



**BEHIND
THE VEIL**
AT THE
RUSSIAN COURT
(ANNOTATED)

CATHERINE RADZIWILL

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Behind the Veil at the Russian Court (Annotated)

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Enriched Edition. An Eye Witness Account of Palace Intrigues and Gossips by a Princess

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Greta Somerwick

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BOOK I. 1855-1894

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CHAPTER I

NICHOLAS I. DIES

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In the vast halls of the Winter Palace, on the 18th of February—the 2nd of March according to the Gregorian Calendar^[1]—of the year 1855, a great crowd was waiting amidst a profound silence and intense grief for news it expected as much as it dreaded.

In the large square in front of the big building which had seen enacted within its walls so many momentous events in the history of Russia and the life of its Tsars, another crowd was gathered. The whole of the long night it had stood there in the snow and cold, with its eyes fixed upon a corner window—that of the room where all knew their Sovereign lay dying. Women were seen weeping, for, in spite of what was said abroad, Nicholas was beloved by his people, and they felt that his demise, occurring as it did at a critical moment in the destinies of his Empire, was an event fraught with mighty consequences.

Inside the Palace all the dignitaries of the Court and the Military Authorities, as well as those of the Civil Service, also were keeping watch: a sad vigil, which already had lasted two days—days full of anxiety both for the present and for the future. From time to time a door was opened to let in a new arrival, or to give passage to a messenger from the sick-room. At once the messenger would be surrounded by eager questioners, but all that he could say was that, so far, there had been no change, though the doctors had not given up all hope.

Inside the dying monarch's bedroom his family and a few trusted friends were gathered round the small camp bed upon which he was lying, fighting for breath. The Empress was sitting beside her Consort, holding his hand in hers. At the foot of the bed the Heir to the Throne was standing, his eyes fixed upon his father, and with tears slowly rolling down his cheeks. They all waited—waited for the last words of the mighty Sovereign for whom the gates of eternity were already opened. They all hoped for a sign, a farewell, a recommendation as to what was to be done when he would be no more; and in this sad watch they forgot time and aught else, even the news from the distant Crimea, where Russian soldiers were defending their country's flag against an angry foe.

But the dying man had not forgotten. Slowly he raised himself upon his hard pillow and beckoned to him one of his trusted friends; with gasping breath he asked him: "Any news from Sebastopol^[2]?" and when answered that none had come, "A messenger must have arrived this morning; go and ask what news he has brought, and tell me—tell me everything."

The friend went out; when he returned, his face was white, because he knew that the message which he brought was one of woe. But one thing he could tell, and that was that Sebastopol still held out, and that it could resist longer than the enemy expected. That he told. Nicholas listened in silence, and then in a clear voice, such as had not been heard since the beginning of his short illness, he said:

"I send them my thanks, my blessing, my gratitude; tell them so."

The Heir to the Throne came closer to his father, and knelt beside him.

“Hear me, my son,” spoke the dying man. “You are going to be a great Emperor to-morrow. Love your people, do for them that which I was not able to do; conclude peace if you can, but an honourable peace. Do not trust to Austria, and do not forget its ingratitude for the help which I gave it in 1848. Austria is our enemy, I see it too late.... Love your mother, reverence her always, and do not allow your dreams to take the upper hand. A Sovereign has no right to dream[\[19\]](#). He can only work, and endure. I know you want to give the serfs their liberty; I have wished it too, and you will find among my papers documents concerning this subject; but, my son, take care: a nation easily abuses liberty if granted to it too soon. Do not estrange yourself from the nobility: it is the strength of Russia, together with our Holy Church; and remember that if you show yourself too great a Liberal, you will only create difficulties for yourself, and you will not die in your bed as I do; you will fall under an assassin’s knife.”

Profound silence reigned in the room after these solemn words had been spoken; the Empress was quietly crying, all the Imperial Family stood gathered round her. Nicholas I. scanned all these sorrowful faces, and sighed as if not seeing among them one whom he expected to be there, and from his parched lips came out one word, a single name: “Barbara.” Then the Empress got up, and going out of the room, returned soon in company with a woman whom she was holding by the hand. She led her to her husband’s bedside, saying softly: “Bid good-bye to him.”

“*Merci, madame,*” was the broken reply, as, bending down, Mademoiselle Nélidoff kissed the Emperor’s hand, sobbing heartbrokenly as she did so; and he repeated the words after her, “*Merci, Charlotte,*” thus calling the wife of his youth by the name she bore in that past but not forgotten

time when he first knew her, before the Crown of All the Russias had been put upon her head.

And that was all. The dying man only spoke to utter words of thanks to the faithful servants who surrounded him, and then his voice was heard no more, save to pray to the God to Whom he was about to give up his soul.

A priest was called, who gave him a last blessing, and then calmly, fearlessly, clinging to his wife's hand and to a crucifix which he pressed upon his breast, Nicholas I. breathed his last.

The doors of the bedroom were thrown open, and Alexander II. appeared upon the threshold as he passed from the chamber of death into the Throne Room, where his courtiers were gathered. To them he said with a broken voice:

"Au nom de mon père je vous remercie pour vos services, messieurs." And later on, when the emotion of the first moment had passed, it was noticed and commented upon that the first words of the new Sovereign to his people had been uttered in French, as if to lay claim to the tendencies of which he had been suspected during his father's reign.

At the same moment the large window opening on to the balcony overlooking the square in front of the Winter Palace was unclosed. An aide-de-camp general appeared, and addressing the crowd standing outside: "Our Most Gracious Sovereign the Emperor Nicholas Paulovitch is dead," he said in a loud voice; "let us pray for his soul!"

The crowd fell upon their knees, and the chant of the solemn service rose and fell in harmonious cadence amidst the noises of the street, which were hushed as soon as the sad strains were heard.

So began a new reign.

The one that had thus come to a tragic close had been one of the most eventful in Russian history. Nicholas I. was unmistakably a great Sovereign, the last one of that autocratic type that had given to the world Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and, in a certain sense, Catherine II.

He had ascended the Throne surrounded by solemn circumstances, amidst almost overwhelming difficulties, with his Empire in the throes of a rebellion that had for its leaders some of the greatest nobles in Russia. The time was not yet forgotten when these nobles had dethroned their emperors, and some of the assassins of Paul were still alive to encourage by their example those inclined to follow in their footsteps.

Many, even amongst the people, did not believe that Alexander I. had died in Taganrog; many others did not recognise the abdication and surrender of his right to the Crown of the Grand Duke Constantine in favour of his brother. They looked upon Nicholas as a usurper. When the standard of rebellion was raised during that eventful month of December, 1825, it was the conspirators who were supposed to be fighting for the right cause and the supporters of Nicholas for the wrong one. As for the people, they understood so little what was going on that they believed the famous Constitution, about which so many were speaking, was the work of the Emperor Constantine, as he was supposed to be.

When the public anxiety and emotion in St. Petersburg was at its height, when half of the troops had already gone over to the mutineers, Nicholas I. showed of what stuff he was made. Entrusting his wife and children to a few trusted followers, he appeared alone and unarmed on the square in

front of the Winter Palace, and in a thunderous voice commanded the crowd to fall upon their knees and obey his orders. And such is the strength of a really strong personality, in alliance with a fearless disposition, that he was instantly obeyed, and soon an immense "Hurrah!" greeted him from those same people who, a few short moments before, had been ready to tear him to pieces.

In this manner was the rebellion crushed at once.

Its leaders were ruthlessly punished. A Prince Troubetzkoy, a member of the illustrious family of Volkhonsky, a Muravieff apostle, the noblest blood in Russia, saw themselves condemned and treated like vulgar criminals. Siberia witnessed a long procession of chained convicts, reminding it of the times when Menschikoff, Biren, and many others expiated the misfortune of having fallen under Imperial disgrace. Women gave a touching example of devotion to their husbands and to their duty. The Princess Troubetzkoy, the Princess Volkhonsky, as well as the wives of other conspirators, claimed as a favour the right to share their husbands' exile and prison. There, in the wilds of the Siberian woods, they gave birth to children, who, later on, were to be restored to the fortunes of their fathers and to their rank. And, strange to say, no word of rebellion was said, no murmur was heard; they all suffered bravely, thus showing that they were worthy of the great names which they bore.

But this conspiracy of the 14th of December, as it is still called, embittered the character of the Emperor Nicholas. It affected, also, the gentle Empress, who contracted, from sheer fright for her dear ones, a nervous affliction, which caused perpetual trembling of her head, of which she never was cured.

The dreams which every new Sovereign indulges in when he ascends his Throne were rudely dispelled from the very first, and since that sad day the spectre of revolution never left the Emperor's side. It influenced all his actions, and it imparted to him a hardness absolutely foreign to his original nature. He firmly believed himself to have been designed by Providence to crush revolution, and he devoted all his energies to that task.

Later events transpired which encouraged him still more in that decision and confirmed his belief. He found himself confronted, immediately after a long and difficult war with Turkey, by the Polish rebellion. That was a bitter blow to his pride and heart. He had loved the Polish army, had firmly thought he could do away with the prejudices that existed against him and his nation in Poland; he had had himself crowned in Warsaw, and had showered graces and gifts upon his Polish subjects. All that was forgotten; he found himself surrounded by traitors, even among those whom he thought he could trust, if only on account of the old French proverb: "*Noblesse oblige*." And they had turned against him—those whom he had loved. Prince Sanguszko, who had been his personal aide-de-camp; Prince Adam Tsartoryski, who had been the intimate friend and confidant of Alexander I.—they all went over to the mutineers. Personal ambition had a great deal to do with this action. It is said, even, that Prince Tsartoryski addressed himself to Nicholas I., asking him to recognise him as Viceroy of Poland, in return for which he would undertake to put an end to the rebellion. The message did not reach the Emperor, as the person who was asked to transmit it categorically refused to do so. One can well fancy in what spirit it would have been received had it come to the Emperor's ears. But all the nobleness in the character of Nicholas I. revolted at this base ingratitude, and, as a result of these blows dealt him by fate, he became a hard and embittered man, relentless

sometimes, stern always. They say he rarely smiled, and yet his was a gentle nature, full of kindness and generosity such as is rarely met with in a Sovereign, and profoundly unselfish.

All those who knew him well, his family, his entourage, his children, his servants, they all would have given up their lives for him with joy. No one ever appealed to him for relief in vain. He loved to do good, to help others. The only things which he could not forgive, because he despised them, were ingratitude, or want of self-respect. He had principles, and what is more, he lived up to them. He never would consent to any compromise, and this perhaps was the primary cause of the unfortunate Crimean War.

He had hurt the vanity of Napoleon III. by refusing him the title of *Monsieur mon frère*, and so declining to admit him as an equal to the circle of European Sovereigns.

He sent his troops to help the Austrian Government to subdue the revolt of the Magyars because he believed it was his duty to do so, without any illusion as to the reward which he would get for this act of chivalry.

Talking of this reminds me of an episode connected with that event. When Nicholas had decided to send his troops to Hungary, he announced his resolution in the town of Moscow, at the Kremlin Palace, to the nobility and the notables of the ancient capital. His words were received with immense enthusiasm, and a loud "Hurrah!" was the reply to them. The Emperor looked round him, and suddenly noticed that one of his personal friends, the same man who seven years later was to bring him for the last time before he died news of Sebastopol, that that man alone kept silent and in the background. When all was over and the Sovereign had retired to his own rooms, he had him called and asked him:

“Why did you not shout ‘Hurrah!’ with the rest?” “Because I was thinking of the day when Austria would astonish your Majesty with its ingratitude,” was the unexpected reply. Nicholas sighed. “You may be right,” he said, after a pause, “but I haven’t sent my troops to help Austria, I have sent them to help a brother Sovereign.”

This anecdote gives the key to the character of this extraordinary monarch, the Sir Galahad of crowned heads, who up to the last moment would not believe that England and France would fight against him for the interests of Turkey, and who never wavered in his trust in Queen Victoria, whom he immensely admired since the visit which he had paid to her at Windsor when she was quite a young wife, and whose portrait adorned his writing-table to the last days of his life. Intensely as he hated English politicians and politics, he made a distinction between the Queen and her Ministers, and whilst distrusting the latter, had the utmost respect for the former, though at the same time not being able to understand the mechanism of constitutional government, nor how impossible it was for an English Sovereign to go against her Parliament or the opinion of her responsible advisers. He attributed to timidity on the part of Queen Victoria the failure of his attempt to come to a direct understanding with her, as he had tried to establish by means of a correspondence, which had not relieved the tension existing between the Court of St. James and that of St. Petersburg in regard to the Eastern Question; and anyone who would have told him that his personality was not sympathetic to the Queen would have profoundly surprised him. In his opinion all Sovereigns ought to like one another, and prejudice in regard to each other was a thing he would not admit, any more than he would admit the right of intruders, such as, in his opinion, were Napoleon III. and Louis Philippe, to hold their own against monarchs “by the grace of God.”

Nicholas I. has been accused of being narrow-minded. This was not the case at all, but he was extremely firm in his opinions, and not empty of prejudices. His hatred of revolution was keen, because he held that one never knew where it would lead to, nor how it would end. His mother, the Empress Marie Feodorovna, had brought him up to feel a horror and execration of the French Revolution, and that mother he worshipped. She had been a visitor at the Court of France during the reign of Louis XVI., and had formed an enthusiastic friendship for the unfortunate Marie Antoinette, who had welcomed so heartily the Comte and Comtesse du Nord during their journey to France. The fate of the hapless Queen was a frequent subject of conversation among the Imperial Family in St. Petersburg, and it is no wonder that it excited hatred against all the instruments of it. Moreover, the French emigrants had been very well received by the Empress Catherine, and they had rapidly spread their prejudices against the new ideas among the Russian aristocracy, and at that time it was the aristocracy alone who ruled public opinion. It upheld all Nicholas's prejudices, even outdid them, and certainly no one was bold enough to tell him that they were, perhaps, stretched too far, and that the world must advance on the road of progress and liberty.

But the Emperor, in spite of this shortcoming of his otherwise powerful mind, was fully aware that his country ought to follow to a certain point the development of science, literature and politics of the rest of Europe. What he wanted was to regulate that development, and there was his error. The human mind cannot be treated like a soldier at drill. It must be left a certain latitude of criticism and liberty, if only to neutralise its efforts at independence. This the Emperor did not admit. He considered literary men in the light of pests, and was sensible to the appreciations of the press when these were directed against his Government, whilst totally indifferent when they touched his own person.

Curious mixture of haughtiness and sensitiveness, which no one who did not know him well could understand.

In his private life Nicholas I. was, above all things, a gentleman. His wife he loved tenderly, and always and upon every occasion treated her with the utmost respect. He was not a ladies' man like his son. Indeed the only *liaison* which he had, and which was known, and not merely suspected in Society, was his love for Mademoiselle Nélidoff, a maid of honour of the Empress, who had succeeded in captivating him by the cleverness of her mind, and who loved him on her side as few men have ever been loved by women.

Mademoiselle Nélidoff was a remarkable person. Few have been gifted with such tact, such intelligence, such penetration, and such a spirit of self-sacrifice as she showed during the whole of her long life. Her intimacy with the Emperor lasted many years, and never once did she allow herself to fail in the least mark of respect towards the Empress, or to assert herself in any way. She was always humble in her demeanour towards the latter, always submissive, never aggressive in the least. Nicholas used to come to her rooms every afternoon to talk over the events of the day; but the most bitter enemy of Mademoiselle Nélidoff could not say that she ever mixed herself up in politics, or tried to play a rôle in Society, as many so circumstanced would have done. She maintained the dignity of her womanhood so well that the world, whilst it knew, yet could not affirm that she had won the affections of her Sovereign, who, in his turn, never showed to her in public any particular attention. The only time that he ever did so was at the very beginning of their *liaison*, during a review in the park of Tsarskoye Selo. The Empress, as usual in such cases, drove in front of the troops, in an open carriage with her lady-in-waiting, who happened on that day to be Mademoiselle Nélidoff. The Emperor, who was on horseback,

accompanied the carriage, and with an affectation totally foreign to his usual strict observance of the conventions of life, remained the whole time beside the carriage, and bending from his saddle, talked with the young maid of honour, who in her turn became white and red, and appeared to be very unhappy. The Empress, too, was quite upset, and an eye-witness of this occurrence related afterwards that she was with difficulty restraining her tears. But apart from this single occasion, never once did Nicholas show in public that he was interested in the charm of character and conversation of Mademoiselle Nélidoff.

The latter contrived to keep the good graces of her Imperial mistress, and ended by winning her heart by her tact and submissiveness. And when the Emperor was dying, it was the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna herself who had the generosity to bring to her husband's bedside, for a last farewell, the woman who had loved him so well.

Mademoiselle Nélidoff never appeared in Society after the Emperor's death. She continued living at the Winter Palace, and went on fulfilling her duties to the Dowager Empress until at length the latter died. Then gradually the name of the woman who had won the heart of Nicholas I. was forgotten. She retired entirely from the world, and, save a very few chosen friends, never received anyone, or ever spoke about the past. The silence of the grave closed upon her long before she was dead. Her constant visitors were her brother-in-law, the husband of her deceased sister, and his two sons, whom she dearly loved, but even with them she remained silent as to the great drama of her life. No word ever passed her lips concerning those past years of her youth, no confidence was exchanged with anyone as to what she had felt whilst her romance had lasted. She died at a very advanced age a year or two before the closing of last century, after having burned all the papers or letters which

she possessed. The newspaper notices that she had passed away was the first intimation received by many of those to whom her name was familiar from childhood, of the fact that she had not long before passed from the land of the living to that of eternal peace and rest.

CHAPTER II

ALEXANDER II. ON THE THRONE

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At the time he ascended the Throne Alexander II. was very popular. People had begun to get tired of the despotic rule of his father, and the Crimean War[3] with its loss of life and prestige and the disasters which it had brought upon the nation had, as is usual in such cases, aroused discontent against the existing order of things. Many Russians who had lived abroad, and witnessed the perturbations occasioned in the whole of Europe by the Revolution of 1848, held the opinion that in Russia, too, something ought to be done to meet the aspirations of the intelligent classes of Society towards an improvement in the Government. The great qualities of the Emperor Nicholas were not questioned, but it was felt that a monarch could not be everywhere, nor see for himself all the needs of the nation, and that with a Sovereign less conscientious than he was a system of absolutism such as he had maintained was not possible. The Heir to the Throne, on the contrary, was credited with the desire to govern more or less according to constitutional principles, to try and introduce into Russia some of the reforms that had gradually permeated the rest of Europe. It was known that his great ambition was to emancipate the serfs, that he was humane, kind, and not the partisan of a tyrannical inquisition as to the opinions of his future subjects. As is usual in Royal Houses, the Emperor and his son had been at variance on many points, and all those who were tired of Nicholas looked towards his successor to reform the many abuses that were known to exist. The Crimean War had been opposed by him, and this alone would have made him popular; and yet, when the event dreaded by a few and desired by many had taken place,

when the remains of Nicholas had been laid to rest with those of his ancestors in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, it was felt that somehow a great light had gone out, and that it remained a question whether the critical condition of the country could be bettered by the efforts of his successor. Alexander II. also had enemies; these for the most part were men in power whom it was difficult to remove at such a moment of national peril, and between them and his own personal friends, who wanted to replace them at once, the new Sovereign found himself in a most difficult and embarrassing position, from whence he had not sufficient strength of will to extricate himself.



EMPEROR NICHOLAS I. EMPEROR ALEXANDER II.

The young Emperor had a great defect, which, to a certain extent, is inherited by his grandson, the present Tsar, and that is a lack of firmness and endurance in his character. He was easily influenced, easily led, and apt to be easily discouraged by the slightest difficulty. Exceedingly sensitive,

he never forgave an injury or pardoned a criticism. At heart he was really more autocratic than his father, but, having been brought up with immense care and by people imbued with Liberalism as it was understood at that time in Russia, he exhibited a curious mixture of despotic and revolutionary ideas. Some may think it anomalous to apply the term “revolutionary” to a Tsar of Russia, but was not the emancipation of the serfs a revolution? Not in its fact, but in the way in which it was conducted. Nicholas had dreamed about it, but he had realised that a reform of such magnitude could not be rushed; he saw in it dangers of further conspiracies against the Throne, such as that of December 14, but of greater possibilities, because they would not be confined to the upper classes, but would be the revolt of unknown forces of the nation against an authority which for ages had refused to acknowledge their existence.

Alexander II. was devoid of the power of realising the consequences of events, and only gave his attention to the difficulties of the moment. There was in him a strange blending of superstition and recklessness which he never lost during his whole life. He was humane, and at the same time could become intensely cruel; he was vindictive—the greatest defect that a Sovereign can have—and his vindictiveness persisted throughout his life. He was intelligent, cultured, but not clever; he had none of the qualities indispensable to a great statesman, and depended for his opinions to a large extent on those by whom he was surrounded, and of these the men who flattered him most had the greatest influence. He was exceedingly vain, and the many mistakes that marked the close of his reign arose in part from wounded vanity. He had principles; indeed, it would have been impossible for his father’s son to be without them, but he did not live up to them, and at times he could act like the most unprincipled of men. Few

understood him, and it is doubtful whether he understood himself, but he had full consciousness of his power, and of all that it gave him, whilst not overburthened with the sense of the responsibility that it entailed, which Nicholas I. had felt so acutely. With several of his father's failings, he had none of the grand traits of the latter's character; he was the type of an absolute Sovereign, but not that of an autocrat; he could neither punish nor forgive with dignity, and though he gave easily, yet his was not a generous nature.

In the year of grace 1855, however, few were acquainted with the character of Alexander II. That character, indeed, did not reveal itself in its true light until after the disappointments of his reign had done their work. At first the whole nation gave itself up to the task of helping the Emperor, and when he received the solemn oath of allegiance to his Crown from the principal dignitaries of the Empire, on the morrow of his father's death, he was greeted by them with very sincere enthusiasm. The ceremony took place in the private chapel of the Winter Palace, in the presence of the whole Imperial Family, including the Empress Mother, who with indomitable courage was present in order to support her son. She was dressed all in white, in accordance with the Russian convention, which forbids the wearing of mourning at the accession festivities of a Sovereign. The young Empress, too, appeared in a white dress, unadorned, however, with a single jewel, and it was noticed by everybody with what reverence she approached her mother-in-law and kissed the latter's hand, bending so low that her knees almost touched the ground.

The Emperor every now and then wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, and after the ceremony addressed a few words to the members of his military household, thanking them for their past services and asking them to show to him the same devotion that they had shown to his father. He

then also solemnly transmitted to them the touching message of gratitude which Nicholas had caused to be inserted in his will, and which was addressed by him to all those who had held office under him. He added a few words of his own expressing the hope that peace, *honourable peace*, would soon be concluded. The speech was delivered in Russian, so as to be understood by all. It was very favourably received both at home and abroad, and the European Bourses rose in consequence. The general situation, however, was still felt to be full of danger and anxiety; everyone knew that the task before the new Sovereign was arduous in the extreme, and that it was impossible for him to begin anything in the way of interior reforms until peace had been concluded.

At length the Congress met in Paris, thus increasing the prestige of the Napoleonic dynasty which Nicholas had always refused to acknowledge, and though Alexander II. did not like him, it was Count Orloff, the trusted and intimate friend of his father, who was appointed by him as his representative at this assembly, upon which the fate of Russia depended.

Count—afterwards Prince—Orloff was one of the curious figures of the previous reign. He was a stern old man, even more autocratic perhaps than his master, but kind at heart, and always careful not to abuse the power which he wielded. He was the head of the famous “Third Section,” as it was called, or the Department of the Secret Police, of the Empire, and had the right to seek his Sovereign’s presence unannounced whenever he thought it necessary. At that time it was usual for Court society to carry all its family grievances to the foot of the Throne, and to ask the Emperor to pronounce a final verdict upon them. That verdict always depended on the report made by the head of the Third Section[\[4\]](#), and to Count Orloff’s credit it must be said that

he never profited by the family secrets with which his office had made him familiar. He was the type of an old Russian *grand seigneur* or *barine*, as the Russian peasantry say, with a dignity that never left him for a single moment, even in the most trying circumstances; a man who fearlessly expressed his opinion to his Emperor as well as to those with whom he came into contact in his official position. He was intensely feared, but at the same time immensely respected. The nation knew that its honour was safe in his hands, and he was perhaps the only man in Russia with sufficient authority to sign the Treaty of Paris; the humiliation of which would never have been forgiven to anyone else.

Before he left for France he was received in audience by the young Empress Marie Alexandrovna, and it was related then that she asked him to notice particularly the Empress Eugénie and her manners and dresses. The old man replied brusquely that he was not sent to the French Court to pay any attention to a crowned adventuress, and, added he, "*Vous devriez, madame, être la dernière à vous intéresser à ce monde là!*"

Of course, I do not vouch for the truth of the anecdote, but it was related everywhere at the time.

Count Orloff received the title of Prince on his return from Paris, and died not very long afterwards. He left an only son, who for a great number of years represented his Government on the banks of the Seine, under the Third Republic. His widow, *née* Gérebtsoff, an exceedingly clever woman, gifted with a very caustic wit, which made her rather disliked in St. Petersburg, retired to Florence, where she possessed a splendid palace, and passed her life there in quasi royal state. She was a favourite with the Emperor Nicholas, who appreciated her austerity of principles and

Feodorovna of Russia. She later took the Russian Orthodox faith and was known in Russia by her imperial name.

[37](#) The “Khodinsky catastrophe” was a tragic stampede at the Khodynka Field in Moscow in 1896 during festivities for Nicholas II’s coronation. It caused many deaths and injuries and became a major public relations disaster for the new imperial couple.

[38](#) A morganatic marriage was one between people of unequal rank, in which the lower-ranked spouse and any children usually did not receive the higher spouse’s titles or succession rights. In royal families it was a common way to describe marriages considered dynastically unequal.

[39](#) This refers to the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Borodino (1812), a major engagement in Napoleon’s invasion of Russia. Such centenary commemorations were often marked by official ceremonies and public remembrance.

[40](#) The main imperial residence in St. Petersburg, used for major court ceremonies and official receptions. It later became closely associated with the Russian monarchy and, after 1917, with revolutionary events.

[41](#) The last Emperor of Russia, who reigned from 1894 until his abdication in 1917. The passage refers to his early public statement rejecting any role for the zemstvos in government.

[42](#) A senior female court office in imperial Russia, responsible for supervising the Empress’s household and formal attendance. In this chapter, the post is held by Princess Mary Galitzine.

[43](#) The Duma was the Russian legislative assembly created after the революция of 1905. It gave limited parliamentary representation, though the tsar retained significant power.

[44](#) A large open area on the outskirts of Moscow used for public gatherings. In this chapter it is the site of the 1896 coronation festivities and the Khodynka Tragedy, a deadly stampede that killed many people.

[45](#) This refers to the Khodynka disaster of 1896, when a stampede during celebrations for Nicholas II's coronation in Moscow killed and injured many people. It became a symbol of poor planning and public resentment toward the new reign.

[46](#) This is the Trans-Siberian Railway, the major rail line connecting European Russia with Siberia and the Far East. In the 1890s it was still being completed and its administration was a significant government issue.

[47](#) This refers to Sergei Witte, a leading Russian statesman and finance minister who helped secure foreign loans and promote industrial development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

[48](#) A Russian naval fortress and port in southern Manchuria, besieged and captured by Japan in 1904-1905 during the Russo-Japanese War. In this chapter it is central to the discussion of the siege and surrender.

[49](#) A Prussian military order of merit, among the highest honors in the Kingdom of Prussia. The text refers to it as a foreign distinction granted to General Stössel by the German Emperor.

[50](#) A Russian court title used for the heir apparent to the throne. In this chapter it is applied to Grand Duke George

Alexandrovitch, Nicholas II's brother, before the birth of a son to Nicholas II.

[51](#) The Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg was a major state prison in Imperial Russia, used to hold political prisoners and other detainees.

[52](#) A women's higher-education institution in Imperial Russia. Such schools gave women access to university-level study when full university admission was limited.

[53](#) A form of hard labor punishment used in the Russian Empire and elsewhere. It usually meant imprisonment combined with forced labor, often for political offenses.

[54](#) This refers to Vyacheslav von Plehve, the Russian Minister of the Interior who was assassinated in 1904. His death was seen by contemporaries as a major political shock and a sign of escalating unrest.

[55](#) Khodynka Field in Moscow was the site of a disastrous crowd crush in 1896 during festivities for Nicholas II's coronation. The tragedy, often called the Khodynka disaster, badly damaged public opinion of the new tsar.

[56](#) This refers to the 1905 St. Petersburg massacre commonly called Bloody Sunday, when troops fired on a crowd of petitioners near the Winter Palace. It is often treated as a major trigger for the Russian Revolution of 1905.

[57](#) The peace treaty signed in 1905 at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, that ended the Russo-Japanese War. Under its terms, Russia recognized Japan's predominance in Korea and transferred several rights and territories in East Asia.

[58](#) The States General was the representative assembly of pre-revolutionary France, last convened in 1789 before the French Revolution. The text compares the opening of the Russian Duma to that event at Versailles.

[59](#) Viborg (now Vyborg, in Finland) was then part of the Russian Empire. After the first Duma was dissolved, some deputies met there and signed the Viborg Manifesto, a protest that led to legal penalties and political disqualification for many participants.

[60](#) The Duma was Russia's parliamentary assembly created after the revolution of 1905. The "first Duma" refers to the first elected body, which was dissolved by the czarist government in 1906.

[61](#) Pyotr Stolypin was Russia's Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior until his assassination in 1911. He was a central figure in late imperial Russian politics and reform.

[62](#) This refers to the 1913 celebrations marking 300 years of Romanov rule in Russia. The festivities were used to emphasize dynastic legitimacy and imperial unity.

[63](#) Sergey Sazonov was Russia's foreign minister from 1910 to 1916. The text discusses his cautious diplomacy during the Balkan and prewar crises.

[64](#) Alexander Izvolsky was a Russian diplomat who served as foreign minister before becoming ambassador to France. He is often associated with the diplomatic tensions of the years before World War I.

[65](#) Balmoral is a royal estate in Scotland that was a frequent summer residence of the British royal family. In this context it refers to a diplomatic visit there.