

CLASSICS TO GO
**THE ROMANCE OF
THE ROMANOFFS**



JOSEPH MCCABE

The Romance Of the Romanoffs

Joseph McCabe



THE TSAR NICHOLAS II

PREFACE

THE history of Russia has attracted many writers and inspired many volumes during the last twenty years, yet its most romantic and most interesting feature has not been fully appreciated.

Thirteen years ago, when the long struggle of the Russian democrats culminated in a bloody revolution, I had occasion to translate into English an essay written by a learned professor who belonged to what was called "the Russophile School." It was a silken apology for murder. The Russian soul, the writer said, was oriental, not western. The true line of separation of east and west was, not the great ridge of mountains which raised its inert barrier from the Caspian Sea to the frozen ocean, but the western limit of the land of the Slavs. In their character the Slavs were an eastern race, fitted only for autocratic rule, indifferent to those ideas of democracy and progress which stirred to its muddy depths the life of western Europe. They loved the "Little Father." They clung, with all the fervour of their mild and peaceful souls, to their old-world Church. They had the placid wisdom of the east, the health that came of living close to mother-earth, the tranquillity of ignorance. Was not the Tsar justified in protecting his people from the feverish illusions which agitated western Europe and America?

Thus, in very graceful and impressive language, wrote the "sound" professors, the clients of the aristocracy, the more learned of the silk-draped priests. The Russia which they interpreted to us, the Russia of the boundless horizon, could not read their works. It was almost wholly illiterate. It could not belie them. Indeed, if one could have interrogated some earth-bound peasant among those hundred and twenty millions, he would have heard with dull astonishment

that he had *any* philosophy of life. His cattle lived by instinct: *his* path was traced by the priest and the official.

But the American onlooker found one fatal defect in the Russophile theory. These agents of the autocracy contended that the soul of Russia rejected western ideas; yet they were spending millions of roubles every year, they were destroying hundreds of fine-minded men and women every year, they were packing the large jails of Russia until they reeked with typhus and other deadly maladies, in an effort to keep those ideas away from the Russian soul. While Russophile professors were penning their plausible theories of the Russian character, the autocracy which they defended was being shaken by as brave and grim a revolution as any that has upset thrones in modern Europe. Moscow, the shrine of this supposed beautiful docility, was red with the blood of its children. In the jails and police-cells of Russia about 200,000 men and women, boys and girls, quivered under the lash or sank upon fever-beds, and almost as many more dragged out a living death in the melancholy wastes of Siberia. They wanted democracy and progress; and their introduction of those ideas to the peasantry had awakened so ready and fervent a response that it had been necessary to seal their lips with blood.

We looked back along the history of Russia, and we found that the struggle was nearly a century old. The ghastly route to Siberia had been opened eighty years before. Russia had felt the revolutionary wave which swept over Europe during the thirties of the nineteenth century, and the Tsar of those days had fought not less savagely than the rulers of Austria, Spain, and Portugal for his autocracy. Every democratic advance that has since been won in western Europe has provoked a corresponding effort to advance in Russia, and that effort has always been truculently suppressed. Nearly every other country in Europe has had the courage to educate its people and enable them to study its institutions with open mind. Russia

remains illiterate to the extent of seventy-five per cent, and its rulers have ever discouraged or restricted education. The autocracy rested, not upon the affection, but upon the ignorance, of its people.

When we regard the whole history of that autocracy we begin to understand the tragedy of Russia. We dimly but surely perceive, in the dawn of European history, that amongst the families which wandered through the forests of Europe none were more democratic than, few were as democratic as, the early Slavs. We find this great family spread over an area so immense that it is further encouraged to cling to democratic, even communistic, life, and avoid the making of princes or kings. We then find the inevitable military chiefs, not born of the Slav people, intruding and creating princedoms: we find an oriental autocracy fastening itself, violently and parasitically, upon the helpless nation: we find the evil example and the tincture of foreign blood continuing the development until Princes of Moscow become Tsars of all the Russias, and convert a title dipped in blood into a title to rule by the grace of God and the affection of the people. And we find that Moscovite dynasty, from which the Romanoffs issued, playing such pranks before high heaven as few dynasties have played, until the old Slav spirit awakens at the call of the world and makes an end of it.

That is the romance of the Romanoffs, of Russia and its rulers, which I propose to tell. This is not a history of Russia, but the history of its autocracy as an episode: of its real origin, its long-drawn brutality, its picturesque corruption, its sordid machinery of government, its selfish determination to keep Russia from the growing light, its terrible final struggle and defeat. To a democratic people there can be no more congenial study than this exposure of the crime and failure of an autocracy. To any who find romance in such behaviour as kings and nobles were permitted to flaunt in the eyes of

their people in earlier ages the story of the Romanoffs must be exceptionally attractive.

J. M.

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CHAPTER I

THE PRIMITIVE DEMOCRACY OF THE SLAV

A LITTLE south of the centre of Europe rises the great curve of the Carpathian mountains. The sprawling bulk of this long chain, rising in places until its crown shines with snow and ice, formed a natural barrier to the spread of Roman civilisation. It enfolded and protected the plains of Hungary and the green valley of the Danube, and it seemed to set a limit to every decent ambition. Beyond it men saw a vast and dreary plain filled with wild peoples whom the Romans and Greeks called "Scythians." It was, in effect, in those days, almost the dividing line of Europe and Asia. One branch of the great European race had gone down into Greece and, becoming civilised, remained there. Another branch had found the blue waters and sunny skies in Italy. A third, the vast horde of the Teutons, was moving heavily and slowly southward in the west.

But about the eastern feet of the Carpathians was a little northern people, the Slavs, which may one day fill the earth's chronicle when Teuton has followed Greek and Roman into the inevitable tomb of warriors. Where these Slavs came from, and what was their precise kinship to the other northerners and to the Asiatic peoples, we do not confidently know. Some tens of thousands of years before the Christian Era the last spell of the Ice-Age had locked the north of Europe. It seems that a branch of the human family followed the retreating ice-sheet and, in the bracing winds which blew off the frozen regions, shed its weaklings and became the vigorous "northern race." From this came the successive waves of Greeks and Romans, Goths and Vandals, English and Norman and German. From these northern forests seem also to have come the Slavs, who

split at the barrier of the Carpathians into two great streams: Bohemians and Serbs to the west, and Russians (as they were later called) to the east.

We have not much information about this people which settled across the limit of civilisation. To the Romans they were part of the medley of barbarism which got a rude living out of the bleak north. A few later Greek writers had some acquaintance with them, and an early Russian monk, Nestor, gathered their traditions, into a chronicle, and described them as they were before the development of autocracy obliterated their native features. From these sources we learn that the Slavs were singularly democratic for a people at their stage of evolution.

We know to-day the real origin of kingships and princedoms, which was hidden from our fathers by legends of "divine right." The right of a man to rule his fellows came of his possession of a stronger arm or a wiser head, or a combination of the two: a plausible enough theory until kings began to insist on leaving the power to their sons, whether or no they left them the strong arm and the wise head. As a rule the hunt and the battle gave the strong man his opportunity, and in every other nation at the level of the Slavs we find chiefs, who dispense justice and direct warfare, and exact a reward proportionate to their services.

It is a common and surprised observation of the early writers who notice the Slavs that they had no chiefs. The monk Nestor, who wrote in their midst at the beginning of the twelfth century, says that they had "chiefs," but would not tolerate "tyranny." The primitive life of the Slavs had then been modified, as we shall see, but the reports may be reconciled. The Slavs had no hereditary families of chiefs, no rulers of tribes who exacted tribute. Nestor gives a very different character to the various tribes of the Slav family. Being a monk, he is unable to give any of them a good character in their pagan days, but we may make a genial allowance for this natural prejudice. Perhaps some of the

tribes, who were in closer touch with the fierce Finns and Scythians, had chiefs. Warfare is the great king-maker. Clearly the primitive and normal condition of a Slav community was exceptionally democratic.

The one definite institution of those early days that is known to us is the village-council; the institution that, being most deeply rooted in the heart of the Slav, has survived all autocracies by divine right and is familiar to-day to the whole world as the *Mir*. In ancient Slavdom the family was not the basis of the state. It was the state, or there was no state. An enlarged family—for the Slavs were a social and peaceful folk, and the young, founding a new family, clung to the home until it grew too small and some must wander afield—with cousins and children and grand-children, was the unit. The father had patriarchal power in his little colony, and when he departed the next oldest and wisest, a brother generally, took up the mild sway. Such families grew into villages or settlements in a few generations: not too large, for they lived on the land, yet compact, for there were plenty of human wolves east of the Carpathians. The Finns and other Asiatic tribes then filled, or roamed over, the vast area we now call Russia, and their code did not forbid the plunder of peaceful agriculturists. New colonies would be founded near the old and form villages. Out of this grew the *Mir*, the council in which the heads of the various households met to discuss and decide their common affairs.

No doubt some kind of chairman, some sage elder, would be chosen to preside, but it is clear from later practice and early comment that the council only acted upon a unanimous decision. That form of democracy had inconveniences, and, when Russia begins to have chroniclers, we find that unanimity was often secured, in a struggle, by pitching the minority into the river. That, at all events, was the original Slav custom. In theory even a majority could not tyrannise over a minority, much less a minority over a majority.

There would be frequent calls for these village-councils, as the land, on which most of them worked, was held in common. The head of a family owned only his house and enclosure, and was entitled to the harvest of his own labour. Then there were the rights of hunting in the forest and fishing in the rivers, the constant need to send out new colonies into the eastern wilderness, and especially the need to protect these new colonies from the wandering Asiatics. Flanked by the Carpathians, up which they could not spread, the tribes had to push steadily eastward, and the land was full of Asiatics, for the most part swift and ruthless horsemen. Co-operative defence was as necessary as co-operative counsel. The elders of many neighbouring villages met together in a larger council. There was a rough organisation of villages into a canton or *Volost*. Again there would probably be a president, and some think that a temporary chief or leader might be appointed in an emergency. But the Slavs had no hereditary rulers, no heads of the various tribes.

It also helped to sustain their democratic and communistic life that they had no priests. When priests later come upon the scene we shall find them very easily becoming the instruments of autocracy. We shall find, as is usual, the autocrat enriching the clergy, and the clergy discovering very impressive legends upon which he may establish his title to rule. In the pagan days of the Slavs there were no priests. The religion was the kind of primitive interpretation of nature which we always find at that level of mental development. The fire of the sun, the roar of the storm, the mysterious fertility of the earth, and the awful solemnity of the forest filled the child-like mind with wonder and dread. These things were felt to have life, a greater life than the puny and limited life of man; and the Slavs learned to bow down to the mighty spirits of the sun and the river and the wind and the earth. In particular they mourned the death of the sun, and celebrated joyously its annual re-birth

and restoration to full glory. But they had no priests. The heads of the family or the village performed the invocations and the sacrifices.

We must remember that even in these primitive and patriarchal arrangements there was the germ of autocracy. The eldest male was an autocrat. So absolute was his power that it is said that, when he died, wife and servants and horse had to follow him into the nether world. There seems here to be some confusion between different tribes, and there is evidence that, as among the Teutons, woman was generally respected; although there were ancient marriage-rites which suggest that at one time brides were stolen, and there was some practice of polygamy. However that may have been, the father of the household was an autocrat. We may plead only that he does not seem to have had, as in ancient Rome, power of life and death over his mate.

Such was the Slav people when we first discover them about the feet of the Carpathians. We have next to see how they became the Russian people, and how contact with civilisation and the growth of commerce modified their primitive communism.

The towering masses of the mountains checked the western expansion of the growing tribes. The Danube and the outposts of the Roman Empire—the fathers of the Rumans—shut them from the south. They were, as their number increased, bound to travel eastward, and their pioneers would discover that the central part of this mighty waste of eastern Europe was a particularly fertile region. From the foot of the Carpathians the land spreads in one of the largest plains of the world until it begins to rise toward the Ural mountains. Between the forests and bleak deserts of the north and the arid prairies of the south there are about a hundred and fifty million acres of “black earth,” as rich and fertile as any to be found, and south of these a hundred and fifty million acres of ordinary arable land. At the beginning of the Christian Era this great area would be

for the most part forest and morass, chequered by vast spaces of grassy plain, furrowed by broad rivers. The advancing colonies of the Slavs would discover the fertility of the soil and clear the ground for their corn and flax. The rivers gave them abundant fish. The forests swarmed with animals which afforded fur and meat, and the innumerable wild bees gave them stores of honey and wax for the long winters. Timber for the vapour-bath, which the Slav family seems already to have held in affection, lay on every side.

We find the Slavs especially spreading over this fertile heart of Russia about the eighth century of the present era. The land had long been held by the Finns and other Asiatic tribes when, in the third century, the Goths from the north fell upon them and drove them eastward. In the next century began that more formidable invasion from Asia which flung the Finns westward once more, and cast the Teutons upon the crumbling barrier of the Roman Empire. In the seventh century a new semi-civilised race, the Khazars, created an empire in south-eastern Russia, and drove the Asiatic Finns definitely to the north. It was at the close of these great movements that the Slavs moved rapidly over the fertile regions, between the land of the Finns and the southern kingdom of the Khazars. By the end of the eighth century the various Slav tribes had overrun the central part of western Russia.

The chief change which this migration caused in the life of the Slavs was the development of commerce. The great rivers of the land at once became the highways. Fishers as well as tillers of the soil, the Slavs would spread along the river-valleys, and the junctions of the rivers would naturally become the chief stations for what intercourse there was between the scattered villages. It is probable that in those days, when four-fifths of Russia was marsh and forest, the rivers were deeper than they are to-day. In our time they are for the most part shallow throughout the summer. Only in the spring, when the melting snows and rains flush the

broad channels, can large boats ascend them; and in the winter their frozen waters make good passage for the sledge. They became the high-roads of the new commonwealth, as the site of the older cities indicates when one glances at the map.

The Slavs had at that time probably little or no commerce. Some exchange, in kind, of fish, fur, honey, or corn might take place, but the resources were much the same for each village. In a short time after the settlement, however, a busy commercial system was inaugurated. Further north than the Finns were the Scandinavians, whose skill in metal-working was early developed. The Slavs traded with them for swords and spears and axes.

To the south, beyond the land of the Khazars, was the chief representative of civilisation in the west, the Byzantine (or Constantinopolitan) Empire. The northern tribes had now shattered Roman civilisation. The solid roads, the ample schools, the courts of law and municipal institutions established by the Romans in southern Europe were in complete decay, and four-fifths of the city of Rome was a charred and desolate wilderness. But the city which Constantine had founded on the Bosphorus, on the site of ancient Byzantium, lay out of the path of most of the barbarians, and the glory of Constantinople penetrated feebly into the distant forests of Russia. Its soldiers give us our first direct knowledge of the Slavs. Its merchants crossed the Black Sea, ascended the rivers of Russia, and spread before the eager eyes of the Slavs the silks and damasks and velvets, the shining metal-work and imitation-jewels, of the great "Tsargrad," or City of the Emperors. For these the Slavs could offer choice furs, for an enormous variety of fur-clad animals roamed their forests, as well as honey for the table and wax for the myriad tapers of the Byzantine churches.



VLADIMIR, GRANDE DUKE OF KIEFF, 980-1015
From an Ancient Banner

This busy commerce increased the importance of the settlements at the junction of the rivers. The evenness of the Russian plains, the great depth of soil or clay or glacial rubbish which uniformly covers the level strata below, make stone scarce in the greater part of the country then occupied by the Slavs. The ordinary village was a cluster of rude huts made of timber, with roofs of straw and mud. The towns also were of timber, and the accumulation of merchandise in them for traffic or fairs attracted the Asiatic marauders and increased the need of defence. The *Véché*, or democratic council of the district, grew in importance. Stockades of timber were erected. The Slavs, preferring peace as an agricultural people always does, were compelled to acquire some skill in the art of war.

Up to this point, the ninth century, the democracy of the Slavs was unaltered. The villagers were still free and independent men, while the peasantry over the rest of Europe were slaves or serfs. They regulated their own affairs in their *Mir*, recognised no central government, and paid tribute to neither chiefs nor priests. There was plenty of timber to heat their stoves during the long winter, and in

the summer the song and dance cheered the leisure from their labours. The plot of corn and the nests of the wild bees fed them; the plot of flax clothed them; and the winter harvest of furs, taken to the nearest town or fair, gave them many a tawdry luxury from the great cities of the south. Even in the towns they had still no money or currency. It was not until long afterwards that they cut disks of leather to serve the purpose of coinage. And even in the largest settlements or towns, such as Novgorod in the north and Kieff in the south, the democratic council, with unanimous decision, ruled their little affairs.

The defect of a primitive democracy of this nature soon became apparent. When the less peaceful neighbours who surrounded them on every side made an attack in force the isolated towns or communities could not defend themselves. The Khazars of the south overspread the nearest Slav districts and virtually enslaved them. The Scandinavian pirates of the Baltic pushed southward from the coast and wrung tribute from them. Either they must establish a compact military organisation, which their loose social texture did not easily permit, or they must hire defenders. They chose the latter course, not knowing, as we do, the ultimate price of engaging military chiefs.

The Scandinavians or Norsemen were as little pacific as any people of Europe, and their large frames and mighty weapons made of them formidable warriors. The Slavs were well acquainted with them. Somehow they had found the way across Russia to Constantinople, where their services were richly paid. From the southern shores of the Baltic they descended the northern rivers, and, crossing short stretches of country from river to river, they sailed down the broad waterways to the Black Sea. In the ninth century the Slavs were familiar with the tall, blue-eyed, blond-haired giants, with heavy spears and formidable axes. The Greeks of the south, who called them Varangians, clothed them in rich armour and made of them a special imperial guard. The

Slavs called them *Rus*, or “sea-farers” (if not “pirates”), a name they seem to have borrowed from the Finns.

This, at least, is what modern scholars make of the ancient legend, given in Nestor, that the men of Rus were foreign warriors invited by the Slavs to come and settle and undertake military service. The story runs that the Slavs of the north, wearied by invasion and pillage, invited these soldiers to defend them and share their goods. Some historians suspect that the legend may be invented by the vanity of the Slavs, who did not care to confess that the northerners had subdued them, but it is not unlikely that they were invited to defend the Slavs as they were invited to defend the Emperors of Constantinople. They had already shown the Slavs that those who did not pay voluntarily might have to pay involuntarily. As the democratic institutions of the Slavs survived most strongly in the city where the Norsemen first settled, Novgorod, it does not seem as if they settled in virtue of conquest. In western Europe the northerners, wherever they settled, established the feudal system, which never existed in Russia.

The story handed down in Russia—as the land of the Slavs soon came to be called—was that three brothers, Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor, answered the call of the Slavs, and, with their kinsmen and followers, settled on the Baltic coast. This is assigned to the year 862. From those seats they cannot have defended, or raised taxes from, much of Russia, but when Sineus and Truvor died Rurik went to settle in Novgorod. That city, about a hundred and twenty miles south of Petrograd, was the chief town in the northern part of the route from north to south. Rurik seems to have built a stone fort overlooking the timber settlement and been content with a kind of tribute for his military services. Novgorod remained until centuries afterwards a jealously democratic community.

The chief Slav town in the south was Kieff, and to this two of the unruly officers of Rurik’s troop, Askold and Dir,

led a company of the northerners. As is well known, these northern barbarians, once their barriers were broken down, wandered from end to end of Europe, and even to Carthage and Alexandria, terrifying the natives everywhere with their gigantic frames, their immense axes and swords, their guttural grunts, and their infinite capacity for liquor. The Slavs of Kieff, voluntarily or involuntarily, received the warriors, and a fresh colony of men of Rus was planted. They seem to have infected even some of the Slavs with their piratical spirit, for we read of them leading an expedition down the river and across the Black Sea against Constantinople itself.

The next step was to unite the towns of Novgorod and Kieff, and bring the remainder of the Slavs under the vague lordship of the Norsemen. This was done by Rurik's brother and successor, Oleg. The Teutonic rule of hereditary succession came in with the northerners, and the men of Novgorod seem to have had no further choice. Oleg assumed command, and he marched his troop against the smaller body of his countrymen in the south. Askold and Dir had, he said, acted without orders, and had usurped a lordship which belonged to his brother. Kieff had no more choice than Novgorod. Oleg found it a finer town than the settlement among the marshes of the north. He set up there his court of brawling, drunken warriors, and gradually induced all the tribes of the Slavs to pay him tribute and furnish soldiers. He was so successful that one year he embarked his men on two thousand boats, led them against the imperial city, and forced the Greeks themselves to add to his treasury.

The land of Rus was in those days not the spacious Russia of our time. It spread little eastward beyond Novgorod and Kieff, and it was bounded by the Khazars to the south and the Finns and Lithuanians to the north. But it was now Russia, a group of Slav tribes dominated by a military caste. It was, however, not yet a nation, certainly

not a monarchy. Tax-gathering and defence were the sole duties of the military chief, and as the Slavs had demanded the one they were not unprepared for the other. But the germ of autocracy was now planted in the soil, and the terrible events of the next few centuries would foster its baleful development.

CHAPTER II

THE DESCENT TO AUTOCRACY

It is sometimes said that the Slav people lost its democratic institutions because it was too pacific to defend them. It is true that an agricultural people would tend to be more pacific than hunting tribes like the Asiatics who surrounded them, but the native peacefulness of the Slav has probably been exaggerated. The early Russians seem to have been as much addicted to hunting and fishing as to tilling the soil, and the long winter, when all agricultural work was suspended for six months, would encourage the men to hunt the furry animals which abounded. Certain it is that both the monk Nestor and the Greek Emperor Maurice represent the primitive Slav as far from meek, and the chronicle informs us of constant and even deadly quarrelling.

The truth is that the democracy of the Slavs was too little developed. It was nearer akin to Anarchism than to Socialism, and the mind of the race was not as yet sufficiently advanced to grasp the political exigencies of the new situation. There was no national consciousness, and there could be no national defence and administration, because there was no nation; and a body of disconnected communities, scattered over a wide area, was in those days bound to succumb to marauders.

Russian historians of the official school eagerly point out that the situation plainly called for a monarchic institution, and that the monarchs rendered great service in welding the scattered communities into a nation. That they did unite the people and make the great Russia of to-day is obvious. It is equally obvious that, with rare exceptions, they did this in their own interest, and that in all cases they exacted a

reward which made serfs of the independent Slavs, sowed corruption amongst the rising middle class, and laid upon all an intolerable burden.

The period of the Norse warrior-chiefs and their descendants lasted about three centuries, and it fully exposes the fallacy of the monarchic principle. From being military servants the Norsemen rapidly became, as is customary, princes and parasites. As long as they discharged their duty, binding the communities and securing for them the necessary peace against external foes, this departure from the primitive democracy might be regarded as merely a regrettable necessity. But the sheep soon found that the protecting dog was first-cousin of the wolf, The principle of hereditary succession and the practice of providing for all sons and relatives soon led to a worse confusion than ever, and the distracted and weakened country was prepared for a foreign invasion. The long and sanguinary history of the descendants of Rurik may be briefly sketched before we see how the autocratic Mongols beat a path for the autocratic Tsars.

Oleg, who had united the Slav tribes under his ill-defined rule, was murdered in the year 945. To the north of Kieff a tribe known as the Drevlians ("tree-folk") wandered in the forests and paid a reluctant and uncertain tribute in furs. When Oleg tried to enforce his tax upon these, they captured him and tied him to two young trees in such fashion that, when the bent trees were released, Oleg's body was torn asunder. Oleg's widow, Olga, was a handsome Valkyrie of the masterful northern type, and she sent her armies to scatter the thunders of Thor among the wild foresters. It is said that she afterwards visited the Greek capital and was won to the Christian religion. She lives as St. Olga in the calendar of the Russian Church. Her successor involved the Russians in long and terrible wars with Constantinople, to enforce his ambitious claim to Bulgaria, and at his death the fierce feuds and murders of

his three sons plunged the country into a condition of bloody anarchy.

From this sordid strife of the shepherds whom the Slavs had hired to protect them there emerged in 972, over the corpses of his brothers, the blond beast St. Vladimir, the founder of Christianity in Russia. To what extent the lusty and lustful Prince Vladimir was, as the priestly chronicles maintain, transformed into a saint during his life we need not stay to consider. He seems to have been converted as superficially as his prototype, the Emperor Constantine. He was married to a beautiful nun who had been torn from a convent during one of the raids upon the Greek Empire, and whom he had taken from his murdered brother; and thousands of concubines relieved the comparative tedium of her companionship. The monastic chronicle tells us, in trite language, that he at length wearied of sin and sought more substantial spiritual aid than the paganism of his fathers could afford. Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity now offered their rival assurances to such a promising penitent, and it is said that Vladimir, with the broad-mindedness of a modern Japanese, sent his servants to inquire into the merits of the three religions. The rich ritual of the Greek Christians at Constantinople prevailed over the more sober practices of the Mohammedans and the less consoling assurances of the religion of the Old Testament, and Vladimir became a Christian and a saint.

But the chronicles also recount that Vladimir, whose principality of Russia was now so important that it could sustain wars with the Greeks, sought a matrimonial alliance with the royal house of Constantinople, and the prosy imagination of our time finds here a safer clue to the development. The Emperors Basil and Constantine replied that the hand of their sister Anne would be bestowed upon the experienced barbarian if he would consent to baptism; and Greek priests, who were apt also to be courtiers, were sent to expound to him the new religion. Vladimir readily

consented to pay so small a price for so great an honour and advantage. He threw into the river the idols of the Russian gods—these carven figures had been introduced since the settlement in Russia—and lent his energy and truculence to the extirpation of paganism. His people were driven in troops into the rivers, the Greek priests pronounced over them the sacred formula, and in a very short time the nature-gods of the old Slavs and Norsemen were turned into devils and the cross of Christ glittered above gilded domes in the wooden settlements of the land. Vladimir was so generous to the new clergy that he died in the odour of sanctity.

But the sins of Vladimir's pagan manhood lived after him. Seven sons, by various legitimate mothers, claimed the succession to his dominions, and there ensued such bloody anarchy as the handsome Teutonic princes, no matter what gods they worshipped, knew how to create. As usual the fitter to survive in such a world—the more lusty and less scrupulous—emerged from the struggle, and Prince Iaroslaf, one of the heroes of early Russian history, reunited the various regions under his rule.

Iaroslaf has been compared, not quite ineptly, to Charlemagne. From Novgorod, which his father had left him, he cut his way to Kieff, and definitely made the southern city the metropolis of the country. Kieff was enriched and adorned with a splendour which, in the mind of the Russians, rivalled that of Constantinople. The southern rivers now bore thousands of Greek artists and architects, musicians and scholars, priests and courtiers, to the new capital of barbarism. Four hundred churches soon shone like gilt mushrooms in the summer sun, and the grateful clergy discovered that a monarchy which rested on a divine foundation in Constantinople could hardly have an inferior basis in Kieff. Iaroslaf, it is true, was not a monarch in title, Russia had no constitution or political organisation. It was still semi-barbaric in culture and judicial procedure. The

duel, the ordeal, and the payment of blood-money still flourished, and literacy existed only in the form of feeble lamps here and there in the vast darkness. It must be remembered that Constantinople itself was, with all its splendour of gold and mosaics and jewels and silks, half barbaric in its moral complexion. The most sordid and brutal crimes disgraced its palace-life on the shores of the Sea of Marmora, and the most revolting penalties of vice and crime were publicly inflicted. The discovery by modern apologists that there was a glow-worm here and there does not relieve the terrible gloom of the Dark Ages.

In such an age, amidst so scattered and helpless a people, Iaroslaf needed no kingly title to enable him to act as monarch. To sustain the new splendour of Kieff and his court—his sister and daughters married into the royal families of Poland, Norway, France, and Hungary—a larger tribute from the people was needed, and it was not meekly solicited. Russian historians of the old school have dilated upon the magnificence with which Iaroslaf invested his capital and the measure of prestige which Russia gained in the eyes of the world. They do not point out that this concentration of light at Kieff and the court darkened the life of the Russian people. For the first time we now encounter the odious name for a child of the soil *moujik*. Foreigners who lightly repeat that name to-day are unaware that it is in origin a term of disdain. It means “mannikin.” The warriors in glittering armour or shining silks who gathered about the court were the prince’s “men.” The vast mass of the people, whose labour ultimately paid for this magnificence, were “mannikins.”

The burden fell most heavily upon the scattered peasantry. Not only were the “legitimate” taxes wrung from them, but the military leaders exacted tribute to support their own splendour and pleasure. The feudal system, which now prevailed over the remainder of Europe, was not introduced. The land was still the possession of the people,

and military chiefs remained about the court instead of raising, as they did where stone abounded, massive provincial castles from which they might enslave the peasantry and even defy the ruler. But in their excursions the soldiers behaved as wantonly as feudal barons of the west, and the people sank under the burden. Slavery still flourished in Christendom, and many a Slav found his way to the distant market at Constantinople. Moreover, under the degenerate Greek influence there was introduced the practice of flogging and torture which the rough chivalry of the northerners had hitherto avoided.

To say that the unity of faith, the protection against invaders, and the introduction of art and a small amount of mediocre culture compensate for these evils is an historical mockery. The death of Iaroslaf at once revealed the insecurity and selfishness of the regime he had established. It was followed by two hundred years of civil warfare and murderous confusion. Eighty-three struggles which seem worthy of the name of wars devastated Russia during those two centuries, and over the enfeebled frontiers the waiting tribes repeatedly poured while the guardians of the Russian people slew each other for their petty principalities. Sons, legitimate and illegitimate, abounded in that world of blond warriors, and the successful chief provided for each out of his dominion. Titles were disputed, or the old title of the longer sword was boldly advanced. A dozen large principalities were carved out of the principedom of Iaroslaf, and fragments of these were constantly detached by heredity and restored by war.

It is not my intention to follow the grisly chronicles over this prolonged anarchy and select for admiration the heroic butcheries of some strong-armed soldier. For our purpose it suffices to notice that the mass of the Russian people were, as a rule, the passive and suffering spectators of this brutal pandemonium. During the summers they sowed and gathered their corn and flax, and the long winters occupied

them with the making of clothes and the quest of fur. The Mir was still the centre of every village. But a tithe of its produce had now to go to sustain this costly petty monarchy, a tithe to support the whitened monasteries and gold-domed churches, and a tithe to repair the damage when the tornado of civil war or some fierce band of Asiatics had passed over their district. There were, we shall see, provinces of Russia where the larger intelligence of the townsmen saw that the proper thing to do was to form a strong republic, armed in its own defence. These still hated "tyranny" and sustained the old tradition of the race. But the greater part of the Russian people were not sufficiently developed to perceive this, or were too scattered to achieve it, and they sank under the military power they had invited to serve them.

A few pages borrowed from the story of this dark period of anarchy will suffice to explain how Russia was prepared for the later schemes of the Moscovites. Kieff remained "the mother of Russian cities," and it was natural that, as its princes founded petty princedoms here and there for their descendants, the more ambitious of these should invent a title to the rule of the metropolis itself or found rival cities. One of the chief of these new principalities was Suzdal, on the Volga and the Oka. Here, at the extremity of the Russia of the time, a large dominion was created out of the marshes and forests, and braced by incessant conflicts with the neighbouring Finns. George Dolgoruki, who, after failing to get Kieff, had founded this principality, regarded it as in an especial sense his own creation and possession, and his monarchic sentiment was strengthened.

But the democratic tradition was not wholly obliterated, and the military caste itself—the *boyars*, or captains of the troops—formed some check upon the will of the prince. George's successor, therefore, Andrew Bogolyubski, an astute and ambitious man, made a new capital of a small town or village called Vladimir. Andrew possessed the

supposed miraculous painting of the face of Christ, which had once been the great treasure of Constantinople, and he professed that this gave him some special measure of divine guidance. He pitched his camp near the village of Vladimir, and shortly afterward the people of Suzdal heard with consternation that he had been divinely directed to convert the little settlement into his capital. Andrew had the great advantage of being extremely pious and generous to the clergy, as nearly every great Russian adventurer has been. The priests warmly supported him, and Vladimir soon grew into a city.

Kieff still had an immeasurably greater splendour, and was in closer touch with Constantinople. Andrew raised a large army and led it south against the metropolis. A three days' siege was followed by three days of such pillage that Kieff lost forever its supremacy. Even the churches and monasteries were looted, and the golden treasures of both palace and cathedral were carried off to enrich the aspiring city of Vladimir. Flushed with this and other triumphs Andrew then turned his arms against the republic of Novgorod, where the old democratic spirit was best preserved, and, after fierce fighting, compelled it to accept a prince of his own nomination. He extended his rule in other directions, setting a conspicuous example of autocracy and ambition to the Princes of Moscow who would later issue from his blood. But Russia was not yet reduced to the state of servility which Andrew's design of supremacy required. In 1174 his powerful boyars rebelled and assassinated him, and the oppressed people rose in turn and vented their democratic sentiment in the pillage and slaughter of the rich.

This is but one outstanding figure amidst the host of brutal soldiers or scheming princes who fill the chronicle of the time with blood. It is a wearisome repetition of the same process. A strong or unscrupulous man unites a large part of Russia under his sway, then a group of less strong, but not

less ambitious, sons and grandsons fight for the spoil over the helpless bodies of the peasantry. Those who succeed must reward their boyars and the clergy, and the land of Russia passes more and more into the hands of large proprietors and is worked by slaves. "If you want the honey, you must kill the bees," was the characteristic remark of one of these descendants of Rurik, as he despatched his victims; and the little restraint which their new faith imposed upon them may be gathered from the flippant retort of another princeling, who was accused of breaking an oath solemnly made over a cross: "It was only a little cross."

There were, as I said, northern parts where the democratic evolution proceeded healthily. Novgorod, a large northern city of a hundred thousand souls, rising in the centre of a beautiful plain fringed by forests, had become a republic with wide territory and three hundred thousand subjects beyond the rude defences of the city. There is a legend that it had rebelled even against Rurik, the first Scandinavian adventurer. It accepted, of its own choice, what had come to be called princes, but it endorsed or rejected them, and curtailed their powers, with a good deal of civic pride and independence. "Come and rule us yourself or else we will choose a prince," the citizens said to a Grand Prince of Kieff who ordered them to receive his nominee. To another Grand Prince, who would send his son to govern them, a later generation of citizens replied: "Send him—if he has a head to spare." They had even an independent Church and elected their archbishop. The old democratic *Véché*, or council of citizens, was the central institution of the city, and the great bell summoned all to the market-square whenever some business of importance called for a decision. The neighbouring republics of Pskoff and Viatka were hardly less faithful to the democratic tradition. While these territories were the farthest from Constantinople, they were nearest to Germany and the Baltic, and they were