointed questions that the tutor could not answer. George's parrot took an active dislike to their English tutor and mimicked him with an exaggerated British accent, aggravating the man until he refused to teach in the parrot's presence.<sup>26</sup> The fact that the same children who respected etiquette so well in the dining room—usually—left it completely behind in the confines of the classroom speaks volumes about their regard for their tutors. Marie, who

---

<sup>24</sup> J. L. Black, *Citizens for the Fatherland*, p. 175; the textbook, *Book on the Duties of Man and Citizen*, has been translated: see pp. 209-266.

<sup>25</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Vorres, p. 34.

expressed the greatest resentment at the insufficiency of her education, remembered the ridicule and sarcastic comments that met her efforts at dance class.<sup>27</sup> This was not an atmosphere likely to promote self-confidence in the children who perhaps needed it more than any others in the Empire. Boredom also played a factor. Marie had little patience for lessons that did not equip her for any practical purpose or stimulate her intellect. She described her tutors collectively as, "with hardly an exception, beings of no personality, and with no ability to give life to facts." Her religious instructor, an aged priest "whose robes exhaled a peculiar musty odour," was particularly objectionable. Both she and her younger brother Dmitri conceived an intense dislike for the priest. "His dry and mawkish appearance, his interminable, monotonous lessons, uttered in a nasal voice, set us on edge, and after several months, became unendurable." When complaints to her uncle brought only reprimands for her lack of respect for her tutor, Marie wrote to her father, Grand Duke Paul, to complain. This act only brought further trouble for the young Grand Duchess, who had to put up with that same instructor until her uncle's death in 1905.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the fact that they felt their education was more worthwhile, Kirill and Alexander also found fault with their tutors. Even Kirill, whose description of his childhood gives the impression of being recalled through hindsight shaded by rose-coloured glasses, mentioned that his mathematic studies were sub-par—"I was not at this stage taught any higher mathematics, trigonometry, mechanics, or dynamics,"—and that history was taught "unimaginatively," concentrating almost solely on Russia. When he

---

<sup>27</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5, 57.

began his studies at the Naval College in 1891, he had to work to catch up with other students, "as I had not the least knowledge of chemistry, mechanics, or trigonometry."<sup>29</sup>

Beyond the monotony of their instructors, Alexander had another complaint:

"...the unnecessary severity of our tutors created considerable bitterness. No doubt a mammoth protest would be staged by the fond American parents were their children to be treated in the manner approved of by the imperial family of Russia."<sup>30</sup> Mistakes removed the possibility of dessert, rebellion brought slaps. The fact that corporal punishment was used in many schools worldwide well into the twentieth century demonstrates the unoriginality of the Romanov tutors' undue severity, but does not negate the Grand Duke's right to complain. Because he did not dwell on the personal idiosyncrasies of his tutors, the reader must observe Alexander's attitude towards them through general comments. With the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war, he was not sad to see his military tutor go off to the front, rather, he "did wish that a helpful Turkish bullet should spare us the necessity of ever seeing this ferocious man again." When his brother Alexis was born, his parents were expecting some jealousy on the part of the newborn's older siblings. Instead, young Sandro felt only pity for the infant. "I hoped for his sake that by the time he grew up, all our teachers would have passed out of existence."<sup>31</sup>

An incident relating to that same Alexis Mikhailovich illustrates an important point about these tutors: while not necessarily chosen specifically by the children's father, the tutor would be maintained and supported by him. The children's upbringing

---

<sup>29</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 24-25, p. 33. At Naval College he also learned the art of Russian swearing ("There is no comparison with it. It excels itself in unadulterated filth"), to which he had not been previously exposed. Though his ignorance spared him the worst of its vulgarity, his aged manservant understood and was horrified that his young master should be exposed to such filth. See p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 16. However, Alexander and Kaiser Wilhelm II concluded that "all the sovereigns of Europe seem to have agreed that their sons should be beaten into the realization of their future responsibilities." Wilhelm's heir noted dryly that "the amount of punishment dealt to an imperial father invariably fails to soften the path of his son," pp. 16-17.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 23.

was harsh because the parents felt it should be so, and were unwilling to soften the rules set by tradition lest any "weakness" should creep into the pupil's character. Alexander glosses over his brother Alexis' early death; Kirill does not. During his training period with the Navy, Alexis, whose health had always been fragile, caught a severe chill during a storm.

... When he caught this chill, it was suggested to his father, the Grand Duke Michael Nicholaevitch, that he should interrupt his course of training to get over his illness. Grand Duke Michael, however, who had a great, and possibly exaggerated, sense of duty, would have none of it, and insisted that the boy should finish his course. As a result cousin Alexey developed double pneumonia, of which he died. The first time he wore his midshipman's uniform was in his coffin.<sup>32</sup>

Under such a system of rigid discipline, there is little wonder that none of the Imperial children recall the details of their education in a very positive light. Alexander's reflections on his education seem to speak for the whole group: "It shall always remain a mystery to me how such an inane system did not succeed in dulling our wits and fostering a hatred for all subjects we had to study in our childhood."<sup>33</sup>

In defense of the tutors, the problematic education of the fledgling grand dukes and duchesses was not solely their fault. Frequent relocation was common in the imperial family, who might reside at their summer palace for part of the year, visit their other landholdings in the fall, move to St. Petersburg for the winter social season, and then take trips abroad in the spring. This lack of residential stability can only have hindered attempts at giving the children a complete education. Marie also felt this was an obstacle in her education; "My studies were neglected or conducted from a point of view entirely superficial. I was moved so often from place to place that my teachers and

---

<sup>32</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 16.



professors changed constantly."<sup>34</sup> The results of such a course of study speak for themselves. Russian letters written to the Tsar by her brother Dmitri are riddled with spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, although at the time of the correspondence he would have been eighteen to twenty-three years old.<sup>35</sup>

One might wonder if the children sensed any gaps in their education during their youth. It is prudent to assume that the realization of such a lack, and its effects, came only later in life, while trying to understand the cause of the Revolution and to cope with the rigours of life in exile. In addition, Marie noted that she was "deprived of all freedom of action; my every expression of will or independence was at once suppressed." Later in life, during the long months of her pregnancy in the absence of her husband, Marie would find herself unable to relieve her boredom through independent study: "I was not used to serious books, or trained in the systematic study of a chosen subject... and I was deficient in intellectual curiosity." She recounted that she did not even have access to books in the library of the palace as a child. The cases were locked. This is not surprising, in light of the fact that the aunt who raised her was so afraid of lurid detail that she had Dostoevsky's works read to her in absolute privacy, allowing no one else to attend.<sup>36</sup> In such a climate, neither creativity nor independence could assert itself.

The childhoods of Romanovs were very different from those of their subjects not only because of the atmosphere of severity contrasting with opulent surroundings, and their distinctive education. They were also unique because they were surrounded by a rarefied atmosphere of terror. Olga, Marie, Kirill and Alexander lived though a time of violence in Russia, and though some dwelled on it more than others, none neglected to

---

<sup>34</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> M. Lichnevsky, trans., *Lettres des Grands-Ducs à Nicholas II*, (Paris, 1926), p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 4, 126, 5, 27.

mention the threat of terrorism that cast a shadow over their youths. Kirill and Alexander were old enough to remember the assassination of their uncle Tsar Alexander II, a relatively reform-minded autocrat who was killed despite his considering a measure of consultative popular representation in the government. Alexander, named after this uncle, first noticed the feelings of unrest brewing in the population in 1879, on his first trip to Moscow and St. Petersburg. During the entire train-ride, soldiers standing guard flanked the track. At first the young man thought this was done to honour his father, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, but was greatly distressed to find out that this was done because the Tsar intended to take the same route on an upcoming trip. His father's own worry did not alleviate his concern over the necessity of guarding the Tsar's person against his own subjects. The worst part was not being able to foresee from which direction the blow might fall. "To say that we lived in a besieged fortress would be using a very poor simile. During the war one knows one's friends and enemies. We never did. The butler serving the morning coffee might have been in the employ of the nihilists...."<sup>37</sup> When Alexander II was killed in 1881, the first news coming from the scene was that Michael Nikolaevich, Sandro's father, had also been killed. Though this was an error, one can only imagine the fear it inspired. However, the guard that was immediately set up around Imperial persons was soon reduced. Only after the Revolution of 1905 were serious measures taken to protect the lives of the Imperial family, although their belief in the unswerving loyalty of their people was badly shaken. The seeds of fear and distrust began to undermine the tradition "myth of the tsar" that existed in Russia. Founded on the idea that the *narod* had unconditional faith in the tsar's benevolence and that the masses were unswerving in their loyalty to him, the tsar who clung most fervently to this

---

<sup>37</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 38-39, 57.

myth was Nicholas II, who made it the foundation of the ideology of his reign. While he remained undeterred in his belief in the myth of the Tsar, his relatives, in their memoirs, claim to have questioned it. The fact that these grand dukes and duchesses were spurred by this doubt to try and warn Nicholas of the potential consequences of his actions will be discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>38</sup>

Olga and Marie, though younger, were also affected by the terrorist attacks that seemed to be sweeping the country. In 1888, Olga and her entire immediate family were involved in a train wreck at Borki; Alexander III held up the roof of the train car while his wife and children escaped. Many others aboard the train were not so fortunate, although the fatalities were never attributed conclusively to an act of terrorism or sabotage. Nonetheless, Olga was later told that she had been screaming, "Now they'll come and kill us all!" while running away from the train, though at the tender age of six, she could hardly have understood the danger the revolutionaries presented. She claimed to have become "conscious of a danger lurking somewhere" and, from then on, was afraid of the dark. Olga might have felt more secure by the increased presence of soldiers to guard them, but the plain-clothes men irritated both her and her father, Alexander III. They nicknamed these obvious lurkers "'naturalists' because they kept darting in and out from behind trees and shrubs."<sup>39</sup> Her childhood was not deprived of humour.

Marie claims also to have felt from early childhood that their way of living was out of synch with Russia and might not last. She remembered sitting on the floor of her

---

<sup>38</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 15. Nicholas' stubborn belief in this "myth" was certainly genuine. Had Nicholas believed the masses capable of disloyalty (or untraditional thought), he would no doubt have approached the governance of Russia quite differently. For more on Nicholas' dependence on the myth of the tsar in his "scenario of power," see Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power; Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, v.2. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, 2000). For more on the myth of the tsar, see Daniel Field's *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1976) or Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People. Studies in Russian Myths* (New York, 1969).

<sup>39</sup> Vorres, pp. 29-32.

nursery, trying to teach herself to button her own boots; "in case of a revolution I had to look after myself." When thieves broke into their home one night, not only stealing the silver, but also eating and smoking there with apparent ease, she realized how vulnerable the family really was.<sup>40</sup> During the disturbances of 1905, her life was disrupted directly by an act of terrorism. Despite the precaution of moving into the Kremlin, her uncle and guardian, Grand Duke Serge, was assassinated. Serge was the governor of Moscow, and was determined to suppress ruthlessly the revolutionary elements in Russia. A month previously, an attempt had been made on the life of Nicholas II at the Epiphany Day celebrations. A policeman behind him was injured, and bullets sent window shards spraying over Olga and the Dowager-Empress Marie.<sup>41</sup> Olga would never lose the fear of terrorism that she learned early in life. Decades later, living in safety in Ontario, Canada, she still checked under her bed at night before sleeping, and "when a water-pipe burst with a deafening bang her first reaction was to telephone the police. She was not thinking of water-pipes but of bombs...."<sup>42</sup> Such traumatic conditions present in their childhood obviously had a lasting impact on these children, shaping their attitudes towards revolutionaries later in life.

Growing up in such an unusual setting could only have added to the pressures of being a member of a ruling family of such a vast expanse of territory. Another consequence of their upbringing, not unusual in the Victorian upper classes of the day, in Russia or elsewhere, must be discussed: loneliness. The important positions held by their parents meant that much of their time would be spent on their duties, leaving little

---

<sup>40</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 5, 62.

<sup>41</sup> Vorres, p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

for their children, plus the very position of these children ostracized them from other youths their own age.

With the exception of Kirill, none of the children were close to their mothers. Marie's mother had died in childbirth with Dmitri, and her aunt Ella "showed no interest in us or in anything that concerned us, and she saw as little of us as she could. She appeared to resent our presence in the household, and our uncle's evident affection for us. At times she said things that wounded me."<sup>43</sup> Olga was afraid of her mother despite her diminutive size, viewing her more as "the Empress" than her mother, for she never seemed to take a personal interest in this daughter. Going to the Empress' rooms for tea was a "duty" forced upon her by her nurse. "I could never bring myself to speak naturally. She had a horror of anything beyond the frontiers of etiquette and propriety." Olga could not imagine laughing over her brothers' childish pranks with her mother as she did with her father, Alexander III.<sup>44</sup> After her father's death in 1894, Olga must have been lonelier than ever, for he and her brothers seem to have been her only comfort. Her brother George died not long after his father, and Nicholas and Michael had other duties to attend to by this time. Her sister Xenia seems not to have played a role in her life; Xenia's marriage to Grand Duke Alexander, "Sandro," in July 1894, prior to the Tsar's death, would no doubt have preoccupied the newlywed. Sandro himself had an unenviable relationship with his mother. She "dedicated all her efforts to the ungrateful task of suppressing even the slightest exterior signs of tenderness or affection; in her early youth she fell a victim to the far-fetched ideas of Spartan education advocated in her native Germany." Later in life, when she expressed concern about his safety during

---

<sup>43</sup> Marie, *Education*, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Vorres, p. 40. This provides quite a contrast to Nicholas' close relationship with his mother.

his naval duties at sea, he reflected, "I wish I could reciprocate her affection but it is not my fault that she has never shown me her love in the years when I needed it most."<sup>45</sup>

Unlike Olga's open adoration for her father, Alexander's sentiments towards Michael Nikolaevich seem to be a love based on deep respect and esteem that could have blossomed into a warmer relationship if not for the barriers thrown up by the all-encompassing etiquette that governed the human relationships of elite society. This barrier becomes evident when Alexander describes his father's grief at his mother's death; the inability of Sandro and his brothers to comfort their father stemmed from these deep-seated feelings of respect. "When talking of him, we always referred to him as 'Michael Nicholaevich'; when talking to him, we weighed our words and controlled our emotions. Our hearts went out to him...but we could not find an appropriate way to express our sympathy."<sup>46</sup>

Marie's father, Grand Duke Paul, was exiled for marrying morganatically. She was raised by his brother Serge and Serge's wife, Grand Duchess Elizabeth, or Ella. After Serge's assassination in 1905, Marie would have no father figure in her life on a regular basis during her youth.

Kirill wrote flattering things about his father. Kirill admitted his father held the same conservative principles as the rest of the males of his generation, yet felt he was broad-minded and exceedingly kind, with a noble character. The tone of Kirill's memoirs, particularly with regard to his family, his career, and his role in Russian politics, seems to have a sugarcoated quality. Perhaps his descriptions of a childhood so different than that of his cousins should be taken with a grain of salt.

---

<sup>45</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 21, 116.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

Though having parents who were often emotionally and physically inaccessible was not unique to the Romanovs, the Imperial children differed from their contemporaries because they were segregated from other children. Rarely are there episodes in the memoirs where the Grand Dukes and Duchesses interacted with children outside their immediate family. Brothers and sisters came to mean the world to each other in the absence of other suitable playmates. Marie and her brother Dmitri were so close that one historian is of the opinion that "psychologically, if not physically, the relationship was incestuous."<sup>47</sup> On Sundays, Olga and her brother Michael could invite other noble children to visit Gatchina for a few hours.<sup>48</sup> Marie described her own Sunday play dates, but they seem to have held little amusement for the child. "No real intimacy was permitted. No one was allowed to *tutoie* us or call us by our names. All games took place under the vigilant gaze of our guardians, and the children who became too noisy were not invited again."<sup>49</sup> The sad truth is that, "from the point of view of our parents and tutors we grew to be a nice bunch of healthy children, but the modern scientists would have detected in our natures the unmistakable traces of love-starvation," as Alexander later realized.<sup>50</sup>

A strict upbringing, an irregular and sometimes inadequate education, fears of terrorism and loneliness were the features that played the greatest part in the youths of these cousins. All of these factors would influence their characters, and haunt them throughout their lives. Their conservative values would cloud their judgement regarding liberal reformers who were still loyal to the throne. Educated to revere the autocratic form of rule, this value system would influence their world view even after revolution

---

<sup>47</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 105.

<sup>48</sup> Vorres, p. 40.

<sup>49</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 42.

<sup>50</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 20.

proved it outmoded and untenable. The narrowness of their education combined with notions of duty and service would frustrate the Romanovs when they discovered the purpose for which they had been educated—service to Russia—could not be adequately fulfilled. Their general and unfocused, rather than specialized, education, left them ill-suited to be useful or competent in a governmental role. Writing of the dominance of Classicism in the underlying principles of eighteenth-century education, J. L. Black states, "there developed within aristocratic circles the conviction that their sons should be educated to govern, and that other classes of people should be trained specifically to obey."<sup>51</sup> This could easily be applied to nineteenth-century Russia as well, and one gets the alarming impression from these memoirs that Grand Dukes and Duchesses, like their subjects, were not educated to govern, but to obey. Equally important, once thrust into the world of the émigré, dispossessed and impoverished, the holes in their education and their sheltered childhoods would leave them ill-equipped to deal with the real world on its terms.

---

<sup>51</sup> Black, p. 6.



CHAPTER TWO  
*The Supporting Cast:  
Grand Ducal Roles in Russia*

The memoirs offer a unique opportunity to understand the Romanov role in Russia both as they *say* they perceived it and as they lived it. Their notion of what a Grand Duke or Duchess should be, and how close they came to that ideal, will be studied below. Such an examination makes it very clear that the grand ducal role was an empty one. Before beginning that investigation, one should understand how some Grand Dukes and Duchesses of the previous generation fulfilled that role, enabling a comparison that is only somewhat to the credit of the younger generation examined in this study.

In the elite circles of the nineteenth century there was a very definite idea of what a Grand Duke should be like. In fact, Chavchavadze says, several *bons vivants* "made the phrase *grand duc russe* legendary in Paris and on the Riviera." Alexis Alexandrovich, the brother of Alexander III, is the perfect example of a representative of this lifestyle. His contemporaries viewed him as extremely attractive, though heavy later in life. He was the Grand Admiral of the Russian Navy, but preferred to spend his time in either Paris or Monte Carlo, no doubt a reason why no naval reforms were implemented. Alexis had antiquated notions of ships and naval warfare; he resigned after the disaster of the Russo-Japanese war, though not before he had driven Grand Duke Alexander to leave the country in frustration due to Alexis' continued attempts to block his naval reforms. "It was a common joke in St. Petersburg that the ladies of Paris cost Russia at least a battleship a year!" After winning at the gaming tables, jewels were presented to the company to share in the Grand Duke's victory.<sup>1</sup> Involved with the wife of a distant relation, Alexis beat the man and threw him down the stairs when the unfortunate husband discovered his wife in the Grand Duke's embrace. The offended party, the Duke of Leuchtenberg, appealed to Alexander III with no results: instead, he was upbraided for

---

<sup>1</sup> David Chavchavadze, *The Grand Dukes*, pp. 113-117.

being unable to manage his wife and told that divorce was out of the question. Thus began a royal *ménage à trois*, with the Duke of Leuchtenberg taking the couch.

This was not a unique incident, for the behaviour of the Grand Dukes was often scandalous. Vladimir and Alexis Alexandrovich were the worst offenders, even involved in public brawls at restaurants. Vladimir's wife, Marie Pavlovna senior ("Miechen") was at the root of several scandals. She was a gossip, later the leader of smear campaigns against Empress Alexandra, and had a suspect private life; rumours circulated concerning an affair between her and Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich ("Nikolasha"). The Grand Dukes were known for excess. In Paris, restaurants and jewelers happily anticipated their visits, placing signs in their windows: "We speak Russian."<sup>2</sup> One wonders if the Grand Dukes tended to live this lifestyle simply because it was expected of them. Alexander III tried to rein in his brothers and their entourage and generally succeeded, at least temporarily. Family discipline and unity would dissolve during the reign of Nicholas II.

The duties of grand dukes and duchesses were fairly basic: to serve one's country and Tsar, maintain active and ceremonial posts in the military, be active in supporting the arts and various charities, and keep up the appearance of grand ducal splendour. However, these tasks were complicated by the fact they came with all the appearance of authority, but none of the actual power. Perry and Pleshakov point out that attempts to overstep this boundary were strongly discouraged:

If they showed energy and eagerness to serve, their ambition might provoke jealousy and excite suspicion. If, on the other hand, they did too little, they might be judged self-indulgent and hedonistic. Though they were usually mere figureheads of army or navy administration, public opinion nonetheless would judge grand dukes harshly for anything that went wrong. Grand dukes had responsibility without authority. The real purpose of the grand duke was to stand by in case he should be called to the throne.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, pp. 37-40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

An added problem was the rapid growth of the Imperial family; the growth in the family during the nineteenth century resulted in too many men to fill the rather limited ceremonial offices available. Both ambitions and opinions overlapped.<sup>4</sup> Arguments between Alexis and Alexander over naval reforms are evidence of this, as well as of tensions created by a generation gap within the family. The ultimate sufferer of this generational difference in outlook would be Nicholas II, who was somewhat intimidated by his older uncles, and absorbed their more conservative views of autocracy.

Opportunities for grand duchesses were even more limited. As in most royal families, their main duty was to contract a marriage that would be advantageous to the family. Olga and Marie would turn to nursing during the war in an effort to be of service to Russia, but one wonders what creative outlet they would have had if World War I had been averted.

Grand Duchess Olga did not have many duties to fulfill. She would not have minded tasks to perform, but she did hate being on public display. Unfortunately, for such a close relation of two reigning Tsars, avoidance of the public was impossible. She remembered a reception her mother gave in her honour in 1900, and how uncomfortable it was for her to be in such a large crowd. "I should have remembered who I was and done my duty without any such feelings—but I couldn't help myself. And it is something of a riddle because I was immensely proud of the name I bore and all the tradition—but there lived an imp somewhere inside me...." In 1901, she married Prince Peter of Oldenburg, a marriage arranged by her mother. It was not at all a love match; the Prince had no interest in women and the marriage was never consummated. Yet Olga believed it was her duty to follow her mother's wishes, and this marriage preempted any possibility of having to leave Russia through marriage to a foreign prince.<sup>5</sup> After a year of marriage, Olga moved into a home of her own, but was frustrated by the endless parade of visitors:

---

<sup>4</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Vorres, pp. 85-87. The Oldenburgs were an offshoot of the Romanov family and lived in Russia.

ambassadors, diplomats, and family. Also, it was her duty to give audiences, and to return those calls. Olga hated the formality of luncheons, receptions, and the clothes that they required. But it was her image of what a Grand Duchess should do, and she followed it until war was declared in 1914. Long in love with Colonel Nikolai Koulikovsky, whom Peter had ordered attached to his personal staff for his wife's benefit, Olga told her husband she was leaving for the front to become a nurse and that she was, in effect, leaving him.<sup>6</sup> Her career as a nurse was interrupted by the Revolution, her captivity, and subsequent flight from Russia.

One notes the overwhelming presence of the concept of duty in Olga's *raison d'être*. Even in exile, Olga tried to help any Russian who approached her for help. Living in Denmark during World War II, émigré soldiers sought asylum at Olga's estate, fearful of returning to the Soviet Union after the German defeat. Though Olga did not have the money to help financially, she did hire and hide soldiers on her estate. Such actions provoked the interests of the Soviets, and with their army not far away, the Danish government thought it wise to move Olga Romanova, by then Olga Koulikovskaia, out of the country. For her trouble, she was relocated to Canada, where she was very happy. Reflecting on her life as a Grand Duchess, Olga remembered, "however little I had to give, I don't think I withheld anything to serve my dear country as a Romanov."<sup>7</sup> It would be difficult to disagree with this assessment. She remained aloof from the family circle that put itself forth as advisors to Nicholas II, when perhaps her advice might have meant something, but it is likely that Olga's advice was not solicited. Perhaps she was unwilling to alienate a beloved brother. Her path in life was justified by the fond affection with which she is remembered by those who knew her.<sup>8</sup>

If Olga did not discuss the actual office of grand duchess as such, Marie did and realized its hazards. "They kept me purposely in ignorance of the importance of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Vorres, pp. 91-93, 132.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-189, 218.

<sup>8</sup> See Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 273.

situation into which I had been born," Marie recollected. It is interesting that, in contrast to Olga, Marie felt her opportunities were deliberately restricted. She recognized that her position was one of great influence, but she "remained until almost the end totally unaware of the grand possibilities it offered me to serve my country." Marie also remembered when, in 1902, Nicholas chose to celebrate Easter in Moscow. The crowds were enthusiastic and pressed as close as they could get to the Tsar; no measures had been taken to prevent his being swarmed. A bruised Marie was inspired by this show of enthusiasm, and wrote that she "dreamed secretly of an occasion when I could prove my devotion to my sovereign in a truly striking fashion."<sup>9</sup> The significance of this idea of service to the autocracy cannot be overemphasized in either the lives or memoirs of these four Romanovs. It was the cornerstone of their identity and their expulsion from Russia was therefore a harsh psychological blow.

Marie was also very aware how the limitations of her royal positions affected her life. She considered herself "helpless," complaining that,

The protected and restricted existence of a Grand Duchess had rendered in me, thus far, all ideas of independence or initiative useless, even dangerous. I had been cast in the bourgeois ideals then current in royal circles, and leveled to my kind. This levelling had penetrated into our circle long before the equalizing of the masses; a Princess who distinguished herself by her intelligence or by a desire for intellectual activity, if this activity should go beyond the commonplace domain of charity, attracted the envy of her equals, and was spared neither criticism nor irony. An intellectual mediocrity was both a refuge and a protection....<sup>10</sup>

Marie therefore felt there was very little impetus for a woman to rise above the limitations of her position. Out of our four memoirists, Marie's works by far convey the greatest sense of having been robbed or cheated of something. Ironically, it is not the period of exile in which she felt deprived, but the period of her childhood and life in Russia.

---

<sup>9</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 4, 53-55.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Marie's marriage to a Prince of Sweden was an arranged one, just as Olga's had been. She returned to Russia at the beginning of World War I, and was alarmed at how her situation as a young divorcée affected the public's opinion of her. Marie decided to go to the front and become a war nurse, again viewing this as an opportunity to be useful.<sup>11</sup> This need to find purpose and direction in life would haunt Marie forever.

Marie felt purposeful for the duration of her nursing career. She learned to perform minor operations, and was head of a hospital. She expanded her authority to overhaul the hospital's disorganized financial administration. Horrified at the lack of cleanliness and proper linens and bandages, Marie wrote the Empress to ask for her help, since Alexandra had opened a linen workshop on the grounds of the Winter Palace. Alexandra reproached Marie for "meddling in what did not concern [her]." <sup>12</sup> Marie's efforts to use her position for the advantage of her subjects had been a failure. Although she viewed the role of Grand Duchess as one of service to the state, Marie's opportunities to serve were restricted.

For the men, a whole new set of complexities is introduced. They actually had a role to perform in Russia, and had to swear an oath to serve the Tsar and the nation. Their roles in Russia were naturally more important in the overall governance of the country. They were also in a position to encounter more competition in their sphere, and, reflecting society at large in that era, led a much less restricted existence than the women.

Like the Grand Duchesses, the Grand Dukes were still rather limited in the scope of careers they could choose for themselves. Though his father, Michael Nikolaevich, used to tell Alexander his life was his own, the memoirist recalled,

The very thought that any one of their sons would cast his ambitions outside the military service would have struck my parents as distinctly heretic. The House of the Romanoffs expected its members to wear a

---

<sup>11</sup> Marie remembered these war years as "one of the happiest times of my life, a time of real service...." See *Education*, p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206, 191-193.

uniform of some description and cared little about their personal predilections and heartfelt desires.<sup>13</sup>

One of a grand duke's first duties, in fact, was to obey this unwritten family rule.

A grand duke's military career was unlike that of any other enlisted man or officer. Although he had to perform the same duties as his fellow officers, he was set apart by his status. Alexander explained the problems this created: "The fact of my being a grand duke and a cousin of the Emperor puts me in a dual position liable to breed hatred in our commander. Aboard ship he is my undisputed superior, but ashore he had to salute me, stopping five paces in front of me."<sup>14</sup> This no doubt led to some awkward moments, if not outright resentment.

The position of Grand Duke required, of course, attendance at ceremonial functions. It also involved occasional stints as a statesman. Both Alexander and Kirill were called upon to play that role. In 1898, Nicholas asked Kirill, whose ship was docked in Japan, to make a diplomatic call to the Emperor of Japan. In 1902, he was asked to make an official visit to the Empress of China to express Russia's sympathy for China due to the Boxer uprising.<sup>15</sup> Alexander also made diplomatic calls in Japan, America, and was charged with paying Nicholas' compliments to Queen Victoria during a visit to England.<sup>16</sup> There were times when the Grand Dukes took it upon themselves to act as unbidden statesman, as did Kirill in 1894, following the death of Alexander III. Kirill was the senior Grand Duke at Tsarskoe Selo while the family was attending to the bed-ridden Tsar at Livadia. Kirill found himself "...having to cope in that position with a crowd of officers, who were anxious to make certain of what they had to do concerning the oath of allegiance to the new monarch. They pestered me from morning till night."<sup>17</sup> His description of the events surrounding Alexander III's funeral suggests he rather

---

<sup>13</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 92-132.

<sup>16</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 121, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 57. For Alexander's intentions to play a role in Versailles, see *Once*, pp. 314-315.

enjoyed his brief period of importance. By swearing allegiance to the Provisional Government the day before the Tsar's abdication, Kirill made it clear that he was a Grand Duke of Russia, rather than a servant of Nicholas II. This, no doubt, had more to do with his dynastic ambitions than any democratic sentiment. His memoirs prefer to focus on his naval duties, rather than his grand ducal ones.

Like Marie, Alexander is aware of the contradictions inherent in the grand ducal title. It conferred responsibilities without the power to enforce the authority of their decisions. During the Russo-Japanese war, Nicholas charged Alexander to organize a "cruiser war" to stop contraband materiel from getting through to Japan. Alexander felt quite proud of his men and rather heroic himself when they seized an armada of ships from Germany and England loaded with contraband. He returned to Tsarskoe Selo for the congratulations he felt entitled to, but protests from London and Berlin reached the palace before he did. Alexander was instead given a dressing down for "piracy" and was told to dispatch an order to his ships to release the armada. Alexander felt humiliated for himself and his men, but chose not to resign from his position as Minister of the Merchant Marine, feeling "...a grand duke cannot desert his sovereign at a moment of national disgrace. So I had to execute his orders and keep my sorrow to myself."<sup>18</sup>

It must have been frustrating to have the ear of the Tsar and yet not the ability to be heard. Alexander had some very firm opinions about the way Russia should be governed, and convinced of his own righteousness, was rather upset whenever he was dismissed. His advice was neglected so often that he eventually got used to it, for example, when he continued with his plans for introducing aviation to Russia. His initiatives resulted in Russia's first airdrome, barracks, and aviation school. In 1909, he organized an air show, much appreciated by the crowd. The Minister of War, General V.

---

<sup>18</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 219-221. Likewise, Alexander was asked to chair an industrial enterprise in the East. He agreed, but resigned when he felt this "Yalu Committee" might cause war with Japan. His resignation was kept secret to maintain an image of unity with the Tsar's policies. Therefore, when war broke out, politicians accused Alexander of causing the Russo-Japanese war by "his adventure" in the Yalu Peninsula. See *Once*, pp. 206-208.



A. Sukhomlinov, however, laughed it off, finding it "stupendously entertaining, though of no use whatsoever for the army."<sup>19</sup> Alexander's success in the field of aviation might never have come about had he not resigned from the Merchant Marine in 1905. He wanted to resign at several instances before then, after the debacle of the contraband raids, his uncle Alexis' rejections of his naval reforms, and after being overruled in the matter of sending the Baltic Fleet to fight against Japan, which led to the fleet's destruction.<sup>20</sup> Alexander endured his impotence for the sake of duty, but his forbearance ended with the October Manifesto of 1905. He wanted no part of a compromise, brought about by a war he felt Nicholas might have won had he listened to his advice. Additionally, Sandro could not stomach weakening of the autocracy. As early as 1898, he had written to Nicholas,

Autocracy, as I and all its true adherents understand it, cannot tolerate any compromises. Each compromise leads to a gradual erosion of the principles of autocracy, and consequently, of power. Many people, unfortunately, believe that you are inclined to reforms, which would lead to a widening of public self-government.<sup>21</sup>

Though Andrew Verner states that Alexander supported the part of Prince P.D. Sviatopolk-Mirsky's 1904 program that called for a public consultative body within the government and tried to convince Nicholas of the need for popular representation<sup>22</sup> (which he would reiterate in 1916-1917), the discrepancy in attitude can perhaps be explained by the very tangible difference between popular representation granted by the tsar and popular representation wrested from him by a discontented populace. The fact that Nicholas had been forced to grant a manifesto in 1905, which Sandro had advised him to bestow willingly in 1904 to turn necessity into seeming benevolence, was too strong a blow to be endured—so, he resigned, adopting a new outlook on life. "Up to 1906 it had always been--'Russia comes first.' In 1906-1914 I possessed a different

---

<sup>19</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp.221-223.

<sup>21</sup> Maylunas and Mironenko, p. 168.

<sup>22</sup> Verner, pp. 141-142.

motto: 'I have but one life to live'.<sup>23</sup> The frustration of being a grand duke in name only was too much to bear.

If Alexander was dissatisfied with his role, one is prompted to ask if he had another solution to this problem. According to A. A. Mossolov, Head of the Court Chancellery 1900-1916, he did. Mossolov wrote that Alexander published a book in which he argued the Tsar should put his closest family (i.e., the Grand Dukes) at the head of all the important departments of the government.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps this was Sandro's way of circumventing a bureaucracy that was extremely unpopular with both the Tsar and his subjects and restoring the ideal of direct communion between Tsar and people. This idea of a Council of Ministers composed entirely of Romanovs is interesting, but by this time, it would have been vehemently opposed by the various oppositionist groups in Russia. Also, in light of the differences of opinion between the grand dukes, it is likely this council would have fought as much, if not more, than any other.

Alexander's dissatisfaction with his limited role as grand duke stirred up controversy within the Romanov family, but as a rule, they dismissed him. He responded in kind. According to one biographer, "for most of the family, he had little respect, regarding them as unimaginative, hyper-conservative and paralyzed by inertia. The family heartily responded, refusing to take Sandro seriously."<sup>25</sup> However, it is important to recognize that Alexander was ridiculed not simply because people felt his ideas were unsound, but because the ideas were coming from a grand duke. As his brother, Sergei Mikhailovich, would discover when he attempted to warn army headquarters of increased

<sup>23</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 225-241.

<sup>24</sup> A. A. Mossolov, *At the Court of the Last Tsar* (London, 1935), p. 94.

<sup>25</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 59. Their characterization of Alexander is interesting. "Sandro believed himself a profound thinker. He was not." "He was like quicksilver, the most restless male Romanov of his generation: amorous, adventurous, incapable of sticking to anybody or any project for any length of time. His active mind swarmed with schemes to gain glory, power, and more wealth, but he lacked both clarity of vision and a sense of responsibility. As an entrepreneur he would have gone bankrupt; as a politician he would have ended in jail; as an admiral he would have lost all his ships. But being a grand duke he was protected from all these calamities." See p. 59. Unfortunately, Perry and Pleshakov give no grounds for the basis of such a characterization, nor do they provide any sources for materials that have caused them to form such an opinion.

production in central Europe's munitions factories, it was imprudent for a grand duke to be seen as the source of any initiative. "The Ministers laughed. The idea of a grand duke giving sound advice seemed blasphemous. It had been always conceded that a grand duke should play the part of a glorified ne'er-do-well,"<sup>26</sup> Alexander complained. The occasional inappropriate behaviour of the Tsar's relatives, such as that mentioned above, only reinforced this view and undermined grand ducal attempts to be taken seriously in the political arena.

The Grand Dukes and Duchesses of Russia were placed in an awkward position. Although they benefited financially from their titles and inheritances, the impotence of their titles must have been difficult to bear when their advice went unheeded and the Empire was brought to ruin. They could make suggestions, but they could not implement them. The women's roles were more limiting than the men's, but for all of them it was a struggle simply to understand what the grand ducal role was. They had been raised to judge their success by the performance of their duties of service to Russia, yet were frustrated to discover that their ability to contribute was undermined by a complete lack of power necessary to carry out their responsibilities. It seems that, except for Kirill, the four Romanovs had a sneaking suspicion that their roles were somehow incompatible with Russia, that they had outgrown the system. Marie became painfully aware of this during her Red Cross work, remembering in particular a conversation that "revealed to me clearly how far I had outdistanced myself and showed me the deep abyss that had opened between my present mental attitude and that of my milieu."<sup>27</sup> Worse yet, these Romanovs could not understand why this was so. Their frustration foreshadows the opinion of Prince Nicholas of Russia, their descendant—like the system of monarchy, the impotent grand ducal role was "out of step with the times."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 253.

<sup>27</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 207.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Robert K. Massie, *The Romanovs; The Final Chapter* (New York, 1995), p. 276.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### *People and Personae*

This collection of memoirs offers the reader an opportunity to view Alexander III, Nicholas II and Alexandra through the eyes of family. They both tear down myths and replace them with new ones. The memoirs also discuss the most controversial personage of Nicholas' reign, Grigory Rasputin, as the Romanovs claim to peel away layers of gossip and misunderstanding. By understanding how the Romanovs viewed the people involved in this family drama, one can better understand how they tried to come to terms with the influence they had on the autocracy's downfall. The memoirists' views of these people reveal not only their ideals of Tsardom and what went wrong with it, but also the degree to which the Romanovs identify "Russia" as a family preserve.

The reign of Alexander III was looked upon as a "golden age" by the members of his family. He came to power following the assassination of his father, Alexander II, and felt justified in ruling with an iron hand and the Okhrana (secret police) to contain revolutionary sentiments and acts. Regardless of the fact that both the intelligentsia of his day and historians found his reign stagnant and oppressive, Alexander is fondly remembered, almost worshiped, by the Romanovs. To Kirill, he represented everything a Tsar should be to a people. "While he reigned all felt safe, because a strong man was known to stand at the helm of the Ship of State. His great and handsome frame of a blond giant held a character of iron and an absolutely truthful nature. He was no subject to flattery." Also, he looked like a Tsar, "the veritable personification of a 'bogatyry,' the

legendary national heroes of the early Russian chroniclers...."<sup>1</sup> One cannot help comparing descriptions of Alexander's strength and presence to Nicholas' unprepossessing self.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, "It was his policy...to keep the Imperial Family united in a bond of friendship of peace. He was the father of his family, as well as of his people, and all looked up to him as such." His death in 1894 brought an end to this security, according to Kirill. "Never again was there to be that same spirit of understanding among us, that easy fellowship and gay merriement. All that had come to a final conclusion."<sup>3</sup> Though he could be harsh, Alexander III inspired respect and love from his extended family.

Grand Duke Alexander heartily seconded this assessment. As Alexander III's son-in-law, he had even more opportunity to observe the Tsar's forceful personality first-hand. In his estimation, "no other Romanoff ever came so near to the popular conception of a Czar as this bearded giant with the shoulders of a Hercules."<sup>4</sup> Influenced by his reactionary tutor, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the new Tsar had a firm suspicion of liberal thinkers, blaming Alexander II's policies for opening the door to revolutionary activities.<sup>5</sup> He promptly changed the entire administration and although this brought accusations of being reactionary, Sandro contended that an examination of his Ministers' portfolios would have revealed reformers and visionaries in the group. He had an admirable work

---

<sup>1</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 55. "We were very fond of Uncle Sasha, who was exceedingly kind of us, and many of the happiest hours of my childhood were spent at Gatchina...." Kirill remembered, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this, see Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, pp. 322-323. Even government officials found Nicholas' appearance uninspiring next to his father's. Nicholas' small stature and increasing retirement from public ceremony were to his detriment.

<sup>3</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 55-56.

<sup>4</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Pobedonostsev called liberalism "the malady of our time" and felt representative government in Russia would be a perversion of God's will. See Pobedonostsev, *Reflections*, chapters 8 and 16.

ethic, had no time for the escapades of his brothers, amused the children and became just what Sandro thought a Tsar should be: "the busiest man in Russia."<sup>6</sup>

Grand Duke Alexander may have disagreed with some of Alexander III's foreign policies, but he certainly admired the directness of the Tsar's methods. The Emperor was afraid of no one's army. Threatened with mobilization of two or three army corps by an Austrian ambassador over the Balkan question, Alexander III calmly took a silver fork, twisted it into a knot, then tossed it at the ambassador. "That is what I am going to do to your two or three army corps," the Tsar informed him. Alexander III was fond of saying that Russia's only Allies were her army and her navy.<sup>7</sup> One wonders how much the vocalization of Alexander's suspicion of Western powers influenced the Allies' attitudes towards Russia during and after World War I.

Grand Duke Alexander wrote in his memoirs, "the premature death of Alexander III advanced the outburst of the revolution by at least twenty-five years."<sup>8</sup> He had kept a firm hold on the country, quashed the opposition (albeit temporarily), and managed to keep the family in check. "They were all afraid of Alexander III," Sandro remembered. His outspokenness became almost legendary. "Stop playing the Czar," he wired to his brother Sergei in Moscow; "throw that swine out!" he wrote on a report outlining a government official's scandalous behaviour; "Europe may well afford to wait while the Russian Czar is fishing," he told a courtier urging him to receive an ambassador promptly. When one of his ministers threatened to quit, the Tsar reportedly shook him, yelling, "You shut up; when I choose to kick you out you will hear of it in no uncertain terms." Wilhelm II of Germany, an excitable schemer, was told "don't act like a whirling

---

<sup>6</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 63-65.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67. Sandro disagreed with Alexander's Franco-Russian alliance, though, feeling he had allowed his personal dislike of Kaiser Wilhelm II to influence a policy that was not to Russia's benefit; p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136. One can infer from this that Alexander believed revolution to be inevitable. Olga agreed Alexander III's death affected the course of world affairs, stating "I am convinced that if he and Uncle Bertie [Edward VII of England] had been alive in 1914 there would have been no war. The Kaiser was terrified of them both." See Vorres, p. 67.

dervish, Willy, look at yourself in the mirror."<sup>9</sup> Grand Duke Alexander was proud of his cousin.

Sandro had personal reasons to be grateful to Alexander III for it was he who had convinced Michael Nikolaevich to allow the young grand duke to join the navy rather than the artillery. He also overrode Empress Marie's objections to allowing Xenia to marry Sandro and permitted the marriage to proceed.<sup>10</sup> Alexander's regard for his cousin was based on a duality of his strength of mind and a firm character tempered by kindness.

Olga was Alexander III's youngest child, and loved him devotedly. As a child, her world revolved around her father, and her deep respect and love for him is in evidence throughout her memoirs. Olga recognized her father was a hard worker who cared a great deal about the affairs of state, but to her he was first and foremost a family man. He was faithful to his wife, played with his children, and shared little secrets with his daughter, who had breakfast in his study every morning, Olga's favourite part of the day.<sup>11</sup> He would take Olga and Michael for nature walks, teaching them to make fires and how to row. She remembered with particular fondness their annual trips to the home of her grandfather, King Christian IX of Denmark. These visits were royal reunions, as most of the monarchs of Europe were somehow related. The children delighted in playing pranks on their elders, whose normal formal demeanour made them a more worthwhile target. Alexander III was actually the ringleader of many of these pranks, once turning a hose on the king of Sweden, much to the children's delight.<sup>12</sup> Here the family could relax and enjoy each other completely.

In Russia, however, the Tsar was a very busy man. Ignoring the servants, he rose early, washed in cold water, dressed without servants in peasant-style clothing, cooked his own breakfast, then began work. Olga claimed that her father arrived at his opinions

---

<sup>9</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 173-174. Some are recounted in Vorres, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 128-130.

<sup>11</sup> Vorres, pp. 21-22, 28, 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

independently and was not prey to the influence of his advisors, although he was willing to listen to what they had to say.<sup>13</sup> She admitted that his policies did seem reactionary, but argued that he had no other choice in holding back on governmental reforms while the masses were too uneducated to understand democratic principles. He was very concerned about his people, the Grand Duchess remembered, and if he had lived longer, she was sure that he would have made good progress towards better living conditions. Alexander identified with the peasants, detesting "all pomp and luxury, had simple tastes, and told us he never felt so much at ease as when, all alone, he would wear ordinary peasant clothes."<sup>14</sup> Although his mother was German, "to look at him he might have descended from an old Kievan warrior and his personal habits were as simple as those of a Russian peasant."<sup>15</sup> Olga shared her father's love for the peasantry. In old age, her face became quite wrinkled and a friend suggested she do something about them. Olga laughed; she was proud of her wrinkles, feeling they made her look like a peasant woman. "My father would have understood my feeling," the Grand Duchess was sure.<sup>16</sup> His dislike of opulent display extended to the society balls he and his wife were required to attend and host. He looked distinctly uncomfortable the whole time, and when he figured he had endured enough as could be decently required,

he would impatiently begin ordering the musicians, one by one, out of the ballroom. Finally only a solitary drummer would remain on the orchestra stand, too frightened to leave, too frightened to stop playing. If the guests continued to dance the Emperor would turn off the lights as well and the Empress would bow to the inevitable, graciously taking leave of her guests by saying with a smile, "Well, I suppose the Emperor wants us all to go home."<sup>17</sup>

Olga felt that her family's respect and love for Alexander III was shared by the populace. "I know that, contrary to everything that had been said, he was loved. You

---

<sup>13</sup> Vorres, p. 38. Pobedonostsev was less an "influence" than the originator of Alexander's ideology during his childhood.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.



should have seen soldiers' upturned faces at manoeuvres or after a review. It was not an expression assumed at an officer's command. Even as a child I was conscious of that devotion,"<sup>18</sup> Olga remembered. At her first review, she remembered the thousands of men singing "God Save the Tsar" with real feeling, and their answering shouts of "We are happy to serve your Imperial Majesty!" to his "Well done, children!" thundered in her ears. "Had you been there with us, you would have known that the men meant every word of it," Olga was certain.<sup>19</sup> Even four decades after the Revolution demonstrated a less than universal support of tsarism, Olga continued to believe the mystical bond between the Tsar and his people, formed by tradition and cemented by Orthodoxy, was very real.

There was only one thing with which Olga could reproach her father: his failure to train his heir, Nicholas, as a statesman. He would not even let Nicholas sit in on the meetings of the Council of State until 1893. Although he could not have known that he would die at such a young age—forty-nine—the mistake was still a grievous one, contributing to Nicholas' problems for the duration of his reign. It was unfortunate for Nicholas that he would constantly be compared with his father's image; it made him seem even less adequate than if he had succeeded a less Herculean figure.

In his study of the relationship between power, myth and ceremony in the success of an emperor in Russia, Wortman states the general respect for Alexander III was rooted in his effective appropriation of symbols, ideals (including his appearance) and ceremonies that tradition declared representative of Russianness and Empire. The memoirs demonstrate that the Romanovs themselves bought into this image of the ideal Tsar and felt Alexander III was its living incarnation.

The Romanovs' recollections of Nicholas II are less enthusiastic in their praise. Olga's reminiscences concerning her brother Nicholas are the least critical. Her

---

<sup>18</sup> Vorres, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

overwhelming impressions of him are that he was a good and kind man. His unfitness to reign was not his fault; as mentioned above, he had not been groomed for succession despite being the heir. But he had other strengths—his kindness, his courage, his faith, his intelligence. Even so, Olga remembered that after their father's death, "He was in despair. He kept saying that he did not know what would become of us all, that he was wholly unfit to reign."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Nicholas' own lack of confidence in his abilities was as problematic as his lack of training. It most certainly led to his excessive dependence on his uncles' ideas. Alexander III had had no such problem. According to Vorres, "Where he had commanded, his son would plead. Alexander III did not always trouble to put a velvet glove on his iron hand. Nicholas II never had any need for velvet gloves: his hands were far too gentle."<sup>21</sup> During her marital troubles of 1904-1906, Olga sought consolation in the home of the Emperor and Empress, and grew closer to them. She was therefore in a good position to analyse her brother's character, and though she admitted he was flawed, she felt these flaws were far overshadowed by his positive qualities: simple habits, dedication to family, careful with money for personal expenses, kindness, cheerful athleticism. Olga may have been influenced by the reactions of the wounded soldiers he visited in the hospital where she nursed. Their devotion to the Emperor was clear, Olga felt.<sup>22</sup> Her love for her brother blinded her to the fact that the Tsar's ability to inspire devotion in the hearts of the soldiers was not the only ingredient necessary to maintain a healthy country. Olga seems to have felt that her brother was a good man, and that was all that mattered.

Grand Duke Alexander also seems to have loved his cousin and friend deeply, but it grew to be a love tempered by frustration. Their lasting friendship was formed from their first meeting, as children. This bond would take them through some difficult times. "I frequently disagreed with his policies and wished he had shown better judgment in

---

<sup>20</sup> Vorres, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108, 150-151.

choosing his counselors and more determination in some of his decisions; but all this concerned Emperor Nicholas II and did not in the least affect my relations with 'Cousin Nicky,'" Alexander wrote later.<sup>23</sup> This was fortunate, considering Sandro was quite aware of his cousin's failings. Like Olga, he realized Nicholas' education was haphazard; only languages were taught with any precision or organization.<sup>24</sup> Before Alexander III's death, he feared for the heir's future. He used to discuss this with Nicholas' brother George. "We both hoped that his father would reign for many years more. We both feared that Nicky's total unpreparedness would handicap him stupendously should he ascend the throne in the near future."<sup>25</sup> He felt his fears were justified, especially in consideration of the influence his older uncles were able to exercise upon him. "A slender youth, five-feet-seven, Nicholas II spent the first ten years of his reign sitting behind a massive desk in the palace and listening with near-awe to the well-rehearsed bellowing of his towering uncles. He dreaded to be left alone with them."<sup>26</sup> In spite of himself, Sandro could not help but sympathize; the elder grand dukes were physically imposing.

If Alexander was Nicholas' friend for all the same reasons that Olga felt her brother deserved to be loved and respected, he was occasionally frustrated and disillusioned with the Emperor. The fact that Nicholas continually sided with the older grand dukes instead of his brother-in-law has been remarked upon above, but Nicholas also had a habit that many people found infuriating: impassivity. In his memoirs, Alexander discusses this trait and the effect it had on Nicholas' reputation.

Nicholas II was polite. He was exasperatingly polite. I suppose he was the most polite man in Europe. Therefore, the skeptical statesmen left his

---

<sup>23</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 173. Another relative, the poet K.R., was concerned about Nicholas' pliability as early as 1896, confiding to his diary: "...unfortunately he is likely to be influenced by the last view expressed. This tendency, to agree with the last opinion voiced, will probably get worse over the years. How painful, how sad, and how dangerous!" See Maylunas and Mironenko, pp. 143-144.

presence thoroughly convinced of having discovered an impish desire for mischief behind this impenetrable wall of civility. "Our Czar is an Oriental, a hundred per cent Byzantine," said Witte shortly after his dismissal from the post of President of the Council of Ministers. "We talked for two solid hours. He shook my hand. He embraced me. He wished me all the luck in the world. I returned home beside myself with happiness and found a written order for my dismissal lying on the desk."<sup>27</sup>

To those who did not know the Tsar well, this trait made Nicholas seem unfeeling. Olga defended her brother on this score: "The Grand-Duchess held that the Emperor's impassivity was a mask he wore to hide his feelings...Her brother ruled over millions of subjects, and none of them knew that their Tsar felt everything so deeply that he was afraid he might break down in public."<sup>28</sup> Alexander was also of the opinion that Nicholas' reserved demeanour was not the result of coldness. "Both [Nicky and Xenia] possessed that certain strange something which people mistook for weakness but which helped them stand still in the face of a cannonade."<sup>29</sup> The certain something was indefinable as a whole, but Alexander was sure that it was due in part to Nicholas' religious fatalism. Nicholas was a believer that "God's wishes shall be fulfilled." Born on Job's day, he believed he was meant to suffer, and that God intended these trials for both Nicholas and Russia.<sup>30</sup> How could one argue with that?

Kirill has little to say about Nicholas II. The only distinctive thing about his memoirs as concerns Nicholas is that he often refers to him as "Emperor," instead of Tsar, as the rest of the Romanovs did. Though Kirill had pointed out the problems with the governance of Russia, he is careful to not lay the blame at the feet of the Emperor. It is conceivable that, written in exile where his claim to the throne was tenuous, he had no wish to further incite the émigré community against himself by attacking the Tsar.

<sup>27</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>28</sup> Vorres, p. 108. This passivity led to rumours that Nicholas had been pleased at Stolypin's assassination. In fact, Nicholas was horrified; Stolypin was 'the best Prime Minister I have had.' "People who said Nicky was relieved to hear of Stolypin's death are too wicked for words... His grief for Stolypin was utterly genuine, I know," vowed Olga. See Vorres, p. 126.

<sup>29</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always a Grand Duke* (New York, 1933), p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 186.

Marie's view of the Emperor is interesting because, perhaps unwittingly, it changed over time. During the portion of her memoirs that deals with her childhood, Marie remembered that she and her brother Dmitri often went to play with Nicholas' children at the Winter Palace. "The Emperor and his wife held for each other and for their children a deep and unswerving devotion, and their conjugal happiness was beautiful to see." These were Marie's happiest childhood memories; she remembered fondly that Nicholas and Alexandra used to call her their "oldest daughter".<sup>31</sup> During her career as a nurse, she likewise noticed that the Tsar's visits to the hospital uplifted the soldiers almost as would a religious experience.<sup>32</sup> As Marie's narrative progresses, however, and particularly after the Emperor's punishment of Dmitri for his role in the death of Rasputin, her attitude became more of a relationship between sovereign and subject. Rather than dwell on Nicholas as a person, she focused on the Emperor and the nature of his power. She called him a "psychological enigma." Though she believed he cared nothing for power, "He felt it a mystical and sacred duty to keep intact the heritage of autocracy handed down to him by his forbears." Furthermore, "The Emperor believed in the divine origin of his authority...An opinion expressed outside the milieu from which he chose his advisers was not to be taken into consideration...."<sup>33</sup> The judgement no doubt reflects the fact that Nicholas would neither take advice from her father, Grand Duke Paul, nor Dmitri, and his failure to do so resulted in the death of the first and the exile and unhappiness of the latter.

Marie's examination of Nicholas' character provides a good conclusion to an examination of the Romanovs' views of Nicholas II, for it demonstrates both sides of their analysis: they loved and respected "Nicky"; Emperor Nicholas II of Russia left them feeling bewildered and left out.

---

<sup>31</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 51, 128.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>33</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 225-227.

The Romanovs' assessment of Alexandra is perhaps more interesting than that of her husband, for in gossip circles, the Imperial family was supposed to hate her from the start as much as the anti-Rasputin crowd.<sup>34</sup> This was obviously exaggerated; letters and diaries of members of the Imperial family, including Xenia, Empress Marie, Alexandra's sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth (guardian of Grand Duchess Marie), and Kirill's mother Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna senior, reveal that they were still trying to convince Alix to accept Nicholas' proposal of marriage after even he had despaired of overcoming her resistance to marrying into a different religion.<sup>35</sup> Contrary to the myth that a haughty Alix made scenes over being relegated to the background during Alexander III's last days, the poet K.R. confided to his diary, "I have not yet talked to the Emperor's bride; but she smiles so sweetly whenever you greet her."<sup>36</sup> In some ways, it seems Alexandra always remained a mystery to her in-laws. They could neither wholly admire her nor wholly accept her.

As she was with Nicholas, Olga was in the best position to be on intimate terms with the new Tsaritsa. "I loved her from the beginning," the Grand Duchess said. Following Alexander's death, Olga remembered, rather than demanding attention for herself, Alix was so self-effacing that some members of the household found her overly-reserved. Rumours persisted at court that there were rivalries between the reigning and dowager empresses. Olga admits there was tension, but that Alexandra was actually glad her mother-in-law had to take precedence in court functions.<sup>37</sup> Based on her friendship with Alexandra, Olga felt the popular image of the Empress was utter fabrication.

She is the most maligned Romanov of us all. She has gone down in history so calumniated that I cannot bear reading any more of the lies and insinuations people have written about her. Nobody even in our own family tried to understand her except myself and my sister, Xenia, and Great-Aunt Olga. Even as a girl in my teens, I remember things which set

---

<sup>34</sup> For example, see the above-mentioned works by Princess Catherine Radziwill.

<sup>35</sup> See the letters and diary excerpts in Maylunas and Mironenko, pp. 24-42.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Vorres, p. 65-72. See also Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 239.

my teeth on edge. She could do nothing right so far as my mother's court was concerned. Once I knew she had a dreadful headache; she looked pale when she appeared at dinner, and I heard them say that she was in a bad humour because my mother happened to talk to Nicky about some ministerial appointments. Even in that first year—I remember so well—if Alicky smiled they called it mockery. If she looked grave they said she was angry.<sup>38</sup>

In this light, Alexandra's withdrawal from society is understandable. Unable to overcome her shyness, she could do nothing to change people's opinion of her. Only with her immediate family did she find peace. Olga was willing to forgive much for the peace "Alicky" gave to her brother. Plus, Olga felt very sorry for her sister-in-law. She remembered how eager people were to gossip about her without giving the Empress a break. "Countess Voronzov [sic] would come to Gatchina and tell my mother that society grumbled about Alicky's aloofness. I thought it was so unfair. Alicky's health grew poorer and poorer. Her heart was none too good. She suffered from sciatica. Her pregnancies were difficult." Health definitely was a factor in the Empress' retirement from society. Olga wrote that by 1913, "Alicky was indeed a sick woman. Her breath often came in quick, obviously painful, gasps. I often saw her lips turn blue. Constant worry over Alexis had completely undermined her health."<sup>39</sup> When the war broke out, with Nicholas often away from home, the Tsarina felt more alone than ever. Olga remembered visiting Alexandra in the autumn of 1915. "Poor Alicky was all agony and dejection. Of course, I never told her about all the fantastic rumours. She told me how she missed Nicky. We both cried at parting."<sup>40</sup> Olga's reminiscences about Alexandra bear the stamp of tenderness. She gives the Empress' motivations every benefit of the doubt and regarded her sister-in-law as someone to be pitied rather than vilified.

After Olga, Grand Duke Alexander would have been the most familiar with Alexandra. His friendship with Nicholas, the closeness of their wives, the sharing of a home during the first year of their marriages, all permitted the Grand Duke to observe the

---

<sup>38</sup> Vorres, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83, 130.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Empress within the intimate circle of her home. He did not blame her for creating a bad impression upon her entrance to Russia; she had been summoned at a moment's notice while Alexander III was on his deathbed and became Empress without ever having had the opportunity of getting to know her adopted country. Alexander explains some of the difficulties she encountered. "Unable to grasp the relative standing of the innumerable courtiers she made errors, irrelevant in themselves, but tantamount to formidable crimes in the eyes of St. Petersburg society. It frightened her and created marked reserve in her treatment of visitors."<sup>41</sup> He defended the Empress against one very serious slander perpetuated throughout World War I: her supposed German sympathies.

Of all the accusations thrown against the imperial couple, that particular one made my sympathies go back to the Empress. I knew her mistakes. I loathed Rasputin. I wished Alix would not take her synthetic palace-born picture of a Russian peasant for a reality, but I must admit that she was far above all her contemporaries in fervent Russian patriotism. Raised by her father...to hate the Kaiser, she dreamed all her life to see the day of Prussia's debacle, and next to Russia her admiration lay on the side of Great Britain. For me, for my uncles and cousins, for anyone who ever met or talked to Alix, the very suggestion of her 'German sympathies' sounded monstrous and ridiculous.<sup>42</sup>

Alexander's memoirs give the impression that although he greatly disapproved of the Tsarina's policies during the war years, and her increasing retreat within family circles which put her out of touch with Russia, he remembered the youthful bride who came to Russia with such love and good intentions and could not disassociate himself from her for all posterity. His feelings towards her seem to be the same as those for Nicholas: familial love but official antipathy.

Kirill had even less to say about the Empress than he did about Nicholas. He mentions only that they once attended the same social gathering at the palace of Wolfgarden, near Frankfurt. He felt the visit must have been a success "for the late Empress was particularly gay and charming, and gaiety was not part of her character.

---

<sup>41</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.



This place contained memories of her youth and she felt at home in these familiar surroundings."<sup>43</sup> This is an interesting observation; once in surroundings where she felt comfortable and at ease, Alexandra easily revealed the personality that made her intimates love her so devotedly. Unfortunately for her, once in public she retreated into herself and few ever saw her from this more flattering vantage point. Though Kirill said little about the Empress, it was something of substance.

Marie's feelings towards Alexandra appear to be ambivalent. As a child, she had fond memories of the Empress, who acted as a mother when Marie came to play with the little Grand Duchesses. Yet as Marie grew older and began to know Alexandra in her official capacity, she did not approve of what she saw. The most serious grievances occurred during Marie's time as a nurse. When she appealed to the Tsarina for help with obtaining supplies for her hospital, she was told to mind her own business. On a visit to Marie's hospital in Pskov, Marie recalled the Empress' inability to reach the wounded soldiers. Despite her excellent Russian, she was unable to interact with them in a way that made her empathy clear to them. "They watched her move about the ward with eyes that were anxious and frightened, and their expressions did not change after she had approached and spoken."<sup>44</sup> Misunderstanding the Russian psychology, she did not understand that her role as Empress, figurehead of Russia's imperial tradition, meant more than her efforts as a war nurse. On that same occasion, she disappointed the soldiers in part because she arrived dressed as a Red Cross nurse, looking no different from any other nurse on the ward. She also refused to give an audience to the students of the Pskov School of Military Cadets, preparing to leave for the front. Marie therefore arranged to have them form up along the road when she knew they would be driving by on their way to the train station, but Alexandra resented even this imposition. Marie blamed this behaviour on Alexandra's absorption in household affairs and on her failure

---

<sup>43</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 193-195.

to understand the role of Empress as being something that should inspire the nation on a grand scale; an Empress should not need to be a war nurse in order to do that.<sup>45</sup>

Despite her view that the Empress gravely mishandled such matters, as well as affairs of state, Marie admired the Tsarina's personal strength. Like Olga, she was aware of Alexandra's failing health and was surprised that the Empress had been able to put in such long, strenuous days during her tour and inspection of Marie's hospital. Matters of state also required some sacrifice on Alexandra's part. "The fatigue of the fêtes and receptions was telling on the Empress, who was often indisposed; she had to spend days in bed, arising only to don state robes, with long trains and heavy jewelry, showing to the multitude for a few hours a face full of sadness."<sup>46</sup>

In general, though the Romanovs liked Alexandra well enough on a personal level, they were aware that she did not make a very good Empress, representing a value system and adopting an attitude that was ill-suited to twentieth-century Russia.

There is no more controversial figure during the reign of Nicholas and Alexandra than Grigory Rasputin. Felix Youssouпов, Sandro's son-in-law and conspirator in the *starets'* murder, would immortalize him as an evil genius in his memoirs, no doubt to provide greater justification for his involvement in Rasputin's death.<sup>47</sup> Youssouпов believed Rasputin had hypnotic powers and was a thorough scoundrel who duped the Tsar and Tsarina to gain political influence for his own obscure and perverse reasons. The Romanovs have a rather different opinion of Rasputin the man.

"The 'truth about Rasputin' is sufficiently simple," wrote Grand Duke Alexander. "He rose to power because of another 'sterling virtue' of Nicholas II which stamped the character of the Czar as strongly as his unfortunate politeness. The Czar was a devoted

<sup>45</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 154.

<sup>47</sup> See Prince Felix Youssouповoff, *La Fin de Raspoutine* (Paris, 1927) and by the same author, *Lost Splendour* (London, 1954), originally published as *Avant L'Exil, 1887-1919*, by Librairie Plon in 1952. After years of exile in Europe, Felix Youssouповoff settled in Canada. However, Youssouпов was one of Rasputin's intimates in 1916. He claims his *rapprochement* with Rasputin was in order to more successfully plot his demise for the good of Russia. Rumour had it that Youssouпов was fascinated by Rasputin and shot him for refusing Youssouпов's sexual advances.

husband and a loving father." When the wives of Grand Dukes Nicholas and Peter, known as "the Black Plague" both because they were Montenegrin and for less flattering reasons, introduced Rasputin to Alexandra as a healer who might cure her son, she was willing to try. Whether or not he really had any control over the Tsarevich's hemophilia, Alexandra believed he was little Alexis' lifeline. Sent away to Siberia by the Tsar, who tired of the rumours concerning the holy man's presence in the palace, Rasputin was returned when Alexandra begged her husband to recall the "saviour of Alexis." This time, Alexander felt, the peasant wished to secure his influence in Petrograd, and began throwing his support behind the careers of various men. "His letters of introduction signed in an appallingly illiterate hand made their appearance on the desks of high government officials and in the private offices of prominent bankers," Alexander remembered. The irony of this situation, according to the Grand Duke, was that "the same society that demanded his blood a few years later invited Rasputin to its receptions and asked him for all sorts of favors."<sup>48</sup> Alexandra could not influence her husband to appoint people to the government whom she felt might be the instrument of dismissing her son's guardian angel, and while Nicholas was away at the front, she chose ministers for their acceptance of the *muzhik* at court, rather than for their abilities. The Dowager-Empress was saddened by this, but powerless to interfere. It is possible that Alexandra was not aware of the extent to which Rasputin was being blamed for Russia's troubles, or it is also possible she did not care as long as she felt he could help her son. Youssouпов wrote that each of his visits to Rasputin convinced him that the *muzhik* "was the cause of Russia's disasters, and that if he disappeared the diabolical spell cast over our Tsar and Tsarina would vanish with him."<sup>49</sup> Other Romanovs agreed, and Grand Duke Dmitri was heavily involved in his assassination. The murder of the man Alexandra repeatedly

---

<sup>48</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 181-184.

<sup>49</sup> Youssouпов, *Lost Splendour*, p. 214. For an examination of the spiritual nature of Rasputin's influence, see Gregory Freeze, "Subversive Piety: Religion and the Political Crisis in Late Imperial Russia," *Journal of Modern History*, v. 68, no. 2, 1996, pp. 308-350. Freeze argues Rasputin's claims to be an authentic *starets* provided a spiritual alternative to the official Orthodox Church.

referred to as "Our Friend" in her correspondence with Nicholas alienated the Tsarina from the family. She cut herself off from the Romanovs at that point.<sup>50</sup> Rather than viewing Rasputin as any sort of manipulative evil genius, Alexander seems to see him more as a catalyst for Russia's discontent, a figurehead for a new "time of troubles." Though Alexander did not express himself in this fashion, perhaps because he was himself unaware of the fact, he viewed Rasputin's presence at court as symptomatic of what was wrong with the régime in its declining years—a Tsar subjecting himself to improper influences and ignoring public opinion in the governance of his country.

Olga did not only disagree with the myth of Rasputin as "evil genius"; she mocked it. "Of the stature of a Mephistopheles, I suppose," she sneered when questioned about him. Based on what she saw in the palace, Nicholas and Alexander continued to view Rasputin as a peasant who could alleviate their son's sufferings with his faith in God. She wished to remind people that he held no court or Church position, and was of use strictly as a healer to the Tsarevich. They knew of Rasputin's past and his spotty reputation, but it seemed irrelevant. "I say it again—and I have the right to say so—neither of them had been duped by Rasputin, or had the least illusion about him," Olga insisted. She felt that Rasputin's "power" came to him in rather the reverse way than what legend ascribes; rather than using his proximity to the Emperor to appoint people he liked to high positions, those same people used him as a tool to climb up the ladder, hoping that by paying court to Rasputin, they could curry favour with the Imperial couple. Olga did not like the man, and found nothing hypnotic in his demeanour. She found him too curious and too free with her person. Olga did feel Rasputin's healing powers were genuine, and he behaved humbly in front of the Emperor and Empress. To

---

<sup>50</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 270-277. The "Nicky-Sunny" correspondence shows Alexandra sincerely believed Rasputin was God's instrument. Not only does she call him "Our Friend," but urges Nicholas to follow his advice, and that through prayer Rasputin "has kept you where you are;" see Fuhrmann, *The Complete Wartime Correspondence of Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra, April 1914-March 1917* (Westport, 1999), p. 658. She believed Rasputin's advice had to be correct for it came to him from God (*Ibid.*, p. 672). Evidence that she urged Nicholas for ministerial dismissals and appointments based on Rasputin's advice is also given in the letter on page 658. Some ministers imposed upon her the same way; see *Ibid.*, p. 411.

Olga's mind, there was no harm in his presence, except what gossip made out of it. She defended Alexandra's patronage of Rasputin. "They all blamed my poor sister-in-law for having transmitted the disease to her son and then they blamed her for trying all she could to find a remedy."<sup>51</sup> They did not view him as a man of supernatural gifts, but rather as an intercessor for Alexis; as Olga pointed out "'Alicky suffered terribly from neuralgia and sciatica, but I never heard that the Siberiak helped her'."<sup>52</sup> His murder only served to remove all doubt from the court's mind that he was a "devil incarnate"; why else would members of the Imperial family have plotted to kill him?<sup>53</sup> To Olga, the whole affair was blown out of proportion, the legend of Rasputin bearing no relation to the man she knew.

It is interesting that Kirill has more to say about Rasputin than the Emperor and Empress combined. Kirill never met Rasputin, but records in his memoirs that criticisms of the Emperor and Empress in this regard had been unfair. Like Olga, he put faith in Rasputin's power to heal Alexis and since he behaved well at court, saw no reason why he should be prevented from serving in this capacity. People sought him out for help, money, and advancement; he did not seek to hold such a position of influence. Kirill concluded that Nicholas and Alexandra "have not deserved the calumny which has been poured over them because of Rasputin."<sup>54</sup>

Marie withheld judgement on this score, for she bought into the "evil genius" theory and does not seem to be sure if the Empress was taken advantage of or if she let herself be used. Marie first noticed his growing importance during the war when everyone was talking about him instead of the war itself. People she respected were buying into this assessment of his power. She herself believed the Empress was his dupe; Rasputin told the Empress that the Tsarevich could not live without him and so,

---

<sup>51</sup> Vorres, pp. 135-143.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>54</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 191-193. Kirill's memoirs also present an explanation for why Rasputin was so easily received into the palace. He speaks of a servant in his home during his childhood who had the "strange gifts" of the "folk" and whose herbal village remedies made her seem like a miracle healer; see p. 23. Obviously, Rasputin's claims to be a healer were falling on fertile ground.

"Rasputin... adroitly took possession of the Empress's mind. But his domineering character could not be satisfied with the comparatively modest role of a household's miracle worker, he needed a vaster field of action."<sup>55</sup> Having gained the Empress' full confidence, he turned her against her family and the court, taking revenge upon the nobility for its long-standing ill-treatment of the peasants. She remembered that "the news of his death was met everywhere with a joy bordering on hysteria; people in the streets embraced each other as they did at Easter, and women cried." Marie only wished that Rasputin had been done away with earlier, in a way that the Emperor and Empress "would never have been submitted to the humiliating necessity of punishing their kinsman for a killing which had brought about general rejoicing."<sup>56</sup>

The divergence of her views on Rasputin from those on her family is interesting, but puzzling. Why did Marie regard Rasputin as bearing malice towards the Imperial family and the government while the rest of her family felt it was Rasputin who was used? Is she simply being more honest, or was she giving in to the sensationalism promoted among her "set"? Is it an attempt to justify her brother's involvement in the *muzhik's* death? There seems to be no way of solving that puzzle.

The memoirs' focus on Alexander III, Nicholas II, Alexandra and Rasputin reflect the way four Grand Dukes and Duchesses viewed Russia, for as part of a ruling dynasty, there is no question that they identified with "Russia" on familial terms. The strong character and charisma of Alexander III shaped their view of what a Tsar should be—a physically robust patriarch who had the strength of character to keep both a country and a wayward and often bickering family in line. Alexander III represented their ideal Russian ruler. On the other hand, Nicholas and Alexandra figure in the memoirs not only on a personal level, but are introduced as a prelude to the end of the Empire. Whether the Grand Dukes and Duchesses realized it or not, they blamed the collapse of the Empire on Nicholas' inability to live up to that ideal, and by extension, the similar unsuitability of

---

<sup>55</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 248, 250-251.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

his wife as an imperial consort. Without the brashness and forcefulness of his father, not to mention Alexander's imposing physical presence, Nicholas lacked the Imperial aura the Romanovs associated with a Tsar. The fact that Nicholas allowed Rasputin into the family—and by extension, government—circle, was seen as further proof of his weakness. Although three of the memoirs attempt to demonstrate that Rasputin did not play a significant political role and was therefore a rather benign presence at Court, the lack of regard for outraged public opinion that permeates the memoirists' attempted rehabilitation of Rasputin is characteristic to those who rule without needing to consult any opinions but their own.

CHAPTER FOUR  
*Warnings Unheeded;  
The Fall of the Third Rome*

The origins of the Russian Revolution are beyond the scope of this study and can easily be researched elsewhere. However, it is rare that so many members of a former government, especially a monarchy, take the opportunity to conduct a *post mortem* to discover the causes of its own death. Grand Dukes Kirill and Alexander, and Grand Duchesses Marie and Olga, all point to problems in the fabric of the empire, some minute and some overwhelming, that contributed to the Empire's demise. Since their observations are valued here because they belonged to the ruling dynasty, only the issues the Romanovs chose to raise will be discussed. This may lead the reader to wonder if the same Romanovs who pointed fingers at problems in hindsight tried to point out these difficulties to Nicholas while there was still time for him to act upon their suggestions. Some claim to have done so. Hindsight aside, this chapter will reveal that the Romanovs were far from ignorant of Russia's problems and how the House of Romanov contributed to them.

These four Romanovs identified the factors that they felt had the most impact on Russia's collapse, placing them into these categories: a lack of knowledge concerning the nature of Russia and the challenges she faced; rank incompetence of people who held key positions in the government and military; and the inefficiency of the Russian war machine. They also blamed Nicholas himself, the undignified behaviour of the Romanovs and the limitations on the grand ducal role that prevented them from being a real help to the Tsar.

One of the obvious sources of misgovernance was the fact that the ruling caste knew little about their native land and the peoples who lived in it. As a rule, traveling was done abroad, or between palaces in the capital and palaces in the Crimea. Voyages through the heartland of Russia were very rare. Traveling was done on private trains,



preventing exposure to new people and new places. Though the Romanovs felt love for their subjects, they were rather out of touch with them, their needs, their wants, their daily cares. When Grand Duchess Olga spoke of General Cherevin, head of the tsar's secret police, for example, as "friendly, generous, and humble. He was very popular in St. Petersburg," it was obvious that she knew nothing of the fear he and his *Okhrana* inspired in Russians.<sup>1</sup> Marie became aware of this phenomenon in retrospect, explaining, "Princes of reigning families are a race apart—a race that has been for centuries shut off in palaces, protected, restricted, compelled to live among its own dreams and illusions. Meantime the world and its needs pass us by. That is why we are destined to be destroyed...."<sup>2</sup>

Marie's awareness of being a "race apart" first impressed her forcefully during her first contact with peasants as a nurse in Pskov. In quiet moments, she slipped away from the hospital and spent time with them. Their views of the on-going war amazed her. She would explain to them troop movements and the war's progress, but they preferred their own interpretation. She never heard a criticism of the Tsar from these people; rather, they viewed him as forgiving, rewarding brave men at the front and punishing cruel officers. "They liked these stories of theirs much better than my explanations as to the meaning of the war and the activities of our distant Allies. All that was incomprehensible to them, beyond their understanding, inaccessible to their imaginations." Peasants' distance from the political goals of the war inspired something like fear in the Grand Duchess. They did indeed expect the land would be redistributed to them following the war, and although Marie was comforted by the thought that these peasants bore the Romanovs no personal malice, she also felt that the ruling and educated classes had no way to reach or change the peasantry's way of thinking. Marie felt the lack of effort to educate the peasantry and to address the agrarian problem in an equitable manner was

---

<sup>1</sup> Vorres, pp. 35-38.

<sup>2</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 129

inexcusable.<sup>3</sup> Even the fact that Kirill had grown up unexposed to the art of Russian swearing, encountering it only upon his first sea voyage with the Navy, demonstrates the distance between the Romanovs and their people.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of unqualified personnel also runs through the four memoirs. In some cases, it presents an amusing anecdote. Olga remembered that the General in charge of the Imperial stables was less than qualified for his post. "Once Mother wanted a pair of larger horses for her pony-chaise. Later, when she asked to see them, old General Grunwald said, '*Oui, je les ai achetés, mais je conseillerais Madame de ne pas les conduire*'."<sup>5</sup> This episode is humorous because Grunwald's position was relatively unimportant, but unfortunately, this incompetence was not limited to ceremonial positions. Grand Duke Alexander remembers the ambassador to France, A. P. Izvolskii, a man with thirty years of diplomatic service, laughingly unwilling to consider the possibility of war as late as July 28, 1914.<sup>6</sup> During his naval career, Kirill encountered more serious signs of incompetence. When he was appointed to the ship *Peresviet*, Kirill was amazed that the majority of her officers were "incapables." "Few of them knew their jobs. The captain, who knew nothing at all, came from the Black Sea squadron, and had to learn all his navigation during the voyage," Kirill recalled. He did not even know how to use the engine telegraph. "The evil emanation of amateurism and rank inefficiency was as pronounced on the lower deck as it was on the quarter-deck. The engines were bad, as was everything else on board--all was dismally chaotic." On another occasion, when coming across another ship heading on an opposite course, an officer steered the *Peresviet* straight for it, and Kirill "presumed he considered it his duty to sink anything that chance brought on our course. He was in every way typical of the kind of person we had to contend with, and the result was that those of us who understood our jobs had to

---

<sup>3</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 245-247.

<sup>4</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Vorres, p. 41. (Yes, I bought them, but I would advise Madame not to drive them!)

<sup>6</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 257.

do the work of two or three."<sup>7</sup> Kirill also found the naval strategists unfit for their commands, particularly during the Russo-Japanese war. Their plan to send the Baltic Fleet to fight the Japanese would have been laughable, if it were not so tragic, he felt. "The Admiralty seemed undismayed. Their attitude amounted to that kind of negligence which owing to its blatant disregard for natural consequences might be called 'criminal'."<sup>8</sup>

Being ill suited to one's employment affected other areas of Russian governance. Criticism of the Tsar's ministers was a heated topic even in their own time. Kirill agreed that they were often poorly chosen. However, the memoirists make no significant attempt to address why such rampant incompetence existed nor do they raise the question of whether this was symptomatic of flaws in the very ideology of autocracy.

In addition, orders given by the Tsar were not always carried out by his administrators or by the civil authorities. Perhaps an answer lies in the following statement by Lieven: "In the 1890s there were many ministers who saw themselves primarily as the Tsar's servitors and assistants. In their view their duty lay in executing the monarch's decisions, whatever they may be." However, "by 1905 such views seemed increasingly anachronistic. The focus of most civil servants' loyalties had shifted from the dynasty to the state and nation."<sup>9</sup> Functionaries began making independent decisions for the sake of Russia, rather than simply following the Tsar's orders. To this Romanovs, this seemed, according to Kirill's best naval metaphor, as if "the country was like a gradually sinking ship with a mutinous crew."<sup>10</sup>

Grand Duke Alexander believed the Grand Dukes' inability to help Nicholas as well as they might if they had been able to choose their own careers, thereby making use of their strengths and talents, was a contributing factor to this problem. Alexander firmly believed his brother, the intelligent and urbane Nicholas Mikhailovich, could have been

---

<sup>7</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 114-115, 120-121.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>9</sup> Lieven, *Nicholas II*, p. 110.

<sup>10</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 202-203.

Nicholas II's strongest diplomat. Centuries of tradition cited that Grand Dukes should instead join the military. To emphasize the irony, Alexander quoted Pushkin: "He would have been a Pericles in Athens/He would have been a Brutus in Rome/He is but a Hussar Officer in Russia!"<sup>11</sup> Alexander believed even the most inept and uninspiring of the Grand Dukes would have made a better administrator than military officer. For example, "the self-same Uncle Alexis, an unsurpassed joke as grand admiral of the navy, would have fitted perfectly a position requiring his knowledge of foreign countries and his ability for 'mixing'." He felt Nicholas would have better served Russia by giving the Grand Dukes various government posts and thus place himself at the head of a "party" of loyal subjects who could serve as an intermediary between the Tsar and the nation.<sup>12</sup> Better this than have a grand duke perform his duties half-heartedly, viewing them as a distraction from some other pleasure. This is a proposal for reform couching a reactionary desire to return to the autocracy dealing with its people solely through a coterie of boyars, without the insidious modern bureaucracy getting in the way. This suggestion to Sandro's Imperial cousin went unheeded.

When Nicholas did listen to a grand duke's advice, it was usually bad advice, Alexander felt. Nicholas had a habit of consulting his older cousin Nicholas Nikolaevich, for whom Grand Duke Alexander had felt an extreme antipathy from childhood. His distrust of Nikolasha's judgement only grew with the role he played as Nicholas II's advisor. Alexander praised his cousin's military abilities; he just wished Nikolasha would confine himself to them. In retrospect, Alexander could not find any "logical explanation why, in the name of God, the Czar should have sought Nicholasha's advice on any matters of state importance." He cites the 1905 Revolution as his basis for this opinion.

The general strike of October 1905, left him bewildered, his beloved military status prescribing no remedies for that sort of collective insubordination. There was obviously no way of arresting several million strikers! The next best thing to do, in his estimation, was to ascertain the

<sup>11</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

nature of the demands of the "commanders of the strikers." An attempt at explaining to Nikolasha that the revolt of 1905 was marked by its anarchistic character and that there were no "commanders" to negotiate with, would have proved useless.<sup>13</sup>

While Alexander wanted Nicholas to take a hard line with the strikers, Nikolasha persuaded Nicholas to sign the October Manifesto to end the disturbances by the peasants and revolutionaries. Alexander held Grand Duke Nicholas almost solely responsible for the Tsar's decision to grant the Manifesto, and quoted Sergei Witte's memoirs to reinforce his point: "Nicholas II would have never signed the Manifesto of October 17 had it not been for the insistence of Grand Duke Nicholas Nicholaevich Jr."

Unfortunately, Alexander felt, what he saw as the poor quality of Nikolasha's advice did not stop Nicholas II from soliciting it. On the night the Tsar was contemplating his abdication, a telegram from Nikolasha arrived, begging the Tsar to hand over power for the good of the people. "...The former commander-in-chief of the Russian Army was still looking for the 'commanders of the revolution' and thought he recognized one in Mr. Kerensky," Alexander mused. "The real significance of the tragedy dawned on him only a week later, when arriving at G.H.Q. to resume his exalted post he learned that the St. Petersburg Soviet would not permit Mr. Kerensky to employ his services."<sup>14</sup> The fact that Nicholas listened to the counsel of Nikolasha rather than to the more practical (in Alexander's view) admonishments of the rest of his family, discussed below, was incomprehensible and an everlasting source of bitterness for Grand Duke Alexander. Alexander's problem with Nikolasha was that the latter was willing to compromise with the discontented elements in the population to the detriment of the image of the unshakeable autocracy. Alexander's refusal to attempt compromise with the revolutionaries in either 1905 or 1917, however, demonstrates a failure to recognize the gravity of the situation and the underlying causes of both revolutions. This in itself was a

---

<sup>13</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

huge problem—members of the ruling family did not grasp the political and social crisis Russia faced.

Exacerbating all the tensions and lack of qualified leadership in Russia was World War I. All of the Romanovs cite problems with the Russian war administration as a huge factor in the Empire's collapse. For the first few months of the war, Olga worked as a nurse in a town not far from the Polish-Austrian borders. Not only was the hospital short of medical supplies, but wounded soldiers told her they had to fight the Germans with sticks due to the shortage of guns and ammunition. The medical staff kept pleading with her to write to Nicholas for help.<sup>15</sup> Marie likewise wrote of shortages in the war hospitals; lack of bandages and bed linen were compounded by lack of beds and the cramped and irregular filthy hospital trains that carried the men from the front to the rear. When she made an appeal for Red Cross representatives to investigate the hospital to substantiate her claims, in the hopes of securing more supplies, the representative (incidentally, her former governess) seemed more interested in assuring the nurses' dresses were the proper length and that their Red Cross kerchiefs were sewn according to the prescribed pattern.<sup>16</sup>

Alexander had noted Russia's unpreparedness for war in 1913. Despite the War Minister's assertion that Russia was ready for a war, Alexander noted that "at that moment we were not only short of cannons and rifles, but our stock of boots and overcoats would not have sufficed to clothe even a fraction of the millions of men to be mobilized in case of war."<sup>17</sup> Kirill pointed to the navy as an example of Russia's military inertia, describing antiquated ships, out of date before being completely built. One such ship, too top-heavy to sail, became a restaurant on the Neva River. "She just lay there, a monument to inefficiency, an embodiment of the conception of failure," Kirill scoffed.<sup>18</sup> Even the manner of naval recruitment was unproductive in his estimation. The men of

---

<sup>15</sup> Vorres, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 192, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 38. See also pp. 102-103 for further examples.

the Baltic Fleet, who "should have been recruited from the Baltic and the White Sea coasts, with their excellent supply of material in men born and bred to the seas for centuries, were as a rule taken quite illogically, and for no earthly reason whatever, from the Central and Southern provinces...."<sup>19</sup> In addition, Russian industry was not supporting the war industry in the way it should. The naval base at Vladivostok imported its coal from Cardiff, and yet coal jutted out of the ground there: "one only needed to scoop it into trucks."<sup>20</sup> In summation, Russia "had more men than we needed and little enough in arms and munition. The supplies system worked badly. Train loads of food, arms, and other equipment were sent off, and disappeared completely, others arrived with stuff that no one wanted." Kirill recognized that such conditions could not continue free from criticism. "Some had no rifles, others no shells, and in the rear among the idle reservists and the factories...coming more and more to the fore out of its hiding, first cautiously, later ever bolder, the lurking hydra of revolution began to raise its head. It whispered, it suggested...."<sup>21</sup> The régime's failure to meet the demands of the war effort played a large part in the dynasty's downfall, according to the Romanovs themselves. One must keep in mind, however, that these opinions were likely fully articulated only in the years of exile that followed the Revolution.

Although Nicholas was their cousin, nephew, or brother, the Romanovs could not hold him to be blameless for the failure of the régime. Olga mourned the fact that he had not been taught the craft of statesmanship, a fault of her father's that she could not explain.<sup>22</sup> This made him an easy target for the influences mentioned above, for he weighed their experiences and trusted their judgement above his own. She refused to try to influence her brother, unlike Sandro, who bemoaned Nicholas' vulnerability in that area yet never failed to supply advice of his own. Nicholas' and Alexandra's increasing

---

<sup>19</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>22</sup> Vorres, p. 67. Marie went further, claiming the family as a whole was not educated enough to govern properly. See *Education*, p. 309.

retirement from society was given as an explanation for how they grew so out of touch with the situation in the country during the Empire's final years. The Tsar's refusal to undertake serious reform prompted the *intelligentsia*, deprived of a legal outlet for its opinions, to come out in vocal opposition of the régime in the press.<sup>23</sup> Opposition broke out in an even more dangerous place—the Court—where rumour and intrigue reigned unchecked, undermining the credibility of the Tsar and Tsarina, and staining their image of sanctity.<sup>24</sup> Lastly, Nicholas was criticized by members of his family because he did not do anything concrete to stop this chaos.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to imagine how one would check society gossip, but the other problems could have been addressed. Tempered by hindsight, our memoirists all project the sentiment that in the face of all these problems, the Revolution and the fall of the dynasty were inevitable. However, this is no doubt more reflective of hindsight than prophecy.

In addition, the actions of the Romanovs themselves at times served to shake the image of the Tsar as the benevolent father of his people. The memoirists cite a lack of family solidarity in times of crisis for discrediting the Romanov name. This might be true, but the sentiment is often misplaced. The first crisis of Nicholas' reign was that of Khodynka Field. Refreshments and gifts were set up there for the commoners attending Nicholas' and Alexandra's coronation ceremonies. A rumour spread through the crowd that there was not enough to go around, and a stampede ensued; a few thousand people were trampled and killed. That night, Nicholas and Alexandra danced at a ball given by the French ambassador. The fact that certain members of the Imperial family would place greater emphasis on the family's arguments over the matter, as discussed below, than on the impression the catastrophe and the sovereigns' subsequent actions made on

---

<sup>23</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 196, 226, Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 195.

<sup>24</sup> Both Olga and Alexander address this factor, which merits a more profound discussion elsewhere. See Vorres, p. 127, Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>25</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 204.



the populace, demonstrate an exaggerated sense of self-importance on the Romanovs' behalf.

The tragedy at Khodynka Field was complicated by the fact that a Romanov was in charge of the preparations. Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich was responsible for the security arrangements, and was heartily condemned by some members of the family. Compounding the situation, the French Embassy was hosting a coronation ball that evening. Alexander and his brothers, known collectively as the "Mikhailovichi," demanded both Sergei's resignation and the cancellation of the celebrations. Nicholas Mikhailovich implored his nephew, "You cannot revive the dead but you must show your sympathy with their families. Do not let the enemies of the régime say that the young Czar danced while his murdered subjects were taken to the Potter's Field." Fearful of insulting the French, Nicholas ordered the festivities to continue. In protest, the Mikhailovichi left "at the moment the dancing commenced, thus committing the gravest breach of etiquette and making Uncle Alexis exclaim with venom: 'There go the four imperial followers of Robespierre!'"<sup>26</sup> They left in a way designed to assure their protest would be noticed, refusing to be seen dancing while their subjects mourned their dead. One might well understand their wish to disassociate themselves from this seeming callousness towards the death of their subjects, but according to Grand Duchess Olga, the Mikhailovichi boycott did more harm than good. She remembered that the Mikhailovichi, and particularly Alexander, blamed Sergei for the tragedy. The Governor of Moscow felt terrible and did offer to resign, but Nicholas would not accept this resignation. Olga felt Alexander and his brothers were unfair to him. Plus, "by their efforts to throw the entire blame on one of their own kin, my cousins actually incriminated the entire family and that at a time when solidarity among them was so essential. When Nicky refused to dismiss Uncle Serge they turned on him!"<sup>27</sup> By

---

<sup>26</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 170-172.

<sup>27</sup> Vorres, p. 78.

walking out, they made Nicholas and Alexandra look worse for staying, no matter how much they cried privately afterwards.

The Mikhailovichi were not the only Romanovs who would have had qualms with Olga's untimely wish for family solidarity. The diaries of Nicholas' and Olga's sister, Grand Duchess Xenia, and of their cousin Grand Duke Konstantin (the poet "K.R.") reveal that Nicholas and Alexandra begged tearfully to be allowed to excuse themselves, but Sergei, Alexis and Vladimir browbeat them into staying. Xenia and Konstantin fault Sergei's handling of the situation, contradicting Olga's memories completely by stating Sergei was not guilt-stricken. Instead, he blamed his subordinates, refused to visit the site of the disaster, and refused to cancel a ball scheduled at his home for the following day.<sup>28</sup> Such unconcern for the feelings of the Russian populace did far more damage to the dynasty's credibility and image as benevolent protectors of the people than the failure to present a united front to the public. Count Constantine von der Pahlen's conclusion at the end of his investigation of the incident—"whenever a Grand Duke was given a responsible post there was sure to be trouble"—perhaps results from the conditions discussed in Chapters One and Two.<sup>29</sup> Uneducated in the arts of statecraft and governance, Grand Dukes were ill equipped to handle the power they wished would accompany the grand ducal responsibilities they shouldered.

If family solidarity was not the main issue surrounding the Romanovs following the disaster at Khodynka Field, family unity was broken down by rivalry in the family concerning overlapping careers. In large part this would be a generational conflict between the younger Romanovs, attempting to bring about reform, and the older Grand Dukes, who were contented with the *status quo*. The clashes of Alexis and Alexander over naval reforms are the best example of this type of conflict.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Maylunas and Mironenko, pp. 136-1369.

<sup>29</sup> Lieven, *Nicholas II*, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> See Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 138, 202-203.

However, this was not the only type of political turmoil surrounding the Romanovs. Increasingly aware of the lack of discipline enforced during Nicholas' reign, some members of the Imperial family would be caught up in various schemes to challenge or discredit the Emperor and Empress. The greatest number of controversies centered on the "Vladimirovichi," the sons of Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich. Following the murder of Rasputin, the French Ambassador Maurice Paléologue, a confidant of Vladimir's wife, Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna senior, wrote that Kirill, Boris and Andrei were promoting a palace coup, in which the monarchs would be seized in the night, Nicholas forced to abdicate, and Alexandra confined to a convent. Grand Duke Dmitri, one of Rasputin's murderers, was to head this scheme. Supposedly, Kirill and Andrei approached him about it, begging him "to persevere relentlessly with his work of national salvation'. After a long mental conflict, Dmitri Pavlovich finally refused to 'lay his hands on the Emperor'; his last word was: 'I will not break my oath of fealty.'" <sup>31</sup> Whether or not this accusation was just, in January Kirill was ordered to report for service in Port Romanov (Murmansk) on the Arctic. Andrei was sent to the Caucasus for "medical treatment," and Boris, though overlooked because of his dissolute reputation, left for the Caucasus also. Their mother, Miechen, followed, saying she would return when "everything was over." <sup>32</sup>

The Vladimirovichi were not the only Romanovs rumoured to be involved in conspiracies against the throne. Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich (Nikolasha) was reportedly approached by Duma member Prince George Lvov, who wished to know if he would become a constitutional monarch with Lvov as his Prime Minister, proclaim himself Tsar and stay in the Caucasus with troops loyal to him personally. Nikolasha wavered, citing his uncertainty of the army's acceptance of the plan. Within two days, he

---

<sup>31</sup> Maurice Paléologue, *Memoirs*, quoted in Andrei Maylunas and Sergei Mironenko, *A Lifelong Passion: Nicholas and Alexandra, Their Own Story* (London, 1996), p. 521.

<sup>32</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 141. Nicholas did not trust Kirill, aware of his pretensions to the throne. He secretly arranged for the navy to keep Kirill's royal privileges to a minimum; Perry and Pleshakov, p. 82.

had responded in the negative.<sup>33</sup> In addition, in the days leading up to the Tsar's abdication, Nicholas' brother, Michael, was already in negotiation with members of the soon-to-be Provisional Government concerning the possibility of his regency. In concert with these vague efforts at changing the head of state, the Romanovs attacked Alexandra and her efforts to form a government while the Tsar was away at the front following his dismissal of Nikolasha as Commander-in-Chief.<sup>34</sup> Sadly, they were too blind to see they were discrediting themselves by association.

Grand Duke Dmitri's involvement in the murder of Rasputin was a double-edged sword for the Romanovs. While it made him wildly popular with Rasputin's opponents, it horrified the Tsarina. Olga felt there was nothing positive to be gained from imperial involvement with his death. "Remember what Trotsky said about it—that it 'was carried out in the manner of a scenario designed for people of bad taste'....I think that for once the Communists were not severe enough in their judgement....That proved how low we had fallen."<sup>35</sup> Grand Duke Alexander saw the murder the same way as Olga, even though his son-in-law, Prince Youssouppoff, was Dmitri's co-conspirator. Sandro seemed an odd choice to defend the two murderers, but the Imperial family asked him to go to the Tsar to intercede on their behalf. "I was going to do so anyway, although their ravings and cruelty nauseated me. They ran around, they conferred, they gossiped, and they wrote a silly letter to Nicky. It almost seemed that they expected the Czar of Russia to decorate his two relatives for having committed a murder."<sup>36</sup> Alexander hoped the conspirators would receive a harsher punishment than they had—Felix was exiled to one of his estates, Dmitri to Persia. Marie, Dmitri's sister, could not have felt more different about it. Beyond her concern for her brother, she also feared that the public, currently rejoicing in Rasputin's death, would take Dmitri's punishment as a sign of "the excessive devotion

---

<sup>33</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, pp. 140-141. Grand Duchess Olga confirms rumour of such schemes, although she does not name any Romanov in particular. See Vorres, p. 145.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 121-122.

<sup>35</sup> Vorres, p. 145-146.

<sup>36</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, p. 278.

of the Empress to the memory of Rasputin, confirming the worst rumours of his influence, and demonstrate anew the helpless passivity of the Emperor."<sup>37</sup> Angered by a letter written by Alexandra assuring Marie that she shared none of Dmitri's guilt in the Empress' thoughts, Marie did undertake to write "a silly letter" to the Emperor, angered by the gift of a cross and an icon sent to her by the Empress with a letter stating that Marie in no way shared Dmitri's guilt in her thoughts. Marie had no wish to be disassociated from her brother. Although her father did not necessarily approve of the letter she wrote the Emperor, he felt it would at least demonstrate some family unity. It was promptly returned, with a comment scribbled on the top by the Tsar: "No one is permitted to engage in murders. I am surprised that you addressed yourself to me. Nicholas." Miechen repeated that comment all over Petrograd, further adding to the Tsar's unpopularity.<sup>38</sup> As Rasputin had divided the family in life, he divided it in death.

If family rivalry and politics played a part in discrediting the Romanovs, their "scandalous" behaviour certainly did as well. In the older generation, controversy again swirled around Vladimir and Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna Sr. Olga readily admits that this whole branch of the family was disliked by her own, largely because their political ambitions were well known.<sup>39</sup> Their occasional less than imperial conduct made them even less popular with their relations. Firstly, Miechen's court was the seat of the majority of gossip concerning the monarchs. Secondly, both parties of the marriage were believed to have had multiple affairs. The last straw, as far as Alexander III was concerned, was when they were involved in a brawl at a public restaurant. An actor in

<sup>37</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 267. Dmitri's involvement was very painful, because both the Tsar and Tsarina had considered him as a son. *Lettres des Grands-Ducs à Nicolas II*, pp. 50, 52, 56. In fact, it was believed in some circles that he was engaged to the Tsar's oldest daughter, Olga. See *Lettres*, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 279. The signatories of the petition for leniency were: Olga, Queen of Greece (his grandmother), Miechen, Kirill, Ducky, Boris, Andrei, Paul, Marie, Nicholas Mikhailovich, Sergei Mikhailovich, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Mavrikiyevna (widow of Grand Duke Konstantin, the poet K.R.), and some of their children. See Perry and Pleshakov, 136.

<sup>39</sup> Vorres, pp. 58-59. Olga also remembers that Miechen was always first in line to criticize Alexandra, whether she deserved it or not; see p. 107. Reputedly, when hearing of the train wreck at Borki, in which Alexander III and his heirs could have been killed, Miechen said, "We shall never have such a chance again." Likewise, Alexander III was supposed to have said "Imagine Vladimir's disappointment when he hears that we all escaped alive." See Vorres, p. 58. Of such history myths are made.

the restaurant had grabbed Miechen and kissed her; Grand Duke Vladimir hit the actor, who returned the blow. Vladimir's brother, Alexis, threw the actor out of the dining room and assaulted the chief of police when he tried to intervene. Alexander III prohibited his wayward brothers and sister-in-law from visiting restaurants.<sup>40</sup>

Nicholas II would have no such control over his family; they simply refused to take him seriously, yet this was the same generation to which he would turn to for council. Nicholas wrote a letter of protest to his Uncle Vladimir for using the Imperial box at the theatre without his permission, reminding him that this would not have happened in his father's day. "It is also unfair to try and take advantage of the fact that I am young and your nephew...And you ought to be the first to help me....In future, please spare me the necessity of writing such letters which make me feel abominable."<sup>41</sup> It is unfortunate for Nicholas that he was the son of a man who, in the same position, might simply have banned Vladimir from the theatres until he learned a lesson about Imperial prerogatives. His father's unusually strong character only made Nicholas' look weaker in contrast. This was reinforced in July 1905, when Nicholas called some of the Grand Dukes together to propose some reforms that would appease the peasants. Grand Duke Konstantin ("K.R."), Dmitri Konstantinovich, Vladimir, Nikolasha and his brother Peter were present. The Tsar suggested selling the peasants 1,800,000 acres of crown land. This proposal met with agreement from Nikolasha and Peter, but Vladimir protested that too few male Romanovs of legal age were present for such a decision to be made, no doubt thinking of his three sons. Nicholas conceded his point and backed down, reinforcing the image of being weak-willed.<sup>42</sup>

The last, though very important evidence of the collapse of family solidarity, was the number of morganatic marriages, elopements, and divorces in the family. The first of these during Nicholas' reign was the marriage of Michael Mikhailovich, "Miche-Miche,"

---

<sup>40</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Perry and Pleshakov, p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

to a commoner, in defiance of Nicholas' ban. He was exiled and lived in England for the rest of his life.<sup>43</sup> Next, his uncle Paul married a divorcée, prompting Nicholas to write an impassioned letter to his mother, in which he reiterated, "The statutes on the imperial family say that morganatic marriages are forbidden and that no marriage contracted WITHOUT PERMISSION is considered real." Having expressed his pique, Nicholas then voiced his concern for the future. "What guarantee is there that Kyril won't do the same thing tomorrow, or that Boris or Sergei Mikhailovich won't do it the day after that? A whole colony of the imperial family will be living in Paris with their semi-legal or illegal wives."<sup>44</sup>

Next, Nikolasha married the divorced Anastasia, Princess of Montenegro. The news was not well-received in the family. "How awful, what disgusting nonsense!" wrote Grand Duchess Xenia in her diary. K.R. also recorded the upcoming nuptials in his diary: "I learned with horror from my wife...that Stana is divorcing Yuri and is going to marry Nikolasha!!!...It breaks all church convention, which forbids first cousins to marry. Kyril was not allowed to marry Ducky, because they were first cousins..." He concluded his entry by saying "In these dark times, divorce in the family is something inauspicious and deplorable."<sup>45</sup> Kirill was pestering Nicholas for permission to marry his first cousin, "Ducky" (Victoria Melita of England). Permission was not only refused because they were first cousins and she was a divorcée, but also because she was divorced from Alexandra's brother, Ernest of Hesse-Darmstadt. In 1903, Xenia wrote in her diary, "Kyril arrived with a languid expression of persecuted innocence!...In fact, the only honourable thing for him to do—is to marry her and take the corresponding punishment, but he doesn't want that."<sup>46</sup> As if in fulfilment of Nicholas' prophecy, Kirill did eventually marry Ducky in 1905. The last of these affronts to Imperial dignity was the

---

<sup>43</sup> Vorres, p. 116.

<sup>44</sup> Maylunas and Mironenko, p. 212.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

hardest blow to bear; the Tsar's brother, Grand Duke Michael, eloped with a twice-divorced commoner in 1906, despite being next in line to the throne in the event of the heir's death.<sup>47</sup> On top of those morganatic marriages, Sandro's own was riddled with affairs, ending in a permanent separation, and both Marie's marriages ended in divorce.

The Romanovs set a very poor example during the reign of the last Tsar by placing their individual happiness above the wishes and orders of their Emperor, and they were perfectly cognisant of it, aware that they were not only harming their reputation, but also creating further difficulties for Nicholas by publicly defying their sovereign. Rather than helping him to solidify his increasingly weak grasp on the reins of government, they concerned themselves with their own affairs instead. Olga wrote that

Not that there were not some among us who had the intelligence and the capacity to serve the Tsar and their country, but there were not enough. The majority of us pestered Nicky, and sometimes even made scenes in his presence, in the efforts to further our own interests, our own petty schemes, or else to find fault with whatever he did or did not do. It reached such a pitch that in the end Nicky could not be blamed for avoiding certain members of the family. As I look back on it all, I can see that too many of us Romanovs had, as it were, gone to live in a world of self-interest where little mattered except the unending gratification of personal desire and ambition. Nothing proved it better than the appalling marital mess in which the last generation of my family involved themselves. That chain of domestic scandals could not but shock the nation—but did any of them care for the impression they created? Never. A few of them actually did not mind being banished abroad.<sup>48</sup>

Olga's summary of the situation makes it clear that the Romanovs themselves did not realize they were sowing the seeds of their own destruction; they could not possibly have acted in this way if they had. If, in Kirill's words, the Empire looked like a sinking ship with a mutinying crew, the Romanovs looked like the ringleaders of the insurgence.

Whether the nation was really as shocked as Olga believed is less certain. It is true that the Romanovs set a bad example in marrying disinterestedly; in doing so, they defied both the Orthodox Church and their Emperor. If Nicholas was seen as unable to

---

<sup>47</sup> Vorres, pp. 116-117.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.



control his family, how could he be believed to govern a country in orderly fashion? Yet only the Romanovs' elite circle would have been familiar with the ins and outs of their behaviour. It is likely many Russians felt it was much less important than Olga believed. Certainly, few would have cited it as a "cause" of the Revolution. The fact that the Romanovs do only demonstrates further the narrowness of their vision of Russia.

Malicious gossip and "eye-witness" accounts of events in Russia 1916-1917 perpetuated the slander that the Romanovs engaged in this self-indulgence and political intriguing disinterestedly.<sup>49</sup> Yet although they were indifferent to the harm they were doing themselves through their actions, they were certainly aware of Nicholas' mistakes and problems with the system of government. Knowing that problems in Russia could easily lead to a revolution that would topple them all, it seems only logical that they would have tried to steer Nicholas from his path.

"I, having been so close to them both, never interfered, either with advice or criticism. I knew little or nothing of purely political matters and the rest was their own affair," Olga wrote.<sup>50</sup> This statement removes Olga from consideration as one of those who cautioned Nicholas about the continued instability of his reign. Kirill likewise does not speak of any sort of advisory role. Since Kirill was younger than Nicholas, that was unlikely in any event, plus it must be remembered that neither the Emperor nor the Empress fully trusted him. Kirill remembers that the Tsar "rarely spoke of the War to me" although Kirill was attached to Nicholas' staff in 1916.<sup>51</sup> He had no role as advisor to the Tsar.

Marie's role as counselor to the Tsar was also negligible, but she was in the position to be aware of the influence her brother and father had with him. Dmitri

---

<sup>49</sup> For examples of that sort of hearsay, gossip, and complete fabrication regarding the Romanovs, and particularly Alexandra, see Princess Catherine Radziwill (under the pseudonym of Count Paul Vassili), *Secrets of Dethroned Royalty* (New York, 1920). Also, under the pseudonym, see *Confession of the Czarina* (New York, 1918).

<sup>50</sup> Vorres, p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 202.

cautioned the Tsar against taking command of the army in 1915 (the family was split on this issue; Kirill and Alexander approved) for it would make him directly responsible for losses at the front. By the end of the emotional interview, Dmitri was convinced the Tsar had come to his point of view; two days later, he learned of the Tsar's departure for the front from the newspapers.<sup>52</sup> Dmitri felt the Tsar "did not in the least realize the terrible abyss gaping wider and wider under his feet. No words could, it seemed, arouse him to the danger that threatened his country and his dynasty." He had neither respectable advisors nor knowledge of the public's condemnation of his reign.<sup>53</sup> Dmitri's involvement in Rasputin's death was the culmination of his own despair in the face of his helplessness to open the Tsar's eyes. Her father, Grand Duke Paul, tried his luck with the Tsarina shortly before Nicholas' abdication. Rather than allow him to present his arguments, Alexandra accused him of a lack of loyalty to the throne and remained adamant in her refusal to grant concessions.<sup>54</sup> When Paul realized that none of his attempts to warn the Tsar and Tsarina were taken seriously, he made a final attempt to save the throne, drafting a manifesto in Nicholas' name which granted Russia a constitution. He obtained the signatures of Grand Dukes Kirill and Michael Alexandrovich, and then went to present the document to Nicholas at the train station at Tsarskoe Selo. Of course, the train had been stopped at Pskov, so Paul tried to get the Tsarina's endorsement. She refused.<sup>55</sup> The family's attempt to let the Emperor and

<sup>52</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 223-225.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264. Nicholas increasingly trusted only his wife, who reinforced his misplaced sense of security in their correspondence. See Joseph T. Fuhrmann, ed., *The Complete Wartime Correspondence of Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra*. On Dec. 4, 1916, she wrote "I am fully convinced that great & beautiful times are coming for your reign & Russia... Show to all that you are the Master & your will shall be obeyed... they shall be made to bow down before you & listen to your orders & to work how & with whom you wish—obedience they must be taught, they do not know the meaning of that word..." pp. 654-655. In another letter she begged Nicholas to be firm so that they could pass on the autocracy unchanged to their son, reminding him Russia "wants to feel Your hand—how long, years, people have told me the same—'Russia loves to feel the whip'—its their nature—tender love & then the iron hand to punish & guide," p. 672. "Be Peter the Great, John the Terrible, Emperor Paul—crush them all under you..." was how Alexandra advised her husband to deal with even well-meaning opposition. She also wanted Duma and Council Ministers punished for high treason, pp. 675-676.

<sup>54</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 302-303.

<sup>55</sup> Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustal'ev, *The Fall of the Romanovs*, pp. 87-88.

Empress appear to be at the head of any changes that would have placated the public had failed. Marie could only observe, increasingly disillusioned, while her family tried to steer the Tsar from a path the family knew could only end in revolution.

Alexander was never too shy to give Nicholas advice; perhaps its frequency is what resulted in its being discounted. Alexander's father, Michael Nikolaevich, had believed that grand dukes did not have the right to criticize a Tsar's decisions; they should obey, as would any good soldier. Michael Nikolaevich's sons, the "Mikhailovichi," disagreed with their father on this issue. "Although faithful subjects of the Emperor, we did not approve of everything occurring in the palace. We spoke frankly and criticized constructively. We were called 'dangerous radicals'..." the Grand Duke recalled.<sup>56</sup> Alexander's advice ranged from the specific to the general, cautioning Nicholas that his policies would lead to war with Japan and recommending that a second track to the Trans-Siberian railroad should be built. Neither suggestion was heeded.<sup>57</sup> He had likewise warned Nicholas about the potential dangers of the Khodynka Field coronation festivities, questioning Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich's ability to manage this effectively. Again, he was rebuffed. Alexander felt he was at a disadvantage in his attempts to council Nicholas because he was only two years the Tsar's senior and the two had been close childhood friends. He felt that relationship should have made his counsel more palatable than that of Nicholas' uncles Vladimir, Alexis, and Nikolasha. His disappointment is evident from his recollections on the subject:

I attempted to make Nicky see the impositions of our relatives. Being as much his uncle as any one of the elder grand dukes and capable of matching their height inch for inch, I did not mince my words. I talked for hours. I quoted history, economics, native and foreign precedents. I failed dismally. My voice lacked that shouting quality. I was "Sandro," the pal of his childhood, the husband of his beloved sister Xenia. He knew how to cool my temper by a joking

---

<sup>56</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 48, 146.

<sup>57</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, p. 218. He claims he predicted Russia would lose this war; see p. 212.

reference to bygone days. He noticed my habit of crouching in my chair so as to look smaller. He was not afraid of me.<sup>58</sup>

Advising Nicholas in person was not working, so Alexander wrote the Tsar a letter, a final impassioned plea that he grant a parliamentary body truly responsible to the people. The letter, written 25 December 1916, was not sent until 4 February 1917 in the hopes that Nicholas would make changes on his own. A despairing Sandro finally mailed the letter, which set out his belief that Nicholas and Russia were headed for ruin. Alexander had come to believe that autocracy, in the form that Nicholas practiced it, was out of date; a government was needed not just to appease the nation but to make Nicholas' burden of governance easier to bear. Alexander's most strenuous objection to Nicholas' course of action was his refusal to consult public opinion. "You cannot run a country without listening to the voice of the people...", Alexander cautioned.<sup>59</sup> Further, he did not understand the direction Nicholas was taking; "what do you hope to accomplish?" he asked. Did the Tsar not realize that his actions were pushing the people as yet unsure whether to support the monarch or the Duma into the hands of the leftists? Therefore, according to Alexander, it was urgent that Nicholas form a government that would enjoy the people's confidence, otherwise there was no hope of saving the throne. "Despair overtakes me when I see that you do not want to hear the voices of those who understand the situation in which Russia finds herself and who counsel you to take the measures that would extricate us from the chaos we find ourselves in today." This refusal to listen to such counsel, in Alexander's opinion, put Russia in the strange position of having the government prepare the revolution. "The people do not want it but the government is employing every possible means to augment the number of malcontents and is succeeding exceedingly well. Unfolding before us is an unprecedented drama: revolution coming from above and not below."<sup>60</sup> Alexander's letter bore no tangible

---

<sup>58</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, pp. 170, 174.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander's letter is reprinted, in French, in *Lettres des Grands-Ducs*, pp. 206-217. The translations are mine.

<sup>60</sup> *Lettres des Grands-Ducs*, pp. 216-217.

results. Nicholas continued to follow his own course until he abdicated—an act again committed in a fashion contrary to the recommendations of his advisors.

The memoirs demonstrate that the Romanovs were able to pinpoint some significant problems with the way Russia was governed, but could not explain their origins, nor did they attempt to. The Grand Dukes and Duchesses did not seem to realize that the problems they identified were symptoms of unwellness in the system of autocratic government itself. By placing an inordinate amount of the blame on problems in the family dynamic, the memoirists no doubt inflated the importance of the example they felt duty-bound to set for the Russian people. However, their actions, such as morganatic marriage, divorce, and occasional undignified behaviour were detrimental to Nicholas' prestige by demonstrating that even his own family was willing to defy his orders. Despite their own mistakes, the Grand Dukes and Duchesses were quite willing to point out those of the Emperor, although they had little to offer in the way of practical solutions. Efforts to caution the Emperor and Empress against imprudent policies were a dismal failure, serving only to alienate Nicholas and Alexandra and further dividing the family. The fledgling attempts of the Grand Dukes and Duchesses of Russia to become politically involved came too late to be accepted by the Emperor and Empress as anything other than interference. The fact that they tried to warn the Tsar, but did not succeed, only underlines the impotence of the grand ducal role.

CHAPTER FIVE  
*Romanovs, Revolution, Revolutionaries*

The Romanovs had the most to lose from the Revolution. They were far from being the only family to suffer murder, persecution, material loss, and psychological trauma, but as members of the ruling family, their very purpose in life was removed from them. They deemed themselves useful only in service to their state yet after the events of February/March 1917, their state no longer wanted them. Romanovs lost their palaces, incomes and privileges, and also their exalted place in a world based on 300 years of tradition. Still, their memoirs contain little self-pity, or few sentences about loss, with the obvious exceptions in mentions of murdered family members and homesickness. With one significant exception, the similarities of the Romanovs' experiences of the Revolution end there, for each was exposed to it in a different way and setting. Kirill found himself in the thick of the action in Petrograd, Alexander and Olga in Kiev and the Crimea, and Marie in Pskov and Petrograd. The exception that unifies all four accounts of the Revolutions of 1917 is that they all blame the wrong portion of society for the Revolutions, holding the liberal *intelligentsia* responsible for inciting the masses, rather than recognizing the origins of the popular strikes among workers throughout Petrograd in February 1917. This misinterpretation indicates that even after decades had passed between the Revolutions and the writing of the memoirs, the Romanovs' belief in the loyalty of the populace—in the "myth of the Tsar"—remained unshaken despite tremendous evidence to the contrary. Analysis of the Romanovs' experiences of revolution illuminates their point of view.

Considering the fates of Nicholas and Alexandra, as well as the other Romanovs who met their deaths at Bolshevik hands, the revolutionary experiences of our four grand

dukes and duchesses are significant. Paradoxically, these members of the Imperial family claim the February Revolution came as no surprise. They could not foresee exactly when the blow would come, but none seem to have doubted that it would. As early as September 1916, with the rather inappropriate appointment of A.D. Protopopov as Minister of the Interior,<sup>1</sup> Marie noted, "It was about this time that I first heard people speaking of the Emperor and Empress with open animosity and contempt. The word 'revolution' was uttered more openly and more often; soon it could be heard everywhere."<sup>2</sup> Finally, in late February 1917, Kirill reported that "the mob got out of hand and a mass murder of the police began. In the barracks reserve contingents of soldiers either arrested or massacred their officers. There was shooting in the streets by rival gangs. Gangsterdom and hooliganism took the upper hand." Then, open revolt broke out in Petrograd.

In an effort to restore order in the capital, Kirill recalled one of his Naval Guard battalions protecting the Alexander Palace—and the Tsarina and her children—to Petrograd "...because these were almost the only loyal troops still left which could be relied on to keep order if things became still worse. The Empress agreed to this measure of emergency and other troops who carried out their duties well were dispatched to Tsarskoe [Selo]."<sup>3</sup> This was early March 15 (N.S.), the morning of the abdication. The moment was a difficult one for the Empress. One of her ladies-in-waiting observed that Alexandra was very moved when the battalion left. As the Naval Guards marched away, "she watched the scene with tears that no personal danger had been able to make her shed. The loss of the colours seemed symbolic of all the other things that were slipping

---

<sup>1</sup> Protopopov was a fanatical mystic, a disciple of Rasputin, and fawned embarrassingly over the Imperial couple. See Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy, A History of the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1996), p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 204-206.

away."<sup>4</sup> The account neither corroborates nor contradicts Kirill's claim that Alexandra let the troops leave willingly, and Kirill was later vilified for leaving the Tsarina and her five children, sick with the measles, improperly guarded. The measure demonstrates the seriousness of the disturbances in the capital in the days leading up the abdication, however. As for the replacement troops Kirill insisted "carried out their duties well" Grand Duke Paul observed their behaviour first-hand only two days later, when he went to inform Alexandra of the Tsar's abdication. They were behaving badly and proved to be a sorry contrast to the Naval Guard. Tsarskoe Selo "was now inundated by unruly, dissolute soldiers of the reserves.... They damaged statues, trampled the grass, broke the trees, and bathed naked in the ponds in plain sight of everybody."<sup>5</sup> The Empress was under arrest, and all of a sudden, rumours of the Tsar's disappearance were replaced with rumours of the Tsar's abdication.

Though the Romanovs claim they had presentments that revolution was not far off, their memoirs leave the feeling that none of them imagined that the Tsar would actually abdicate. All were shocked by the manner and speed of the Tsar's fall from power. They had envisioned, perhaps, a violent overthrow of the Tsar, but not his surrendering without a fight.

In February/March 1917, Marie was working as a Red Cross nurse and the head of a hospital in Pskov, the only member of the family near the Tsar at the time of his abdication. On the evening of March 1 (O.S.), she heard that two Duma representatives were in Pskov to implore the Tsar to abdicate in favour of his son. "It was only then that I actually understood what was happening and comprehended the meaning of the word

---

<sup>4</sup> Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, *The Life & Tragedy of Alexandra Feodorovna, Empress of Russia; A Biography* (London, 1928), p. 260.

<sup>5</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 309-310.



'revolution.'..." wrote Marie, although she did not believe it possible that the Tsar would act upon their request.<sup>6</sup> In fact, she did not even take the possibility seriously; after all, the Tsar still had loyal troops, clergymen, subjects, and what were a few riots localized in one city? Marie made no attempt to see the Tsar that night, as she still harboured ill-feelings towards him for exiling her brother, Dmitri, to the Caucasus for his role in Rasputin's murder. At 2 a.m., General Ruzsky summoned Marie to Pskov headquarters and informed her of the Tsar's abdication in favour of his brother Michael, instead of in favour of his son Alexis, as the Duma representatives had planned. Marie was stunned. "I rose. My place was now by the side of the Emperor; I thought of going immediately to the station. He was Tsar no longer. He was alone." Her shock only deepened when Ruzsky informed her that the Tsar had already gone back to Mogilev. Marie could not accept "the simplicity of the *dénouement*....I would not have been surprised had the lightning struck, or an earthquake occurred. It was an historical death and subconsciously I expected it to be followed by signs—as after the death of the Saviour upon the Cross."<sup>7</sup>

When the Tsar arrived in Mogilev, he was met by his mother, his sister Olga, and Grand Duke Alexander. If Marie's reminiscences of those historic days reflect disbelief, Alexander's reflect a mixture of disbelief and contempt. He belittled the causes of the February Revolution in his memoirs. The morning papers spoke of strikes among munitions workers in Petrograd, yet this had happened before. Evening telegrams mentioned hunger strikes. According to Alexander, this was a lie. There were shortages, yes, but not of famine proportions. He believed the story was blown out of proportion by the Duma to provoke a revolt. The fact that Nicholas' order for the cavalry of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 287.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 288-291.

Imperial Guard to put down the riots was mysteriously countermanded only strengthened this belief. Since he viewed these disturbances as being of a minor nature in the grand scheme of things, Alexander's reaction to the Abdication Manifesto is not surprising:

Nicky must have lost his mind: since when does a sovereign abdicate because of shortage of bread and partial disorders in the capital? The treason of the St. Petersburg reservists? But he had an army of fifteen million men at his disposal! The whole thing, including his reckless trip to St. Petersburg, seemed ludicrous in 1917. It still remains so in 1931.<sup>8</sup>

Alexander's assessment of the situation seems rather optimistic. The increasing politicization of the army was at its strongest in the rear—in the garrisons—and yet the government was forced to turn to the military to put down the disturbances in Petrograd. The police force of 3,500 was woefully outnumbered by the roughly 200,000 strikers that had taken to the streets by the end of February. Yet the soldiers who had fired on the crowds of 1905 refused to fire on those of 1917. The Petrograd garrisons contained a significant amount of disaffected soldiers—recuperating evacuees and new recruits over forty bitterly resenting being pulled away from their holdings back home—and young recruits. Allan K. Wildman argues that ordering these soldiers to fire on the crowds was fatal to the dynasty, for it forced the soldiers to take sides. They chose to side with the demonstrators. On February 27, the Volynskii, Litovskii, and part of the historic Preobrazhenskii guard units threw their lot in with the strikers. The situation was repeated in cities throughout Russia.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, even if one were to grant the slim possibility that the strikes in the capital could have been contained by armed forces from a distant and unpoliticized front, a number of the "fifteen million men" were engaged in rebelling against traditional forms of military authority at this time. On March 1, 1917

---

<sup>8</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 286-287. For the account of the Tsar's orders to distribute the Cavalry Guards being pre-empted, see Kirill, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army; v.1, The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April 1917)*, (Princeton, 1980), pp. 120-157.

(O.S.), the Petrograd Soviet had issued "Order No. 1," a document proclaiming the Soviet's jurisdiction over the army and promoting the "democratization" of the army by restricting officers' powers of discipline and creating soldiers' committees. In many units, soldiers mutinied against their officers and elected their replacements.<sup>10</sup>

Refusing to accept these realities, Alexander maintained that Nicholas' abdication was premature. He still greeted his cousin warmly in Mogilev, hugging Nicholas in silence. He stayed by Nicholas during the swearing-in ceremony to the new Provisional Government, and through the first *Te Deum* sung in over three hundred years where the Emperor's name was not mentioned in the prayer ("What tortures he must suffer at this moment!"). But Alexander still could not understand why his cousin had given up so easily. And when Nicholas criticized his brother, Grand Duke Michael, for refusing to take the throne he had abdicated in his favour, Alexander's sense of the ironic leaps off the page.

"Misha should not have done a thing like that," [Nicholas] concluded sententiously. "I wonder who could have given him such strange advice." This remark, coming from a man who had surrendered one-sixth of the earth's surface to a mob of drunken reservists and rioting workers left me speechless.

Alexander was not impressed by the reasons Nicholas gave for his decision: fear of civil war, fear of politicizing the army he wanted to keep focused on aiding the Allied cause, and his faith that the Provisional Government would do a better job of ruling Russian than he could. In Alexander's estimation, "a twenty-four-hour battle in the suburbs of St. Petersburg would have restored order."<sup>11</sup> With an uninformed and incomplete

---

<sup>10</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York, 1994), pp. 47-48. Reports circulated that hundreds of naval officers had been either arrested or killed in the February riots at the hands of the Kronstadt and Baltic Fleet sailors. Coming so closely before the abdication, it is possible news of the order had not yet reached Alexander before the abdication manifesto, but by the time he wrote his memoirs, Alexander should have realized the impact of Order No. 1 on the discipline of the army.

<sup>11</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 286-289.

understanding of the situation in the capital, Alexander could not forgive Nicholas for ceding the throne.

Although surprised by Nicholas' decision, Olga could not bring herself to agree with her brother-in-law Alexander about the hastiness of her brother's actions. She believed his motivations were correct.

Not only did he want to prevent further disorders when he gave up the crown, but he had no other choice. He found himself deserted by all his army commanders, who, with the exception of General Gourko, favoured the provisional government. Nicky could not even rely on men in the ranks. He saw nothing but cowardice, treachery, and deceit all round him....<sup>12</sup>

Olga's and Nicholas' mother, the Dowager Empress Marie, was not as understanding, saying "it was the biggest humiliation of her life." The Tsar's mother had gone to Mogilev with Sandro, but on her return to Kiev, the Imperial platform was barred. No one met her at the station, and she had to drive home in a cab. Olga remembered, "she could not sit still for a moment. She kept pacing the floor, and I saw that she was more angry than miserable. She understood nothing of what had happened. She blamed poor Alicky for just everything. It was an afternoon to turn your hair grey."<sup>13</sup> Despite her mother's indignation, Olga continued to sympathize with her brother. Closer to Nicholas than the majority of his relations, perhaps she was in the best position to understand his feeling of being overwhelmed by events that seemed beyond his control. No doubt their shared profound religious faith enabled her to understand his resignation and seeming fatalism better than the anti-Orthodox Alexander.

---

<sup>12</sup> Vorres, pp. 151-152.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Kirill, alone of the four Romanovs studied herein, was in the capital during those first days of revolutionary fervour, and his actions in the days leading up to the abdication would become extremely significant during his exile.

Kirill's memoirs describe the disorders in the capital, disorders that he felt were exacerbated by the fact that no one, at the end of February, knew where the Tsar was.

The absence of stability, of someone at the helm, of at least some semblance of direction was felt by all. If leadership could have been found at that moment, and if this drifting ship of State could have been steered on some definite course, even the mutinous soldiers and the rabble would have followed, no matter where. They were more like sheep without a shepherd than a pack of dangerous wolves.<sup>14</sup>

Without his explicitly saying so, it seems Kirill decided to fill that void. He had already served as mediator of a dispute when his men locked up their officers, and found that his men still remained loyal to him, even volunteering to guard him during the February disturbances. This no doubt reinforced Kirill's confidence. According to Kirill's memoirs, in the last days of February the Government called on all troops and their commanders to present themselves to the Duma and pledge their loyalty. This measure to try and regain control of the soldiers put Kirill in an awkward position; as commander of the Naval Guards, the order applied to him as well.

I had to decide, therefore, whether I should obey that order and take my men to the Douma, or else whether to leave my men leaderless in this dangerous situation by resigning, and thus to let them drift on to the rocks of revolution with the rest. Hitherto I had succeeded in preserving loyalty and good discipline among them. They were the only loyal and reliable troops left in the capital. It had not been an easy task to preserve them from the contamination of the revolutionary disease. To deprive them of leadership at this time would simply have added to the disaster. My main concern was to do my utmost to re-establish order in the capital by every means available, even with the sacrifice of my personal pride, so that the Emperor might safely return.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-209. Given Kirill's dynastic ambitions, the selflessness of his motivations is questionable.

It is unclear how Kirill felt his involvement with the troops' march to the Duma would effect this reestablishment of authority in Petrograd, but he nonetheless presented himself to the barracks of his troops, praying along the way that "it would not be necessary to drink this bitter cup. When I arrived, however, I saw that I had no course left to me other than to take them to the Douma [sic]. They wanted to be led."<sup>16</sup> When they arrived at the Duma, the place was in "absolute pandemonium." Officers were being physically abused by their men, rakish-looking soldiers were shouting and smoking, the place was filthy. Whatever Kirill had hoped to accomplish, or whatever role he had wished to play, he "spent the whole of the afternoon and evening in this painful atmosphere guarded by my men. In the end a mining student came to my room and said that a car was waiting to take me away."<sup>17</sup> Although Kirill's relatives would later place immense significance on his actions of that day and on the violation of his oath to the Tsar (who had not yet abdicated), it is obvious even from his own account that this burgeoning government placed little importance on having a Romanov Grand Duke in its midst. A day or two later, "...the consummation of this ghastly tragedy came with all the crushing weight of an overwhelming and sudden catastrophe. It was the end." The catastrophe was, of course, Nicholas' and Michael's abdications. Kirill remembered that "it was the saddest moment of my life. Thereafter all seemed futile and hopeless. Hitherto there had been hope." Kirill handed in his resignation, shared a farewell with his men, and with the help of Alexander Kerensky, relocated to Finland.<sup>18</sup>

If the Tsar's abdication affected Olga and Alexander personally, it also affected Kirill politically. Fourth in line for the throne, with Nicholas' abdication for both himself

---

<sup>16</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210-215.

and his son, and Michael's subsequent refusal of the honour, Kirill now became the heir presumptive to any form of monarchy in Russia. Although nothing was known of the Tsar's whereabouts immediately following his departure from GHQ, Kirill was certainly aware of the Duma's plans to insist on Nicholas' abdication in favour of Alexis and the appointment of a regent until the boy's majority. The Duma was turning to the popular Michael, brother of the Tsar, to fulfill that role. It is possible that Kirill aspired to the role himself. March 2 (O.S.), the same day the Tsar would make his decision to abdicate, Grand Duke Paul sent his nephew a letter signaling his displeasure at the idea of Michael being regent, figuring it might be the result of his objectionable wife's intrigues. Paul felt the manifesto some Grand Dukes had signed on Nicholas' behalf, granting a constitution, should be enough to satisfy the Provisional Government and keep the throne for Nicholas at all costs. Kirill's reply has little to do with keeping Nicholas on the throne; in fact, that is not mentioned at all. He speaks of his displeasure with Michael for not consulting with his family and only with Mikhail Rodzianko, and then complains, "I was completely alone during these difficult days, and I take full responsibility before Niki and the motherland for trying to save the situation and for recognizing the new government."<sup>19</sup> Yet the appeal of the Duma Kirill mentioned, calling for all loyal troops and their commanders to report to the Duma to swear allegiance, oddly makes no mention of that very fact. In the Declaration of the Interim Committee of the State Duma, released February 28, "...the Committee express their confidence, that the people and the army will give their support to the task of creating a new government...."<sup>20</sup>

Since there was no call to the physical body of the Duma, it is no wonder that the Duma chairman, Rodzianko, was surprised to learn Kirill had presented himself. At

---

<sup>19</sup> Steinberg and Khrustal'ev, pp. 22-23.

<sup>20</sup> Maylunas and Mironenko, pp.550-551.

4:15p.m. March 1 (O.S.), a secretary reported to Rodzianko that representatives of the Naval Guards had arrived. Rodzianko's answer, "tell them to go to hell! When am I to get down to business? Is there no end to this?" leaves little doubt that the Duma's appeal to the military was one of symbolic support that did not require the army to present itself to the Duma to make pledges of allegiance in person. The Committee had made no preparations to receive someone of grand ducal stature, yet Rodzianko had to see him, if begrudging the time. Rodzianko pleasantly received Kirill's assurance, "I am at your disposal, like the rest of the people." The Duma member was shocked, however, by the red rosette, emblem of the revolution, on the Grand Duke's lapel, and by Kirill's message to the garrison at Tsarskoe Selo before leaving for the Duma, stating, "I and the Guards under my command have joined the new government. I am sure that both you and the unit under your command will want to come with me."<sup>21</sup> These acts would come back to haunt Kirill and his children. The Romanovs who survived the Revolution could not forgive him for swearing an oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government before the Tsar had even abdicated.<sup>22</sup> They could not forgive the red rosette either, or the fact that Kirill had marched his troops to the Duma under the red banner of the Revolution.

Despite Kirill's demonstration of loyalty to the Provisional Government, when the Tsar abdicated, Rodzianko turned to Michael as custodian for the proposed regency of Alexis. This coincides with the period of Kirill's memoirs in which his contempt for the Provisional Government first becomes evident. Considering Kirill's past ambitions, the

---

<sup>21</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, pp. 150-151. See also V. V. Shulgin, *Dni: 1920*, (Moscow, 1989), p. 212 for an account of Kirill's announcement. It underlines the unexpectedness and undesirability of his arrival.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Kirill's response to the Duma's appeal with Alexander's response to General Alexeev's invitation to take the oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government following the Tsar's abdication: "I wonder how the others feel, but I myself fail to understand how anyone could take an oath of allegiance to combination of schemers who had just broken their own oath," (*Once a Grand Duke*, p.291). Certainly Kirill's view was more pragmatic; in the estimation of Perry and Pleshakov, "A survivor of the *Petropavlovsk* explosion, he now wanted to be a survivor of the collapse of Nicholas II," pp.150-151).



ambitions of his scheming mother, and his future proclamation of himself as Tsar Kirill I of Russia in exile, it is not unreasonable to assume that Kirill's contempt for what he refers to as the 'government' was born when he realized his attempt to set himself up as the first constitutional monarch of Russia had failed due to their lack of support. In any event, his march to the Duma failed to either restore order in the capital or prevent Nicholas from losing the throne, so even by his own motives, his mission was a failure.

Like his cousin Alexander, Kirill believed the situation would have been salvageable had some sort of military force been used. "... The only really effective step would have been to hand over all power to the military. This alone would have saved the situation. One or two regiments from the front would have sufficed to re-establish order within a few hours."<sup>23</sup> However correct or incorrect this estimation may have been, the fact remained that on the morning of 3 March, people awoke to a Russia with no Tsar. The Provisional Government that took up the reins of power had to contend with a rival, the Petrograd Soviet, from the moment of its inception. Although Marie would record that there was something very unsettling about the easiness with which the Tsar was abandoned and that change was accepted,<sup>24</sup> the transfer of power was not a smooth one. Nicholas' abdication led to the very thing he had hoped to avoid: Russia was plunged into revolutionary chaos and civil warfare.

Accounts of the Russian Revolution(s) are numerous, and neither its chronology nor its effects will be recounted here. Tangible losses to members of the Romanov family, such as material goods, can be inferred from the fact that they were forced to flee the country and exist elsewhere as refugees. It is rather the psychological impact and their impressions of the revolution that demand consideration, as through their memories

---

<sup>23</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 206.

<sup>24</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 297.

and experiences, one sees them coming to grips with the fact that their country is revolting against, essentially, them.

Kirill's memoirs do not have much to say about the revolution following the abdication of Nicholas II. He did not mention how the family spent its time during this interim period, with the exception of going to church for Easter Saturday. He does remark on his surprise that the "troubles of March" never interfered with the electricity, gasoline, nor the water supply. Then finally, "after considerable difficulties I obtained permission from the 'Government' to leave for Finland with my family. Our departure was very well and quietly arranged by a commissionaire." After a short return to Russia, Kirill again left for Finland in June with his daughters, followed by his pregnant wife, Victoria Melita of England.<sup>25</sup> This ensured his safety while enabling him to remain close enough to Petrograd to answer a call that never came.

In contrast to Kirill, the first to leave Russia, the other Romanovs would have the full experience of the Revolution. Nearer to the capital than aunt and cousin, Marie's position was most precarious. Technically an officer, she feared the effects of the infamous Order No. 1. Drunken crowds threatened to harm her, the wounded in her hospital began to treat her disrespectfully and the staff became unfriendly. It became clear to Marie she would have to leave Pskov. The chief physician dealt the final blow; his wife was coming to visit him and he wanted to install her in Marie's rooms. She left Pskov on a sealed train car, as the railway authorities could establish no control over the loud soldiers, traveling armed, who packed the cars so full that some even sat on the roof of the train cars.<sup>26</sup> The Grand Duchess offers no explanation of why the soldiers who had earlier demonstrated love for the Tsar were now hostile to the aristocracy. Her first

---

<sup>25</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 211-213.

<sup>26</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 294-299.

introduction to a revolutionary Petrograd was a footman from the house, "...no longer wearing his livery...instead of the car, there was a hired, ancient brougham, drawn by two faded white horses."<sup>27</sup> Marie found the mood of the capital strange; there was a sense of "joy and relief" at the change in government instead of the "perplexity and anxiety" of the militarized Pskov. A powerful counterbalance to this joyful mood in Petrograd was the state of the city itself,

sluggish and colourless. The streets were carelessly cleaned. Crowds of idle, dissolute soldiers and sailors wandered continually about, while the well-dressed people who owned carriages and cars hid away in their homes. Police were not to be seen. Things ran themselves, and very badly.<sup>28</sup>

Several events connected with revolutionary zeal were personally traumatic to the young Grand Duchess, from the demands and belligerence of long-time family servants to the arrest of her father, Grand Duke Paul. One might also expect sympathy for Nicholas and Alexandra, imprisoned so close at the Alexander Palace, but Marie's sympathies, particularly for the Empress, were "purely impersonal. I was sorry for them all as I would have been for anyone in their position, but that was all. Deep within my heart had accumulated so much bitterness....It was too great, the price we now had to pay for their age-long narrow-mindedness and stubbornness."<sup>29</sup> This bitterness alone must have been difficult to live with. Fear was ever-present as the family lived under danger of an attack. The Bolshevik Revolution in October only exacerbated Marie's fears. Her father was rearrested. Events began to prey on Marie's mind, and she lived in fear of being abducted from her home and incarcerated.<sup>30</sup> Thinking to relieve her stress temporarily, one night Marie and her husband went to the Imperial Theatre. For reasons she could not explain,

---

<sup>27</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 299.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 341, 343.

the sight of grubby soldiers and their ladies sitting in the imperial box caused her to faint.<sup>31</sup> The world had changed irrevocably and coming to terms with that fact was psychologically traumatic.

There were physical dangers as well. At the end of October, fearing a Bolshevik uprising, Marie and her husband decided to travel to Moscow to remove her jewels from the state bank. When they arrived, Marie could sense that something was not quite right. She and her husband, Sergei Putiatin, had only to walk a little ways before they could hear shots fired. Unbeknownst to them, they had arrived in Moscow during the Bolshevik Revolution. They arrived at the bank, which was closed. Where should they go? They decided to head for his parents' house, but it took the entire day for them to arrive. They often had to crouch in alleys to avoid being shot at, and in one particular instance, they came face to face with an armed gang who began to fire at them. Marie, Putiatin, and other people trying to escape down the same alley flattened themselves against the wall as shots rang out, and when the soldiers reloaded, they hit the ground. The rest of the afternoon is a blur to Marie; all she could remember for the purpose of her memoirs was the constant sound of shots fired, mingled with incessant church bells.<sup>32</sup> This was as close as any Romanov who was not arrested got to the action of the Revolution.

Physical danger soon came to include hunger. The only meat available was horse meat, bread was rationed in the smallest quantities and had to be mixed with sawdust. Cabbage and potatoes were staple fare. Upon meeting an acquaintance, conversations would center on food. Then one day, Marie received a welcome surprise. "I shall never forget the joy I experienced from a box of food sent by the Swedish royal family, who

---

<sup>31</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 344.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 334-337.

had heard of my half-starved existence; I remember to its smallest detail everything it contained and the state of almost sacred exaltation with which we unpacked it."<sup>33</sup> Her counterparts in the south could have sympathized with Marie's hunger pains. "We laughed at the hundred per cent vegetable recipe for preparing a 'Wiener schnitzel' out of carrots and cabbage...", remembered Alexander.<sup>34</sup> In addition to hunger, fuel gave out in the winter, causing frostbitten feet and sores so bad that Marie could not put on her shoes. Days seemed mundane and unending, people stopped by to commiserate with her and talk about days of grandeur passed. "Especially on the days when I was hungry," Marie remembered, "...all such talk stirred in me an impotent, silent wrath."<sup>35</sup> By spring, Marie could stand Petrograd no longer and took a cottage in the countryside. It would not be long before she had to leave Russia.

Marie gave birth to her son Roman in July; he was christened the day of the murders at Alpaevsk. When she was able to get around again, Grand Duke Paul insisted his daughter leave Russia. With a great deal of bravado and some papers from the Swedish Legation, Marie managed to get herself and her husband across the barricades into German-occupied territory. Procuring a Ukrainian visa secured them a train-ride to Kiev.<sup>36</sup> When Kiev became unsafe, Marie's little party continued on to Odessa, where she and her husband fell very ill with influenza. One day, while Marie was still too sick to get out of bed, a Russian officer presented himself as the representative of the Canadian Colonel Boyle, chief of the Allied Intelligence Service in Romania. Colonel Boyle had heard of her troubles and had sent this officer to offer an invitation of hospitality from the Queen of Romania, Marie's cousin. Ill or not, the Putiatins seized the

---

<sup>33</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 346.

<sup>34</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once a Grand Duke*, p. 309.

<sup>35</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 346-348.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 352-368.

opportunity, for the Red and White armies were clashing not far off. They boarded a train, and the crossing into Bessarabia was a very emotional moment for Marie. A small detachment of White Army soldiers had vowed to guard her train. "I wanted to say something significant to them so that they would remember me for ever, but I could not utter a word; only tears, bitter tears and comfortless, rolled down my cheeks," remembered Marie. "Thus I said good-bye to Russia."<sup>37</sup>

Olga's and Sandro's memoirs show the immediacy of the Revolution was not felt in the same way in Kiev as in Petrograd. While the Romanovs who were in the south of Russia in 1917 no doubt cursed their distance from the capital, from their families, and from news of the disturbances, this distance probably saved their lives. The Provisional Government and the Soviets had imprisoned more inconspicuous Grand Dukes than Alexander and Nikolasha, Commander-in-Chief of the army. The first two weeks following Nicholas' abdication were relatively peaceful in Kiev. There were joyous demonstrations rather than riots. The populace remained friendly towards the Imperial persons in their midst. Alexander remembered that "people appeared to be very friendly with me. They stopped me in the street and shaking my hand said they knew my liberal views."<sup>38</sup> Dowager Empress Marie kept visiting hospitals for the wounded and travelling freely around Kiev. This initial tolerance did not last; the mood in Kiev was growing decidedly anti-Romanov. It happened very suddenly. Kiev was inundated with radical slogans and

overnight the Kieff newspapers changed their attitude toward our family. 'The whole dynasty must be drowned in mud,' proclaimed a popular columnist, and the mud-slinging began. No more reference was made to the liberalism of my brother, Grand Duke Nicholas, nor to the supreme

---

<sup>37</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 378-382. Colonel Boyle's career is a very interesting one. Visit [www.woodstock.library.on.ca/boylecollection.asp](http://www.woodstock.library.on.ca/boylecollection.asp) for a history and archives of his life and career.

<sup>38</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 293-294.

unselfishness of Grand Duke Michael. All of us became just 'Romanoffs, the Enemies of the Revolution and the Russian people.'<sup>39</sup>

Alexander and Olga felt it would be wise to relocate to the Crimea while the opportunity was still available. The Dowager Empress refused to go, unwilling to move even farther away from Nicholas and Michael, despite the growing tensions present in Kiev. "The public mood grew worse and worse. Prisons having been opened by the mob, streets teemed with released murderers and burglars, who, still wearing their prison uniforms, were wildly cheered by the crowds," Olga remembered. Finally, at a Kiev hospital inspection, the entire staff banded together to refuse the Dowager Empress admittance. They next day, she agreed to leave Kiev.<sup>40</sup>

The journey from the Ukraine to the Crimea was a perilous undertaking, even in these early stages of the Revolution. Although Alexander made no mention of it in his memoirs, Olga recalled that it was thanks to Alexander's "initiative and...Herculean efforts..." that they were able to safely leave Kiev at all, believing the communists would not have allowed their departure. Alexander asked a group of loyal sappers to guard their party on a train he had managed to have assembled outside the city. The guards proved loyal, and at every station between Kiev and the Crimea, rebuffed the crowds who tried to board the train. Four days later, they reached Sebastopol and stopped at a station on the outskirts, where cars were waiting from the Military Aviation School to take them to Alexander's estate, Ay-Todor. Alexander had set up the Military Aviation School and it remained loyal to the monarchy. It is at this point in Olga's memoirs that one sees how the events affected her personally. When they got off the train outside Sebastopol, Olga noticed that some unsavoury-looking sailors were watching them. "It was sheer anguish

---

<sup>39</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 296.

<sup>40</sup> Vorres, p. 153.

to be aware of their hatred. There were few of them and they could not harm us because of the loyal sappers. None the less, Nicky's sailors had been my friends since my childhood. It was a shock to realize that they were now enemies."<sup>41</sup> Like Marie, Olga could not understand the about-face in the soldiers' demeanour.

The first few weeks at Ay-Todor were uneventful, save for the birth of Olga's first son, Tikhon. It was not long before sentries were posted, movements were restricted, and representatives of area soviets subjected the family to random, unannounced searches. Olga was allowed more freedom because she married a commoner, Nikolai Koulikovsky, and eventually took a cottage in the area with her little family. The pleasant atmosphere of Ay-Todor began to wear under confinement. Empress Marie refused to accept Olga's husband, Alexander's and Xenia's children ran riot, the servants became lazy. In addition, there was no love lost between this branch of the family and Nikolasha and his wife, who would come to share their captivity. In Olga's words, "Grand-Duke Alexander became a shadow of his former self, and lost interest in everybody and everything...."<sup>42</sup> Although Alexander writes of that time with a great deal of humour (see below), his son Fedor remembered that his father seemed like a changed man: Sandro no longer smiled and was "awfully silent" and short-tempered.<sup>43</sup> Alexander was the most politically active of the Crimean captives; he who had warned Nicholas so vehemently that his actions could only bring Russia to this pass must have spent a great deal of time reflecting on how the whole situation might have been avoided. Also, observing the weakness of the position of the Special Commissioner of the Provisional Government, Alexander could foresee Bolshevik triumph. The Commissioner tried exhorting the benefits of the revolution to

---

<sup>41</sup> Vorres, pp. 153-154.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>43</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 178.



Alexander's son in the language of the French Revolution. "My son corrected his French phrasing and let it go at that. My wife laughed but I felt a peculiar presentment of danger. Alarming news coming from the north indicated an imminent seizure of power by the Bolsheviks."<sup>44</sup> One morning, a new commissioner showed up, this one from the Sebastopol Soviet—the Provisional Government had fallen. This commissioner of the Sebastopol Soviet, Zadorozhnii, informed the family they were to be moved immediately to neighbouring Dulber, the estate of Nikolasha's brother, Grand Duke Peter, for defensive considerations. The neighbouring Yalta Soviet demanded the immediate execution of the entire Romanov party, but Zadorozhnii was determined to keep the group alive until he received such orders from Lenin. The group was moved to Dulber, but representatives from the Yalta Soviet arrived to try and harass Zadorozhnii into handing them over. These conversations are worth reprinting here, not only for their relevance to Alexander's experiences of captivity in Bolshevik hands, but also because they offer unique evidence of factionalism and chaos among the Soviets during the early days of the October Revolution.

Every second week the Yalta Soviet sent its representatives to Dulber to carry on negotiations with our involuntary defenders. Heavy trucks loaded with men and machine guns would stop before the walls and demand an interview with comrade Zadorojny, the commissioner of the Sebastopol Soviet. The stalwart comrade Zadorojny—he stood six-feet-four in his stockinged feet—would approach the gates and inquire the purpose of this friendly visit. The prisoners, who were ordered on such occasions to remain inside of the house listened through the open windows, learned by heart the ensuing dialogue. "Zadorojny, we are sick and tired of your line of talk. The Yalta Soviet claims its rights on the Romanoffs unlawfully held by the Sebastopol Soviet. We give you five minutes to make up your mind." "You tell the Yalta Soviet to go to hell. You guys are beginning to get my goat. I've got a good mind to let you have a taste of Sebastopol lead." "How much did you get from the aristocrats, Comrade Zadorojny?" "I've got enough to pay for your funeral." "The president of the Yalta Soviet will report your counter-

---

<sup>44</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 300.

revolutionary activities to Comrade Lenin. We'll teach you not to monkey with the Government of the Working Class." "Get the order of Comrade Lenin and the prisoners are yours. And don't you talk to me of the working class. I am an old Bolshevik. I belonged to the party in the days you were serving a jail sentence for theft." "You'll regret these words, Comrade Zadorojny." "Oh, shut up, and get off this highway." The speaker of the Yalta Soviet, a young man wearing a leather coat and leather breeches, frequently attempted to harangue the Sebastopol machine gunners, whose faces he could not see but whose presence he felt somewhere on the top of the walls covered with ivy. He spoke to them of the historical necessity of beheading the counter-revolution, he appealed to their spirit of "proletarian fairness," and he mentioned the inevitability of gallows for all traitors. They remained silent. Once in a while they would hit him with a small stone or throw a butt of a cigarette at him.<sup>45</sup>

Alexander was placed in a very odd position at Dulber; Zadorozhnii importuned him to help setting up fortifications. Then one day, Zadorozhnii approached Alexander with the news that the Sebastopol Soviet feared counter-revolutionaries might attempt a submarine rescue. Alexander politely pointed out that a submarine could not possible reach them so far inland. Zadorozhnii knew this, of course, but the Soviet insisted some searchlights be set up anyway. There was only one problem: none of the men knew how to mount them; could Alexander help? Alexander recalled,

I readily consented to do whatever I could to interfere with the mythical submarine that was supposed to carry us all to safety. My family was completely baffled by my comings and goings with Zadorojny. When the searchlights were properly installed we invited everybody to watch them in action. My wife thought that eventually Zadorojny would ask me to load the guns of the firing squad.<sup>46</sup>

The conflict between the Sebastopol and Yalta Soviets could not continue indefinitely. Zadorozhnii woke Alexander in the middle of the night with the news that the Sebastopol Soviet had just telephoned with an urgent message: the Yalta Soviet had

---

<sup>45</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 306-307. The conflict is interesting because there was really no mandate for one soviet to have authority over the other. As Alexander explained it, "Zadorojny's idea of revolutionary discipline had been built on the supposition that the Bolshevik Government ruled over the Crimean Peninsula through the medium of the Sebastopol Soviet only, and that the Yalta Soviet consisted of chameleons who were passing as Communists."

<sup>46</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 308.

tired of waiting for directives from afar and was about to attack. The situation was serious; although the Sebastopol Soviet had dispatched five armed trucks, Yalta was closer to Dulber. Alexander remembered Zadorozhnii's main concern "I am not afraid of machine guns, but suppose Yalta should send artillery?" Zadorozhnii cautioned the Grand Duke, "don't go to bed, better stick around. If worst comes to worst you can reload the guns for the boys." At that, Alexander remembered, "I could not suppress a smile. My wife was right."<sup>47</sup> The evening was spent in a state of extreme tension. In the village, word had spread of the impending attack by the Yalta Soviet. Olga, living in a cottage there with her husband, remembered they "heard appalling shouts along the road. We ran to the door to see some Tartar [sic] women running past our cottage. One screamed at me, 'They'll kill us all'." Olga, her husband, and the baby hid themselves in the rocks of the shore and picked their way along to Dulber. "And there stood I, a Romanov, begging to be taken prisoner by the Communists!"<sup>48</sup> She waited together with the rest of the family for the trucks to roll in from Yalta, but they never came. Alexander did not know what to make of it until Zadorozhnii, addressing him as "Your Imperial Highness" explained to the Grand Duke that the Germans had taken Kiev and had arrived in the Crimea. The German general would be at Dulber in an hour; could the Grand Duke protect him? He begged Alexander to remember he had not caused them to suffer unnecessarily and had treated them fairly. "It was too pathetic for words to see this giant tremble at the thought of the approaching Germans and hear him address me by my full title," Alexander wrote in his memoirs.

Both Alexander and Olga comment on how odd the Germans must have thought them; here were the Romanovs, begging for the lives of the communists who had

---

<sup>47</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 310.

<sup>48</sup> Vorres, p. 160.

imprisoned them for a year and a half.<sup>49</sup> Rescue by the Germans was a mixed blessing for the Romanovs. Olga wrote, "I did not know whether to feel happy or sad. Here we were, the Romanovs, being saved from our own people by our arch-enemy, the Kaiser! It seemed the ultimate degradation." The Dowager Empress averred that Russia proper was still at war with Germany and refused to even receive the German officers.<sup>50</sup>

It was not long before the Germans themselves had to evacuate the Crimea in fulfillment of the terms of the Armistice. The British fleet docked at Sebastopol and the family was informed that British ships were at their disposal. Alexander left for Paris in December 1918 in the hopes of representing the Romanovs at the Peace Conference, and the rest of the Romanovs, including the reluctant Empress Marie, sailed from Sebastopol in April 1919, after two years of captivity. Marie refused to leave until every refugee who wanted to join the party be allowed on board the boat. A requiem for her Imperial career in Russia was sung across the waters. As the *Marlborough* began its voyage away from communist Russia with the Romanovs aboard, it passed close to a Russian ship with imperial guardsmen crowded upon the deck. "The tiny empress, dressed all in black, stood alone at rigid attention at the stern of the battleship as the guardsmen burst spontaneously into a thundering chorus of 'God Save the Tsar.' For the last time the imperial anthem was sung to a Romanov in Russia."<sup>51</sup> Sometimes truths can be as poignant as legend.

The most interesting part of the memoirs dealing with the Revolution is not so much the privations or hardships the Romanovs endured during their captivity and flight;

---

<sup>49</sup> See Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 312-313, Vorres, p. 161.

<sup>50</sup> Vorres, p. 161.

<sup>51</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 218. See also the note in Vorres, p. 163, for corroboration of this account. This corroboration is fortunate, for although Perry and Pleshakov cite the account of Marie's lady-in-waiting, Countess Ekaterina Kleinmichel's in Norman Stone and Michael Glenny, eds., *The Other Russia; The Experience of Exile* (London, 1990) as the source for their information, there is no mention of it in Kleinmichel's reminiscences.

they themselves would acknowledge they were far from being alone in this circumstance and that others likely suffered a great deal more than they. More fascinating is their differences in feeling towards the revolutionaries of the February Revolution and the Bolsheviks. Regardless of what they thought of the Communists on a grand scale, on a more personal level their experiences were not all negative—Zadorozhnyi is an example of this. Their special contempt was reserved for the liberals and their "utopian" ideals, despite the fact that these were not the catalyst for the February Revolution.

The Romanovs' derision of the Provisional Government was rooted in their contempt for Russia's intellectuals, the *intelligentsia*. They were disgusted by their apparent callousness in overthrowing—as they saw it—a régime without being able to replace it. Most of the bitterness expressed in these memoirs concerns the group they felt was the most responsible for the Imperial régime's demise: the liberal intelligentsia. Alexander felt that the Duma, under their leadership, "while an excellent place to study the Russian capacity for endless talking, had been a rather poor exhibit of the constructive liberal leadership...."<sup>52</sup> This distrust of the liberal intelligentsia was not new in Russia. It was a characteristic of the nineteenth century and exemplified by men like Pobedonostsev, who, as mentioned above, labeled it and the ideals of democracy that arose from it, "the greatest malady of our time". His doctrine of faith in the ideology of autocracy as taking precedence over rational thought, mentioned in Chapter One, is in evidence here. There was simply no room for opposition in an autocracy, even if that opposition was not radical in nature. For these Romanovs, this animosity was also likely personal in nature, stemming from a belief that the liberal intelligentsia was responsible for the granting of the October Manifesto in 1905. This compromise of half-measures

---

<sup>52</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, p. 60.

was held against Nicholas as well as the intelligentsia, but there was no room for forgiveness in the hearts of the Romanovs. Alexander remembered vividly the opening of the first Duma in 1906. The Dowager-Empress and Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich had cried. Alexander would have cried also "had it not been for a peculiar feeling that came over me when I saw burning hatred in the faces of some of the parliamentarians. I thought they were a queer lot and that I should watch Nicky carefully lest one of them should attempt to come too close to him."<sup>53</sup> This feeling of mutual distrust was an inauspicious beginning. Just as the Duma members would protest against the Tsar's incompetent leadership, the Romanovs would blame these same men for Russia's troubles. Alexander's memoirs recall "...the utter stupidity and the boundless irresponsibility of the clique that for twenty-three years persisted in their efforts to cause the collapse of the empire." He recognized, though, that the Tsar's tolerance of their behaviour was a contributing factor.

Only the vacillating government of Nicholas II could have tolerated them in Russia. To quote one of their own ideologists, Mr. Michael Gershenson—"The Russian intelligentsia should be grateful to the Czar's government for protecting them by its jails and bayonets against the furor and anger of the nation; woe to us all, if we ever live to see the day of the fall of the Czar."<sup>54</sup>

The problem with Alexander's recollections on these events is, of course, that neither the Duma nor the intelligentsia were "responsible" for the February Revolution. Industrial strikes had raged since January 1917. On February 22 (O.S.) the workers of the Putilov factory, the largest in Russia, were locked out, increasing both worker resentment and the number of people on the streets. The next day, International Women's Day, women demonstrated against the lack of food supplies and the long line-ups at near-

---

<sup>53</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 227.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

empty stores. Demands for bread became "a symbol of general grievances and could unite a broad spectrum of the population against the authorities." Over the following days, the idea circulated through the crowd that the only way to change Nicholas' policies was to get rid of Nicholas. Workers gathered at factories to listen to speeches, rather than to work. Activists, not Duma members, gave the speeches.<sup>55</sup> The soldiers' revolt on the 27<sup>th</sup> only galvanized the anti-autocratic nature of the disturbances. Alexander, even after fourteen years of exile, did not seem cognisant of any of these factors in touching off the Revolution, nor of the fundamental social problems that lay beneath them—poverty, hunger, poor working conditions, etc.

Alexander was also incorrect in asserting the Duma had taken advantage of "minor" disturbances to perpetuate a revolt against the monarchy. In fact, the majority of the Duma members fought to keep the monarchy to the bitter end. Proof of the majority of the Duma's desire to keep the monarchy—and even the Romanov dynasty—afloat was the dismay expressed by the Duma's deputies A. Guchkov and V. Shulgin on Nicholas' abdication on behalf of his son Alexis; they had hoped the Tsarevich's youth would have regained the public's sympathy.<sup>56</sup> Duma chairman M. V. Rodzianko stated "I have no desire to revolt. I am not a rebel. I made no revolution and do not intend to make one. If it is here it is because they [the Romanovs] would not listen to us. But I am not a revolutionist."<sup>57</sup> Rodzianko was eager that the responsibility for the Revolution not be laid at either his, or the Duma's, door. Contrary to Alexander's belief, the Provisional Government took up the burdens of power most unwillingly.

---

<sup>55</sup> Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> Steinberg and Khrustal'ev, p. 97.

<sup>57</sup> Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 43.

Marie is the only one who had detailed contacts with members of the new government. Her father's arrest prompted her to seek the help of members of the Provisional Government to secure his release or at least obtain a visiting permit for herself. She first tried Cabinet Minister M. I. Tereschenko, who agreed to see her. This was Marie's first exposure to a member of the new government, and she had not expected such a well-mannered and amiable man. Despite his assurances that he would do all he could to help her father, Marie never heard from Tereschenko again.<sup>58</sup> Her next attempt was with Kerensky, who could only see her at 11 pm. The interview was not a pleasant one for the Grand Duchess, who seems to have bristled under the indignity of being a supplicant, a condition quite unique for a Romanov. Marie got nowhere with her prepared arguments for her father's release and switched to emotional appeals. She begged that her father be released for her upcoming wedding. "In a few days, I said, 'I am to marry. My fiancé is Prince Putiatin,' I added, hoping that so democratic a choice on my part might soften my judge." Kerensky was not impressed and Marie's confidence was deflated. Marie left, feeling thoroughly ashamed. Not only was she sure that her mission had failed, but also she could not bear "that I should have found no more adequate words, that I should have pleaded and stammered and lost my wits in Kerensky's presence, that I should not only have failed my father, but have given Kerensky occasion to laugh at me!"<sup>59</sup> She decided to pursue her cause, and saw Kerensky's assistant Kuzmin, who reportedly had much influence with him. Since Kuzmin had been a political convict in Siberia, their conversation proved an interesting one; he was extremely curious about Marie's life and upbringing. Finally, this revolutionary mused aloud, "Is it possible that the Romanovs love Russia?" Marie

---

<sup>58</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 322.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324-327. Kerensky makes no mention of this visit in his memoirs.



answered, "Yes, they do; they have loved and will continue to love her always, no matter what happens," I replied, not suspecting how often I would in the future have cause to remember this sentence.<sup>60</sup> This broke the ice, and Marie overcame her shyness to plead for her father. He was soon released.

Kerensky bore the brunt of the Romanovs' disgust with the Provisional Government. He was vilified for his reversal of an alleged position of support for the Kornilov revolt, and he "had become odious by his continual speechmaking, his mania for grandeur, his posturing towards the Radical elements, his falseness."<sup>61</sup> Hatred for the members of the Provisional Government seems a transferal of dislike for members of the Duma. Grand Duke Alexander had no respect for Rodzianko, either. This contempt predated the revolution.

The President of the Duma, Mr. Rodzianko, an insipid fat man at best, called on me with a handful of humors, theories and anti-dynastic plans. His arrogance knew no bounds. Combined with his mental deficiencies it created the impression of that famous 'bluff character' in medieval comedies. A month later he pinned a Cross of St. George on the soldier of the Volinsky Regiment who was the first man to kill his commanding officer in 1917. Nine months later Rodzianko was obliged to run away from St. Petersburg pursued by Bolshevik police.<sup>62</sup>

Following his experience at the Winter Palace with the Duma, Kirill had nothing good to say about these men as a collective governing body. Everything he had witnessed in February was to him a "sad and dangerous farce in which I had witnessed the triumph of

<sup>60</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 327-329.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 330-333.

<sup>62</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 281. Alexandra called him "horrid Rodzianko," "rotten," "fool," "that odious Rodzianko." (see Fuhrmann, pp. 166, 421, 516, 517); Nicholas recalled "that idiot of [a] Rodzianko wrote a very impertinent official letter to" Sandro (Fuhrmann, p. 586). Alexandra responded, wishing they could hang the "insolent fellow" (Fuhrmann, 588.) Members of the Council of Ministers felt he was a "half-madman" who "suffers from delusions of grandeur." See Michael Cherniavsky, *Prologue to Revolution; Notes of A.N. Iakhontov on the Secret Meetings of the Council of Ministers, 1915* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1967), pp. 99, 117.

the forces of disorder and of ill-placed Utopian idealism...."<sup>63</sup> When it was clear that the end was rapidly approaching, there was no sympathy to be found from any Romanov.

Meanwhile one heard less and less about the government. The Soviet of the Soldier and Peasant Deputies every day clamoured louder and more often. The intelligentsia, who had so warmly welcomed the revolution, sought desperately now to conceal with catchwords, speeches, and sounding manifestoes, its complete incapacity to govern.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that Marie mentioned this "incapacity to govern" is quite significant, for it must lie at the root of the Romanovs' bitterness towards those they blamed, however inappropriately, for the February Revolution. They were contemptuous of the men of the Provisional Government because they could do nothing to overwhelm the soviets; according to the Romanovs, these intellectuals had thought they could rule better than the Tsar and instead failed just as miserably. "...All the intellectuals could talk about was revolution and assassination, and didn't they pay for it?" mused Grand Duchess Olga in a rare flash of vengeful smugness. Olga then quoted a passage from Rozanov's article "Revolution and Intelligentsia," written shortly after the October Revolution, that summarized their situation perfectly. "Having thoroughly enjoyed the gorgeous spectacle of the revolution, our intelligentsia got ready to put on their fur-lined overcoats and to return to their comfortable houses, but the overcoats were stolen and the houses were burned down."<sup>65</sup>

Soldiers loyal to the Provisional Government were not treated with the same harshness. Although none of the memoirs explicitly consider the difficulty many soldiers must have had in adjusting to the new regime once they got over their initial shock of the Tsar's abdication, there is consideration given to the fact that the soldiers

---

<sup>63</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 210.

<sup>64</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, p. 307.

<sup>65</sup> Vorres, p. 108.

were only instruments of the Provisional Government. Even Kirill, particularly hostile to all things revolutionary, excused the enlisted men:

Much of what they shouted and of what was told them by the agents of the revolution they did not even understand. They had picked up slogans and repeated them like parrots. The people as such were not disloyal to the Emperor, as were those in the Ministries and in his entourage.<sup>66</sup>

Likewise, they were not to be faulted for swearing allegiance to the Provisional Government. The strangeness of the situation made itself felt in those soldiers who were in proximity to the Imperial family, however. Pending her father's release from house arrest, Marie secured a pass for a visit supervised by a guard. When the family sat down to tea, the officer sat with them. Paul's wife, Princess Palei, offered him tea, which he stirred listlessly for a while trying hard not to listen in on their conversation. The awkwardness grew too great and the officer, in violation of his orders, fled the room.<sup>67</sup> The soldiers of the Provisional Government were not subjected to the contempt the Romanovs felt for their masters.

One might expect that the Romanovs' deepest feelings of hatred and bitterness would be reserved for the Bolsheviks, responsible for the arrest, and later the death, of so many of their family members. Surprisingly, this is not the case. Of course none of these particular Romanovs had personal contacts with Lenin, Trotsky, or any of the other leaders of the Communist régime, so their impressions of them and their politics were formed in exile through both time and distance and will be discussed later. As for their experiences with the soldiers and representatives of various soviets, these were not all negative. Like the soldiers who pledged allegiance to the Provisional Government, some of the confrontations revealed the communist troops were still wavering in their

---

<sup>66</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 205. Again, the "liberals" were blamed for leading the loyal masses astray; this reinforces the Romanovs' skewed perception of Russia's situation at the time.

<sup>67</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Education*, pp. 322-323.

ideologies and their loyalties. Marie recounts the details of the arrest of her aunt and guardian, Grand Duchess Elizabeth ("Ella"). In the summer of 1917, soldiers appeared at her Moscow convent to arrest her on behalf of the Moscow Soviet. She told the soldiers that before she left, she would have some prayers said in the convent church. "Her tone sounded as if she never doubted that her wish would be granted. It was. When they got to the church steps, she turned to the men, inviting them to come in. Avoiding each other's eyes they shuffled into the church and sheepishly pulled off their caps."<sup>68</sup> One sees the men of the revolution were not as yet firm in their convictions, nor had they completely accepted that they no longer had to obey their former masters.

Olga and Alexander had the most intimate contact with representatives of the new régime through their captivity under the Sebastopol Soviet. Contrary to popular images of filthy soldiers looting and pillaging, when the Sebastopol representatives came to search the Crimean estate in which the family was incarcerated, they took away only weapons, official looking papers, personal correspondence—and the Dowager Empress' treasured Bible. A distraught Marie offered to give the men her jewels if only she could keep the Bible. "'We are not thieves,' said the chief, completely disgusted at the failure of the raid. 'This is an anti-revolutionary book, and an old woman like you should know better than to poison her brains with such trash!'"<sup>69</sup> Also, both Alexander and Olga had to admit that, despite the fact that he was a communist, Zadorozhnii was likable. "'He was a murderer but a charming man,' recalled the Grand-Duchess. 'He never met our eyes. Later he confided that he could not bear to look at those he would have to kill some day. As time went on, however, his manner became much

---

<sup>68</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Exile*, p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, pp. 303-304.

kindlier'.<sup>70</sup> As mentioned above, Alexander spent much time in Zadorozhnii's company; no doubt the fact that the soldier had been in Alexander's aviation school helped to foster that connection. Grand Duke Nicholas, never a friend of Alexander's, chastised the younger Grand Duke for spending so much time with a revolutionary. "Do not imagine,' he said, 'that you can bring this man to your way of thinking. One word from his masters and he'll shoot you with the greatest of pleasure'," Nikolasha cautioned. Alexander agreed, "but there was something singularly attractive about the roughness of our warden's manner and the clearness of his purpose. Anyway, I preferred his outspokenness to the hypocrisy of the Commissioner of the Provisional Government."<sup>71</sup> By the time the captives were freed by the Germans, the men of the soviet had gained the respect of the more open-minded of the Romanovs. When the Germans wanted to shoot the guards immediately, the Grand Dukes pled for their lives. Olga remembers a rather sad parting when Zadorozhnii and his men left Ay-Todor. They said their goodbyes to their captives using their imperial titles and kissed their hands. "I watched them go, a deep gratitude in my heart. They had been decent. Not only did they save our lives but they restored our faith in the innate kindness of the Russian people. To me at least this was almost more important than my life'.<sup>72</sup> This is all the more important because that experience would have to sustain Olga through exile, while learning of the hardships both endured and propagated by her own people during the Soviet regime. This was Olga Romanova's only experience of 'socialism with a human face.'

---

<sup>70</sup> Vorres, p. 159.

<sup>71</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Once*, p. 307.

<sup>72</sup> Vorres, p. 161.

In retrospect, it is difficult to explain why there was no uniform policy applied to the Romanov family during the Revolution. It is difficult to explain why some were arrested while other more politically active Romanovs were allowed to go free.<sup>73</sup> It is difficult to explain why four grand dukes in Petrograd jails were shot, while those in captivity in the Crimea were allowed to languish for two years with no action taken. Much no doubt depended on chance and local circumstances. But for the Romanovs themselves, it was not difficult to explain why these tragedies, and all those to come during the Communist era, happened. It was the fault of those intellectuals, liberal and socialist both, who had generated revolution and demanded the Tsar's abdication in the belief that they would be a wiser governing body. Their vehement criticism of the liberals and even well-meaning opposition demonstrates the degree to which the fundamental principles of autocracy were ingrained in the Grand Dukes and Duchesses; they could not conceive the masses could be disloyal to the Tsar unless they were led astray by the *intelligentsia*, nor could they understand that the members of the Provisional Government were pushing for measures to shore up the faltering autocracy rather than trying to nudge it further into the abyss. The reader gets the sense that the Romanovs, unaware they were faulting the wrong party, were all laughing up their sleeves when the Provisional Government fell, an event they viewed as a form of poetic justice. Unfortunately, the learning of that lesson came at the hands of the Bolsheviks, and although the Romanovs had civil relations with the Communists of their acquaintance, they blamed the Provisional Government for allowing the country to pass

---

<sup>73</sup> For example, Alexander Mikhailovich was one of the most politically astute and intelligent of the Romanov family, plus he had Nicholas' ear and was active in the service of the state. He was not brought back to Petrograd to be jailed and shot, yet his brother, George Mikhailovich was murdered. George was a family man and museum curator who wanted nothing more than to ride out the war in his museum so he could move to England to be reunited with his wife and daughters. The Bolsheviks' logic in his arrest is incomprehensible.

into Communist hands. Whether the Provisional Government could have acted in any other way is beyond the scope of this study; it is the Romanovs' impressions of the Revolutions and revolutionaries that are the issue here. It is significant that though the memoirs tend to view some representatives of the Bolshevik regime in an amiable way, none of them had any illusions about the necessity of leaving the country as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Although the death of the Emperor and his family was as yet unknown to them, and the Grand Dukes imprisoned in Petrograd had not yet been shot when Marie and Alexander left Russia, there must have been some presentment that warned them of the urgency of the situation. They must have feared that the men the soldiers worked for would not be so lenient with them. The most curious feature of this revolutionary experience was that Kirill would forever resent the Bolsheviks for what he had lost in not being able to return to Russia, but Marie, Alexander, and Olga would not hold the Bolsheviks' victory against them. This is apparent not only in their memories of life in Russia 1917-1918/9, but also in their attitudes to the Soviet Union's progress and future, which will be explored in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX  
*The Soviet Union and Beyond:  
Restoration or Republic?*

It may seem like a moot point to examine the Romanovs' visions of Russia's future considering the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. It is important to remember that they did not live to see this, but rather lived through an era where the USSR was at the zenith of its power and achievement. Olga, the longest lived of our four Romanovs, died in 1960, following the Khrushchev thaw but before the Brezhnev régime became clearly entrenched with stagnant values and policies. In fact, the failure of the Communist system of government once again raised the question of how Russia should be governed. In this context, it is interesting to consider how the Romanovs themselves viewed the Soviet Union and their hopes for Russia's future. This was a relevant question for them to consider, for they arguably had a stake in the country's future. Also, it is interesting to observe how their experiences of the Revolution, as well as their lives in exile, influenced their thinking about the Communists and post-Communist Russia.

None of the Romanovs felt the Bolsheviks would be able to stay in power for very long. Even the leaders of the Western powers held this opinion until 1922-23. As the months, and then the years, went by the Russian refugees were forced to reevaluate that opinion and recognize the Soviet Union. Watching the progress of the USSR from either Western Europe or North and South America, the opinions of the Romanovs were divided on this subject. Whereas Kirill would place himself in staunch opposition to the Soviet Union ("I am the enemy of Communism and the teaching which gave it birth"<sup>1</sup>), Marie, Olga and Alexander were willing to recognize the successes of the USSR as well as its failures.

"The power of the Communists is doomed. It will disappear, leaving the memory of a terrible destroyer and oppressor."<sup>2</sup> Kirill published this statement in a decree on

---

<sup>1</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.



10/23 December, 1931. Now it might seem rather prophetic, but in 1931 there was little to encourage such a view beyond Kirill's ardent desire to return home as Tsar Kirill I of Russia and his sorrow at seeing his native country under the Stalinist yoke. Considering the difficulty for foreigners in obtaining accurate knowledge of conditions within the Soviet Union, Kirill's analysis of the situation of the Russian people is accurate in many instances. As for the Soviet government,

for its own crude mistakes it punishes and executes thousands of innocent people, and, fearing a catastrophe, it tortures its victims in prisons and exile. The Government is not based on the support of the nation, but on the G.P.U., which bullies and cows the people; the country is ruled by force and terror.<sup>3</sup>

This statement was inspired by the first stages of forced collectivization 1928-1930, and the program of "liquidation of the kulaks as a class." When violence erupted and collective organizers met with insults, beatings or worse at the hands of angry peasants, Stalin's "Dizzy with Success" speech of March made some conciliatory overtures to the peasants. Between March and June of 1930, peasants took advantage of this to drop their names from the *kolkhoz* lists; the fact that farms that were collectivized dropped from over half of Russia's farms to less than a quarter during that time period<sup>4</sup> is perhaps the basis for Kirill's opinion. Kirill was not willing to give an ounce of credit to the Soviet government or its policies for any of the progress made within the Soviet Union, a task made much more difficult by the damage and chaos of World War I, the Revolution, and the Civil War. "In this rebuilding effort no credit can be given to the Communist Government. On the contrary, by the negative results of their inefficient leadership and muddle, by attempting to carry out unworkable ideas, the Communists have nearly brought the effort to failure." Even in the area of industrialization, where the Soviets were able to do the most credit to themselves by thriving during the era of the Great Depression, Kirill offers a wholesale condemnation of their policies: "I have pointed out

---

<sup>3</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp. 263-264.

<sup>4</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 136-138.

that the Soviet Government, taking advantage of the creative efforts of the Russian nation, only hinders that rebuilding with the Socialist five-year plan, inefficient leadership and in the perseverance in holding to lifeless ideas."<sup>5</sup> In 1934, at the wedding of the Duke of Kent, the Soviet Ambassador, M. Maisky, was one of the guests at the reception at Buckingham Palace. "It was the first occasion on which Father found himself in such close proximity to a representative of Soviet Russia. No conversations passed between them," Kirill's son Vladimir remembered.<sup>6</sup>

Why was Kirill so hostile to the Soviets? Is it simply that, having proclaimed himself Emperor in exile in 1924, the Soviets were "the enemy," a force that stood between himself and the throne? Perhaps that was a great portion of it, but his personal feelings toward the suffering of the Russian people cannot be discounted; his motivations were not completely political in nature. His disgust seems to come from his impression that the Soviets were performing a social experiment without any regard to the cost for a cause that was completely bankrupt. At the end of his memoirs, he declares that the results of the Provisional Governments attempts at governance were

innocently farcial when compared with some others—for example, that the 'Social Experiment' of the Revolution cost Russia the lives of about fifty million human beings. If this sacrifice had at least produced a Marxian paradise on earth and happiness for all, it might have been a dear price to pay, but it produced nothing but continuous starvation for more than twenty years, tyranny of the worst kind, and an absolute negation of all natural rights of the individual. This Utopian doctrine has expressed itself in more suffering, bloodshed, and privation than the most merciless campaign of extinction by the world's cruellest conquerors.<sup>7</sup>

"Utopian" is a word that Kirill used repeatedly to describe both the aims of the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks. The idea that they thought they knew better than the Tsar what was good for his people was something that Kirill, a staunch supporter of the monarchy, could not accept. However, he had been quick to pledge allegiance to

---

<sup>5</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, pp.260-261.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

the "Utopians" a day before the Tsar abdicated. An element of shame for this action may have caused him to be so harsh in his memoirs concerning the Provisional Government and the régime that overwhelmed it. Whatever his reasons, Kirill could not admit that the Soviet Government had produced a single positive contribution to Russia's progress.

Marie, Olga, or Alexander did not share this outlook. Marie does not make much reference to what she thought of Soviet policies. She did alienate several members of her family by her desire to meet the famous revolutionary Boris Savinkov, who aborted an attempt to assassinate Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich because she and her brother Dmitri were in the carriage with him when he passed by. As a result of her husband's strenuous objections, Marie never met with the man who had "saved her life."<sup>8</sup> Obviously, her mind was not completely prejudiced against those who had supported revolutionary movements. Her fellow memoirists were more specific about their feelings.

Alexander was the most tolerant of the Soviet Union. This was not an indication that he had Communist leanings or was an admirer of Stalin; rather, he viewed that an appreciation of the Soviet Union's progress was an appreciation of Russia's progress. Whether the régime would last or not, the gains Russia had made under its guise would remain. Alexander came to this conclusion in a rather interesting way. A group of émigrés had "elected" his son Nikita as Tsar-in-exile. Alexander rushed to his son to make sure the boy was not taking this seriously. For his interference, the Grand Duke

---

<sup>8</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Exile*, pp. 96-97. Savinkov's career was diverse: terrorist, Assistant Minister of War for the Provisional Government who had an eye on Kerensky's position, then Allied agent hunted by the Soviets. In one of the most amusing anecdotes from *Always a Grand Duke*, Alexander was having a drink at a Paris café when he noticed two men glaring at each other with obvious animosity. Their faces were familiar, but he could not place them. This became awkward, for they apparently recognized him and extended their glares in his direction as well. One he recognized—Savinkov, then confirmed his guess on the second with the waiter—Alexander Kerensky. "One had to be a Russian and live through twenty years of assassinations and uprisings in order to appreciate this subtle satire of fate," wrote Alexander. "Savinkoff, Kerensky, and a Grand Duke—all three of them on the terrace of the same third-rate café in Paris, all three in the identically same situation, unable to return to Russia, unwilling to forget the past, choking with toothless hatred, not knowing whether they would be permitted to remain in France and continue to possess the price of a cup of coffee." Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, p. 72. Alexander could not help but laugh at the irony of the situation.

"...was told by the former Russian liberals converted to monarchism by financial reverses..." that this was proof of his "drifting towards Bolshevism." Alexander would have been upset had anyone else accused him of this, "...but thrown at me by the chattering who were directly responsible for the downfall of the Empire, they sounded like a compliment."<sup>9</sup>

It dawned on me that, though not a Bolshevik, I could not agree with my relatives and friends and sweepingly condemn whatever was done by the Soviets just *because* it was done by the Soviets. True enough, they had killed my three brothers, but they had likewise saved Russia from becoming a vassal state of the Allies. One moment I hated them and wished I could lay my hands on Lenin or Trotzky but then I would hear of this or that unquestionably constructive action of the Moscow Government and would catch myself whispering: "Bravo!" Like all lukewarm Christians, I knew no way of getting rid of hatred except by submerging it in still bigger hatred. The subject for the latter was provided by the Poles. When in the early spring of 1920 I saw the headlines of the French newspapers announcing the triumphal march of Pilsudsky through the wheat fields of southwestern Russia, something snapped inside me and I forgot that scarcely a year had passed since the assassination of my brothers. All I could think was: "The Poles are about to take Kieff! The perennial enemies of Russia are about to cut off the Empire from its western borders!" I dared not declare myself but, listening to the nonsensical chatter of the refugees and looking at their faces lit with smiles, with every drop of my blood I wished victory to the Red Army. It mattered not that I was a Grand Duke. I was a Russian officer who had sworn to defend the nation from its enemies. I was a grandson of the man who had threatened to plow up the streets of Warsaw should the Poles once more dare disrupt the unity of his Empire.<sup>10</sup>

In this evaluation of Alexander's view and the events in the Soviet Union, it is clear that he was inspired by feelings of Russian patriotism, and that he was unwilling to see his Russia humiliated simply for the opportunity to criticize the Soviet government. Anything harmful to the Soviet state was harmful to the Russians, as far as he was concerned. He continues his argument, and it is worthwhile making note of, for it anticipates the situation in the USSR following World War II.

---

<sup>9</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, p.127.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.128-129.

It was clear to me then, in the eventful summer of 1920, as it is now in the quieter days of 1933, that in scoring a decisive victory over the Poles the Soviet Government had done what any truly national government would have been obliged to do. However ironical it might appear that the Unity of the Russian State had to be defended by the members of the Third Internationale, the fact remains that from the day on the Soviets were forced to pursue a purely national policy which happens to be the age-old policy introduced by Ivan the Terrible, crystallized by Peter the Great and brought to a climax by Nicholas I: To defend the borders of the State at all cost and step by step to fight toward the natural frontier in the west! I feel certain that my sons will live to see the day when not only the nonsense of the independent Baltic republics will be brought to an end but Bessarabia and Poland will be reconquered by Russia and a considerable remapping of the frontier will take place in the Far East.<sup>11</sup>

The accuracy of this vision, written in 1933, demonstrates that his worldview of the rightness of Russia's Imperial status is very much in line with what would come to be called the "Evil Empire" of the Soviets.

Alexander also made an interesting distinction between his feelings towards the Soviet Union as a man and his feelings towards it as a Grand Duke. The man felt very resentful towards those who had deprived him of estates and heritage, but the grand duke felt duty-bound to uphold the oaths of duty to serve the nation, to "...admit that the Soviet Government should be helped and not hindered in its experiment and to wish it would succeed where the Romanoffs had failed."<sup>12</sup> These views were quite contrary to what the public expected: a certain pose of tragic dignity, a Grand Duke pining for all that he had lost and violently denouncing those who had taken it from him. As a result, Alexander's opinions often shocked his acquaintances (sometimes intentionally, no doubt). On a lecture tour of America in 1928, Alexander was invited to a dinner in New York at the Army and Navy Club. The men at the club expected Alexander to denounce the Soviets and predict failure for the Five-Year Plan. "This I refused to do," wrote Alexander. "Nothing revolts me more that the spectacle of a Russian exile who lets his thirst for revenge overcome his spirit of national pride."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this was a criticism of Kirill's

<sup>11</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.263.

denunciation of all things Soviet. In any case, the meeting at the club continued, giving Alexander the chance to explain that he

was a Russian first and after that a Grand Duke. I described to them as best I could the unlimited resources of Russia and said that there was no doubt in my mind that the Five-Year Plan would succeed. "It may take," I added, "a year or two more but in the long run not only will the Plan succeed but it will have to be followed by another Plan, possibly a Ten-Year or a Fifteen-Year Plan. Never again shall Russia consent to be the dumping ground of the world. Never again shall she depend on any foreign power for the development of her natural wealth. The Czars could never have accomplished a program of such magnitude because their perspective was clouded by too many scruples, diplomatic and others. The present rulers of Russia are realists. They are unscrupulous in the sense that Peter the Great was. They are as unscrupulous as your railroad kings were fifty years ago and as your bankers are today, with the only difference that there is more personal honesty and unselfishness in their case."<sup>14</sup>

Needless to say, the Grand Duke's audience found his speech quite odd. The General sitting beside him commented, "'A strange speech for one whose brothers were killed by the Bolsheviks.'" Alexander agreed with him. "'You are quite right, General,' I replied, 'but then, we Romanoffs are a strange family. The greatest of us killed his own son because the latter tried to interfere with his Five Year Plan....'"<sup>15</sup> The Grand Duke was referring to Peter the Great, who was rumoured to have murdered (or at least ordered the torture of) his son, Alexis, a focal point for the traditionalists who opposed Peter's reforms. The Grand Duke's comment is as appropriate as it was strange, considering its source. His willingness to admit the achievements of Soviet rule and his approval of Soviet policies is the most deliberate from among the Romanovs included in this study, reflecting the transferal of his pre-revolutionary Great Russian world-view to the idea of a Great Soviet Empire. Another dispossessed aristocrat of the day asked the Grand Duke,

If what you loved in Russia was limited to the boundaries of your family, then you can never forgive the Soviets. But if you have spent your life as I am spending mine, hoping and wishing for the preservation of the

<sup>14</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, pp.263-264.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

Empire, be it under its present banner or under the red flag of a triumphant revolution, then why hesitate? Why not have sufficient courage to admit the achievements of those who replaced you?<sup>16</sup>

Sandro could not help but agree.

Olga's opinion was that 'the growth and the incredible strength of Communism are the direct result of the blunders and selfish policy of the West. I feel no pity for the countries which bear the brunt of the cold war today.' Though she "loathe[d] the very name of Stalin," she would also have seconded General Brussilov's words when the Poles attacked Russia: "With every drop of my blood I wish success to the Red Army, so help me God."<sup>17</sup> Olga was able to see progress in the Soviet Union because she believed its policies were not so different from those of her brother, Nicholas II. Among these points of similarity were nationalism, Germanophobia, fear of China, desire for a demilitarized zone in Central Europe, pan-Slavism, desire of access to ports, and strict control of the borders. To Olga, "...all the salient features of Tsarist policy are as evident today as they were under the Romanovs."<sup>18</sup> This ability to see continuity between the two régimes likely made it easier for Olga to acknowledge some of the triumphs of the Soviet system, for example, progress in the sphere of education.<sup>19</sup> By extension, Olga's tolerance of the Soviet Union reaffirms her beliefs in the principles of autocracy.

Though Olga was willing to defend Stalin's paranoia of being betrayed by the West and to give credit where it was due, she was also certain that these same similarities in policy to the Tsarist régime, as well as the advances being made in the country, would contribute to the Communists' downfall. She viewed the advancement in education as being incompatible with a country governed by such a massive bureaucracy and that allowed so few personal freedoms. It was from this group of new intellectuals that Olga

---

<sup>16</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always a Grand Duke*, p. 132. An anonymous former monarch posed this question during a conversation reprinted in his memoirs. Whether or not this conversation ever really took place, the question is a good one.

<sup>17</sup> Vorres, pp. 229, 232.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

believed dissent would come. Also, she cited ideological compromises as a crack in the foundation of the USSR. By allowing religious tolerance in an atheistic state, the government was in fact contradicting its own principles. The idea of "peaceful co-existence" would cause the same problem, as "'a glaring departure from Marxism which taught war was a *sine qua non* of capitalism. Now the Russians are told that they are expected to co-exist with Capitalist countries. It can't make any sense to them.'"

Therefore, Olga concluded,

it is precisely these changes in ideology which will lead to the downfall of Communism some day. Each one of them makes the average Russian a little more confused. Each...makes him lose a little more confidence in a regime which moves further and further away from the tenets it preaches.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps Olga's willingness to be as objective as possible regarding the Soviets was tempered by this faith that they would not persevere. She hoped this collapse would be a gradual one, however. Olga felt that a sudden collapse could occur only through violence and foreign intervention from which she wished her country to be spared.<sup>21</sup> Whether gradually, as she wished, or through an Allied invasion, the Grand Duchess was certain that the Soviet state would not maintain power in perpetuity.

This presents an interesting question: if the Soviet Union were to collapse, what did these four Romanovs believe would, or should, be put in its place? What visions did they have of Russia's future, and what role did they play in them? Did they feel the Romanovs had a place in Russia? Would a post-Soviet Russia see a restoration or republic? The answer involved the various and tangled claims to Nicholas' vacant throne. Again, opinion was split. Kirill's proclamation of himself as Tsar in exile made his opinion on the subject quite clear. The others were not necessarily sure, but did express certain hopes for the future which will be explored below.

---

<sup>20</sup> Vorres, pp. 234-235.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.



Kirill believed that "Russia and [the Romanovs] are inseparable. They are linked together in one destiny, even though for the time being this work had been interrupted...."<sup>22</sup> On 4 August 1924, Kirill proclaimed himself "Guardian of the Throne" in a Manifesto he published and had distributed. A month later, he proclaimed himself Emperor of Russia. His son, Vladimir Kirillovich, is of the opinion that this was done "...with a clear conscience, without any regard for his personal feeling, and prompted solely by a desire to save his country from suffering and misfortune...."<sup>23</sup> Kirill expected that he would be criticized for this step, but he had not counted on the opposition of the Supreme Monarchist Council, leader of all monarchist organizations in exile, which instead preferred to see Grand Duke Nicholas, with his background as Commander-in-Chief of the military, as the figurehead of any restoration movement.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Kirill's claim to be either "Guardian of the Throne" or Emperor went unsupported by the Dowager Empress, who refused to accept reports that her sons were dead. More moderate monarchist groups also wished Kirill had not proclaimed himself, feeling it was quite premature to decide Russia's future while the Soviet Union still showed no signs of collapse.<sup>25</sup> Even General Peter Wrangel, the last head of the soldiers of the White Army who were now themselves exiles, told Kirill his actions were premature and that neither he nor the army under his command would support him. Documents circulating between Wrangel's headquarters and the Supreme Monarchist Council demonstrate that their reluctance to support Kirill was a great deal more personal than political. A meeting between Kirill and Wrangel's representatives in 1923 was to Kirill's disadvantage. His overly casual attire was objectionable, his nervous tic discomfiting. He was quite demanding, stating that since Nicholas II and Michael were "absent right now," it should be announced that Nicholas II and his family were dead and that the throne was Kirill's.

---

<sup>22</sup> Grand Duke Cyril, p. 193.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>25</sup> Robert H. Johnston, *"New Mecca, New Babylon"; Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920-1945* (Montreal and Kingston, 1988), pp. 35-36.

His sarcastic criticisms of the highly respected Nikolasha were off-putting.<sup>26</sup> This probably made Wrangel and the Council less likely to overlook the political impediments that existed when Kirill declared himself Emperor, having tired of waiting on someone else to proclaim him.

To someone unfamiliar with the Russian laws of succession, these obstacles may seem trivial, but to the legitimists of the Supreme Monarchist Council and other traditionalist groups, they were serious problems indeed. The first knock against Kirill was his march to the Duma under the red flag before the Tsar's abdication. Also, his mother, Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna senior (aunt by marriage to the Marie Pavlovna studied here), had not converted to Orthodoxy before his birth, a stipulation for being eligible for the throne. Finally, Kirill had married Ducky in direct defiance of Nicholas' orders. Without his knowledge, the Council had voted 11-5 in favour of forcing Kirill to renounce any rights he had to the throne. A Germanophile, Kirill may have been comforted by the knowledge that his greatest supporters were to be found among the émigrés in Berlin.<sup>27</sup> Yet Kirill continued to "reign" from his estate in St. Briac, Brittany. Although Grand Duke Alexander recognized that Kirill was the "legitimate successor to Crown and Czardom,"<sup>28</sup> he pokes fun at Kirill I of St. Briac.

He issues Orders, bestows Monarchial Thanks, signs Promotions and addresses Messages on policies to be followed by his supporters. His is a life of sustained pathos because the business of being a Czar, while highly overrated at best, is nothing short of a nightmare when one is obliged to rule over an Empire that is no more, with one's subjects driving taxis in Paris, serving as waiters in Berlin, dancing in the picture houses on Broadway, providing atmosphere in Hollywood, unloading coal in Montevideo or dying for Good Old China in the shattered suburbs of Shanghai. The job of running the polyglot Austro-Hungarian Empire of yore was a sinecure indeed in comparison with the present task of Grand

<sup>26</sup> Perry and Pleshakov, p. 272.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.272-273. The authors are of the opinion that Marie Pavlovna's conversion to Orthodoxy in 1908 was politically motivated. By then, the family was aware of the severity of Alexis Nikolaevich's hemophelia, and Michael had seemingly abjured his rights by marrying a divorcée and commoner. Her conversion increased his chance for the throne in the event of Alexis' death.

<sup>28</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, p. 125. Through Kirill was next in line for the throne, Alexander's sons were actually the closer blood relations to Nicholas; their mother was Nicky's sister, Xenia.

Duke Cyril. Under the circumstances his sovereignty has to be enforced solely by mail. Not that he believes the pen is mightier than the sword, but the thing is that he has no sword.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of others' opinions of him, Kirill felt it was his duty to be a leader in the monarchist movement in exile, to pass this duty on to his son, and to reform the principles of monarchy to make them relevant to a post-Soviet Russia.<sup>30</sup> In his Manifesto of 24 March 1938, Kirill stated that "...the speedy establishment of a strong national government is essential. This can be guaranteed only by a lawful Monarchy, the synthesis of which combines the continuity of government with the demands of modern times." The guiding principles of this monarchy were to be:

founded on the union of the nation, on the destruction of party and class differences, on religious tolerance and freedom of conscience, on the equality of rights of all the peoples of the Empire, on the widest participation of the people in the administration of the land and of its economics, on the hereditary power of the Monarch, the permanent, impartial, and natural judge--will save Russia from internal weakness and external dangers and will lead her along the path to well-being and happiness.<sup>31</sup>

Obviously, for Kirill, a post-Soviet Russia without a monarch was inconceivable. The Soviet period was simply an interlude between his cousin's reign and his own.

Marie's visions of Russia's future were much less specific. She stated that such questions would not be answered in her memoirs, but that "there is one thing which can be said with certainty—the old Russia has ceased to exist, and will never be re-established."<sup>32</sup> In exile, it was not so much Russia's fate that troubled the Grand Duchess as the idea that she was not able to contribute to her homeland's future. Furthermore, she was afraid for that first generation of exiles who had expected their refugee status to last only a few months, then only a few years.

---

<sup>29</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, p. 138.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> Grand Duke Kirill, p. 275.

<sup>32</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Exile*, p. 5.

We drifted farther and farther away from what Russia was becoming, without being able to follow or understand the thoroughness of the changes she was undergoing. But many years have now passed, enough for us to be replaced by a new generation which, although it has grown up on foreign soil, still thinks of Russia as its native land. Some of these young ones do not remember anything of their country.<sup>33</sup>

Marie's recognition that the Romanovs were out of touch with the circumstance and desires of the Russian people is correct but what Marie fails to recognize is that enough years had passed in Russia for a generation to grow up unable to remember Tsardom or the Romanovs, except for what Soviet schools would teach them. To this new generation, perhaps the Romanovs would seem irrelevant. In any case, Marie felt it was still possible for an exile to be useful to their homeland "...provided we kept our minds free from preconceived theories." Although she did not speculate on the form of government a post-Soviet Russia might take, "...nothing could shake [her] belief in her ultimate triumph. Some day she will throw off the evil forces which now hold her in her grip."<sup>34</sup>

Alexander's views on Russia's future are much more oblique. In fact, he does not mention them. One must be content with appreciation for the accomplishments of the Soviets and be satisfied that he was willing to let things take their own course. For someone with such firm convictions on all other matters, he is oddly apolitical on this issue:

It was in the month of March of the year of grace 1917 that, acting against the advice of every one of my brothers, cousins and nephews, I refused to sign the famous 'waiver of all claims' stuck in the faces of the Romanoffs by the Provisional Government. Not that I wanted the throne for myself or my children. God forbid. I simply thought that a man does not cease to be his father's son just because a bunch of slackers threaten him with a firing squad. The fact that eleven years later, on the eve of my departure for America, I turned out to be the only surviving Grand Duke without High Ambitions or Inspiring Message for the 160,000,000 Russians proved to my relatives that I was lacking in both brains and patriotism.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Grand Duchess Marie, *Exile*, pp. 220, 282, quotation p.131.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, pp. 241-242.

How can one interpret this quotation? After reading the entirety of Alexander's memoirs, it seems there are several issues in play. The refusal to sign the manifesto depriving the Romanovs of any claims to governance in Russia no doubt has to do with two things: firstly, his utter disgust for the members of the Provisional Government, and secondly, that he was not anywhere near Petrograd in February/March 1917 and therefore could not have signed it even had he wanted to. As for the rest, one could make a case for an underlying, perhaps even subconscious, sense of bitterness. Alexander played the role of advisor to Nicholas and spearheaded some important initiatives in Russia, those concerning aviation being the best example. Nicholas' refusal listen to what Alexander considered his own wise council frustrated him. Instead, Nicholas favoured his older uncle Alexis when Alexander warned him of the stupidity of sending the Baltic Fleet to fight in the Russo-Japanese war. When Alexander made other suggestions for running the Navy along more efficient lines, Nicholas again followed Alexis' outdated policies. When Alexis pressured Nicholas to obtain Alexander's resignation, the latter was crushed when Nicholas accepted it as tendered. A disillusioned Alexander left the country and his boyhood friend behind. A last-ditch visit to Alexandra in the waning days of the Tsarist régime to plead with her to stay out of affairs of state could not have been more coolly received. Alexander's final letter to Nicholas asking him to grant some sort of truly representative body went ignored. At several points in his memoirs, Alexander mentions that although he missed his home in the Crimea, he hoped never to lay eyes on the hated Petrograd again. Perhaps Alexander transferred that hatred of the political center of Russia to utter indifference to her politics. Or perhaps he was not interested in a government where he would have no advisory role. Most likely, he was simply doubtful that he would live to see the Soviet Union's demise. He dismissed the tripartite controversy over the "succession" because the whole question of pretenders to the Russian throne did "not create too great a commotion in the learned circles of constitutional lawyers for the very good reason that neither the forces of the St.-Briac

police nor the enthusiasm of the loyal Russian emigrants can sway the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics from its clearly charted course."<sup>36</sup>

A further factor in his indifference to post-Soviet Russia was Alexander's spiritualism. Conceived during his captivity under the Bolsheviks, developed in exile, and preached on lecture tours, his spiritual views influenced his outlook on the future. At the close of *Once a Grand Duke*, Alexander mused, "Were I to begin life anew, I would commence by surrendering my imperial title and would preach the necessity of a spiritual revolution." He regretted nothing in his life and had hope for a better future for all. His volume *Always a Grand Duke* also ends on a note of anticipation of the future, and the serenity of finding one's place in exile at last. "I am going home. I have one, for the first time in sixty-seven years. Not much of a home—just big enough for me and my future."<sup>37</sup> Sadly, Grand Duke Alexander died the same year this volume was published, 1933.

Olga's memoirs, on the other hand, are concerned with both Russia's future and its past. In research for this study, the considerable amount of "bad" literature concerning the Romanovs became painfully apparent, ranging from the inaccurate to the wholly invented. Tell-all "histories" written by "Count Paul Vassili" (Princess Catherine Radziwill) are the most blatant example of fabrication and slander. Olga was aware of this phenomenon, and feared that Western writers would continue to portray her family as self-indulgent tyrants who cared nothing for their subjects or principles of liberty. She was especially hurt by negative assessments of her father, Alexander III. "It might indeed appear trivial to be so troubled about the judgement of history," Olga admitted, "but to me it is important not because I happen to be a Romanov but because a just appraisal should not be denied to future generations. Justice should mean everything." She wished the West would make a better effort to understand her homeland before

---

<sup>36</sup> Grand Duke Alexander, *Always*, p. 136.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

criticizing it. She reminded her interviewer that it was the Romanovs who originated the idea that the Tsar was the first servant of the state, "a sacred duty from which nothing—except death—could release them." She wanted people to be aware that it was the Romanovs who stimulated widely appreciated Russian culture by paying for the Imperial theatres, ballets, museums out of their own money rather than the state's. "Yet I suppose it is so much easier to remember the cruelties of Peter the Great, the lovers of Catherine, the pseudo-mysticism of Alexander I, and all the rest of it. And naturally the Rasputin legend proved a gold-mine for Hollywood producers," Olga said, with a touch of bitterness. "Will anyone ever write honestly about Nicky and Alicky? The stories invented about them are incredible, and I suppose all the genuine material will never be released by the Kremlin—if it has not been destroyed already."<sup>38</sup> Fortunately she was wrong. Historians are now able to study the Romanovs from their own papers since the opening of the archives in the Russian Federation. However, in a sense Olga was correct; a large part of these materials were difficult for historians to access for decades. Her concerns about history's judgements of the Romanovs have been well-founded.

Olga's convictions about Russia's future were just as firm as her other beliefs. "I am sure there will never be any restoration. If the Communists were ousted Russia would most likely become a republic. Even if there are people who still dream of a restoration, whom could they restore? There is no heir to the throne!" Olga's prediction of a republic was correct, but at the time, Vorres pointed out that there were contenders for the throne, if not heirs. Her preference may seem like an obscure one: Prince Roman Petrovich, son of the Peter Nikolaevich who had owned the Dulber estate where Olga was incarcerated in the Crimea. Although Roman was not even a Grand Duke according to the laws of succession which proscribed that only sons and grandsons of emperors could bear that title, Olga preferred him to Kirill. Olga's rejection of Kirill's claim to the throne was largely based on Kirill's oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government. As Nicholas

---

<sup>38</sup> Vorres, pp. 226-228.

II's sister, Olga took this rather more personally than the other Romanovs in this study. "As a member of the Romanov family, the Grand-Duke had sworn an oath of allegiance to his sovereign and cousin, who alone could release him from it," Olga declared firmly.<sup>39</sup> Despite choosing a candidate, Olga did not believe the opportunity would ever come for Roman to take advantage of this. "All my personal prejudices apart, I cannot think that there will ever be a Tsar in Moscow again. The changes have been too great...a new age exists that had developed without us. However, these are such details. I am convinced that to dream about a Romanov restoration is a pure waste of time today." This was a minor issue, according to the Grand Duchess. Asked what the most important issue was to the Grand Duchess, Olga replied, "The free future of my dear country."<sup>40</sup>

The tolerance expressed towards the Soviet Union by the majority of the Romanov came as a surprise to the author of this study. The fundamental belief system of the original Bolshevik ideology was in staunch opposition to many of Imperial Russia's fundamental principles, including autocracy and Orthodoxy, not to mention the "parasitic" lifestyle presupposed of members of a royal family. However, the Alexander's, Olga's and Marie's mitigated praise for aspects of the Soviet régime makes sense when one considers that they viewed the USSR in many ways as a continuation of Imperial Russia, whether forming this continuity through continuity of policies, comparisons between Peter the Great and Stalin, or through the idea that Russia was the Russian people, whom they absolved from complicity in the longevity of Communism. This ability to see continuity between Imperial and Soviet Russia—indeed, an effort to seek it out—demonstrates that despite their contention that a post-Soviet Russia would not be a monarchy (with the notable exception of Kirill, who as "Tsar" could hardly entertain such a possibility), the Romanovs remained autocrats to the end of their days, true to the principles instilled in them so many years before.

---

<sup>39</sup> Vorres, p. 236. Interestingly, Prince Roman was also the Supreme Monarchist Council's choice for the Russian throne. See Perry and Pleshakov, p. 273. For an overview of the issues and persons involved in the succession controversy, see the same work, pp. 267-278, 307, 344-359.

<sup>40</sup> Vorres, pp. 236-237.



## CONCLUSION

For many years, the name "Romanov" conjured up images of tyranny and despotism as the Soviets laid all the ills of pre-revolutionary Russia at their feet. As early as 23 April 1917, Marie's brother Dmitri noted "the very name 'Romanov' is now a synonym for every kind of filth, obscenity and disorder."<sup>1</sup> Combating this image was certainly one of the Grand Dukes' and Duchesses' motivations for writing their memoirs. Beyond whatever financial or therapeutic value they found in writing about their lives, the Romanov memoirists obviously felt they had a message to send, a story to tell, an account to leave for posterity. After an analysis of the memoirs, it is important to determine if that account has been given in good faith, if it has been properly understood, and if the Romanov memoirs communicate unwittingly anything beyond what their authors intended.

In the face of bad, romantic, or out-of-date literature on the Romanovs, as well as popular history that has obscured truth with myth, the veracity of the memoirs becomes a burning issue. In addition, the fact that memoir literature is particularly susceptible to faulty or biased recollection makes the researcher's task that much more difficult. How can we know that these accounts are really what the Romanovs thought and felt? The fact that this study had not one but six volumes of memoirs to work with made that task easier; though the Romanovs' viewpoints sometimes differed on the events in their lives, accounts of the events themselves diverge very little. Granted, one must admit the odd faulty recollection in the memoirs—that is to be expected—and one must also allow for the wisdom of hindsight, particularly when the Grand Dukes and Duchesses claim to

---

<sup>1</sup> Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution; The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven and London, 1999), p. 59.

have foreseen revolution and how it could have been prevented. Yet there is enough consistency between our memoirs to conclude that they are most likely faithful representations of what their authors felt, thought and believed about themselves, their country, and the events that surrounded them. The idea of "setting the record straight" presupposes an honest sense of purpose from those who seek to vindicate themselves. To the degree that the memoirs can be corroborated by secondary literature, diary entries, and private correspondence, it seems they can generally be believed.

These memoirs are the record the Romanovs wanted people to read and understand. This was obviously important to them, for they chose to write in English so as to attract a wider audience than the Russian language would allow. Marie even tailored her title to Western audiences, changing her grand ducal title for that of "princess" in the titles of both volumes of her memoirs, perhaps feeling it sounded more prestigious to the American ear than the somewhat obscure "Grand Duchess." What exactly did they want their readers to understand? What was the message they wished to convey? The most fundamental thing they wanted to impress upon the public was that the Romanovs loved Russia. After studying these reminiscences, I believe that the younger Romanovs were not prepared to willfully pillage Russia to live lives of luxury at the expense of a people they abandoned to their fate merely to indulge in their own whims and pleasures. The memoirs strive, and succeed, in convincing the reader that even if they were not always competent, the Romanovs were well-meaning. These were not Oblomov-type aristocrats. They were hard-working people. If the Tsar was the busiest man in Russia, the rest of his family was not far behind, whether it was serving in the military, doing charity work, or being on display as the rigours of the court demanded. The memoirs demonstrate, very effectively, that the members of the ruling

dynasty were preoccupied with concepts of duty and service. It is important that they themselves chose those terms to identify their relationship to Russia, because it differs from concepts of "right" and "privilege" that one might expect from members of a dynasty whose head was still supposed to be God's chosen ruler over the Russians. The writings studied here show they served Russia not because it was their right or privilege to do so, but because they felt it was a duty laid upon their conscience. As Nicholas II told Sviatopolk-Mirsky in 1904, "You know, I don't hold to autocracy for my own pleasure. I act in this sense only because I am convinced that it is necessary for Russia. If it was simply a question of myself I would happily get rid of all this."<sup>2</sup> This was *noblesse oblige* on a grand scale. While much has been written about Nicholas being an unwilling Emperor, it was surprising to discover that, in a sense, his extended family comprised unwilling aristocrats as well. Though they were educated to believe very firmly in the principles of autocracy and they certainly enjoyed the material benefits and prestige of their position, the degree to which all but Kirill quickly and seemingly without regret adapted to the simpler life of exile reveals almost a relief at having a burden removed from their shoulders.

Aware that they were largely blamed for the Revolutions of 1917, the Romanovs wished us to understand their point of view. They were willing to concede that mistakes had been made—largely by Nicholas II—but also wished to convey their feelings of betrayal. They felt the Tsar had been poorly served by the intelligentsia and the educated circles at court, that the utopian ideals of one group and the gossip of the other weakened the autocracy. The Romanovs were willing to admit, publicly, that they shared a role in undermining the dynasty, but they felt that role had more to do with an increasingly poor

---

<sup>2</sup> Lieven, *Nicholas II*, p. 147.

public image than with their superficial understanding of Russian politics and problems. They wished us to understand that despite their mistakes, they were Russian patriots, even during the Soviet period, and they had always been, and continued to be, deeply concerned about Russia and the happiness of her people.

The Romanovs, both politically and symbolically, stood at the head of the institution of the autocracy, the last absolutist state of its kind in Europe. Were they educated to shoulder this burden? Though the men received a more thorough education than the women of the family, all of these people were sheltered, educated in a vacuum. In unhappy childhoods, they studied Russia from a classroom, rather than through empirical observation.

Feelings of inadequacy fostered by an incomplete education were exacerbated by their exclusion from the actual process of governance. Whereas they possessed fortunes and titles, their grand ducal role was a hollow one. Indeed, this study contends they had prestige without power.

Their frustration with this fact sharpened the Grand Dukes' and Duchesses' awareness of Russia's problems, and while they identified several of these as origins for the Revolutions of 1917 and provided some solutions informed by hindsight, they lack an understanding of the problems inherent in reforming an autocratic régime, such as making overtures to public opinion without giving the public any part of the autocrat's sovereignty. Instead, they seem to have felt that if only Nicholas had done this or that thing differently, revolutions would have been avoided, without ever questioning the validity of the very principles by which he was governing. In addition, the Romanovs were convinced that they played a part in bringing the régime's collapse upon themselves through undignified behaviour, secret plotting, and defiance of custom by marrying

beneath their status. The fact that they place so much emphasis on this factor in the fall of the monarchy reinforces the narrowness of their world and their isolation from Russia's political challenges.

The memoirs are also to be prized for revealing the private personalities of the influential people of their time, separating them from the public personae they bared to the world, and demonstrating how Alexander III's embodiment of the near-ideal Emperor led the Romanovs to fault Nicholas for failing to conform to his father's image.

Concerning the revolutions of 1917, the Romanovs' recollections draw strong lines between the February Revolution, which they blamed on irresponsible liberalism, and the Bolshevik Revolution. As for the Romanovs' attitudes towards the Soviet Union, opinion was mixed. The study reveals that some opposed every initiative and success of the USSR while others were gratified to see their homeland making progress even under the Communist régime. Did they envision returning home someday? Perhaps, but not to rule. With the exception of Kirill, who proclaimed himself Tsar in exile, the Romanovs felt they would never see a restoration. Most of their descendants agreed with this assessment, even after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the most interesting, as well as the most valuable, things the memoirs have to tell us are the things their authors never intended to put on the page, or perhaps of which they were not even aware. The most blatant of these was that despite their love and concern for Russia, the Romanovs did not understand it. They knew very little of the country beyond their narrow circle. They tried, of course, but the memoirs reveal that even years after being overthrown, the members of Russia's ruling House had not learned very much about their country's political or economic conditions. Despite their own complaints about a lack of an education that would have properly prepared them to do

more for their country, they never doubt that they knew Russia. Perhaps this echoes Pobedonostsev's view that the autocrat learned everything he needed to know to rule during the swearing of his oath—duty and purpose were enough. Their memoirs are preoccupied with family affairs, as they should be, but to such a degree that one realizes they had come into contact with only a very limited variety of opinions. A further proof of a failure to understand political realities is the unabashed praise of the Soviets on the part of Alexander, Olga, and to some extent, Marie. Their lack of knowledge and understanding about Russia was the most damaging thing the Romanovs revealed about the collapse of their world.

A second unwitting revelation made in the pages of the memoirs is that these were not happy people. Though they write with a good deal of wit and humour, there is an underlying sadness throughout the narratives. Unhappy marriages and family bickering—both common to people of all walks of life—were not the sole cause of this discontent. There is not only a guilt that they were not able to do more for Russia, but in some cases a resentment that they had not been trained to do so. Marie was especially bitter about the fact that her education equipped her only to be an ornament fit for marriage to a foreign prince. Without understanding where the fault lay, the Romanovs knew that something was fundamentally wrong with the way Grand Dukes and Duchesses existed, that they were not being used to their full potential, and that by extension, there was something very wrong about the way in which Russia was governed. One would assume that being exiled from one's homeland and deprived of beautiful palaces, jewels and other goods would occasion regret and bitterness—in fact, it was their incomplete education and their lack of tangible and practical purpose that made the Romanovs feel as if they had been robbed of something precious.

A further revelation that none of the Romanovs mention themselves is that despite their forcible removal from their elite position in Russian and their subsequent years during which they reflected on their fall from power, the Grand Dukes and Duchesses never ceased being autocrats. Living in democratic countries in exile, the worldview that had been instilled in them through their education and experiences remained with them and permeates their reminiscences. Even in their *post-mortems* of the Imperial Russia, they never question the imperial tradition or any of the fundamental principles of autocracy. To the Romanovs, individuals had failed, not the system. Their memoirs are an attempt to redeem the Romanovs; in their minds, there was no need to justify autocracy.

The memoirs evoke some empathy with the Romanovs. Their personalities, recreated in some measure herein, leap off the page and almost force a measure of sympathy. For quiet, devoted Olga, who forgave Nicholas and Alexandra everything out of love and prayed to them as martyred saints, one feels all the depth of a family tragedy removed from any political considerations. Irrepressible and energetic, the reactionary Sandro who believed he was a reformer, with a quick wit and a head full of programs and ideas he could never put to good use, makes one aware of the waste of talents in the Russian Empire. His account also inspires pity for someone who only wanted to be useful and hardworking but could not manage even that. One feels most sorry for the spirited but lonely Marie, unfulfilled in Russia, who would spend her exile galavanting across the world searching for that lost childhood and a man whom she could love as much as her brother. Staunch autocrat Kirill, man of destiny, is equally pitiable, quietly fulfilling what he saw as his duty to the Russian state and jealously guarding his right to be Kirill I of Russia, even though it alienated his entire family.

After examining the memoirs of the Royals of 'Russia Abroad,' the patterns that recur tend to point to one thing. Raised as part of the last absolute European monarchy at a court of immense wealth and splendour, in a time of increasing revolutionary fervour when the Empress was admonishing the Emperor to be like Peter the Great, the Romanovs more closely resembled the cast of Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard*. Unable to maintain their estate, the Romanovs, like the fictional owners of the orchard, were cast off their land and watched it being torn down and obliterated by rough hands. The Romanov memoirs, like the echoes of the axe against the cherry trees, are proof that the ghost of their world haunted them to the end of their days. The memoirs go a long way towards explaining their authors, but do not remove them from their 'ivory tower.' The Romanovs' circumstances changed but their values did not.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Berberova, Nina. *The Italics Are Mine*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969.
- Bind, Edward J., ed. *The Letters of Tsar Nicholas and Empress Marie*. London: Nicholson, 1937.
- Buxhoeveden, Baroness Sophie. *The Life & Tragedy of Alexandra Feodorovna Empress of Russia; A Biography*. Longmans, Green and Co., 1928.
- Fuhrmann, Joseph T., ed. *The Complete Wartime Correspondence of Tsar Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra, April 1914-March 1917*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Gilliard, Pierre. *Treize années a la cour de Russie; Le tragique destin de Nicholas II et de sa famille*. Paris: Payot, 1938.
- Kerensky, Alexander. *Russia and History's Turning Point*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1965.
- Lettres des Grands-Ducs à Nicolas II*. Translated from Russian by M. Lichnevsky. Paris: Payot, 1926.
- Maylunas, Andrei and Sergei Mironenko, eds. *A Lifelong Passion. Nicholas and Alexandra: Their Own Story*. London: Phoenix Giant, 1997.
- Mossolov, A.A. *At the Court of the Last Tsar; Being the Memoirs of A.A. Mossolov, Head of the Court Chanellery, 1900-1916*. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1935.
- Paley, Princess Olga Valerianova. *Memories of Russia, 1916-1919*. London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1924.
- Pobedonostsev, Konstantin P. *Reflections of a Russian Statesman*. Michigan: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1965.
- Radziwill, Princess Catherine (pseud. Count Paul Vassili). *Confessions of the Czarina*. New York: John Lane, 1918.
- Radziwill, Princess Catherine. *Secrets of Dethroned Royalty*. New York: John Lane, 1920.
- Radziwill, Princess Catherine. *The Intimate Life of the Last Tsarina*. London: Cassells, 1929.

- Romanov, Grand Duke Alexander. *Always a Grand Duke*. New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1933.
- Romanov, Grand Duke Alexander. *Once a Grand Duke*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1932.
- Romanov, Grand Duke Cyril. *My Life in Russia's Service—Then and Now*. London: Selwyn & Blount, 1939.
- Romanov, Grand Duchess Marie. *A Princess in Exile*. Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1932.
- Romanov, Grand Duchess Marie. *Education of A Princess: A Memoir*. New York: the Viking Press, 1931.
- Romanov, Grand Duke Nicholas. *La Fin du Tsarisme; Lettres inédites à Frédéric Masson (1914-1918)*. Paris: Payot, 1968.
- Shul'gin, V.V. *Dni: 1920*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989.
- Vorres, Ian (for Grand Duchess Olga). *The Last Grand-Duchess*. London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1964.
- Wynkoop, Nancy Leeds and David Chavchavadze, comp. *A Romanov Diary; The Autobiography of H.I. & R.H. Grand Duchess George*. New York: Atlantic International Press, 1988.
- Youssouppoff, Prince Felix. *La fin de Raspoutine*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1927.
- Youssouppoff, Prince Felix. *Lost Splendour*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1954. (Published in France in 1952 by Librairie Plon under the title *Avant l'exile, 1887-1919*).
- Secondary Sources
- Abaza, V. A. *Istoriia Rossii. Narodnoe izdanie*. St. Petersburg, 1885.
- Abaza, V. A. *Rukovodstvo k otechestvennoi istorii*. St. Petersburg, 1889.
- Auclères, Dominique. *Anastasia qui êtes-vous?* Paris: Hachette, 1962.
- Black, J. L. *Citizens for the Fatherland; Education, Educators, and Pedagogical Ideals in Eighteenth Century Russia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
- Chavchavadze, David. *The Grand Dukes*. New York: Atlantic International Publications, 1990.
- Cherniavsky, Michael. *Prologue to Revolution; Notes of A. N. Iakhontov on the Secret*

- Meetings of the Council of Ministers, 1915*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967.
- Cherniavsky, Michael. *Tsar and People. Studies in Russian Myths*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.
- Field, Daniel. *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976).
- Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy, A History of the Russian Revolution*. New York: Viking, 1996.
- Figes, Orlando and Boris Kolonitskii. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution; The Language and Symbols of 1917*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*, 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Ilovaiskii, D. *Kratkie ocherki russkoi istorii; kurs' starshago vozrasta*, nineteenth edition. Moscow: 1880.
- Johnston, Robert H. *"New Mecca, New Babylon"; Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920-1945*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988.
- Lieven, Dominic. *Nicholas II, Emperor of all the Russias*. London: John Murray, 1993.
- Lieven, Dominic. *Russia's Rulers Under the Old Regime*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Massie, Robert K. *Nicholas and Alexandra*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1967.
- Massie, Robert K. *The Romanovs: The Final Chapter*. New York: Random House, 1995.
- Perry, John Curtis and Constantine Pleshakov. *The Flight of the Romanovs; A Family Saga*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- Pivovar, E.I. et al., eds. *Rossiia v izgnanii: sud'by rossiiskikh emigrantov za rubezhom*. Moscow: Institute of World History, 1999.
- Raeff, Marc. *Russia Abroad. A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Solov'ev, Sergei. *Uchebnaya kniga russkoi istorii*, eighth edition. Moscow: 1880.

Steinberg, Mark D. and Vladimir M. Khrustal'ev. *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995.

Stone, Norman and Michael Glenny. *The Other Russia; The Experience of Exile*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1990.

Trewin, J.C. *Tutor to the Tsarevich. An Intimate Portrait of the Last Days of the Russian Imperial Family compiled from the papers of Charles Sydney Gibbes*. London: Macmillan Ltd., 1975.

Verner, Andrew M. *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy; Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Wade, Rex A. *The Russian Revolution, 1917*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Wildman, Allan K. *The End of the Russian Imperial Army; v.1, The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April 1917)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Wortman, Richard S. *Scenarios of Power; Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, v.2. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Internet Sources

[www.woodstock.library.on.ca/boylecollection.asp](http://www.woodstock.library.on.ca/boylecollection.asp)