21H.467J/17.60J Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, 1917 to the Present
Assignment 1: The Revolutionary Year, 1917
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The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II

Nicholas II Alexandrovich Romanov was the last Russian Emperor. After his abdication of the throne the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty came to an end. The tsar's abdication came as a direct result of the revolution that took place in February of 1917 in Russia. In the midst of World War I the main causes of turmoil appeared to be the relations of the Russian people rather than their relations with other nations. When the revolution broke out, demonstrations and street fighting lasted for a week and the workers of some of Petrograd's largest manufacturing complexes went on strike. In response, Nicholas ordered Russian army troops to restore order. The troops, however, mutinied and refused to use violence against the masses. Nicholas then dissolved the Duma, appealing to his right to do so according to the 1905 October Manifesto. Its members, though, refused to disperse. Realizing that there was no authority in the capital loyal to him, Nicholas abdicated on the 2nd of March. In his final attempt to preserve the Romanov dynasty Nicholas abdicated in favor of his brother, the Grand Duke Michael[1]. The proclaimed Emperor Michael II, however, refused to assume power until the "great people" of Russia had "invested him with such power".[2]

There were several key events preceding the revolution that led to the tsar's abdication. These events in conjunction with Nicholas's poor decision making on some occasions were the reason that he is remembered in history as Bloody Nicholas.

The days immediately following Nicholas's coronation can – with hindsight – be considered as foreshadowing the series of unfortunate events that subsequently led to the Tsar's abdication in 1917. A few days after Nicholas's coronation in 1898 many people gathered in the Khodynka field to celebrate and as with most mass gatherings the risk of agitation was high. The banquet resulted in the death of

roughly 2,000 people – allegedly after the Grand Duke Serge and the Minister of Court, Vorontsov-Dashkov, ordered the authorities to use violence in order to control the turmoil. The flawed design of the field was one of the many factors contributing to the disaster. According to Alexei Volkov, the tsarina's valet, Nicholas ordered an investigation about who should bear the responsibility for the deaths[3]. The letter depicts a startling image of the tragedy's magnitude.

In the years that followed the implications of Witte's industrialization development program had caused much distress to the peasants and the proletariat. The harsh taxation was closely related to the famine and the military depression had given rise to numerous revolutionary groups. The government strove to draw popular attention away from itself by promoting pogroms, and thereby exploiting the Russian people's rivalry with the Jewish. Von Plehve, assigned as Interior Minister by Nicholas at the time, made no effort to prevent the violent actions against the Jewish population[4]. In the secondary literature about the Russian pogroms we find no contradictions [5].This suggests that the government had a lot of trouble controlling the masses and persuading them that the industrialization development program would ultimately help modernize the country; this is the reason the government had to resort to such extreme measures.

In another effort to “quiet popular discontent”[6] Nicholas and von Plehve instigated an aggressive foreign policy against the Japanese Empire in order to win control of Manchuria and Korea. Nicholas aspired to “preserve the autocracy and to defend the dignity, honor, and worth of Russia”[7]. He adopted an aggressive foreign policy primarily as means of displaying the power of his nation[8]. Meanwhile, he remained convinced that it would not result in war because 'he did not wish it'. His arrogant stance on the matter left him completely surprised when the Japanese after attempting to negotiate attacked the Russian Far East Fleet and declared war[9]. It is also came as a surprise to him that the Japanese armed forces and navy easily overpowered the Russian armed forces and navy. All sources indicate that the Russo-Japanese War had a very negative impact on Russia. Russia's economic situation had deteriorated, the war resulted in many casualties, and the people, astounded by their

nation's incompetence, continued to lose faith in their Tsar. Even Russia's nobility began to question Nicholas and started holding secret meetings disguised as banquets. Witte accurately stated that "the Tsar was a well-intentioned child, but his actions were entirely dependent upon the character of his counselors, most of whom were bad" [7]. It is most likely that Witte was dismissed from his position as finance minister because he had disagreements with the many of Nicholas's counselors. He also did not approve of von Plehve and others close to Nicholas because he believed that they were unable to help him understand that he was taking a big risk by challenging the Japanese before the Russo-Japanese War broke out in the winter of 1904.

Father Georgy Gapon, a priest and working class leader who by 1905 had managed to receive support to create a police union, initiated a strike and encouraged the people to make a peaceful but direct appeal to Nicholas at the Winter Palace. However, the people's efforts failed when troops were ordered to fire against them on January 22, 1905, a date that became known as Bloody Sunday.

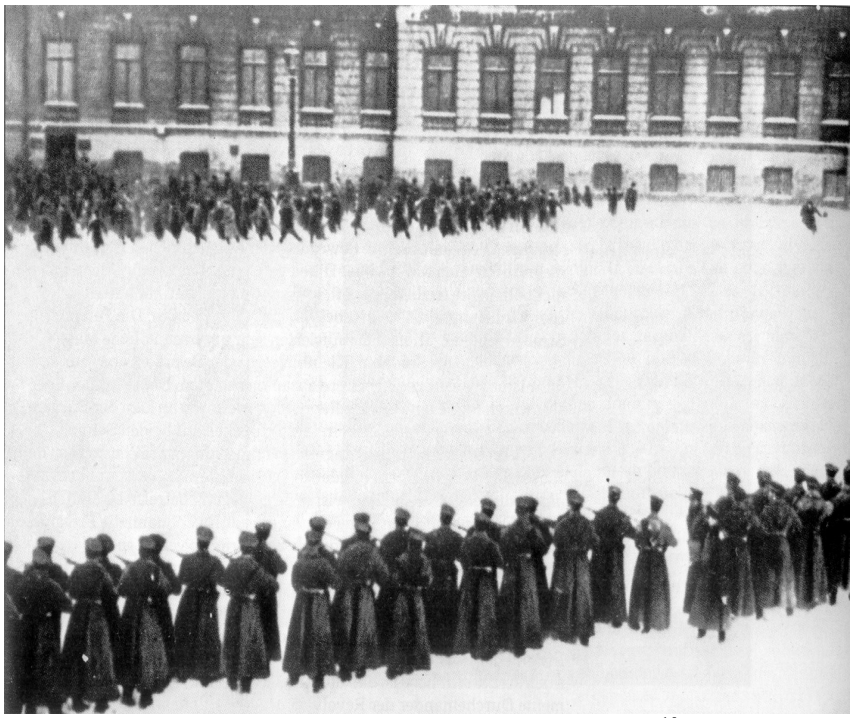

Illustration 1: The Winter Palace on Bloody Sunday[10]

The above illustration shows that the people were defenseless against the armed troops who had

formed a front. According to an American journalist's account, “Gapon, the Hero of Bloody Sunday”, “Gapon readily believed that the Czar would receive him, and if, for any reason his Majesty was prevented from so doing, that the soldiers would not fire on him”. The journalist presented Gapon as a man driven by passion. From his own perspective, Gapon ultimately “led workingmen of St. Petersburg to torture and death in a vain attempt to petition personally Nicholas II”. The journalist tried to report what events signified the beginning of the 1905 Revolution. He also included in his article a short passage from Gapon's autobiography stating that 'horror crept into his heart and the thought flashed through his mind: And this is the work of our Little Father, the Czar?'.[11] The aim of this article seems to have not been to draw sympathy from the American people but rather to distance them from the Russian affairs since the American people were indirectly advised to never allow themselves to be led by a man like Gapon -someone who was characterized as “hypnotized by the revolutionary propaganda” and whose “dead wife visited him in his sleep” - in the rest of the article.

On October 30, 1905 Witte drafted the October Manifesto for Nicholas to sign. The Manifesto granted fundamental civil rights to the people and promised Nicholas's subjects a parliament with legislative powers. In an excerpt on the Manifesto from *The Memoirs of Count Witte* (1921), Witte shows his unhappiness with the results of the Revolution .[12] The excerpt suggests that he knew all along that what was promised to the people would not be delivered. He claimed that the Manifesto was drawn up hastily, that he himself “opposed the publication of a constitutional manifesto”, and that he did not really expect Nicholas to sign it. The tone of the excerpt is apologetic and this may be because Witte was insecure about his actions at the time and perhaps because he wrote his memoirs after he was dismissed from his position in 1917. The Tsar was displeased with him; he called the publication of the October Manifesto 'the greatest sin of his life'. This later resulted in the marginalization of Witte and his resignation in 1906. Once again, Nicholas appears to have only been interested in preserving the autocracy. Not much thought was put into publishing a manifesto that promised constructive changes that Nicholas believed in. The only consequence of the manifesto was to delay the revolution until

1917 by giving the people 'false hope' ; thus Nicholas managed to retain most if not all of his traditional powers for a few more years.

Tsar Nicholas's biography, diary, and letters by him and by 'those who came closest to his daily life' provide insight to his thoughts and decisions during the critical years before his abdication. These sources reveal some of Nicholas's main weaknesses. In the Tsar's recently written biography, Bob Atchison states that “the lack of friends from outside the clan of European royalty deprived Nicholas of the benefit of understanding the way his future subjects lived. In this he was no different than most of his royal peers. But Nicholas was also purposely cut off from liberal thought and ideas by his parents”. [13] This biography justifies the fact that Nicholas did not sincerely try to make any reforms to improve the lives of the people, arguing that he did not understand the mindset or practical situation of the people and this is why he ultimately resorted to the Russo-Japanese War and the publication of the October Manifesto in attempts to keep the people faithful to him and the autocracy. In one of her letters in 1906, Amalia Kussner Coudert, an American artist assigned to draw portraits of the Tsar and the Tsarina, said that 'English was spoken exclusively by the Russian family in their private lives'[14]. This choice of language further emphasizes that the tsar distinguished himself from the Russian people. Even though he was traditionally loved and revered by many of the people he was certainly not a leader that they could identify with. This social gap between the royal family and the Russian people was in sharp contrast to the personal appeal of revolutionary leaders. According to Nicholas's biography, because his father, Alexander III, died at such an early age, Nicholas was only 28 years old in 1896 when he had to assume the throne and he was not ready to rule”. The biographer justifies Nicholas's inability to make firm decisions and his failure to establish a group of advisors that he could trust. This source states that Nicholas felt 'surrounded by deceitful, self-driven bureaucrats and sycophants'. The Tsar saw “asking for advice as a sign of weakness and tried to rely on his instincts”, however, it is clear that he lacked “political savvy”. As a result, the people started to see the Tsar as a self-contradicting weak figure, especially after the Russo-Japanese war. Most sources indicate that Nicholas was very

much against the idea of sharing political decision-making. Sources also suggested that any minister who “displayed activity and energy” was perceived as a threat and soon “lost the royal trust” [15].

Witte is a fine example of a competent minister who worked with sincere zeal and who was dismissed by the Tsar. What is more, primary and secondary sources indicate that Nicholas was a man of delicate nature. This means that he was not driven by power, holding on to it was an act of altruism. Nicholas believed that Russia's future was intrinsically tied to the Romanov family. Amalia Kussner Coudert said that Nicholas “looked kind, there was kindness in his eyes, in his face, in his voice; kindness in every easy, gentle movement of his slight youthful figure”. From Nicholas's diary entries and letters to the tsarina we conclude that “Nicholas forced himself to attend to the affairs of the state but essentially they did not captivate him. Ministers' reports were a heavy burden to him”[16]. Nicholas's diary entries suggest that in his everyday life he was mostly concerned about the weather, outdoor activities such as gardening, his family, and reading for pleasure; he makes very few references to the situation of the Russian people[17]. The letters that Nicholas and the tsarina exchanged also show that he turned to her and Rasputin for advice[18]. Rasputin was able to influence Nicholas in his decision-making because he had gained the tsarina's trust in his questionable efforts to cure her hemophilic son, Alexei. All sources point to the fact that the majority of Nicholas's advisors were inept and those few who were competent had either lost his trust or had been alienated by him because of Rasputin.

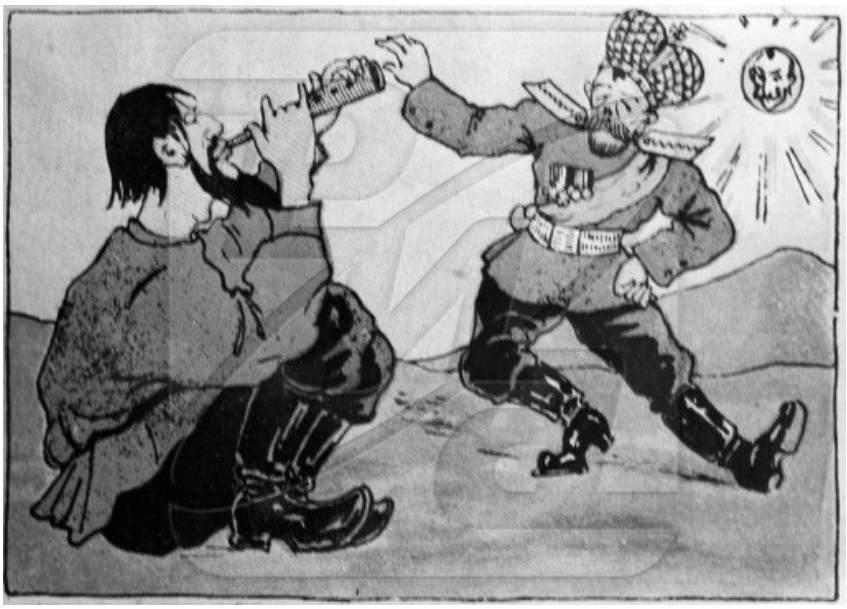

Illustration 2: Reproduction of a cartoon 'Tsar Nicholas II dancing to Rasputin's pipe'. Collection of the Museum of Revolution.[19]

Nicholas V. Riasanovsky in his book *Death of Nicholas I to Abdication of Nicholas II, 1855-1917* (2005) takes for granted that Nicholas's abdication was inevitable and discusses the different perspectives on the reasons that the monarchy came to an end. He suggests that a lot of people felt that the monarchy was outdated and that the Russians had entered a new era of liberalism and political freedom since 1905. Riasanovsky goes on to argue that after 1907 the Duma could no longer be abolished. Additionally, education was spreading very fast and schools were not prone to reinforce the idea of 'obsolete institutions'. According to Riasanovsky, the press became less and less restricted by the government and was able to represent every point of view on political matters. On another note, Riasanovsky argues that the monarchy could not be preserved because of the 'end products of the bankruptcy of the regime' ranging from Rasputin to political terrorism. He also claims that the social and economic problems arising from the 'fundamental inequality and widespread destitution could not be remedied by […] a redivision of the peasants' inadequate land'. Riasanosky views World War I in two different ways; as one of the fundamental reasons that the monarchy collapsed as well as “the tip of the iceberg”. In this secondary source, there is no debate over the Russo-Japanese War. Riasanovsky

concludes that it just proved the inferiority of the Russian armed forces to those of the enemy in the test of war. Moreover, he believes that the increasing educated society of Russians kept leaning towards the idea of the Westernization of Russia and that by 1917 'devotion to the tsar was not prominent'. Another historian, Geoffrey Hosking, in his book *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*(1997) supports the idea that one of the main factors that brought on the revolution of 1917 was that the government was undermining the church. However, Riasanosky disagrees with this notion simply because Nicholas was a very religious tsar. Riasanovsky's last point on the matter of the obsoleteness of the monarchy is also very important. He states that 'the Russian empire was a multiethnic state, out of place in the age of nationalism' and he goes to support his argument by pointing out that *rossiiskii* was the word used as 'the adjective for the Russian empire', whereas *ruskii* meant Russian ethnically.

Opinions and attitudes regarding the possibility of Nicholas's abdication varied.

Some of the peasants believed that everything would stay the same and that Nicholas would just continue to manage his estates outside the capital as he always had, while the others more attached to the idea of the Tsar were more concerned about the sudden change of the regime after so many years. According to Robert K. Massie, in his book *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1968), Churchill in one of his accounts argued that even though Nicholas was an average ruler no one else “was found capable” to assume power. In essense, Churchill believed that there was no one that could solve the very fundamental economic issues that plagued Russia. This was true since in the immediate years that proceeded Nicholas's abdication no true improvements in the economy of the countryside were made. If more people shared this point of view than the abdication could have been avoided. On the other hand, the members of the Imperial family were very much concerned about their role and could only make sense of the situation by saying that Nicholas would be crazy if he even considered abdicating. This simplistic approach showed how much they had distanced themselves from state matters. Furthermore, the Soviet adopted a new saying, “No more Romanovs! We want a Republic!” and the workers were outraged by the thought that Grand Duke Michael would assume the throne if Nicholas

abdicated. So this eliminated the possibility of the continuum of the dynasty all together. Some members of the Constitutional Democratic Party, according to Massey, believed that “the monarchy was the single unifying force in Russia” whilst Kerensky, the Second Prime Minister, of the Provisional Government argued that if “a new tsar took the throne against the people's will, a new torrent of revolution would be released” and that the Grand Duke Michael would be putting himself in danger.

It is important to also examine the tsar's point of view on the matter. Four days before his abdication, Nicholas, was not aware of the revolution that was going on in Petrograd. He had very little information passed on to him through his officials. Massie claims that Nicholas was under the impression that agitation was only caused by street disorders – and since this had occurred many times throughout his reign, Nicholas did not worry. Nicholas only remarked that they were “intolerable in these difficult times of war with Germany and Austria”. These mild disturbances were perceived as an act of treason and Nicholas did not go through the trouble of trying to analyze the fundamental social, economic and political reasons behind them. Rodziano, the Chairman of the Fourth State Duma, claimed that 'His Majesty and his officials were unable to realize what was happening to the capital - a terrible revolution had broken out' he went on to say that 'power was slipping from his hands as well' and that 'it would be too late in any case to propose any new measures'. This reinforces the idea that Nicholas's abdication was inevitable. Those in the Duma committee that were in favor of the throne had also reached the conclusion that in order for the dynasty to be saved, Nicholas would have to abdicate. It is important to note that Nicholas abdication did not only signify the abdication of a tsar but also the end of monarchy. So historians do not only argue whether Nicholas's abdication was inevitable but also if the end of autocracy was inevitable at this time. Nicholas himself was soon persuaded that his abdication was inevitable. Massie argues that he 'could not find any loyal regiments to march on the city', he did not want to put his family at risk, and he 'cared far more about winning the war than he did for his own crown'.

From Nicholas's signed abdication letter we are able to see that even at the end of the Romanov dynasty, Nicholas had an unrealistically optimistic view about the future. He stated in his abdication letter that 'the hour approached when the glorious Russian army together with its gallant allies would crush the enemy'.[1] This primary source indicates that Nicholas did not have a full understanding of what had in fact gone wrong - the nation was not only in turmoil because of World War I but an extreme social revolution was breaking out. The legislative institution had turned against the government, more revolutionary agitations were arising, and the defeated army was driven by the peasants' desire for land. In a time of anarchy Nicholas was talking about an organized and “victorious conclusion”. Nicholas's inability to make decisions is also reflected by the fact that in his original abdication he abdicated in favor of his hemophilic son Alexei rather than his brother. The Grand Duke Michael's letter, on the other hand, shows that he had an easier time accepting the possibility that the Romanov dynasty under the circumstances would have to come to an end, a stance that Nicholas later reproached in one of his diary entries; he says “God knows who put in his head to sign this stuff”.[20]The general quartermaster of the Headquarters for the Supreme Commander's recollection of the event of the abdication also stresses the fact that Nicholas was at a loss that day. Nicholas was open to advice from Iurii Danilov, a general in the Russian army, whom he asked to “speak with full candor”.[21] Iurii expressed his anguish when he told Nicholas that for the sake of his country Nicholas must step down from his position as Tsar. According to Iurii, for the first time he saw signs of Nicholas's anxiety and distress as “his usually expressionless face became unconsciously distorted by a movement of his lips to the side”. It is important to note that the source also indicates that as soon as Nicholas was persuaded that his country's best interests would be served if he were no longer Tsar, he readily accepted the fate of his reign.

After his abdication, Nicholas wanted to say goodbye to the army and drafted an Order of the Day. The former tsar seemed to be very supportive of the Provisional Government which had assumed power, and his Order of the Day he encouraged his troops to 'submit themselves to the Provisional

Government' and to obey their commanders. Nicholas truly believed that apart from beating Germany nothing else mattered. However, his message was suppressed; Massey suggests that the Tsar's support of the Russian army did not get through to the people. What is more, rumors that Nicholas intended to gather troops to fight the revolution and to establish an alliance with the Germans circulated in Petrograd. Meanwhile, the Empress was accused by the Media of treason of having an intimate relationship with Rasputin.

The immediate consequence of Nicholas's abdication was complete chaos. Crime in the cities increased, soldiers in Petrograd murdered their officers, and mobs murdered policemen. This should have come to no one's surprise since the people had been repressed and deprived for many years. A Russian soldier in 1913 stated that his superiors 'tried to beat all human feelings out of him'. This soldier also made a point that gives further insight to the events that followed the Tsar's abdication; he said "what can be expected from a soldier who is used to hating every superior as his worst enemy, whom he would pay back a hundred times at the earliest convenience".[22] The views that this soldier expressed were apparently shared by many of his fellow soldiers. What is more, Iurii Vladimirovich Lomonosov, who kept a account of the events at the end of March 1917, stated that some of the former ministers who worked under the rule of Nicholas asked to be arrested because they feared that soldiers would come after them.[23] The disturbances that arose after the abdication of the throne were also a result of the fact that no group had a legitimate claim to govern; the problem of replacing the old regime came also at a great cost for the Russian people. This succeeding struggle between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet over who would rule, was characteristically named "Dual Power".

Nicholas was a well-intended man, but he was not prepared to face the challenges of the 20th century – many of which were are a result of the long standing autocracy in Russia. Nicholas did not receive enough help in order to effectively rule his empire and the circumstances of the 20th century made it very difficult for him to implement policies that the previous generations of tsar had

implemented. Apart from the fact that most of Nicholas's counselors were unable to advise him on important decision-making, Nicholas also had trouble accepting help by those that could. The issue of poverty was an issue that always persisted, foreign threats were arising, and in addition Nicholas had to assume responsibility for numerous of his officials' mistakes. Foreign influences from the West also played a role in creating social problems at the time. Nicholas was also a man that by nature was never inclined to rule an empire; he would rather spend leisure time dealing with his own personal affairs. As a member of the Imperial family he was already distanced from the common people's mentality and he physically distanced himself by residing in his estates outside the capital.

Summary

The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II came as a direct result of the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia and it signifies the end of the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty. In the discussion of the abdication we take into account the circumstances under which Nicholas assumed the throne, his character weaknesses, and the difficulties that Nicholas faced during his reign (i.e. the Khodynka tragedy, the Jewish pogroms, the Russo-Japanese War, Bloody Sunday, and the outbreak of World War I). We also examine the socio-economic problems preceding the abdication, the opinions and attitudes concerning the abdication, and the immediate consequences.

1 "The Abdication of Nicholas II - World War I Document Archive." *Main Page - World War I Document Archive*. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Abdication_of_Nicholas_II>.

In the days of the great struggle against the foreign enemies, who for nearly three years have tried to enslave our fatherland, the Lord God has been pleased to send down on Russia a new heavy trial. Internal popular disturbances threaten to have a disastrous effect on the future conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honor of our heroic army, the welfare of the people and the whole future of our dear fatherland demand that the war should be brought to a victorious conclusion whatever the cost. The cruel enemy is making his last efforts, and already the hour approaches when our glorious army together with our gallant allies will crush him. In these decisive days in the life of Russia, We thought it Our duty of conscience to facilitate for Our people the closest union possible and a consolidation of all national forces for the speedy attainment of victory. In agreement with the Imperial Duma We have thought it well to renounce the Throne of the Russian Empire and to lay down the supreme power. As We do not wish to part from Our beloved son, We transmit the succession to Our brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and give Him Our blessing to mount the Throne of the Russian Empire. We direct Our brother to conduct the affairs of state in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative bodies on those principles which will be established by them, and on which He will take an inviolable oath.

In the name of Our dearly beloved homeland, We call on Our faithful sons of the fatherland to fulfill their sacred duty to the fatherland, to obey the tsar in the heavy moment of national trials, and to help Him, together with the representatives of the people, to guide the Russian Empire on the road to victory, welfare, and glory. May the Lord God help Russia!

2 1909, August. "Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich of Russia." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duke_Michael_Alexandrovich_of_Russia#Romances>.

Inspired, in common with the whole people, by the belief that the welfare of our country must be set above everything else, I have taken the firm decision to assume the supreme power only if and when our great people, having elected by universal suffrage a Constituent Assembly to determine the form of government and lay down the fundamental law of the new Russian State, invest me with such power. Calling upon them the blessing of God, I therefore request all the citizens of the Russian Empire to submit to the Provisional Government, established and invested with full authority by the Duma, until such time as the Constituent Assembly, elected within the shortest possible time by universal, direct, equal and secret suffrage, shall manifest the will of the people by deciding upon the new form of government.

3 "Memories of Alexei Voklov - Alexander Palace, an Online Book." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/volkov/4.html>.

The parties, receptions and balls following the Coronation were darkened by the catastrophe at Khondinka, where 2,000 people were crushed to death. The same day as the catastrophe, I was taking a walk along the Khondinka and I met many groups of people coming back from that site and carrying the Tsar's gifts. The strange thing, though, was that not one person mentioned the catastrophe, and I did

not hear about it until the next morning, at the Governor General's palace, where General Prefect of Police Vlasovski brought a special report. Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich was very depressed by what had happened; he gave Vlasovski orders to return to him every hour with detailed reports on the progress of the investigation into the causes of the disaster. Then, the typical slowness of these matters set in; Prefect General of Police Vlasovski rejected any fault by Grand Duke Serge; the latter himself considered that the blame for the disaster lay on the incompetence of Minister of the Court, Vorontsov-Dashkov. Emperor Nicholas II himself took an active part in the investigation of the matter as to who was to bear responsibility for the Khondinka disaster. The end result was: Grand Duke Serge was found responsible, as was Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, and they were required to submit their resignations. Then, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich put pressure on the Emperor by declaring that all of the Grand Dukes were going to quit their posts if Grand Duke Serge was to resign.

Emperor Nicholas II gave in, and was it was Vlasovski who was discharged. Some time later Count Vorontsov-Dashkov also left his post. In the days following I witnessed the gruesome sight of the wagons transporting the bodies from the Khondinka field to the morgues. The bodies were stacked up like logs and, with some difficulty, covered with canvas and sacks.

4 Kort, Michael. "The Final Years and the Last Stand." *The Soviet Colossus: History and Aftermath*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010. p75.

5 "Jewish Massacre Denounced", New York Times, April 28, 1903, p 6.

The anti-Jewish riots in Kishinev, Bessarabia, are worse than the censor will permit to publish. There was a well laid-out plan for the general massacre of Jews on the day following the Russian Easter. The mob was led by priests, and the general cry, "Kill the Jews," was taken- up all over the city. The Jews were taken wholly unaware and were slaughtered like sheep. The dead number 120 and the injured about 500. The scenes of horror attending this massacre are beyond description. Babes were literally torn to pieces by the frenzied and bloodthirsty mob. The local police made no attempt to check the reign of terror. At sunset the streets were piled with corpses and wounded. Those who could make their escape fled in terror, and the city is now practically deserted of Jews.

6 Kort, Michael. "The Final Years and the Last Stand." *The Soviet Colossus: History and Aftermath*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010. p75.

7 "Nicholas II and the Russo-Japanese War." *Scribd*. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6364182/Nicholas-II-and-the-RussoJapanese-War>.

Nicholas II and the Russo–Japanese War

By RAYMOND A. ESTHUS

Nicholas II is one of the most elusive individuals in Russian history. One reason for this, as Theodore H. Von Laue has noted, is that the historical sources that relate directly to Nicholas are very limited.[1] Another and even more important reason is that Nicholas' character is puzzling. Those who knew him believed he was easily understood; yet historical records show that the contemporay characterizations of the last Tsar are inadequate. An investigation of the role of Nicholas in the Russo-Japanese War points up this problem, for what emerges is a complex, enigmatic personality.

The contemporary assessments of Nicholas are remarkably uniform. He was described as shy, charming, gentle in disposition, fearful of controversy, indecisive, indulgent to his relatives, and deeply devoted to his family. Aleksandr Mosolov, who headed his Court Chancellery for sixteen years, wrote that Nicholas, though intelligent and well-educated, never adopted a definite, energetic attitude and loathed making a decision in the presence of others.[2] Sergei Witte, who served Nicholas and his father for eleven years as Minister of Finance, commented that the Tsar was a well-intentioned child, but his actions were entirely dependent upon the character of his counselors, most of whom were bad.[3] This widely held belief that Nicholas was weak led to much speculation about what persons exerted influence over him. Many believed that he was swayed by the Grand Dukes and by the Tsarina, Aleksandra Fedorovna. The influence of Aleksandra was thought to have been especially strong after the birth of their son Aleksei in 1904 and the subsequent tragic discovery that he suffered from hemophilia.

The problem with these characterizations of Nicholas and the speculations about the influence of others is that they ignore a significant aspect of his character. No doubt there were elements of truth in the descriptions of Nicholas as weak and irresolute. But his role in the Russo-Japanese War reveals another side of his character. Witte was getting close to it when he said of Nicholas: "A soft haze of mysticism refracts everything he beholds

[1] Theodore H. Von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (New York, 1969), p. 123. Research on this article was facilitated by a grant from the Penrose fund of the American Philosophical Society.

[2] A. A. Mosolov, *At the Court of the Last Tsar: Being the Memoirs of A. A. Mossolov* (London, 1935), pp. 6–10.

[3] Cecil Spring Rice to Gerald Balfour, 2 October 1905, Cecil Spring Rice Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England.

and magnifies his own functions and person."[4] Nicholas was convinced that he was divinely ordained to rule and that he was responsible to God and to his conscience to preserve the autocracy and to defend the dignity, honor, and worth of Russia. His commitment to the preservation of the absolutist prerogatives had been evident at the time of his coronation when he characterized proposals for political reform as "senseless dreams" and declared his resolve to maintain unflinchingly the principle of autocracy.[5] Almost a decade later his actions and attitudes during the Russo-Japanese War showed a similar stubborn resolve to defend the honor and worth of Russia. Indeed, during that war he was to show a doggedness and consistency that his most observant contemporaries did not fully perceive or comprehend.

The "soft haze of mysticism" that surrounded Nicholas was a significant factor at the very outset of the war. It, along with a great deal of administrative mismanagement, contributed to the outbreak of the war itself, for it caused the Tsar to misread completely the realities that he and his nation were confronting. Shortly before the Japanese attack, he assured Kaiser William that there would be no war because "he did not wish it."[6] When the attack came, according to Cecil Spring Rice, First Secretary at the British Embassy, it left the Tsar "almost incredulous."[7] The months that followed presented more occasions for disbelief as the Russians went from disaster to disaster. The initial Japanese attack on Port Arthur was not decisive, but the successive Russian defeats that followed on land and sea placed a growing strain on the political and economic structure of the country and engendered a sense of national humiliation.

In the face of repeated setbacks, Nicholas maintained a steadfast confidence that Russia would ultimately triumph. Throughout the first summer of the war, many Russians shared this confidence. An "informant" who was sent to Russia by the Japanese reported in July 1904 that the ruling class of Russia, though experiencing deep humiliation from the defeats, expected final victory.[8] Even Witte, who would emerge as the strongest proponent of peace, initially shared this expectation. In June he talked with the British Ambassador, Sir Charles Hardinge, about the terms that a victorious Russia would impose upon Japan.[9]

As the war news continued bad during the fall of 1904, Nicholas made an important decision concerning the future prosecution of the war. By this time the Port Arthur fleet was severely battered and Port Arthur itself was

[4] Emile Joseph Dillon, *The Eclipse of Russia* (New York, 1918), p. 327.

[5] Bernard Pares, *The Fall of the Russian Monarchy* (London, 1939), pp. 56–57.

[6] Sergei Iu. Witte, *Vospominania*, ed. A. L. Sidorov, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1960), 2:278.

[7] Spring Rice to Robert H. M. Ferguson, 2 March 1904, in Stephen Gwynn, *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice: A Record*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1929), 1:402.

[8] Motono Ichirō to Komura Jutarō, 2 August 1904, Telegram Series, Reel 55, pp. 17,808–17,811, Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (microfilm collection), Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

[9] Hardinge to Foreign Secretary Lansdowne, 30 June 1904, in *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, ed. G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, 11 vols. (London, 1926–38), 4:2–4.

under siege. No decisive change in the fortunes of war now seemed possible unless Japan's command of the sea could be broken. Nicholas decided, therefore, to send the Baltic fleet to the Pacific. It was a decision reached only after much agonizing, the Tsar changing his mind three times before finally ordering the fleet to the theater of war. Any hope Nicholas had for victory was probably based more on his belief in God than on confidence in Admiral Rozhdestvenskii and his fleet. Rozhdestvenskii apparently had little confidence in either himself or a beneficent Providence, for he confided to Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich that the fleet was going to its destruction in the Pacific.[10] This prediction turned out to be all too true. The only victory the fleet was destined to achieve was an encounter on the Dogger Bank on 24 October with British fishing boats, which the Russians incredibly mistook for Japanese torpedo boats.

By the time the Baltic fleet left Russia, popular support for the war was fading. A German banker, Ernest von Mendelssohn, visited Russia in October, and he reported to Chancellor Bernhardt von Bülow in Berlin that only the court, the military, and government officials wanted to continue the war until victory was achieved. In all merchant and banking circles, said Mendelssohn, there was a longing for a quick conclusion of peace and this sentiment was shared by a great majority of the population. Mendelssohn apparently talked with Witte, for he reported his view that Russia could not expect a turn in the fortunes of war and should make peace as soon as possible.[11]

The new year brought more disasters and a growing sentiment for peace. In January 1905 Port Arthur fell to Japanese forces. In the same month Bloody Sunday laid bare the widening gap between the government and the workers in St. Petersburg.[12] As an atmosphere of pessimism enveloped the Russian capital, Ambassador Hardinge reported to London that even members of the government were now openly expressing interest in peace.[13] One of the Grand Dukes told him frankly that Russia was defeated and should make peace. The Grand Duke added, however, that rather than pay an indemnity Russia would fight until the last soldier fell.[14]

Nicholas remained imperturbable amidst the mounting disasters, and he gave every indication of a determination to see the war through to victory. Foreign observers in St. Petersburg were baffled by what they took to be the Tsar's indifference to the catastrophic events unfolding around him.

[10] Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932), pp. 221–22. Rozhdestvenskii said the same to Finance Minister Vladimir Kokovtsov. See Kokovtsov, *Out of My Past: The Memoirs of Count Kokovtsov* (Stanford, CA, 1935), p. 46.

[11] Memorandum by Bülow, 2 November 1904, in Germany, Auswärtiges Amt, *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914*, 40 vols. (Berlin, 1922–27), 19:2:387–88.

[12] Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St. Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton, NJ, 1976).

[13] Hardinge to Lansdowne, 14 February 1905, F. O. 881/8650, Public Record Office, London.

[14] Inouye Katsunosuke to Komura, 18 February 1905, Telegram Series, Reel 63, pp. 4,089–4,090.

Hardinge wrote to Ambassador Francis Bertie at Paris: "Everybody is clamouring for peace, but the Emperor is impervious to everything, sees nobody and spends his time playing with the baby."[15]

Actually Nicholas could not remain completely impervious to the growing internal unrest, for the violence was moving closer and closer to the throne. The previous summer the Minister of the Interior, V. K. von Plehve, had been killed by a revolutionary bomb, and now on 17 February an uncle of Nicholas, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, was blown to pieces. The mounting dissension caused Nicholas to take the first hesitant step towards political change. Just two weeks after the death of Grand Duke Sergei, he promised that he would permit the election of representatives who would take part in "the preliminary discussion of legislation." Since he accompanied this with a statement on the immutability of the autocracy, it was not surprising that the plans announced six months later for a State Duma limited that body to only an advisory role.[16]

The Tsar's slight softening in the political arena did not signal any change in his resolve to continue the war. Grand Duke Pavel Aleksandrovich, who was living in Paris because of his morganatic marriage, visited Nicholas at this time, and he detected no change in his attitude. On his return to Paris, the Grand Duke told French leaders that Nicholas talked with "alarming complacency" about the war. The Tsar, he said, had not the slightest doubt that Russia would win in the end.[17]

Witte had come to the opposite conclusion about the war, and he now sent a long, blunt letter to Nicholas urging peace. He had little reason to think the Tsar would welcome his views: he had been ousted from the Finance Ministry in 1903, and though he now held the position of Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, it was well known that he was out of favor with the Tsar. As Ambassador Hardinge observed, Witte was distasteful to Nicholas because of his rough manners, brusque speech, and overpowering presence.[18] In his peace appeal, which he dispatched to Nicholas on 28 February, Witte was his usual overpowering self. He stated emphatically that further war expenditures would entirely upset the financial conditions of the country, that General Kuropatkin's army could not hold its position in Manchuria, and that Admiral Rozhdestvenskii's fleet could not score a success. Witte did manage to soften these bold assertions by indicating agreement with the Tsar's dedication to the nation's honor. He said that if negotiations were opened and the Japanese terms remained unacceptable, then the Russian people would rise in defense of the Tsar and the nation's honor.[19]

[15] Hardinge to Bertie, 14 February 1905, Francis Bertie Papers, F. O. 800/176, Public Record Office, London.

[16] Howard D. Mehlinger and John M. Thompson, *Count Witte and the Tsarist Government in the 1905 Revolution* (Bloomington, IN, 1972), pp. 17–18.

[17] Maurice Paléologue, *Three Critical Years (1904–05–06)* (New York, 1957), p. 178.

[18] Hardinge to Lansdowne, 17 January 1905, F. O. 65/1698, Public Record Office, London.

[19] Dillon, *Eclipse of Russia*, pp. 294–95.

8 "YouTube - Russo-Japanese War, Nicholas II of Russia." *YouTube - Broadcast Yourself.* Web. 27 Feb. 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3oL_nl5Qmg>.

9 Murray, David, Kaneko, and Albert White Vorse. *Japan.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906. p 537

THE Japanese Government have from the first attached the highest importance to a speedy solution of the questions which form at this time the subject of negotiations between Japan and Russia. It seemed to them that in a matter of such vital moment as that which engages the attention of the Cabinets of Tokio and St. Petersburg, a quick conclusion was only second in importance to a satisfactory conclusion. Consistently with that view the Japanese Government have at all times during the progress of the negotiations made it a special point to give prompt answers to all propositions of the Russian Government. The negotiations have now been pending for no less than four months, and they have not yet reached a stage where the final issue can with certainty be predicted. In these circumstances the Japanese Government cannot but regard with grave concern the situation for which the delays in negotiations are largely responsible. You are instructed to see Count Lamsdorff

10 Illustration 1: "January 2009." *Daily Desk Calendar*. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <http://dailydeskcalendar.blogspot.com/2009_01_01_archive.html>.

11 "Gapon, the Hero of Bloody Sunday." *New York Times* 18 Feb. 1906. Print. http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F20E12F93B5A12738DDDA10994DA405B868CF1D3

12 "Nicholas II, "October Manifesto"; Sergei Witte, Excerpt from "The Memoirs Of Count Witte." *Euphrates -- William Paterson's Webpage Community*. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <http://euphrates.wpunj.edu/courses/hist330-60/Supplementary Material/HTML/October Manifesto.html>.

The October Manifesto
17 October 1905 (o.s.)

We, Nicholas II, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, Tsar of Poland, Grand Duke of Finland, etc. etc., declare to all our loyal subjects:

The disturbances and unrest in St Petersburg, Moscow and in many other parts of our Empire have filled Our heart with great and profound sorrow. The welfare of the Russian Sovereign is inseparable from the welfare of His people, and national sorrow is His sorrow. The present disturbances could give rise to profound disaffection among the masses, presenting a threat to the unity and integrity of Our State. The oath which We took as Tsar compels Us to use all Our strength, intelligence and authority to put a speedy end to this unrest which is so dangerous for the State. The relevant authorities have been

ordered to take measures to deal with direct outbreaks of disorder and violence and to protect people who only want to go about their daily business in peace. However, in view of the need for successful implementation of earlier measures aimed at pacifying the country, we have decided that the work of the higher agiencies of government must be coordinated. We have therefore ordered the government to take the following steps in fulfilment of our unbending will:

Fundamental civil freedoms will be granted to the population, including real personal inviolability, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.

Without halting the elections that have already been scheduled, participation in the Duma will be granted to those classes of the population which are at present deprived of voting powers (insofar as is possible in the short period before its convocation). Further development of a universal franchise will be left to the newly established legislature (i.e., according to the law of August 6, 1905, to the Duma and the Council of State).

It is established as an unshakeable rule that no law can come into force without its approval by the State Duma and representatives of the people will be given the opportunity to take real part in the supervision of the legality of authorities appointed by Us.

We call on all true sons of Russia to remember their duty to the homeland, to help put a stop to this unprecedented unrest and, together with this, to devote all their strength to the restoration of peace and quiet in our native land.

Issued at Peterhof on the 17th day of October in the year of Our Lord 1905, in the eleventh year of Our reign.

Original signed by Nicholas II.

Source: Unattributed translation from *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 3rd series, vol. XXV/I, no. 26803. Revised (syntax emendations) Jon Bone.

***Excerpt on the* Manifesto *from* The Memoirs Of Count Witte**

The *Manifesto* was drawn up hastily, and until the last moment I did not know whether His Majesty would sign it. Had it not been for Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich, he possibly would not have done it. It is noteworthy that as soon as the *Manifesto* came out, the Grand Duke embraced the creed of the Black Hundreds. Prince A. D. Obolenskii, one of its authors, was in a state of neurotic exhaustion at the time he took part in its drafting. Several days after the publication of the act, this earnest advocate told me that his participation in the movement for the *Manifesto* had been the greatest sin of his life. In the days immediately preceding its publication, His Majesty conducted two parallel sets of conferences. I participated in one, [I. L.] Goremykin in the other. This extreme duplicity at such a critical time greatly discouraged me.

As a matter of fact, I was rather opposed to the publication of a constitutional manifesto. I gave much thought to the alternative plan of setting up a military dictatorship. The original text of the document was drafted against my will and behind my back. Seeing however that those on high were intent upon issuing the *Manifesto*, I insisted that my own version of it be adopted if I were to be appointed Prime Minister.

The effect of the act of October 17th was in many ways salutary. Thus for instance the *Manifesto*

destroyed the unified front that had made the opposition camp so formidable. It sobered up the country, so that the voice of patriotism was heard in the land again. Propertied people got ready to do battle and rose in defense of their possessions. But it also had its serious drawbacks.

The *Manifesto* was a bolt from the blue. Most provincial authorities did not understand what was happening, and many clearly lacked sympathy for the new course of policy. Because the *Manifesto* arrived so unexpectedly, regions that had already been in tension were thrown into a frenzy by it. Violent outbreaks -- both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary -- took place all over the country, the reactionary manifestations involving (of course) anti-Jewish *pogroms*. These last were organized (or at least encouraged) by local authorities. That is what I feared, and that was why I opposed the idea of issuing a *Manifesto*. Furthermore, it cast the shadow of undue haste upon all the other acts of the Government.

I did not for a moment doubt the necessity of a parliamentary regime for the country. In those days even the conservatives advocated a constitution. In fact, there were no conservatives in Russia on the eve of October 17, 1905. The *Manifesto* cut Russia's past from its present like a scalpel. This historic operation was surely necessary, but it should have been performed with greater care and more precautions. Still, I thank God that the constitution has been granted. It is far better that the past has been cut off (even though somewhat roughly and hurriedly) than if it had been slowly hacked off with a blunt saw wielded by a bungling surgeon....

13 "Nicholas II - Alexander Palace Time Machine." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 19 Feb. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/AlexPalaceNRbio.html>.

Nicholas had an excellent education and was perhaps the best educated European monarch of his time. His parents where astute enough to see the challenges of facing a 20th Century Tsar would be quite different than those of the past and tried to prepare him for his future responsibilities. The very real threat of terrorism loomed over the Imperial Family constantly. Once a bomb blew apart their train car, and only Alexander's powerful shoulders kept the roof from crushing the entire family. A powerful cordon of secret police and military guards protected them, but this meant Nicholas grew up in the isolation of his family. This held him back and he was late in maturing. He never gained a sense of confidence and self reliance. The lack of friends from outside the clan of European royalty deprived Nicholas of the benefit of understanding the way his future subjects lived. In this he was no different than most of his royal peers. But Nicholas was also purposely cut off from liberal thought and ideas by his parents. Since he had almost no contact with Russia's growing intellectual and artistic community he developed narrow ideas of honor, service and tradition which would harm his ability to govern Russia in the future.

While heir to the throne, as Tsarevich, Nicholas achieved the rank of Colonel in the Life Guards. He loved the military and always considered himself an army man. His character and social habits were strongly influenced by his years as a young officer and he made many of his longest lasting friendships among his brother officers. These where his happiest years, when he was almost free of care and worry about the future. His father was still relatively young and Nicholas could expect a few years to fill the role of a dashing, aristocratic officer before he was called to serve his country in an more serious role. The Tsarevich embraced the relative freedom of army life with gusto. He could drink and carry on like the most hedonistic of his fellow officers. Life was full of regimental dinners, concerts, dances and beautiful women. It was during this time he met a young dancer from the Imperial Ballet named

Mathilde Kschessinka, who became his first, real girl friend. It wasn't a serious relationship. Both of them knew it couldn't go anywhere and besides, Nicholas had already given his heart to a young, sad eyed and withdrawn German princess named Alix of Hesse. Many thought it was not a good match. Alix wasn't thought to have the right personality traits and outgoing aggressiveness sought in a Russian Empress-to-be. Nicholas could not be persuaded to consider any other bride than Alix, and the couple where formally engaged in 1893. In fall, 1894, Nicholas' father developed a serious nephritis condition which became progressively worse. Alexander's doctors advised a trip to the gentle climate of the Crimea. The famous healer John of Kronstadt was summoned to the Tsar's bedside died in the arms of his wife at Lividia aged 47 from nephritis.

Nicholas felt he was not ready to rule. He knew the weighty task of ruling Russia was greater than his experience and abilities. Yet he believed, even with all his inadequacies and self-doubt, that God had chosen his destiny. The new Emperor took his coronation oath very seriously and saw anointing as Tsar as spiritual experience. After the crown was placed on his head Nicholas would look for support and guidance first within himself and then to God, who had given him this burden. Quickly realising he was surrounded by deceit and the self-interest of bureaucrats and sycophants, Nicholas concluded that on earth he could trust few people. Bullied and misled by his relatives he increasingly turned to his wife for support. Nicholas became cynical and mistrustful of human nature. Loneliness and isolation would be his lot in life.

Above all else, Nicholas loved Russia first and then his family. He thought the fate of the two was inseparable. No one knew the shortcomings of the Romanov Dynasty better than he and yet he felt the monarchy was the only force preventing Russia from coming apart at the seams. Nicholas was intelligent enough to realise the probably of his assassination was quite high. Alexandra's decision to marry him and share his uncertain future was a commitment he always appreciated.

14 "The Human Side of the Tsar - Alexander Palace Time Machine." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 19 Feb. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/century1.html>.

He held out his hand just as kindly and simply as the Empress had done, and he also spoke in perfect English, asking how the miniature was coming on. Indeed, I was already beginning to know that English is spoken exclusively by the Russian royal family in their private life. This would not be singular where the Empress herself were concerned, since she is virtually an Englishwoman, and has spent years in England; but I recall hearing the Grand Duchess Helene, the daughter of the Grand Duke Vladimir, since become the Princess Nicholas of Greece, say that she could not remember ever speaking anything but English to her father. And this exclusive use of English in their private life may account for the fact that among themselves they always say "Emperor" and "Empress" instead of "Tsar" and "Tsarina." At all events, I never heard any member of the royal family use the Russian title, and before long the Tsar and the Tsarina were the Emperor and the Empress to me also.
I wish it were in my power to tell exactly what I felt and thought at this first sudden and totally unexpected sight of the Emperor. There was something in his appearance that caused a quiet tightening in my throat and a queer thumping at my heart. As I have said, he looked young, gentle, and slight. He stood quietly and naturally, looking straight at me with steady, clear, kind eyes. There was a sort of winning buoyancy, too, in the quiet dignity of his bearing. Above all, he looked kind, there was kindness in his eyes, in his face, in his voice; kindness in every easy, gentle movement of his slight, youthful figure.

15 "On Nicholas II, His Character and His Duties - Alexander Palace Time Machine." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 19 Feb. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/nicholasgurko.html>

Nicholas II forced himself to attend to the affairs of state, but essentially they did not captivate him. The enthusiasm for power was something alien to him. Ministers' reports were a heavy burden to him... The chief distinguishing feature of his character was an all-penetrating self-sacrificing devotion to do the performance of what he considered his royal business...

Mild-natured and therefore incapable of forcing people to bow to the opinion he expressed, he was, however, far from being weak-willed and on the contrary was marked by a stubborn striving for the intentions he formed... The main reason for the outward weak-will of Nicholas II that has been mentioned was his extereme natural delicacy that did not permit him to say anthing unplesant to anyone's face...

Nicholas viewed any taking of initiative on the part of his ministers as an attempt to usurp part of his own royal power... Given the absence in the sovereign's mind of a precise boundary between ruling and directing, in practice it turned out that the more business-like a particular minister was, the more he displayed activity and energy, the stronger the thought established itself in the Tsar's mind that this was an infingement of his royal power and the sooner such a minister lost the royal trust. This was the very lot that befell two of Nicholas II's two most talented assistants - Witte and Stolypin...

While Nihcolas II did not know how to command others, his own self-command was, by contrast, complete... If nothing else, we can judge Nicholas II's self-command by the fact that no-one saw him in raging anger or joyful excitement, or even in a state of increased agitation... He took many matters very close to his heart, and some phenomena provoked him to very strong anger, which he nevertheless had the strength to hide completely behind a mask of calm and even indifference...

Exceptional self-possession gave the Tsar the strength to spend hours on end tirelessly reading the reports and detailed memoranda submitted to him. He saw this as burdensome and for him uninteresting occupation as the main performance of his duty and did not shink from it. "I shall never allow myself to go to bed," he said, "until I have completely cleared my desk."

16 "On Nicholas II, His Character and His Duties - Alexander Palace Time Machine." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 26 Mar. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/nicholasgurko.html>.

17 "1917 Diary of Nicholas II - Alexander Palace Time Machine." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/ndiaries1917.html#slide>.

18 "Letters from Tsar Nicholas to Tsaritsa Alexandra - December 1916." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 19 Feb. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/letters/december16.html>.

4 December, 1916.

MY DEAR,

Tender thanks for the severe written scolding. I read it with a smile, because you speak to me as though I was a child.

It is unpleasant to speak to a man one does not like and does not trust, such as Trepov. But first of all it is necessary to find a substitute for him, and then kick him outafter he has done the dirty work. I mean to make him resign after he has closed the Duma. Let all the responsibility and all the difficulties fall upon his shoulders, and upon the shoulders of his successor.

I am sending you two lists of candidates which he left with me, and a letter, sent by him yesterday, in which he again returns to the question of appointing Makarov as President of the Council of State.

Rouchlov is a very good, spiritually strong and respectable man, who loathes Kokovtsev and the others. You know that the President of the Council of State is newly appointed every year, as well as all the members.

Things are not well in Roumania. We have sent and keep on sending troops, but they are obliged to make long marches (three weeks) because of the shocking condition of the railways. Now it has at last been decided to put them under our control.

The 17th of December has been fixed as the day for the meeting of the Generals as, up to then, Gourko has several conferences.

I must finish now. God bless you, my darling, my Sunny! With fond kisses to you and the girls, I remain

Your "poor little weak-willed" hubby

NICKY.

NOTES: KOKOVTSEV: Count Kokovtsev, a former President of the Council of Ministers, had warned the Tsar against Rasputin as far back as 1912, soon after Rasputin's appearance at the Court. It goes without saying that he fell into immediate disfavour.

19 Illustration: "Miss D'Souza's Classes (3 December)." *Nonsuch HP: The History and Politics Blog*. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <http://nonsuchhp.blogspot.com/2010/12/miss-dsouzas-classes-3-december.html>.

20 "1917 Diary of Nicholas II - Alexander Palace Time Machine." *Russian History Websites - Romanov Dynasty - Alexander Palace*. Web. 26 Mar. 2011. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/ndiaries1917.html>

March 16, Friday

I slept long and well. Awoke far beyond Dvinsk. The day was sunny and cold. Talked with those near me about yesterday. Read a great deal about Julius Caesar. Arrived at 8:20 at Mogilev. All ranks of the Staff were on the platform. Received Alexeev in the car. At 9:30 I went over to the house. Alexeev came with the latest news from Rodzianko. It transpires that Misha [Grand Duke Michael] has abdicated. His manifesto ends with a four-tail formula (Universal, direct, equal, and secret suffrage. There was no definite time set for the Constituent Assembly) for the election of a constituent assembly

within 6 months. God knows who put it into his head to sign such stuff. In Petrograd, the disturbances have ceased-if it would only remain that way.

21"The Tsar's Abdication, March 2, 1917." *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914-1922 A Documentary History*. Hackett. p52-55.

22 "The Tsar's Abdication, March 2, 1917." *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914-1922 A Documentary History*. Hackett. P 5-6.

23 "The Tsar's Abdication, March 2, 1917." *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914-1922 A Documentary History*. Hackett. P 55-56.

Additional secondary sources:

Riasanovsky, Nicholas Valentine. "Death of Nicholas I to Abdication of Nicholas II,1855-1917." *Russian Identities: a Historical Survey*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

of literary and artistic argument and creative expression. In a sense, Russian culture was never more "Western" than on the eve of 1917.

The Silver Age affected Russian thought as well as Russian literature and art. Notably, it marked a return to metaphysics, and often to religion eventually, on the part of a significant sector of Russian intellectuals. Other educated Russians, especially the writers and the artists, tended to become apolitical and asocial, often looking to esthetics for their highest values. The utilitarianism, positivism, and materialism dominant from the time of the 1860s finally had to face a serious challenge.

Philosophy in Russia experienced a revival in the work of Vladimir Soloviev and his followers. Soloviev, a son of the historian Sergei Soloviev, a poet and an encyclopedic scholar—in fact, the philosophy editor of the most important Russian encyclopedia—lived from 1853 until 1900 and wrote on a variety of difficult philosophical and theological subjects, such as the theory of knowledge, and the need for an effective union of the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches and for a world theocracy. A study in ethics, *A Justification of the Good*, is generally considered his masterpiece. A trenchant critic of the radical creed of the age, as well as of chauvinism and reaction, Soloviev remained a rather isolated individual during his lifetime but came to exercise a profound influence on the intellectual elite of the Silver Age. In effect, almost everything he had stood for, from imaginative and daring theology to a sweeping critique of the radical intelligentsia, suddenly came into prominence in the early twentieth century. Only Dostoevsky's influence could rival that of Soloviev in the Silver Age. And indeed, in retrospect, some commentators saw Vladimir Soloviev's life and achievement, with its many-sided brilliance and great promise, as well as a certain incompleteness and an early ending, as a faithful premonition of the entire Russian culture of the Silver Age.

The new critique of the intelligentsia found its most striking expression in a slim volume entitled *Signposts* (*Vekhi*) that appeared in 1909. *Signposts* contained essays by seven authors, including such prominent converts from Marxism as Peter Struve, Nicholas Berdiaev, and Sergei Bulgakov, and constituted an all-out attack on the radical intelligentsia: Russian radicals were accused of an utter disregard for objective truth, religion, and law, and of an extreme application of the maxim that the end justifies the means, with destruction as their only effective passion. Although *Signposts* represented a minority of Russian intellectuals and attracted strong rebuttals, a new cleavage among educated Russians became apparent—a cleavage all the more revealing because the critics of the intelligentsia could by no means be equated with the Right. Eventually Struve (1870–1944) became a leading thinker and political figure of the moderate conservatives; Berdiaev (1874–1948) acquired world fame as a personalist philosopher and champion of "creative freedom"; and Bulgakov (1871–1944) entered the priesthood and developed into the most controversial Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century. Other prominent intellectuals of the Silver Age included the "biological mystic" Vasily Rozanov, who was especially concerned with the problem of sex, and the brilliant antirationalist Leo Shestov (a pseudonym of Leo Schwartzmann), as well as the metaphysicians Semen Frank (another contributor to *Signposts*) and Nicholas Lossky. By comparison with the 1860s, or even the 1890s, the Russian intellectual scene had indeed changed on the eve of World War I.

The Silver Age, like other cultural outbursts, defies easy or complete explanation; and it is also difficult to integrate it with the general course of Russian history. The issue was complicated by what many observers considered the premature and violent end of that age in Soviet Russia, although many important developments would continue among the Russian émigrés. Some critics found connections between the nervous, tense, at times even apocalyptic aspects of much of the new mentality and the cataclysmic revolution that followed these premonitions so promptly. Others emphasized the frequently made promise of the coming of the new world and new humanity, which was to find its unexpected embodiment in the Five-Year plans. To be sure, the Silver Age was an abstraction, and any study of its impact must deal with numerous and very different individuals. Thus it was Blok who in January 1918 composed "The Twelve," perhaps the greatest poem ever devoted to revolution, though, appropriately, also a most controversial poem. And it was the futurist Maiakovsky who became in effect the bard of the new Soviet regime during its early years—much to the chagrin of Lenin, whose own tastes in literature were more conservative. Still, the dissonances between the Silver Age and the Soviet ideology and world were much greater than the consonances. The first had to be repressed in the name of the second. Indeed, it has been argued that the Silver Age demonstrated that the Russian educated public was finally moving away from the simple materialistic, utilitarian, and activist beliefs professed by Lenin and his devoted followers. Therefore, the latter had to succeed quickly, if at all. In the event, they just made it.

General estimates of the constitutional period of Russian imperial history are many, but most of them can be readily classified as either optimistic or pessimistic. Optimistic students of the development of Russia from the Revolution of 1905 to World War I and the revolutions of 1917 have emphasized that the country had finally left autocracy behind and was evolving toward liberalism and political freedom. The change in 1907 in the electoral law, reactionary though it was, indicated that the *duma* could no longer be abolished. Moreover, the reformed Russian legislature proceeded to play an important part in the affairs of the state and to gain ever-increasing prestige and acceptance at home, among both government officials and the people, as well as abroad. As an Englishman observed, "the atmosphere and instincts of parliamentary life" grew in the empire of the Romanovs. Besides, continue the optimists, Russian society at the time was much more progressive and democratic than the constitutional framework alone would indicate, and it was becoming increasingly so every year. Modern education spread rapidly at different levels and was remarkably humanitarian and liberal—as were Russian teachers as a group—and not at all likely to serve as a buttress for antiquated ideas or obsolete institutions. Russian universities enjoyed virtually full freedom and a rich creative life. Elsewhere, too, an energetic

discussion went on. Even the periodical press, in spite of various restrictions, gave some representation to every point of view, including the Bolshevik. Government prohibitions and penalties could frequently be neutralized by such simple means as a change in the name of a publication or, if necessary, by sending the nominal editor to jail, while important political writers continued their work. To be sure, as many optimists acknowledge, grave problems remained, in particular economic backwardness and the poverty of the masses. But, through rapid industrialization on the one hand and Stolypin's land reform on the other, they were on the way to being solved. Above all, Russia needed time and peace.

Pessimistic critics have drawn a different picture of the period. Many of them refused even to call it "constitutional," preferring such terms as Max Weber's *Scheinkonstitutionalismus*, that is, sham constitutionalism, because, both according to the Fundamental Laws and in fact, the executive branch of the government and the ministers in particular were not responsible to the *duma*. In any case, the critics asserted, whatever the precise character of the original arrangements, they were destroyed by the arbitrary electoral change of 1907. On the whole, the government refused to honor even its own niggardly concessions to the public. Nonentities, like the twice—prime minister Ivan Goremykin and the minister of war Vladimir Sukhomlinov, and the fantastic Grigory Rasputin himself, were logical end products of the bankruptcy of the regime. Other aspects of the life of the country, ranging from political terrorism, both of the Left and of the Right, to Russification and interminable "special regulations" to safeguard order, emphasized further the distance that Russia had to travel before it could be considered progressive, liberal, and law-abiding. Social and economic problems were still more threatening, according to the pessimists. Fundamental inequality and widespread destitution could not be remedied by a few large-scale "hothouse" industries and by a redivision of the peasants' inadequate land, always safeguarding that of the landlords. Workers in particular, including those concentrated in St. Petersburg and in Moscow, were becoming more radical and apparently more responsive to Bolshevik slogans. Moreover, the argument continues, the government never wanted real reform, because it was devoted to the interests, first, of the landlords and, second, of the great industrial capitalists. Russia was headed for catastrophe.

The optimists, thus, believe that a basically sound imperial Russia was ruined by World War I. The pessimists maintain that the war merely provided the last mighty push to bring the whole rotten structure tumbling down. Certainly it added an enormous burden to the load borne by the Russian people. Human losses were staggering. To cite Golovin's figures, in the course of the war, the Russian army mobilized 15,500,000 men and suffered greater casualties than did the armed forces of any other country involved in the titanic struggle: 1,650,000 killed, 3,850,000 wounded, and 2,410,000 taken prisoner. The destruction of property and other civilian losses and displacement escaped count. The Russian army tried to evacuate the population as it retreated, adding to the confusion and suffering. It became obvious during

the frightful ordeal that the imperial government had again failed in its tasks, as in the Crimean War and the Russo-Japanese War, but on a much larger scale. The Russian minister of war and many other high officials and generals proved to be incompetent in the test of war. Russian weapons turned out to be inferior to the enemies', Russian ammunition in short supply. Transportation was generally bogged down, and on numerous occasions it broke down completely. Together with the army, the urban population suffered as a result of this, because it experienced difficulties obtaining food and fuel. Inflation ran rampant. Worst of all, the government refused to learn any lessons: instead of liberalizing state policies and relying more on the public, which was eager to help, Nicholas II, in an anachronistic gesture, handed over supreme power to the reactionary empress, and through her to Rasputin, when the tsar assumed command at the front.

Uncounted Russian soldiers were dying in the hecatombs of World War I fighting "for God, tsar, and fatherland," just as their ancestors had died in the heroic defense of Sevastopol in the Crimean War sixty years earlier. Yet the situation was not quite the same. In the intervening period, educated Russians, and their numbers were always increasing, participated more than ever before in the beliefs and obsessions of the West, modifying them, as everywhere else, to the conditions of their own country. Thus Russian radicalism was predominantly peasantist, from Herzen until the victory of Lenin's creed. Dostoevsky found his ideal in the soul of the Russian peasant; Tolstoy in his way of life. The Panslavs were cousins, as well as natural enemies, of the Pangermans. Russia, as well as Great Britain or France, claimed to bring enlightenment to the non-European world. Potentially most significant, however, was the change in the Russian masses. The Muscovite uncompromising adoration of the tsar was coming to its end. Basic to Muscovite history and still very much in evidence in the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries, it apparently faded out by the end of the latter. While the events of "Bloody Sunday" certainly cannot account for the fadeout, they may serve as a symbol of the separation of the tsar and his people. Devotion to the tsar was not prominent in 1917 or in the years of civil war that followed, and the dedicated fighters on the White side were officers of the army and navy, not masses rallying for the true tsar. This erosion of a quasi-religious support of the ruler by the masses went for a long time almost unnoticed in historiography, until the appearance of some interesting recent works. Thus, Geoffrey Hosking in his fine book *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* not only focused on that loss of support but even asserted: "The imperial state's humiliation of the church which underpinned its legitimizing ideology was perhaps its gravest mistake and certainly a fundamental cause of the revolution of 1917."[24] But Hosking did not explain how the old reverence for the tsar could be retained in the modern secularized world, and he wrote almost as if he did not realize how thoroughly Orthodox Nicholas II and most of the imperial Russian rulers had been.

If not the Orthodox tsar, then what? The obvious candidate, as in so many other countries, was modern nationalism. And indeed, it was rising in Russia. A good case

can be made for the emergence of modern Russian nationalism in the period from 1863 to 1878, as well as in the years following, with its own professors, journalists, writers, students, books, periodicals, and newspapers. An aggressive and even violent nationalist Right, though not to be confused with more moderate main currents, was its appropriate component. Such basic developments leading to modern nationalism in France and other countries as popular education, improved communications, and compulsory statewide military service were present in Russia. The empire of the Romanovs lagged behind in many of these important matters, but its retardation could be readily cured with the passage of time.

Yet obstacles in the path of Russian nationalism were many. The Russian educated public was, on the whole, more opposed to the government than intellectuals elsewhere, and it devoted its interest and support more willingly to radical and revolutionary movements. The ruling stratum, even in 1917, was in many ways still that of an *ancien régime* rather than a modern national state. Statesmen like Dmitri Miliutin, Witte, and Stolypin were rare, while the last emperors and most of their ministers tried simply to hold the line, to defend what they could from internal or external attack. The religious bond, so important in Russian history, was itself on the decline, and the government, it is generally believed, made matters worse by treating the Church and different religious issues in its usual authoritarian and bureaucratic manner. Moreover, the Russian empire was a multiethnic state, out of place in the age of nationalism. Finland, for example, was indeed ruled more appropriately by its own grand duke, with its own constitution and rights, than by the same personage as the autocratic Russian emperor. The fundamental difference between *rossiiskii*, the adjective for the Russian empire, and *russkii*, meaning Russian ethnically, has been recognized by most critics. More novel are some suggestions that it was the second that was sacrificed to the first. Finally, it seems precipitous to find the best solution for imperial Russia in becoming a modern national state. Germany did just that, quickly and brilliantly, with the process eventuating in Hitler.

9

Soviet Russia, 1917–1991

Quiet, quiet. Beyond the polar circle
There sleep without separating their arms
Next to a faithful friend, an inseparable friend,
A dead friend a dead friend.

—Ivanov

The issues of belief and identity had some very striking characteristics in the Soviet Union.[1] No other state in history was so explicitly and thoroughly based on an ideology, teaching it in schools and inculcating it by all other means possible, spreading it to almost every detail of human existence and maintaining that stupendous effort for almost three-quarters of a century. Even Nazi Germany, often compared to the U.S.S.R. as its twin totalitarian state, could not claim such a performance, because its ideology was much more mushy, confusing, and incomplete, and the practical realization of that ideology—most dreadful and tragic, to be sure—lasted twelve rather than seventy-four years.

A great deal has been written about communist ideology, including ideology in the Soviet Union. And yet that ideology needs more rather than less emphasis. Failures to appreciate it fully range from suspicions of intellectual history as basic causation to the omnipresence of the official dogma and doctrine to the point that it appears as something obvious and natural rather than imposed. A very large number of misconceptions stems from the substitution of a struggle of leaders for power—their vanity, suspiciousness, pride, vengeance, conspiracies, and so on and on—for Marxism-Leninism. Usually the error is simply mixing the levels of discourse. It is not that Soviet protagonists were free from the above-mentioned vices and rivalries in all their forms. It is rather that their vices and rivalries took place within the basic framework of their ideology, by no means eliminating that ideology. A comprehensive ideology is of a fundamental importance in the first place, because that is how those who believe in it, whether they are aggressive or passive, honest or dishonest, vain or modest, see the world. And that is how the world was seen from the Kremlin from 1917 to 1991.

In fact, the Soviet leadership, from Lenin, to Stalin, to Khrushchev, to Brezhnev, to Andropov, to Chernenko, to Gorbachev, as well as their numerous associates and assistants, demonstrated a remarkable ideological consistency. Lenin, whose contributions extended Marxism to Marxism-Leninism, has often been accused of fanaticism,

recognition of the Provisional Government." A week later, Cyril gave an interview to a Petrograd newspaper: "I have asked myself several times if the ex-Empress were an accomplice of William [the Kaiser]," he said, "but each time forced myself to recoil from the horror of such a thought."

Cyril's behavior drew a terse, prophetic comment from Paléologue: "Who can tell whether this treacherous insinuation will not before long provide the foundation for a terrible charge against the unfortunate Empress. The Grand Duke Cyril should . . . be reminded that the most infamous calumnies which Marie Antoinette had to meet when she faced the Revolutionary Tribunal, first took wing at the elegant suppers of the Comte d'Artois [the jealous younger brother of Louis XVI]."

Petrograd had fallen. Everywhere in the city, the revolution was triumphant. At the Tauride Palace, two rival assemblies, both convinced that tsarism was ended, were embarking on a struggle for survival and power. Yet, Russia was immense and Petrograd only a tiny, artificial mound, scarcely Russian, in a corner of the Tsar's empire. The two million people of Petrograd were only a fraction of the scores of millions of subjects; even in Petrograd, the revolutionary workers and soldiers were less than a quarter of the city's population. A week had gone by since Nicholas had left for Headquarters and the first disorders had broken out. In that week, he had lost his capital, but still he kept his throne. How much longer could he keep it?

The Allied ambassadors, desperately concerned that the fall of tsarism would mean Russia's withdrawal from the war, clung to the hope that the Tsar would not topple. Buchanan still talked in terms of Nicholas "granting a constitution and empowering Rodzianko to select the members of a new government." Paléologue thought that the Tsar had a chance if he pardoned the rebels, appointed the Duma committee as his ministers and "appeared in person . . . and solemnly announced on the steps of Our Lady of Kazan that a new era is beginning for Russia. But if he waits a day it will be too late." It was Knox who sensed more accurately the ominous future. Standing at a corner of the Liteiny Prospect, watching the burning of the district court across the street, he heard a soldier say, "We have only one wish: to beat the Germans. We will begin with the Germans here and with a family that you know called Romanov."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Abdication

NICHOLAS, leaving home for Headquarters on the night of March 7, was subdued and downhearted. Twice, from the train, he sent melancholy telegrams tinged with the loneliness that overwhelmed him on leaving his family after two months at Tsarskoe Selo. In Mogilev, he missed the buoyant presence of the Tsarevich. "Here in the house it is so still," he wrote to Alexandra. "No noise, no excited shouts. I imagine him sleeping—all his little things, photographs and knicknacks, in exemplary order in his bedroom."

Nicholas's last letters as Tsar, written as it were from the brink of the abyss, have often been cited as evidence of his incorrigible stupidity. The most famous remark of all, invariably quoted in even the briefest estimate of Nicholas's character, is the line: "I shall take up dominoes again in my spare time." Taken by itself, the remark is devastating. Any tsar with so little wit as to sit playing dominoes while his capital revolts deserves nothing: neither his throne nor understanding.

Yet, there is more to it than that. It was the Tsar's first night back at Army Headquarters and he was writing to his wife of familiar things. Immediately before this much-quoted line, he is talking about his son. He says that he will greatly miss the games they had played every evening; in lieu of them, he will take up dominoes again to relax in his spare moments. Even more significantly, the letter was written not against a backdrop of revolution, but at a moment when Nicholas believed that the capital was quiet. The date on the letter is March 8, the day on which the first bread riots occurred in the city. The first reports of these disorders arrived at Headquarters on the morning of the 9th; Nicholas did not learn until the 11th that anyone in Petrograd considered them serious.

Despite the weeks of rest with his family, Nicholas returned to

Mogilev still mentally fatigued and physically exhausted. A vivid warning signal on the state of his health flashed on Sunday morning, March 11. As he stood in church, Nicholas suffered "an excruciating pain in the chest" which lasted for fifteen minutes. "I could hardly stand the service out," he wrote, "and my forehead was covered with drops of perspiration. I cannot understand what it could have been because I had no palpitation of the heart. . . . If this occurs again, I shall tell Fedorov [the doctor]." The symptoms are those of a coronary occlusion.

If the revolution in the streets of Petrograd came as a shock to everyone in the city, it is not entirely surprising that the Tsar, at Headquarters five hundred miles away, was neither more alert nor more prescient. Indeed, Nicholas had less information than those who continued blithely to attend dinners, parties and concerts in the capital. He depended on reports passed to him through a chain of officials which included Protopopov in Petrograd and General Voeikov at Headquarters. Both Protopopov and Voeikov served him badly, deliberately underplaying the seriousness of the situation as it developed. Protopopov was defending his own position; disorders which he could not control were a damning reflection on his abilities as Minister of Interior. Voeikov, at the other end of the line, was a conservative, unimaginative man who simply could not face the prospect of walking into the presence of the Tsar and announcing a revolution.

From Thursday, March 8, until Sunday, the 11th, Nicholas heard nothing which caused him serious alarm. He was told that the capital was afflicted with "street disorders." "Street disorders" were not a matter to worry Nicholas: he had faced them innumerable times in the twenty-three years of his reign. There were officials to deal with them: Khabalov, the Military Governor, and above him Protopopov, the Minister of Interior. The Tsar of all the Russias, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, need not bother himself with an affair which was a matter for the city police.

On the night of the 11th, after the troops had been called out and had fired into the crowd and two hundred people lay dead, Nicholas was told that the "street disorders" were becoming nasty. Reacting quickly, he sent an order to Khabalov commanding that the disorders, "intolerable in these difficult times of war with Germany and Austria," be ended immediately. That same night, he wrote to Alexandra, "I hope Khabalov will be able to stop these street disorders. Protopopov must give him clear and definite instructions."

On Monday, the 12th, the news was much worse. "After yesterday's news from town, I saw many frightened faces here," Nicholas wrote. "Fortunately, Alexeiev is calm, but he thinks it is necessary to appoint a very energetic man, so as to compel the ministers to work out the solution of the problems—supplies, railways, coal, etc." Late that night, a jolting telegram arrived from the Empress—"Concessions inevitable. Street fighting continues. Many units gone over to the enemy. Alix." At midnight he ordered his train, and at five a.m. he was under way for Tsarskoe Selo. Nevertheless, even at this point Nicholas did not proceed straight to the capital. Knowing that the most direct route was heavily used by troop supply trains, he chose a longer route to avoid dislocations. He still could not believe that his presence was so urgently required that supplies for the army and hungry civilians should be shunted aside.

As the Imperial train traveled north on Tuesday, the 13th, rumbling through village stations where local dignitaries still stood saluting on the platform to honor the passage of the Tsar, the grim news continued to come. Telegrams from the capital announced the fall of the Winter Palace and the formation of an executive committee of the Duma under Rodzianko. At two a.m. on the morning of the 14th, the train was at Malaya Vishera, just a hundred miles south of the capital, when it was slowed to a halt. An officer boarded the train and informed Voeikov that revolutionary soldiers with machine guns and artillery were just up the track. Nicholas was awakened, and in the middle of the night, alternative possibilities were discussed. If they could not go north to Petrograd and Tsarskoe Selo, they might go east to Moscow, south to Mogilev or west to Pskov, headquarters of the Northern Group of Armies, commanded by General Ruzsky. The discussion leaned in the last direction. Nicholas concurred and declared, "Well, then, to Pskov."

It was eight o'clock in the evening when the Imperial train glided slowly into the station at Pskov. The platform, usually lined with a guard of honor, was deserted except for General Ruzsky and his deputy, General Danilov. Ruzsky, entering the Tsar's car, brought more bad news: the entire garrison of Petrograd and Tsarskoe Selo had gone over, including the Guard, the Cossack Escort and the *Garde Equipage* with Grand Duke Cyril marching in front. Ivanov's expedition, sent ahead to restore order, had reached Tsarskoe Selo earlier in the day, where the trains had stopped and been surrounded by revolutionary soldiers calling on Ivanov's men to join them. Ivanov himself had received a telegram from Alexeiev advising that order had been restored in the capital, and that if there was no further

bloodshed, the monarchy might be saved. Alexeiev had suggested that he withdraw; Ivanov had done so, and his little force had quickly melted away.

The report that his personal guard had defected was a heavy blow to Nicholas. Along with the revelation of personal betrayal, it clearly indicated the end of hope for support from within the city, while the loss of Ivanov's men displayed the futility of sending more troops from the front. Nicholas's freedom of action was narrowing rapidly, and as he sat listening to Ruzsky, he made a decision. He asked Ruzsky to telephone to Rodzianko and offer what he had so long refused: a ministry acceptable to the Duma, with a prime minister, presumably Rodzianko, who would have full power over internal affairs. Ruzsky left the railway car and hurried to the telegraph.

Rodzianko, answering Ruzsky's message, was surrounded by people pushing, shouting, asking advice and yelling instructions. Above the din, the harassed Rodzianko wired melodramatically to Ruzsky: "His Majesty and yourself apparently are unable to realize what is happening in the capital. A terrible revolution has broken out. Hatred of the Empress has reached a fever pitch. To prevent bloodshed, I have been forced to arrest all the ministers. . . . Don't send any more troops. I am hanging by a thread myself. Power is slipping from my hands. The measures you propose are too late. The time for them is gone. There is no return."

Rodzianko spoke truly in describing his own position. A compromise reached that morning between the Duma committee and the Soviet had produced the nucleus of a Provisional Government. Miliukov, leader of the Cadet Party in the Duma, was Foreign Minister; Kerensky, representing the Soviet, became Minister of Justice; Guchkov, leader of the Octobrists, was War Minister. The Prime Minister, however, was not Rodzianko, to whom the Soviet would not agree, but Prince George Lvov, the liberal and popular chairman of the Zemstvo Red Cross. Rodzianko continued to take part in the government's discussions, but his influence, like that of the Duma itself, faded rapidly.

Rodzianko was entirely accurate when he said that it was too late for concessions. Already the Duma committee and the Soviet had agreed that Nicholas must abdicate in favor of his son, with the Tsar's brother Grand Duke Michael as Regent. Even those on the committee who wished to preserve the throne—Guchkov, Miliukov and Basil Shulgin, a Right-wing deputy who participated in all the discussions—had concluded that if the Imperial system and the Romanov dynasty were to be saved, Nicholas would have to be sacrificed. "It is of vital

importance that Nicholas II should not be overthrown by violence," declared Guchkov. "The only thing which can secure the permanent establishment of a new order, without too great a shock, is his voluntary abdication."

On this matter, the leaders of the new government in Petrograd already had been in touch with the leaders of the army. On the 14th, as the Tsar's train was approaching Pskov, Rodzianko had talked to Alexeiev at Headquarters. Alexeiev himself found abdication the only solution and agreed to collect the opinions of the generals commanding the different fronts. By the morning of the 15th, these replies had come back to Alexeiev and were forwarded to Ruzsky in Pskov. They were grimly unanimous: Nicholas must abdicate. Admiral Nepenin of the Baltic Fleet had stated: "It is only with the greatest difficulty that I keep the troops and fleet under my command in check." Grand Duke Nicholas, in the Caucasus, telegraphed that he begged "on my knees" for his cousin's abdication.

In Pskov, after breakfast on the morning of March 15, Ruzsky brought the generals' telegrams to the Imperial train and laid them before the Tsar. Nicholas was overwhelmed. His face became white, he turned away from Ruzsky and walked to the window. Absentmindedly, he lifted the shade and peeped out. Inside, the car was absolutely still. No one spoke, and most of those present could scarcely breathe.

If the anguish felt by Nicholas at this last, climactic moment of his reign is impossible to know, the logic of his reasoning is relatively clear. If he rejected the advice of the political leaders in Petrograd and of his generals, what could he do next? He knew from the defection of the Guard and from Ivanov's experience that it would not be easy to find loyal regiments to march on the city; without the support of his generals, it probably would be impossible. If he could find the men and fighting broke out, there was a risk to his family, still at Tsarskoe Selo, now firmly in the hands of the Provisional Government. On top of this, Nicholas had no real stomach for a bloody, pitched battle in the streets of his capital. Years of rule, years of war, years of personal strain and anguish had left him few inner resources with which to face the prospect of plunging his country into civil war.

Ultimately, the factor which swung the Tsar's decision was the advice of his generals. For Nicholas, each one of these telegrams was more significant than a dozen messages from Rodzianko. These were his fellow soldiers, his comrades, his brothers-in-arms. Nicholas loved the army, and he truly loved his country. He cared far more about

winning the war than he did for his crown. To start a civil war, with Russians killing Russians while the hated Germans looked on, would be a negation of all that he deeply believed. If it was the advice of his generals that the highest act of patriotism he could perform would be to abdicate, then it became impossible for Nicholas to refuse.

All at once, with a sudden movement, the Tsar spun around from the window and announced in a clear, firm voice, "I have decided that I shall give up the throne in favor of my son, Alexis." Nicholas made the sign of the cross, and the others in the car crossed themselves. "I thank you gentlemen for your distinguished and faithful service," he continued. "I hope it will continue under my son."

A form of abdication, prepared at Alexeiev's direction and forwarded from Headquarters, was produced. Nicholas signed it, and the document was dated 3 p.m., March 15. The throne had passed from father to son, as prescribed by law. His Imperial Majesty Tsar Alexis II, aged twelve, was the Autocrat of all the Russias.

At this point, with the signing completed, a confusion in procedure arose. The night before, in Petrograd, the monarchists on the governing committee had decided that Guchkov and Shulgin should be present to witness the signing and to bring the document back to Petrograd. A train for them was provided at dawn, and throughout that day the two delegates were traveling toward Pskov. As they were not expected before evening, Ruzsky was instructed simply to hold on to the document which Nicholas already had signed.

This interval—almost six hours—gave Nicholas time to reflect on the consequences of the act he had just performed. For himself, the shedding of power came as a relief. He assumed that he would be allowed to retire with his family to Livadia, that Alexis would remain with them at least until he had finished his education, and that the actual responsibility of government would pass to his brother Michael as Regent. It was a conversation with Fedorov, the doctor, which caused Nicholas to change his mind. Sending for Fedorov, Nicholas first asked for a frank estimate of Alexis's prospects with hemophilia.

Fedorov, fully aware of the political significance of the question, replied carefully, "Science teaches us, Sire, that it is an incurable disease. Yet those who are afflicted with it sometimes reach an advanced old age. Still, Alexis Nicolaievich is at the mercy of an accident." The young Tsar would never be able to ride, the doctor explained, and he would be forced to avoid all activity which might tire him and strain his joints. Then Fedorov went beyond a purely medical opinion. He pointed out that Nicholas, once off the throne, would almost certainly be exiled with the Empress from Russia. If

that happened, the new government would never allow its sovereign to be educated abroad by the deposed parents. Even if the entire family was allowed to remain in Russia, Alexis's upbringing was certain to be transferred to other hands.

Fedorov's words confronted Nicholas with a heart-breaking dilemma. As Tsar, he knew that his son was the rightful heir to the Russian throne; as a father, he could not bring himself to abandon his beloved child to strangers ignorant of all the ramifications of his disease. For the second time that fateful day, Nicholas was forced to a dramatic decision, a decision which would affect not only the fate of himself and his family, but the history of Russia.

At nine in the evening, Guchkov and Shulgin arrived in Pskov and were led across the tracks to the brightly lit Imperial train. Nicholas, wearing a simple gray tunic, greeted them with a handshake and invited them to sit. With his own back to the green silken wall of the drawing-room car, he listened as Guchkov began to explain why the abdication was necessary. Before Guchkov had finished, Nicholas interrupted. "This long speech is unnecessary," he said calmly, almost apologetically. "I have decided to renounce my throne. Until three o'clock today, I thought I would abdicate in favor of my son, Alexis. But now I have changed my decision in favor of my brother Michael. I trust you will understand the feelings of a father." As Nicholas spoke this last sentence, his voice dropped into a low, hushed tone.

When the Tsar had spoken, he took a new draft of the abdication document and left the room. Some time afterward, Nicholas reappeared and silently handed the document, now bearing his signature, to the emissaries from Petrograd. This final version, removing both father and son from supreme power, was illuminated by a splendid and almost pathetic patriotism:

> In this great struggle with a foreign enemy, who for nearly three years had tried to enslave our country, the Lord God has been pleased to send down on Russia a new, heavy trial. The internal popular disturbances which have begun, threaten to have a disastrous effect on the future conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honor of our heroic army, the good of the people, the whole future of our dear country demand that whatever it cost, the war should be brought to a victorious end.
>
> The cruel enemy is gathering his last forces, and already the hour is near when our gallant army, together with our glorious allies, will be able finally to crush the enemy.
>
> In these decisive days in the life of Russia, we have thought it

a duty of conscience to facilitate for our people a close union and consolidation of all national forces for the speedy attainment of victory; and, in agreement with the Imperial Duma, we have thought it good to abdicate from the throne of the Russian State, and to lay down the supreme power.

Not wishing to part with our dear son, we hand over our inheritance to our brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and give him our blessing to mount the throne of the Russian State. We bequeath it to our brother to direct the forces of the State in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative institutions, on those principles which will by them be established.

In the name of our dearly loved country, we call on all faithful sons of the Fatherland to fulfill their sacred duty to him by obedience to the Tsar at a heavy moment of national trials, to help him, together with the representatives of the people, to bring the Russian State on to the road of victory, prosperity, and glory.

May the Lord God help Russia!

Nicholas

The historic scene was almost concluded. Before it broke up, Nicholas's signature was obtained on two final appointments nominated by the Provisional Government. The first was Prince Lvov as premier, the other was Grand Duke Nicholas, who once again was appointed commander-in-chief of the armies. When this was done, Nicholas rose. At this point, Shulgin, whose heart was bursting with affection and pity for the man who had just been humbled, moved with Nicholas into a corner of the car. "The Emperor looked at me," wrote Shulgin, "and perhaps he read in my eyes the feelings which were distressing me, because in his own there was something like an invitation to speak and my words came of themselves: 'Oh, Your Majesty, if you had done all this earlier, even as late as the last summoning of the Duma, perhaps all that . . . ' and I could not finish. The Tsar looked at me in a curiously . . . [unaffected] way: 'Do you think it might have been avoided?' "

The meeting was over. A coat of varnish was placed over Nicholas's signature on the abdication, and Guchkov and Shulgin left immediately for Petrograd. At 1 a.m. on March 16, after thirty hours in Pskov, the Imperial train left the silent railway platform, bound for Mogilev, where Nicholas would say goodbye to his armies. Through the long day when, with a stroke of his pen, he had removed two Romanovs from the throne of Russia, he had remained calm and almost kindly to those around him. That night in his diary, normally a repository of only the most cryptic and phlegmatic observations on the day's events, Nicholas finally uttered a heartfelt cry: "For the sake of Russia, and to keep the armies in the field, I decided to take this step. . . . Left Pskov at one in the morning. All around me I see treason, cowardice and deceit."

The Tsar had fallen. It was an event of gigantic significance, and yet, neither in Russia nor abroad was this significance more than dimly understood. On the Sunday following the abdication, Paléologue visited three Petrograd churches: "The same scene met me everywhere; a grave and silent congregation exchanging grave and melancholy glances. Some of the *moujiks* looked bewildered and horrified and several had tears in their eyes. Yet even among those who seemed the most moved I could not find one who did not sport a red cockade or armband. They had all been working for the Revolution; all of them were for it, body and soul. But that did not prevent them from shedding tears for their Father, the Tsar. Buchanan had the same impression: "It was not so much the Emperor as the regime of which the nation as a whole was weary. As a soldier remarked . . . 'Oh yes, we must have a Republic, but we must have a good Tsar at the head.' " Far away in a peasant village on the steppe of southern Russia, the peasants clustered around the notice of abdication. "Well, so he's gone, just think of that," said one, "and he's been our Tsar for God knows how many years, and when he leaves us everything will be the same as ever. I suppose he will go to manage his estates somewhere; he always liked farming." "Poor man," said an old woman, "he never did anyone any harm. Why did they put him away?"

"Shut thy mouth, old fool," she was told. "They aren't going to kill him. He's run away, that's all."

"Oh, but he was our Tsar, and now we have *no one!*"

If anything, the governments of England, France and the United States had even less understanding of the event than the Russian peasants. In England, where the Tsar was seen as the tyrant wielding the knout, most Liberals and Laborites were exuberant. In the House of Commons, Andrew Bonar Law, leader of the House, quoted Wordsworth: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven." From Paris, the French Socialist Minister of Munitions, Albert Thomas, telegraphed Kerensky his "congratulations and fraternal greetings."

In the United States, the news was greeted even more extravagantly.

On March 22, only one week after the abdication, the United States became the first foreign government to recognize the Provisional Government. For America, on the verge of entering the war because of the German policy of unrestricted U-boat sinkings, the fall of tsarism removed the taint of fighting beside an autocratic Russia. On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war and make the world "safe for democracy." In the same speech, he spoke glowingly of "the wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia. . . . The autocracy . . . has been shaken off and the great, generous Russian people have been added in all their naïve majesty and might to the forces that are fighting for freedom in the world, for justice and for peace. Here is a fit partner for a League of Honor."

This almost universal ardor and optimism was not shared by the brilliantly erratic Englishman whose mercurial career had been temporarily blighted by the failure of his special brainchild, the attack on Gallipoli. Even a decade later, when the wartime role of Nicholas II and Imperial Russia still was ignored or derided, Winston Churchill, alone in his viewpoint, gave this estimate:

"It is the shallow fashion of these times to dismiss the Tsarist regime as a purblind, corrupt, incompetent tyranny. But a survey of its thirty months' war with Germany and Austria should correct these loose impressions and expose the dominant facts. We may measure the strength of the Russian Empire by the battering it had endured, by the disasters it had survived, by the inexhaustible forces it had developed, and by the recovery it had made. In the governments of states, when great events are afoot, the leader of the nation, whoever he be, is held accountable for failure and vindicated by success. No matter who wrought the toil, who planned the struggle, to the supreme responsible authority belongs the blame or credit.

"Why should this stern test be denied to Nicholas II? He had made many mistakes, what ruler has not? He was neither a great captain nor a great prince. He was only a true, simple man of average ability, of merciful disposition, upheld in all his daily life by his faith in God. But the brunt of supreme decisions centered upon him. At the summit where all problems are reduced to Yea or Nay, where events transcend the faculties of man and where all is inscrutable, he had to give the answers. His was the function of the compass needle. War or no war? Advance or retreat? Right or left? Democratise or hold firm? Quit or persevere? These were the battlefields of Nicholas II. Why should he reap no honor from them? The devoted onset of the Russian armies which saved Paris in 1914; the mastered agony of the

munitionless retreat; the slowly regathered forces; the victories of Brusilov; the Russian entry upon the campaign of 1917, unconquered, stronger than ever; has he no share in these? In spite of errors vast and terrible, the regime he personified, over which he presided, to which his personal character gave the vital spark, had at this moment won the war for Russia.

"He is about to be struck down. A dark hand, gloved at first in folly, now intervenes. Exit Tsar. Deliver him and all he loved to wounds and death. Belittle his efforts, asperse his conduct, insult his memory; but pause then to tell us who else was found capable. Who or what could guide the Russian state? Men gifted and daring; men ambitious and fierce, spirits audacious and commanding—of these there were no lack. But none could answer the few plain questions on which the life and fame of Russia turned."

Inevitably, members of the Imperial family greeted news of the Tsar's abdication with dismay. Some, thinking only of the awkwardness of their own situation, leaped to attack. "Nicky must have lost his mind," wrote Grand Duke Alexander. "Since when does a sovereign abdicate because of a shortage of bread and partial disorders in his capital? . . . He had an army of fifteen million men at his disposal. The whole thing . . . seemed ludicrous."

Far more widely criticized was Nicholas's decision to sign away the rights of his son. Shulgin and Guchkov, both strong monarchists, were surprised by the change from Alexis to Michael. They knew it would make trouble, but in the emotion of the moment on the train, they bowed to a "father's feelings." Among the legalistic, bureaucratic classes whose main concern was to obey whatever government was properly legal, and among the devout monarchists, faithful to tradition, who might have rallied to the legitimate heir, the change created consternation. "The immediate accession of the Tsarevich was the only means of stopping the Revolution," declared Nicholas Basily, an official at Headquarters, who had drafted the first abdication document and been shocked to see the switch from son to brother. "In the first place, the young Alexis Nicolaievich would have had the law on his side. He would also have benefited by the sympathetic feeling of the nation and army towards him."

Even those who had served Nicholas long and faithfully failed to completely understand that the Tsar was also the father of a delicate twelve-year-old boy. Sazonov, who had been Nicholas's Minister of Foreign Affairs for some years, spoke of the matter to Paléologue. "I

needn't tell you of my love for the Emperor and with what devotion I have served him," he said with tears in his eyes. "But as long as I live, I shall never forgive him for abdicating for his son. He had no shadow of right to do so. Is there a body of law in the world which allows the rights of a minor to be abandoned? And what's to be said when those rights are the most sacred and august on earth? Fancy destroying a three-hundred-year-old dynasty, and the stupendous work of Peter the Great, Catherine II and Alexander I. What a tragedy! What a disaster!"

With Nicholas and Alexis both removed, Michael now was Tsar. There was an old Russian legend that when Tsar Michael II sat on the throne, Russia would win her eternal goal, Constantinople. There had been no tsar named Michael since the founder of the Romanov dynasty; Nicholas's younger brother, therefore, would be Michael II. There were other propitious omens. Britain and France, which always before had blocked Russia's advance to the south, now were her allies, and had promised Constantinople as a prize of victory. If Michael took the throne and the Allies won the war, the ancient legend might at last be fulfilled.

As it happened, the reign of the new Tsar Michael was ludicrously brief. The news burst upon him at Gatchina in a telegram from his older brother: "To His Majesty the Emperor Michael: Recent events have forced me to decide irrevocably to take this extreme step. Forgive me if it grieves you and also for no warning—there was no time. Shall always remain a faithful and devoted brother. Now returning to Headquarters where hope to come back shortly to Tsarskoe Selo. Fervently pray God to help you and our country. Nicky."

Michael, now thirty-nine, was wholly unprepared for this abrupt transformation. Before the birth of the Tsarevich, he had for six years been Heir to the Throne. During Alexis's periods of illness, he had faced the possibility of becoming Heir again. But he had never dreamed that both his brother and his nephew would be removed simultaneously and that, with the arrival of a telegram, he would suddenly find himself Tsar. Michael was no coward; he had won the St. George Cross commanding troops in the Carpathians. Nor was he politically insensitive: watching the disintegration of the government earlier that winter, he had come to Rodzianko to see what he could do to help. But he was not a bold, decisive man with extraordinary energies and will power, and it was a man of this character who was required. Nevertheless, taking leave of his wife, now beside herself with excitement at the prospect of becoming the consort of an emperor, Michael traveled from Gatchina into Petrograd to make his historic decision.

In Petrograd, the anti-monarchical tide was running strong. Even as Guchkov and Shulgin were in Pskov obtaining Nicholas's abdication, the Soviet had decided that replacing one tsar with another was not enough. "No more Romanovs! We want a Republic!" became their cry. Guchkov and Shulgin, returning to Petrograd with the document of abdication, were invited to address the railway workers at the station. Shulgin, believing it would please them to hear of Nicholas's abdication, fervently shouted, "Long live the Emperor Michael!" To his horror, the workers were outraged. Closing the doors, they attempted to seize both Guchkov and Shulgin, who barely managed to slip away to a waiting automobile. From the station, the two delegates drove straight to a private house where the new government was meeting. Rodzianko was present, and in an armchair at the head of the table, waiting to hear the advice of the men who would become his ministers if he accepted the throne, sat Michael.

The debate that followed was waged with passionate intensity. Miliukov, Guchkov and Shulgin pleaded that Michael had no right to evade the throne. They argued that the monarchy was the single unifying force in Russia, without which Russia would be destroyed. With equal force and conviction on the other side, Rodzianko and Kerensky threatened that if a new tsar took the throne against the people's will, a new torrent of revolution would be released. The first victim, they predicted, would be Michael himself. "He asked me point-blank whether I could vouch for his life if he accepted the crown," Rodzianko wrote later, "and I was compelled to answer in the negative because there was no armed force I could rely on."

Kerensky was even more vehement than Rodzianko. Knowing the fury that the proclamation of a new tsar would rouse in the Soviet, he declared, "In any case, I cannot answer for the life of Your Highness." Michael asked for a few minutes to think the matter over and left the room with Rodzianko and Prince Lvov. Five minutes later, he returned and announced, "I have decided to abdicate." He added that he would accept the throne later only if invited to do so by a constituent assembly.

Kerensky was overjoyed. "Monseigneur, you are the noblest of men," he shouted. The second deed of abdication was written out on the desk of a children's schoolroom in the house next door, and Michael signed it.

Three hundred and four years after a shy sixteen-year-old boy had

reluctantly accepted the throne at the plea of the Russian nation, his descendant, also named Michael, had given it back. The Romanov dynasty was swept away.

Although it was the defection of his trusted generals which ultimately swung his decision to abdication, Nicholas could not abandon the throne without saying goodbye to the army. In Pskov, immediately after signing the abdication, Nicholas applied for permission to return to Headquarters. The Provisional Government agreed without hesitation. Nicholas was not hostile but submissive; at Headquarters, Alexeiev was with them; at all the battlefronts, the commanding generals had united to urge the abdication. The likelihood that Nicholas would suddenly change his mind, revoke his abdication, rally his troops and march on the capital simply did not exist.

As the train approached Mogilev, Alexeiev sent Basily to meet the Tsar. "He was absolutely calm, but it shocked me to see him with a haggard look and hollow eyes," Basily wrote of his former sovereign. ". . . I took the liberty of saying that we at the *Stavka* were greatly distressed because he had not transferred his crown to the Tsarevich. He answered quietly: 'I cannot be separated from my son.' A few minutes later dinner was served. It was a melancholy meal. All of us felt our hearts bursting; we couldn't eat or drink. Yet the Emperor retained wonderful self-control and asked me several questions about the men who form the Provisional Government; but he was wearing a rather low collar and I could see that he was continually choking down his emotion."

In Mogilev, Alexeiev met the train at the station and drove with the Tsar in an open car back to the governor's house. Sitting down at his desk, Nicholas drafted as an Order of the Day his farewell to the army:

"My dearly beloved troops," he wrote, "I address you for the last time. Since my abdication, for myself and my son, from the throne of Russia, the power has passed to the Provisional Government, which has arisen on the initiative of the Imperial Duma. . . . Submit yourselves to the Provisional Government, obey your commanders. . . . May the Lord God bless you and may the Holy Martyr and Conqueror St. George lead you to victory." Sadly, the message never reached the troops. Forwarded for approval to Petrograd, it was suppressed by the same Provisional Government which Nicholas was so loyally recommending. The Soviet, sitting under the same roof of the Tauride Palace, had let it be known that it did not favor the issuance of Orders of the Day by deposed monarchs.

During these last five days in Mogilev, Nicholas exhibited the same steady restraint and self-control which he had been taught since boyhood. At a ceremonial farewell arranged by Alexeiev, the main hall of the house was packed with officers of the Headquarters staff. Nicholas, appearing at the front of the crowded room, quietly thanked the officers for their loyalty, begged them to forget all feuds and lead the army and Russia to victory. His modesty made a vivid impression; when he had finished, the room burst into loud cheers and most of those present wept openly. But none spoke up to urge him to change his mind, and Nicholas quietly bowed and left.

Alone in his room, he said goodbye to the foreign military observers. General Hanbury-Williams found Nicholas in a khaki uniform, looking tired and pale, with large black lines under his eyes. He smiled and got up from his desk to join his guest on the sofa. "He said that he had meant to carry out . . . [reforms]," wrote Hanbury-Williams, "but that matters had advanced so quickly and it was too late. The proposal that the Tsarevich should take his place with a regent he could not accept as he could not bear the separation from his only son, and he knew that the Empress would feel the same. He . . . hoped that he would not have to leave Russia. He did not see that there would be any objection to his going to the Crimea . . . and if not, he would sooner go to England than anywhere. . . . He . . . added that the right thing to do was to support the present Government, as that was the best way to keep Russia in the alliance to conclude the war. . . . He feared the revolution would ruin the armies. . . . As I said 'Goodbye' . . . he turned to me and added: 'Remember, nothing matters but beating Germany.' "

The change in his status was tactfully concealed by the continuing personal courtesy with which he was treated. It appeared, nevertheless, in the little matters of procedure and ceremony which are the visible trappings of power. On the morning following his last meeting with the staff, the same officers assembled to take the oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government. While Nicholas sat alone in his room, his suite, the staff and the troops of his escort lined up outside the house and pronounced the new oath in an audible chorus. In the prayers that followed, for the first time in hundreds of years the names of the Tsar and the Imperial family were omitted. The town of Mogilev greeted the abdication with noisy celebrations. At night, the town was illuminated and excited crowds stayed up shouting in the streets. From the windows of the local city hall, just opposite Nicholas's window, two large red flags were draped. One by one, as the days moved along, the officers of the suite began removing the Tsar's

initials from their epaulets and cutting away the golden shoulder knots which marked them as aides-de-camp. Nicholas reacted gracefully to this melancholy sight: on March 21, Alexeiev telegraphed Brusilov: "The deposed Emperor understands and has given permission to remove initials and shoulder knots immediately."

On the second day of Nicholas's stay at Headquarters, his mother, the Dowager Empress, arrived from her home in Kiev. "The news of Nicky's abdication came like a thunderbolt," wrote the Tsar's sister Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, who was with her mother in Kiev. "We were stunned. My mother was in a terrible state. She kept telling me it was the greatest humiliation of her life. . . . She blamed poor Alicky for . . . everything." In Mogilev, the Dowager Empress's train was brought to the Imperial platform and a few minutes later Nicholas drove up in his automobile. He said good morning to the two Cossacks standing at the entrance to Marie's car and went inside. For two hours, mother and son were alone. Then Grand Duke Alexander, who had accompanied Marie, entered the car. He found the Dowager Empress collapsed in a chair, sobbing aloud, while Nicholas stood smoking quietly and staring at his feet.

For three days, Marie remained in Mogilev, living aboard her train. She and Nicholas spent most of their time together, going for long drives in the afternoon and dining together every evening. It was the son who comforted the mother. Marie, always gay, witty, brilliant, decisive and totally in control of her emotions, had lost the regal bearing which was her emblem; for once she was frightened, ashamed and miserable. It was Nicholas, the son she had always lectured on behavior, who carefully steered his mother back toward courage and self-control.

While at Mogilev, Nicholas had only the scantiest communication with his family at Tsarskoe Selo. Anxious to return to them as soon as possible, he applied for permission to the Provisional Government, which again had no objections. In Petrograd, however, the position of the Imperial family had deteriorated. Rumors circulated through the city that Nicholas had returned to Headquarters to lead the army against the revolution or to "let the Germans in." Newspapers were filled with garish accounts of the sexual relationship of Rasputin and the Empress, along with stories detailing the Empress's "treason." On March 20, therefore, primarily to assure their own safety, the Provisional Government resolved "to deprive the deposed emperor and his consort of their liberty." The Empress was to be arrested at Tsarskoe Selo on March 21. That same day, Nicholas was to be arrested at Mogilev and then, escorted by four commissioners sent by the Government, brought back to his family at Tsarskoe Selo.

On March 21, the Tsar, knowing that he was to become a prisoner, had lunch alone with his mother. At three p.m., the express from Petrograd arrived, bearing the government envoys. At a quarter to four, the delegation, accompanied by Alexeiev, arrived to claim the Tsar. Nicholas stood up and tenderly kissed his mother goodbye. Neither could guess the future; both hoped that they would soon be reunited either in the Crimea or in England. Nevertheless, Marie cried unrestrainedly. Nicholas left her car, walked across the platform and entered the drawing-room car of his own train, which stood on the adjacent track. Whistles blew, there was a lurch and the Tsar's train started to move. Nicholas, standing at the window, smiled and waved his hand; Marie, still in tears, made the sign of the cross. A few minutes later, when his train was only a blur of smoke on the northern horizon, her car rolled out of the station headed southwest for Kiev. Neither could know it at the time, but the proud Empress and her quiet eldest son were never to meet again.

On the platform a few minutes before, as the Tsar's train was leaving, Alexeiev and other officers of the Headquarters staff had stood at attention as the train bearing their former sovereign departed. As the car carrying the Tsar moved past him, Alexeiev saluted. A second later, as the last car of the same train, bearing the representatives of the Duma, rolled by, Alexeiev took off his cap and made a deep bow.