

private interests when one dreams of serving the nation, of fighting for freedom. I decided to be a political lawyer."

For the next six years, Kerensky would travel to every corner of Russia, defending political prisoners against prosecution by the state. But before he left St. Petersburg, in 1905, an extraordinary episode occurred:

"It was Easter and I was returning late at night, or rather in the morning, about four o'clock from the traditional midnight celebration. I cannot attempt to describe the enchanting spell of St. Petersburg in the spring, in the early hours before dawn—particularly along the Neva or the embankments. . . . Happily aglow, I was walking home . . . and was about to cross the bridge by the Winter Palace. Suddenly, by the Admiralty, just opposite the Palace, I stopped involuntarily. On an overhanging corner balcony stood the young Emperor, quite alone, deep in thought. A keen presentiment [struck me]: we should meet sometime, somehow our paths would cross."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Kaiser's Advice*

IN the early years of the reign, along with his mother, the tutor Pobedonostsev and his uncles, Nicholas was also taken in hand by his cousin Kaiser William II of Germany. From the first months, William peered over the Tsar's shoulder, tapped him on the elbow, flattered him, lectured him and dominated him. William was nine years older than Nicholas and had become Kaiser in 1888, six years before Nicholas became Tsar. He thus had the advantage of experience as well as age, and he used it vigorously. For ten years, 1894–1904, the Kaiser manipulated Russian foreign policy by influencing the youthful, susceptible Tsar. Eventually, an older and wiser Nicholas shook off this meddlesome influence. But the harm was done. Urged on by William, Russia had suffered a military catastrophe in Asia.

In character, the two Emperors were totally unlike. Nicholas was gentle, shy and painfully aware of his own limitations; the Kaiser was a braggart, a bully and a strutting exhibitionist. Nicholas hated the idea of becoming a sovereign; William all but wrenched the crown from the head of his dying father, Frederick III. As Tsar, Nicholas tried to live quietly with his wife, avoiding fuss. William delighted in parading about in high black boots, white cloak, a silver breastplate and an evil-looking spiked helmet.

William II's thin face, bleak gray eyes and light-colored curly hair were partially masked behind his proudest possession, his mustache. This was a wide, brushy business with remarkable upturned points, the creation of a skillful barber who appeared at the palace every morning with a can of wax. In part, this elegant bush helped to compensate for another physical distinction, one which William tried

desperately to hide. His left arm was miniaturized, a misfortune believed to have been caused by the excessive zeal with which an obstetrical surgeon used forceps at William's birth. William arrived in the world with his arm pulled almost from its socket; thereafter the arm grew much too slowly. As much as possible, he kept this damaged limb out of sight, tucking it into especially designed pockets in his clothes. At meals, the Kaiser could not cut his meat without the aid of a dinner companion.

In the military atmosphere of the Prussian court in which he grew up, William's bad arm had a pronounced effect on his character. A Prussian prince had to ride and shoot. William drove himself to do both expertly and went on to become a swimmer, rower, tennis player as well. His good right arm became extraordinarily powerful, and its grip was as strong as iron. William increased the sensation of pain in those he greeted by turning the rings on his right hand inward, so that the jewels would bite deep into the unlucky flesh.

When he was nineteen and a student in Bonn, William fell in love with Princess Elizabeth of Hesse, the Empress Alexandra's older sister. William often visited in Darmstadt with the Hessian family of his mother's sister. Even as a guest, he was selfish and rude. First he demanded to ride, then he wanted to shoot or row or play tennis. Often he would throw down his racket in the middle of a game or suddenly climb off his horse and demand that everybody go with him to do something else. When he was tired, he ordered his cousins to sit quietly around him and listen while he read aloud from the Bible. Alix was only six when these visits occurred, and she was ignored. But Ella was a blossoming fourteen, and William always wanted her to play with him, to sit near him, to listen closely. Ella thought he was dreadful. William left Bonn, burning with frustration, and four months later he became engaged to another German princess, Augusta of Schleswig-Holstein. After Ella married Grand Duke Serge of Russia, the Kaiser refused to see her. Later he admitted that he had spent most of his time in Bonn writing love poetry to his beautiful cousin.

William's restless temperament, his vanities and delusions, his rapid plunges from hysterical excitement to black despair kept his ministers in a state of constant apprehension. "The Kaiser," said Bismarck, "is like a balloon. If you don't keep fast hold of the string, you never know where he'll be off to." William scribbled furiously on the margins of official documents: "Nonsense!" "Lies!" "Rascals!"

"Stale fish!" "Typical oriental procrastinating lies!" "False as a Frenchman usually is!" "England's fault, not ours!" He treated his dignitaries with an odd familiarity, often giving venerable admirals and generals a friendly smack on the backside. Visitors, official and otherwise, were treated to dazzling displays of verbosity, but they could never be sure how much to believe. "The Kaiser," explained a dismayed official of the German Foreign Ministry, "has the unfortunate habit of talking all the more rapidly and incautiously the more a matter interests him. Hence it happens that he generally has committed himself . . . before the responsible advisors or the experts have been able to submit their opinions." To witness the Kaiser laughing was an awesome experience. "If the Kaiser laughs, which he is sure to do a good many times," wrote one observer, "he will laugh with absolute abandonment, throwing his head back, opening his mouth to the fullest possible extent, shaking his whole body, and often stamping with one foot to show his excessive enjoyment of any joke."

William was convinced of his own infallibility and signed his documents "The All Highest." He hated parliaments. Once, at a colonial exhibition, he was shown the hut of an African king, with the skulls of the king's enemies impaled on poles. "If only I could see the Reichstag stuck up like that," blurted the Kaiser.

William's bad manners were as offensive to his relatives as to everyone else. He publicly accused his own mother, formerly Princess Victoria of England, of being pro-English rather than pro-German. Writing to *her* mother, Queen Victoria of England, the Princess said of her twenty-eight-year-old son, "You ask how Willy was when he was here. He was as rude, as disagreeable and as impertinent to me as possible." Tsar Alexander III snubbed William, whom he considered "a badly brought up, untrustworthy boy." When he spoke to the Kaiser, Alexander III always turned his back and talked over his shoulder. Empress Marie loathed William. She saw in him the royal *nouveau riche* whose empire had been made in part by trampling over her beloved Denmark and wrenching away the Danish provinces of Schleswig-Holstein. Marie's feeling was that of her sister Alexandra, who was married to King Edward VII. "And so my Georgie boy has become a real, live, filthy, blue-coated Pickelhaube German soldier. I never thought I would live to see the day," Queen Alexandra wrote to her son, later King George V, when George became an honorary colonel in one of the Kaiser's regiments. When it came Russia's turn to make the Kaiser an admiral in the Russian navy, Nicholas tried to

tell Marie gently. "I think, no matter how disagreeable it may be, we are obliged to let him wear our naval uniform; particularly since he made me last year a Captain in his own navy. . . . *C'est à vomir!*" After another visit from the Kaiser, he wrote, "Thank God the German visit is over. . . . She [William's wife] tried to be charming and looked very ugly in rich clothes chosen without taste. The hats she wore in the evening were particularly impossible." The Empress Alexandra could barely be civil to William. She turned away when he made his heavy jokes, and when the Kaiser picked up her daughters in his arms, she winced. A mutual loathing of William was perhaps the point of closest agreement between the young Empress and her mother-in-law.

Nicholas himself was both repelled and attracted by the Kaiser's flamboyance. From the first, William managed to restore the old custom of former monarchs who kept personal attachés in each other's private retinues. This, the Kaiser pointed out, would enable Nicholas "to quickly communicate with me . . . without the lumbering and indiscreet apparatus of Chancelleries, Embassies, etc."

The famous "Willy-Nicky" correspondence began. Writing in English and addressing himself to his "Dearest Nicky" and signing himself "Your affectionate Willy," the Kaiser drenched the Tsar with flattery and suggestions. Delighted by Nicholas's "senseless dreams" address to the Tver Zemstvo, he hammered on the importance of maintaining autocracy, "the task which has been set us by the Lord of Lords." He advised that "the great bulk of the Russian people still place their faith in their . . . Tsar and worship his hallowed person," and predicted that "the people will . . . cheer you and fall on their knees and pray for you." When they met in person, William tapped Nicholas on the shoulder and said, "My advice to you is more speeches and more parades."

Using this private channel, William bent himself to undo the anti-German alliance between Russia and France. Nicholas had been Tsar less than a year when the Kaiser wrote to him: "It is not the friendship of France and Russia that makes me uneasy, but the danger to our principle of monarchism from the lifting up of the Republicans on a pedestal. . . . The Republicans are revolutionaries *de nature*. The French Republic has arisen from the source of the great revolution and propagates its ideas. The blood of their Majesties is still on that country. Think—has it since then ever been happy or quiet again? Has it not staggered from bloodshed to bloodshed and from war to

war, till it soused Europe and Russia in streams of Blood? Nicky, take my word, the curse of God has stricken that people forever. We Christian kings have one holy duty imposed on us by Heaven: to uphold the principle of the Divine Right of Kings."

Russia's alliance with France withstood these assaults, but on another theme the Kaiser's exhortations had a striking success. William hated Orientals, and often raved about "the Yellow Peril." In 1900, bidding farewell to a shipload of German marines bound for China to help disperse the Boxer revolutionaries, the Kaiser shouted blood-curdling instructions: "You must know, my men, that you are about to meet a crafty, well-armed, cruel foe! Meet him and beat him. Give no quarter. Take no prisoners. Kill him when he falls into your hands. Even as a thousand years ago, The Huns under King Attila made such a name for themselves as still resounds in terror through legend and fable, so may the name of German resound through Chinese history a thousand years from now. . . ."

In writing to the Tsar, William elevated his prejudice to a loftier pedestal. Russia, he declared, had a "Holy Mission" in Asia: "Clearly, it is the great task of the future for Russia to cultivate the Asian continent and to defend Europe from the inroads of the Great Yellow Race. In this you will always find me on your side, ready to help you as best I can. You have well understood the call of Providence . . . in the Defense of the Cross and the old Christian European culture against the inroads of the Mongols and Buddhism. . . . I would let nobody try to interfere with you and attack from behind in Europe during the time you were fulfilling the great mission which Heaven has shaped for you."

William pursued the theme into allegorical art. He sent the Tsar a portrait showing himself in shining armor, gripping a huge crucifix in his raised right arm. At his feet crouched the figure of Nicholas, clothed in a long Byzantine gown. On the Tsar's face, as he gazed up at the Kaiser, was a look of humble admiration. In the background, on a blue sea, cruised a fleet of German and Russian battleships. In 1902, after watching a fleet of real Russian battleships steam through naval maneuvers, William signaled from his yacht to the Tsar aboard the *Standart*, "The Admiral of the Atlantic salutes the Admiral of the Pacific."

William's hatred of Orientals was genuine, but there was more to his game than simple prejudice. For years, Bismarck had urgently promoted Russian expansion in Asia as a means of diminishing Rus-

sian influence in Europe. "Russia has nothing to do in the West," said the crafty German Chancellor. "There she can only catch Nihilism and other diseases. Her mission is in Asia; there she represents civilization." By turning Russia away from Europe, Germany decreased the danger of war in the Balkans between Russia and Austria, and Germany herself was left a free hand with Russia's ally, France. In addition, wherever Russia moved in Asia, she was certain to get into trouble: either with Britain in India or with Japan in the Pacific. William II enthusiastically revived Bismarck's design. "We must try to tie Russia down in East Asia," he confided to one of his ministers, "so that she pays less attention to Europe and the Near East."

The Kaiser was not the only man filling Nicholas's head with expansionist dreams; many Russians were equally anxious to go adventuring in Asia. The temptations were strong. Russia's only Pacific port, Vladivostock, was imprisoned in ice three months a year. Southward, the decrepit Chinese Empire stretched like a rotting carcass along the Pacific. In 1895, to Russia's chagrin, the vigorous, newly Westernized island empire of Japan occupied several Chinese territories which Russia coveted, among them the great warm-water port and fortress of Port Arthur. Six days after Japan had swallowed Port Arthur, Russia intervened, declaring that Japan's new arrangements "constituted a perpetual menace to the peace of the Far East." Japan, unwilling to risk a war, was forced to disgorge Port Arthur. Three years later, Russia extracted a ninety-nine-year lease on the port from the helpless Chinese.

The occupation of Port Arthur was heady stuff in St. Petersburg. "Glad news . . .," wrote Nicholas. "At last we shall have an ice-free port." A new spur of the Trans-Siberian was constructed directly across Manchuria, and when the railroad was finished, the Russian workmen and Russian railway guards remained behind. In 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion, Russia "temporarily" occupied Manchuria. Only one further prize remained on the entire North Pacific coast, the peninsula of Korea. Although Japan clearly regarded Korea as essential to her security, a group of Russian adventurers resolved to steal it. Their plan was to establish a private company, the Yalu Timber Company, and begin moving Russian soldiers into Korea disguised as workmen. If they ran into trouble, the Russian government could always disclaim responsibility. If they succeeded, the empire would acquire a new province and they themselves would have vast economic concessions within it. Witte, the Finance Minister, vigorously op-

posed this risky policy. But Nicholas, impressed by the leader of the adventurers, a former cavalry officer named Bezobrazov, approved the plan, whereupon Witte in 1903 resigned from the government. Predictably, Kaiser William chimed in, "It is evident to every unbiased mind that Korea must and will be Russian."

The Russian advance into Korea made war with Japan inevitable. The Japanese would have preferred an agreement: Russia to keep Manchuria, leaving Japan a free hand in Korea. But the Mikado's ministers could not stand by and watch the Russians swarm along the whole coast of Asia, planting the Tsar's double-headed eagle in every port and promontory facing their islands. In 1901, the greatest of Japanese statesmen, Marquis Ito, came to St. Petersburg to negotiate. He was treated shamefully. Ignored, finding no one to talk to, he put his requests in writing; replies were delayed for days on trifling pretexts. Eventually, he left Russia in despair. Through 1903, the permanent Japanese Minister in St. Petersburg, Kurino, issued urgent warnings and begged in vain for an audience with the Tsar. On February 3, 1904, bowing grimly, Kurino also left Russia.

In Russia, it was taken for granted that if war came, Russia would win easily. It would not be necessary for the Russian army to fire even a single shot, giped the drawing-room generals. The Russians would annihilate the Japanese "monkeys" simply by throwing their caps at them. Vyacheslav Plehve, the Minister of Interior, wrestling with a growing plague of rebellious outbursts, openly welcomed the idea of "a small victorious war" to distract the people. "Russia has been made by bayonets, not diplomacy," he declared.

Nicholas, lulled into belief in Russia's overwhelming superiority, assumed that the decision was his, that war would not come unless Russia began it. Foreign ambassadors and ministers, gathered for the annual gala diplomatic reception on New Year's Day, heard the Tsar talk grandly of Russia's military power and beg that there would not be a test of his patience and love of peace. Nevertheless, during the month of January 1904, Nicholas's indecision kept the Kaiser in a state of constant alarm. He wrote, urging that Russia accept no settlement with Japan, but go to war. He was appalled when Nicholas replied, "I am still in good hopes about a calm and peaceful understanding." William showed this letter to his Chancellor, von Bülow, and complained bitterly about the Tsar's unmanly attitude. "Nicholas is doing himself a lot of harm by his flabby way of going on," said the

Kaiser. Such behavior, he added, was "compromising all great sovereigns."

Japan made a Russian decision unnecessary. On the evening of February 6, 1904, Nicholas returned from the theatre to be handed a telegram from Admiral Alexeiev, Russian Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief in the Far East:

"About midnight, Japanese destroyers made a sudden attack on the squadron anchored in the outer harbor of Port Arthur. The battleships *Tsarevich*, *Retvizan* and the cruiser *Pallada* were torpedoed. The importance of the damage is being ascertained." Stunned, Nicholas copied the text of the telegram into his diary and added, "This without a declaration of war. May God come to our aid."

The next morning, huge, patriotic crowds filled the streets of St. Petersburg. Students carrying banners marched to the Winter Palace and stood before it singing hymns. Nicholas went to the window and saluted. Amid the rejoicing, he was depressed. He had flirted with war and tried to bluff his enemies, but the idea of bloodshed revolted him. The people now looked forward to a quick Russian victory; Nicholas knew better. As confidential reports of the damage at Port Arthur continued to arrive, Nicholas set down his "sharp grief for the fleet and for the opinion that people will have of Russia."

The disaster that followed was far greater than even Nicholas had feared. In scarcely a single generation, Japan had leaped from feudalism to modern industrial and military power. Military instructors from France and naval instructors from England had helped create an efficient army with skilled, imaginative commanders. In the two years since Ito returned, humiliated, from St. Petersburg, Japan's generals and admirals had perfected their plans for war against Russia. The moment further negotiations seemed futile, they struck.

From the beginning, the match was unequal. Although the Japanese army consisted of 600,000 men and the Russian army numbered almost three million, Japan threw 150,000 men into battle at once on the Asian mainland. There they faced only 80,000 regular Russian soldiers, along with 23,000 garrison troops and 30,000 railway guards. Japanese supply lines stretched back to the homeland over only a few hundred miles of water, and losses could be quickly replaced. The Russians had to haul guns, munitions, food and reinforcements four thousand miles over the single track of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Even the railroad was not complete; around the mountainous southern end of Lake Baikal, a gap of a hundred miles yawned in the track.

In summer, the gap was bridged by lake ferries; in the winter, every soldier and shell had to be moved across the ice in horse-drawn sledges.

The Russian Far Eastern Fleet and the Imperial Japanese Navy were more equal in size; the Russians actually had more battleships and cruisers, the Japanese more destroyers and torpedo boats. But with their first surprise attack, the Japanese seized the initiative and gained command of the sea. Russian ships which survived the war's first blow were hemmed in by Japanese minefields and harassed at their moorings by further torpedo attacks. When Russia's most distinguished admiral, Makarov, sortied from the harbor of Port Arthur on April 13, his flagship, the battleship *Petropavlovsk*, hit a mine and sank with a loss of seven hundred men, Makarov included. "This morning came news of inexpressible sadness . . .," Nicholas wrote of the disaster. "All day long I could think of nothing but this terrible blow. . . . May the will of God be done in all things, but we poor mortals must beg mercy of the Lord."

With the sea secured, Japanese expeditionary forces were free to land where they chose along the mainland coast. One army came ashore in Korea, overwhelmed five Siberian regiments, crossed the Yalu River and marched north into Manchuria. Another Japanese force landed at the head of the Yellow Sea and laid siege to Port Arthur with monster eleven-inch siege cannons. Through the summer and fall of 1904, the Japanese infantry stormed one fortified height around Port Arthur after another; by January 1905, when Port Arthur finally surrendered, it had cost Japan 57,780 men and Russia 28,200.

From St. Petersburg, Nicholas watched with dismay. His first instinct had been to go to the front and place himself at the head of his beleaguered troops. Once again, his uncles overruled his inclination. To his mother the Tsar wrote: "My conscience is often very troubled by my staying here instead of sharing the dangers and privations of the army. I asked Uncle Alexis yesterday what he thought about it: he thinks my presence with the army in this war is not necessary—still, to stay behind in times like these is very upsetting to me."

Instead, Nicholas toured military encampments, reviewing troops and passing out images of St. Seraphim to soldiers about to entrain for the Far East. The Empress canceled all social activities and turned the huge ballrooms of the Winter Palace into workrooms where hundreds of women of all classes sat at tables, making clothing and

bandages. Every day Alexandra visited these rooms and often sat down herself to sew a dressing or a hospital shirt.

As the grim prospect of a Russian defeat seemed ever more likely, Nicholas, urged on by William, ordered the Russian Baltic Fleet to travel around the world to restore Russian naval supremacy in the Pacific. Admiral Rozhdestvensky, the fleet commander, viewed the project without much hope, but once the Tsar had commanded, he placed himself on his bridge and ordered his ships made ready for sea. In October 1904, Nicholas took the final salute from the deck of the *Standart*. As the fleet of gray battleships and cruisers slowly left its anchorage and steamed out into the Baltic, he wrote, "Bless its voyage, Lord. Permit that it arrive safe and sound at its destination, that it succeed in its terrible mission for the safety and happiness of Russia."

Unfortunately, long before he got anywhere near Japan, Admiral Rozhdestvensky almost involved Russia in a war with England. The Admiral had been much impressed by Japan's surprise torpedo attack on the fleet at Port Arthur. Assuming that such wily tactics would have a sequel, he suspected that Japanese ships flying false colors might slip through neutral European waters to deliver another frightful blow to the Russian navy. No man to be tricked, the Admiral ordered extra lookouts posted from the moment his ships left home port. Steaming at night through the North Sea in this trigger-happy state, Russian captains suddenly found themselves surrounded by a flotilla of small boats. Without asking questions, Russian guns sent shells crashing into the frail hulls of British fishing boats in the waters of Dogger Bank. After the first salvos, the Russians realized their mistake. Such was the Admiral's fear, however, that, rather than stopping to pick up survivors, he steamed off into the night.

Only one boat had been sunk and two men killed, but Britain was outraged. Nicholas, already irritated by Britain's diplomatic support of Japan, was in no mood to apologize. "The English are very angry and near the boiling point," he wrote to Marie. "They are even said to be getting their fleet ready for action. Yesterday I sent a telegram to Uncle Bertie, expressing my regret, but I did not apologize. . . . I do not think the English will have the cheek to go further than to indulge in threats."

The Russian Ambassador in London, Count Benckendorff, more accurately assessed the extent of Britain's anger and quickly recommended that both parties submit the matter to the International Court

at The Hague. Nicholas reluctantly agreed, and eventually Russia paid £65,000 in damages.

Leaving this nasty crisis in his wake, Admiral Rozhdestvensky steamed into the Atlantic, bound for the Cape of Good Hope, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. He stopped and lay at anchor for three months at the French island of Madagascar while Russian diplomatic agents scoured the world's shipyards seeking to buy extra battleships to reinforce the fleet. The Kaiser ordered German merchant vessels to fuel the Russian squadron. At secluded anchorages in Madagascar and Camranh Bay, Indochina, German seamen transferred hundreds of tons of coal into the bunkers of Admiral Rozhdestvensky's weatherbeaten ships.

At two o'clock in the afternoon on May 27, 1905, the Russian fleet, led by eight battleships steaming in columns, appeared in the Strait of Tsushima between Japan and Korea. Admiral Togo, the Japanese commander, ranged his ships seven thousand yards across the head of the Russian columns, bringing his guns to bear first on one Russian ship, then another. As this blizzard of Japanese shells ripped through them, Russian warships exploded, capsized or simply stopped and began to drift. Within forty-five minutes it was over. Togo flashed his torpedo boats to attack and finish the cripples. All eight Russian battleships were lost, along with seven of Rozhdestvensky's twelve cruisers and six of his nine destroyers.

Tsushima, the greatest sea battle since Trafalgar, had a powerful impact on naval thinking everywhere. It confronted Britain, whose whole existence depended on the Royal Navy, with the appalling prospect of losing a war in one afternoon in a general fleet engagement. The Kaiser, who cherished his High Seas Fleet, became equally frightened. As a result, during the four years of the First World War the huge British and German navies collided only once, at Jutland. In the United States, Tsushima convinced President Theodore Roosevelt that no nation could afford to divide its battle fleet as the Russians had done. Roosevelt immediately began pressing ahead with his plan to build a canal through Panama to link the two oceans that washed American shores.

The Tsar was traveling aboard the Imperial train when the news of the disaster reached him. He sent for the Minister of War, General Sakharov, who remained alone with him for a lengthy discussion. Returning to the lounge car where the staff was waiting to learn Nicholas's reaction, Sakharov declared, "His Majesty showed that he

thoroughly recognized the problems ahead of us and he sketched a very sensible plan of action. His composure is admirable." In his diary that night, Nicholas wrote, "Definite confirmation of the terrible news concerning the almost complete destruction of our squadron."

Recognizing that Russia no longer had a chance of winning the war, Nicholas sent for Sergius Witte and dispatched him to America to make the best of a peace conference which Roosevelt had offered to mediate. Although the war was ending as he had predicted, Witte accepted the assignment grudgingly. "When a sewer has to be cleaned, they send for Witte," he grumbled. "But as soon as work of a cleaner and nicer kind appears, plenty of other candidates spring up."

Crossing the Atlantic on the German liner *Wilhelm der Grosse* accompanied by a swarm of European journalists, Witte struck a pose as the "representative of the greatest empire on earth, undismayed by the fact that that mighty empire had become temporarily involved in a slight difficulty." Arriving in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the scene of the peace conference, to find Americans filled with admiration for the "plucky little Japs," Witte set out to reverse this image. "I may say that I succeeded in swerving American public opinion over to us," he noted afterward. "I gradually won the press over to my side. . . . In this regard, the Japanese plenipotentiary Komura committed a grave blunder. . . . He rather avoided the press. . . . I took advantage of my adversary's tactlessness to stir up the press against him and his cause. . . . My personal behavior may also partly account for the transformation of American public opinion. I took care to treat all the Americans with whom I came in contact with the utmost simplicity of manner. When traveling, whether on special trains, government motorcars or steamers, I thanked everyone, talked with the engineers and shook hands with them—in a word, I treated everybody, of whatever social position, as an equal. This behavior was a heavy strain on me as all acting is to the unaccustomed, but it surely was worth the trouble."

Maneuvered by Witte into the role of villains, the Japanese envoys had difficulty in pressing all of their demands. Finally Nicholas—knowing that Japan was financially unable to continue the war—told his Foreign Minister: "Send Witte my order to end the parley tomorrow in any event. I prefer to continue the war, rather than to wait for gracious concessions on the part of Japan." Komura, who had come as victor, accepted a compromise.

Lunching after the conference with President Theodore Roosevelt at Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay, Long Island, Witte described the meal as "for a European, almost indigestible. There was no tablecloth and ice water instead of wine. . . . Americans have no culinary taste and . . . they can eat almost anything that comes their way." He was "struck by . . . [Roosevelt's] ignorance of international politics. . . . I heard the most naïve judgments." Nor did Roosevelt care much for Witte. "I cannot say that I liked him," said the President, "for I thought his bragging and bluster not only foolish, but shockingly vulgar when compared with the gentlemanly restraint of the Japanese. Moreover, he struck me as a very selfish man, totally without ideals."

Returning to Russia, Witte was pleased with himself. "I acquitted myself with complete success," he wrote, "so that in the end the Emperor Nicholas was morally compelled to reward me in an altogether exceptional manner by bestowing upon me the rank of count. This he did in spite of his and especially Her Majesty's personal dislike for me, and also in spite of all the base intrigues conducted against me by a host of bureaucrats and courtiers whose vileness was only equalled by their stupidity."

In fact, Witte had handled the negotiations brilliantly; "no diplomat by profession could have done it," said Alexander Izvolsky, who was soon to become Russia's Foreign Minister. Nicholas received the returning hero on his yacht in September 1905. "Witte came to see us," wrote the Tsar to his mother. "He was very charming and interesting. After a long talk, I told him of his new honor. I am creating him a Count. He went quite stiff with emotion and then tried three times to kiss my hand!"

Tsushima abruptly ended Russia's "Holy Mission" in Asia. Beaten and humiliated by the Japanese "monkeys," the Russian giant staggered back toward Europe. In Berlin, as he watched events unfold, the Kaiser was not displeased. With a sullen, defeated army, no navy and a disillusioned, embittered people, the Tsar was no longer a neighbor to fear. William assumed that he still possessed Nicholas's friendship. He soothed the Tsar, reminding him that even Frederick the Great and Napoleon had suffered defeats. He strutted in the loyalty he had shown to Russia by "guarding" Russia's frontier in Europe—presumably from his own ally, Austria. Now, stepping smoothly over the ruins of the Far Eastern adventure he had done so much to promote,

the Kaiser reverted to his original purpose: breaking the Russian alliance with France by seducing Nicholas into a new alliance of autocrats between Russia and Germany.

This last spectacular attempt by the Kaiser to manipulate the Tsar was the episode at Björkö on the coast of Finland in July 1905. It had its immediate origins in the international furor arising from the incident at Dogger Bank. The British press, loudly advocating that the Royal Navy prevent German steamers from coaling the Russian warships, had driven the Kaiser to frenzy. Nicholas replied to a letter from William by saying, "I agree fully with your complaints about England's behavior . . . it is certainly high time to put a stop to this. The only way, as you say, would be that Germany, Russia and France should at once unite to abolish Anglo-Japanese arrogance and insolence. Would you like to lay down and frame the outlines of such a treaty? As soon as it is accepted by us, France is bound to join as an ally."

William was overjoyed and feverishly began to draw up the treaty. The following summer, the Kaiser privately telegraphed the Tsar, inviting him to come as a "simple tourist" to a rendezvous at sea. Nicholas agreed and left Peterhof one afternoon without taking any of his ministers. The two Imperial yachts, *Hobenzollern* and *Standart*, anchored that night in the remote Finnish fjord and the two Emperors had dinner together. The next morning William reached into his pocket and "by chance" found the draft of a treaty of alliance between Russia and Germany. Among its provisions was an agreement that France was to be told only after Russia and Germany had signed and then invited to join if she wished. Nicholas read it and, according to William, said, "That is quite excellent. I agree."

"Should you like to sign it," said the Kaiser casually, "it would be a very nice souvenir of our interview."

Nicholas signed and William was jubilant. With tears of joy, he told Nicholas that he was sure that all of their mutual ancestors were looking down on them from heaven in ecstatic approval.

Upon returning to their respective capitals, both Emperors received unpleasant shocks. Von Bülow, the German Chancellor, criticized the treaty as useless to Germany and threatened to resign. The deflated Kaiser wrote his Chancellor a hysterical letter: "The morning after the arrival of your letter of resignation would no longer find your Emperor alive. Think of my poor wife and children." In St. Petersburg, Lamsdorf, the Russian Foreign Minister, was aghast; he could

not believe his eyes and ears. The French alliance, he pointed out to Nicholas, was the cornerstone of Russian foreign policy; it could not be lightly thrown aside. France, said Lamsdorf, would never join an alliance with Germany, and Russia could not join such an alliance without first consulting France.

Eventually William was informed that, as written, the treaty could not be honored. The Kaiser responded with an impassioned plea to the Tsar to reconsider: "Your Ally notoriously left you in the lurch during the whole war, whereas Germany helped you in every way. . . . We joined hands and signed before God who heard our vows. What is signed is signed! God is our testator!" But the Björkö treaty was never invoked, and the private Willy-Nicky correspondence soon dwindled away. Thereafter, the Kaiser's influence over the Tsar also faded rapidly. But Nicholas's eyes were opened late. By 1905, he had lost a war and his country was rushing full tilt into revolution.

1905

THE "small victorious war" so ardently desired by Plehve, the Minister of Interior, was over, but Plehve did not live to see it. Vyacheslav Plehve was a professional policeman: his most spectacular piece of work had been the rounding up of everyone involved in the plot which killed Alexander II. Appointed Minister of Interior in 1902 after his predecessor had been killed by a terrorist, Plehve was described by a colleague as "a splendid man for little things, a stupid man for affairs of state." As Minister, he permitted no political assemblies of any kind. Students were not allowed to walk together on the streets of Moscow or St. Petersburg. It was impossible to give a party for more than a few people without first getting written permission from the police.

Russia's five million Jews were a special object of Plehve's hatred.\* In a bitter cycle of repression and retaliation, Russian Jews were

\* Anti-Semitism, an endemic disease in Russia, stemmed from the oldest traditions of the Orthodox Church. "To the devoutly . . . Orthodox Russians," explains a Jewish historian, ". . . the Jew was an infidel, the poisoner of the true faith, the killer of Christ." Every tsar supported this faith. Peter the Great, refusing to admit Jewish merchants to Russia, declared, "It is my endeavor to eradicate evil, not to multiply it." Catherine the Great endorsed Peter's decision, saying, "From the enemies of Christ, I desire neither gain nor profit." It was Catherine who, upon absorbing heavily Jewish regions of eastern Poland into her empire, established the Jewish Pale of Settlement, an area in Poland and the Ukraine to which all Russian Jews supposedly were restricted. The restrictions were porous, but the life of a Jew in nineteenth-century Russia remained subject to harassment and persecution. That this antagonism was religious rather than racial was repeatedly illustrated by cases of Jews who gave up their faith, accepted Orthodoxy and moved freely into the general structure of Russian society.

driven in numbers into the ranks of revolutionary terrorism. Under Plehve, local police were encouraged to turn a blind eye toward anti-Semites. On Easter Day, Plehve's policy led to the most celebrated pogrom of Nicholas's reign: a mob running wild in the town of Kishenev in Bessarabia murdered forty-five Jews and destroyed six hundred houses; the police did not trouble to intervene until the end of the second day. The pogrom was condemned by the government, the governor of the province was dismissed and the rioters tried and punished, but Plehve remained in power. Witte bluntly told the Interior Minister that his policies were making his own assassination inevitable. In July 1904, Plehve was blown to pieces by an assassin's bomb.

Plehve's death did not destroy his most inventive project, a workers' movement created and secretly guided by the police. The movement was led by a youthful St. Petersburg priest, Father George Gapon, who hoped by his efforts to immunize the workers against revolutionary viruses and strengthen their monarchist feelings. Economic grievances were to be channeled away from the government in the general direction of the employers. The employers, understandably touchy, were persuaded in turn that it was better to have an organization watched and controlled by the police than to leave the workers to the dangerous blandishments of clandestine socialist propagandists.

Gapon was not an ordinary hack police agent. His interest in the people was genuine, and in the working-class districts of St. Petersburg where he had worked and preached for several years, he was a popular figure. He sincerely believed that the purpose of his Assembly of Russian Workingmen was to strive "in a noble manner under the leadership of educated, genuinely Russian people and clergymen toward a philosophy of life and the status of the working man in a sound Christian spirit." By some, Gapon's police connections were suspected, but the mass of workers, happy enough to have any machinery which enabled them to meet and protest, looked to him for leadership.

Early in January 1905, the humiliating news of Port Arthur's surrender sent a wave of protest against mismanagement of the war sweeping across the country. In St. Petersburg, a minor strike at the huge Putilov steel works suddenly spread until thousands of disil-

lusioned, restless workers were out on strike.\* Swept along by this surge of feeling, Gapon had a choice: he could lead or be left behind. Rejecting his role as agent of the police, he chose to lead. For a week he went from meeting hall to meeting hall, giving dozens of speeches, whipping up impassioned support and, day by day, enlarging his list of demands. Before the end of the week, carried away by his sense of mission, he was rallying the workers with an extravagant theatrical vision: He personally would lead a mass march to the Winter Palace, where he would hand to Nicholas a petition on behalf of the Russian people. Gapon visualized the scene taking place on a balcony above the vast sea of Russian faces, where the *Batiushka-Tsar*, acting out the Russian fairy tale, would deliver his people from their evil oppressors, named in the petition as the "despotic and irresponsible government" and the "capitalistic exploiters, crooks and robbers of the Russian people." Along with deliverance, the petition also demanded, specifically, a constituent assembly, universal suffrage, universal education, separation of church and state, amnesty for all political prisoners, an income tax, a minimum wage and an eight-hour day.

Gapon did not communicate the extent of his intentions to any responsible government official; had he done so, they probably would not have listened. Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, the newly appointed liberal Minister of Interior, was concerned for most of the week about the Tsar's ceremonial visit to St. Petersburg on Thursday, January 19, for the traditional religious service of the Blessing of the Waters. In balance, that day was a success: Nicholas was received with cheers as he drove past dense crowds in the streets. While he stood on the Neva bank, a cannon employed in the ceremonial salute fired a live charge which landed near the Tsar and wounded a policeman, but investigation proved that the shot was an accident, not part of a plot.

Only on Saturday, January 21, when Gapon informed the government that the march would take place the following day and asked

\* The era was one of bitter labor strife in all industrial nations. In the United States, for example, during the Pullman strike of 1894, Judge William Howard Taft, a future President, wrote to his wife, "It will be necessary for the military to kill some of the mob before the trouble can be stayed. They have killed only six as yet. This is hardly enough to make an impression." In the end, 30 were killed, 60 wounded and 700 arrested. Six years later, Theodore Roosevelt, campaigning for Vice President, said privately, "The sentiment now animating a large proportion of our people can only be suppressed . . . by taking ten or a dozen of their leaders out, standing them against the wall and shooting them dead. I believe it will come to that. These leaders are planning a social revolution and the subversion of the American Republic."

that the Tsar be present to receive his petition, did Mirsky suddenly become alarmed. The ministers met hurriedly to consider the problem. There was never any thought that the Tsar, who was at Tsarskoe Selo and had been told of neither the march nor the petition, would actually be asked to meet Gapon. The suggestion that some other member of the Imperial family receive the petition was rejected. Finally, informed by the Prefect of Police that he lacked the men to pluck Gapon from among his followers and place him under arrest, Mirsky and his colleagues could think of nothing to do except bring additional troops into the city and hope that matters would not get out of hand.

On Saturday night, Nicholas learned for the first time from Mirsky what the morrow might bring. "Troops have been brought from the outskirts to reinforce the garrison," he wrote in his diary. "Up to now the workers have been calm. Their number is estimated at 120,000. At the head of their union is a kind of socialist priest named Gapon. Mirsky came this evening to present his report on the measures taken."

Sunday morning, January 22, 1905, with an icy wind driving flurries of snow, Father Gapon began his march. In the workers' quarters, processions formed to converge on the center of the city. Locking arms, they streamed peacefully through the streets in rivers of cheerful, expectant humanity. Some carried crosses, icons and religious banners, others carried national flags and portraits of the Tsar. As they walked, they sang religious hymns and the Imperial anthem, "God Save the Tsar." At two p.m. all of the converging processions were scheduled to arrive at the Winter Palace.

There was no single confrontation with the troops. Throughout the city, at bridges and on strategic boulevards, the marchers found their way blocked by lines of infantry, backed by Cossacks and Husars. Uncertain what this meant, still not expecting violence, anxious not to be late to see the Tsar, the processions moved forward. In a moment of horror, the soldiers opened fire. Bullets smacked into the bodies of men, women and children. Crimson blotches stained the hard-packed snow. The official number of victims was ninety-two dead and several hundred wounded; the actual number was probably several times higher. Gapon vanished and the other leaders of the march were seized. Expelled from the capital, they circulated through the empire, exaggerating the casualties into thousands.

The day, which became known as "Bloody Sunday," was a turning point in Russian history. It shattered the ancient, legendary belief that

tsar and the people were one. As bullets riddled their icons, their banners and their portraits of Nicholas, the people shrieked, "The Tsar will not help us!" It would not be long before they added the grim corollary, "And so we have no Tsar." Abroad, the clumsy action seemed premeditated cruelty, and Ramsay MacDonald, a future Labor Prime Minister of Britain, attacked the Tsar as a "blood-stained creature" and a "common murderer."

Father Gapon, from his place of hiding, issued a public letter, bitterly denouncing "Nicholas Romanov, formerly Tsar and at present soul-murderer of the Russian empire. The innocent blood of workers, their wives and children lies forever between you and the Russian people. . . . May all the blood which must be spilled fall upon you, you Hangman!" Gapon became a full-fledged revolutionary: "I call upon all the socialist parties of Russia to come to an immediate agreement among themselves and begin an armed uprising against Tsarism." But Gapon's reputation was cloudy, and the leaders of the Social Revolutionary Party were convinced that he still had ties with the police. They sentenced him to death and his body was found hanging in an abandoned cottage in Finland in April 1906.

At Tsarskoe Selo, Nicholas was stunned when he heard what had happened. "A painful day," he wrote that night. "Serious disorders took place in Petersburg when the workers tried to come to the Winter Palace. The troops have been forced to fire in several parts of the city and there are many killed and wounded. Lord, how painful and sad this is!" The ministers met in great alarm and Witte immediately suggested that the Tsar publicly dissociate himself from the massacre by declaring that the troops had fired without orders. Nicholas refused to cast this unfair aspersion upon the army and instead decided to receive a delegation of thirty-four hand-picked workers at Tsarskoe Selo. The workers arrived at the palace and were given tea while Nicholas lectured them, as father to sons, on the need to support the army in the field and to reject the wicked advice of treacherous revolutionaries. The workers returned to St. Petersburg, where they were ignored, laughed at or beaten up.

The Empress was in a state of despair. Five days after "Bloody Sunday," she wrote to her sister Princess Victoria of Battenberg:

"You understand the crisis we are going through! It is a time full of trials indeed. My poor Nicky's cross is a heavy one to bear, all the more as he has nobody on whom he can thoroughly rely and who can be a real help to him. He has had so many bitter disappointments, but

through it all he remains brave and full of faith in God's mercy. He tries so hard, works with such perseverance, but the lack of what I call 'real' men is great. . . . The bad are always close at hand, the others through false humility keep in the background. We shall try to see more people, but it is difficult. On my knees I pray to God to give me wisdom to help him in his heavy task. . . .

"Don't believe all the horrors the foreign papers say. They make one's hair stand on end—foul exaggeration. Yes, the troops, alas, were obliged to fire. Repeatedly the crowd was told to retreat and that Nicky was not in town (as we are living here this winter) and that one would be forced to shoot, but they would not heed and so blood was shed. On the whole, 92 killed and between 200–300 wounded. It is a ghastly thing, but had one not done it the crowd would have grown colossal and 1,000 would have been crushed. All over the country, of course, it is spreading. The Petition had only two questions concerning the workmen and all the rest was atrocious: separation of the Church from the Government, etc. etc. Had a small deputation brought, calmly, a real petition for the workmen's good, all would have been otherwise. Many of the workmen were in despair, when they heard later what the petition contained and begged to work again under the protection of the troops.

"Petersburg is a rotten town, not one atom Russian. The Russian people are deeply and truly devoted to their Sovereign and the revolutionaries use his name for provoking them against landlords, etc. but I don't know how. How I wish I were clever and could be of real use. I love my new country. It's so young, powerful and has so much good in it, only utterly unbalanced and childlike. Poor Nicky, he has a bitter, hard life to lead. Had his father seen more men, drawn them around him, we should have had lots to fill the necessary posts; now only old men or quite young ones, nobody to turn to. The uncles no good, Mischa [Grand Duke Michael, the Tsar's younger brother] a darling child still. . . ."

But "Bloody Sunday" was only the beginning of a year of terror. Three weeks later, in February, Grand Duke Serge, the Tsar's uncle and Ella's husband, was assassinated in Moscow. The Grand Duke, who took a harsh pride in knowing how bitterly he was hated by revolutionaries, had just said goodbye to his wife in their Kremlin apartment and was driving through one of the gates when a bomb exploded on top of him. Hearing the shuddering blast, Ella cried, "It's

Serge," and rushed to him. What she found was not her husband, but a hundred unrecognizable pieces of flesh, bleeding into the snow. Courageously the Grand Duchess went to her husband's dying coachman and eased his last moments by telling him that the Grand Duke had survived the explosion. Later she visited the assassin, a Social Revolutionary named Kaliayev, in prison and offered to plead for his life if he would beg the Tsar for pardon. Kaliayev refused, saying that his death would aid his cause, the overthrow of the autocracy.

The murder of her husband changed Ella's life. The gay, irrepressible girl who had guided her small, motherless sister Alix; who had fended off the attentions of William II; who had skated and danced with the Tsarevich Nicholas—this woman disappeared. All of the gentle, saintly qualities suggested by her quiet acceptance of her husband's character now came strongly forward. A few years later, the Grand Duchess built an abbey, the Convent of Mary and Martha, in Moscow and herself became the abbess. In a last gesture of worldly flair, she had the robes of her order designed by the fashionable religious painter Michael Nesterov. He designed a long, hooded robe of fine, pearl-gray wool and a white veil, which she wore for the rest of her life.

As the months rolled by, violence spread to every corner of Russia. "It makes me sick to read the news," said Nicholas, "strikes in schools and factories, murdered policemen, Cossacks, riots. But the ministers instead of acting with quick decision, only assemble in council like a lot of frightened hens and cackle about providing united ministerial action." The slaughter of Rozhdestvensky's fleet in Tsushima raised a storm of mutiny in the ships remaining in the Baltic and Black Sea fleets. Sailors of the battleship *Potemkin*, angered when they were served portions of bad meat, threw their officers overboard, raised the red flag and steamed their ship along the Black Sea coast, bombarding towns, until the need for fuel forced them to intern at the Rumanian port of Constanza.

By mid-October 1905, all Russia was paralyzed by a general strike. From Warsaw to the Urals, trains stopped running, factories closed down, ships lay idle alongside piers. In St. Petersburg, food was no longer delivered, schools and hospitals closed, newspapers disappeared, even the electric lights flickered out. By day, crowds marched through the streets cheering orators, and red flags flew from the rooftops. At night, the streets were empty and dark. In the countryside, peasants

raided estates, crippled and stole cattle, and the flames of burning manor houses glowed through the night.

Overnight, a new workers' organization bloomed. Consisting of elected delegates, one for each thousand workers, it called itself a soviet, or council. Like the strike itself, it came from nowhere, but grew rapidly in numbers and power. Within four days, a leader emerged in Leon Trotsky, a fiery orator and a member of the Menshevik branch of the Marxist Social Democratic Party. When the Soviet threatened to wreck every factory which did not close down, companies of soldiers were brought into the city. Sentries paced in front of all the public buildings, and squadrons of Cossacks clattered up and down the boulevards. The revolution was at hand; it needed only a spark.

In one of his most famous letters, written to his mother at the height of the crisis, Nicholas described what happened next:

"So the ominous quiet days began. Complete order in the streets, but at the same time everybody knew that something was going to happen. The troops were waiting for the signal but the other side would not begin. One had the same feeling as before a thunder storm in summer. Everybody was on edge and extremely nervous. . . . Through all those horrible days I constantly met with Witte. We very often met in the early morning to part only in the evening when night fell. There were only two ways open: to find an energetic soldier to crush the rebellion by sheer force. There would be time to breathe then but as likely as not, one would have to use force again in a few months, and that would mean rivers of blood and in the end we should be where we started.

"The other way out would be to give to the people their civil rights, freedom of speech and press, also to have all laws confirmed by a state Duma—that of course would be a constitution. Witte defends this energetically. He says that, while it is not without risk, it is the only way out at the present moment. Almost everybody I had an opportunity of consulting is of the same opinion. Witte put it to me quite clearly that he would accept the Presidency of the Council of Ministers only on condition that his program was agreed to and his action not interfered with. He . . . drew up the Manifesto. We discussed it for two days and in the end, invoking God's help, I signed it. . . . My only consolation is that such is the will of God and this grave decision will lead my dear Russia out of the intolerable chaos she has been in for nearly a year."

Sergius Witte, who gave Russia its first constitution and its first parliament, believed in neither constitutions nor parliaments. "I have a constitution in my head, but as to my heart—" Witte spat on the floor. Witte was a huge, burly man with massive shoulders, great height and a head the size of a pumpkin. Inside this head Witte carried the ablest administrative brain in Russia. It had guided him from humble beginnings in the Georgian city of Tiflis, where he was born in 1849, to the role of leading minister of two tsars.

Witte's mother was Russian, but on his father's side his ancestry was Dutch. His father, a native of Russia's Baltic provinces, was a cultured man who lost his fortune in a Georgian mining scheme, leaving Witte to battle upward on wits and ego alone. In both respects, Witte was handsomely equipped. "At the University [of Odessa]," he wrote, "I worked day and night and achieved great proficiency in all my studies. I was so thoroughly familiar with the subjects that I passed all my examinations with flying colors without making any special preparations for them. My final academic thesis was entitled, 'On Infinitesimal Quantities.' The work was rather original in conception and distinguished by a philosophical breadth of view."

Hoping to become a professor of pure mathematics, Witte was compelled instead to go to work for the Southwestern District Railroad. During Russia's 1877 war with Turkey, he served as a traffic supervisor in charge of transporting troops and supplies. "I acquitted myself with success of my difficult task," he declared. "I owed my success to energetic and well thought-out action." In February 1892, he was promoted to Minister of Communications (including railroads). "It will not be an exaggeration," he noted, "to say that the vast enterprise of constructing the great Siberian railway was carried out by my efforts, supported, of course, first by Emperor Alexander III and then by Emperor Nicholas II." In August 1892, Witte was transferred to the key post of Minister of Finance. "As Minister of Finance, I was also in charge of our commerce and industry. As such, I increased our industry threefold. This again is held against me. Fools!" Even in his private life, Witte took care to ensure that he was not outsmarted. He married twice; both wives had previously been divorced from other men. Of his first wife he said, "With my assistance she obtained her divorce and followed me to St. Petersburg. Out of consideration for my wife I adopted the girl who was her only child, with the understanding, however, that should our marriage prove childless, she would not succeed me as heiress."

Along with the throne, Nicholas inherited Witte from his father. Both the new Tsar and the veteran Minister hoped for the best. "I knew him [Nicholas] to be inexperienced in the extreme but rather intelligent and . . . he had always impressed me as a kindly and well-bred youth," Witte wrote. "As a matter of fact, I had rarely come across a better-mannered young man than Nicholas II." The Empress Witte liked less, although he was forced to admit that "Alexandra does not lack physical charms." As Minister of Finance, he struggled successfully to put Russia on the gold standard. He brought in armies of foreign traders and industrialists, tempting them with tax exemptions, subsidies and government orders. His state monopoly on vodka brought millions into the treasury every year. Nicholas disliked Witte's cynicism and arrogance, but admitted his genius. When Witte brought the Portsmouth peace negotiations to what under the circumstances amounted to a brilliant conclusion for Russia, the Tsar recognized his indebtedness by making Witte a count.

Experienced, shrewd and freshly crowned as a peacemaker, Witte was the obvious choice to deal with the spreading revolutionary upheavals. Even the Dowager Empress Marie advised her son, "I am sure that the only man who can help you now is Witte. . . . He certainly is a man of genius." At the Tsar's request, Witte drew up a memorandum in which he analyzed the situation and concluded that only two alternatives existed: a military dictatorship or a constitution. Witte himself urged that granting a constitution would be a cheaper, easier way of ending the turmoil. This recommendation gained further weight when it was vehemently endorsed by Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaievich, the Tsar's six-foot-six-inch cousin, then in command of the St. Petersburg Military District. So violently did the Grand Duke object to the idea that he become military dictator, that he brandished the revolver in his holster and shouted, "If the Emperor does not accept the Witte program, if he wants to force me to become Dictator, I shall kill myself in his presence with this revolver. We must support Witte at all cost. It is necessary for the good of Russia."

The Imperial Manifesto of October 30, 1905, transformed Russia from an absolute autocracy into a semi-constitutional monarchy. It promised "freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association" to the Russian people. It granted an elected parliament, the Duma, and pledged that "no law may go into force without the consent of the State Duma." It did not go as far as the constitutional monarchy in England; the Tsar retained his prerogative over defense and foreign

affairs and the sole power to appoint and dismiss ministers. But the Manifesto did propel Russia with great rapidity over difficult political terrain which it had taken Western Europe several centuries to travel.

Witte now had maneuvered himself into an awkward corner. Having forced a reluctant sovereign to grant a constitution, Witte was expected to make it work. He was installed as President of the Council of Ministers, where he quickly obtained the resignation of Constantine Pobedonostsev. After twenty-six years as Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev left, but not before he had scathingly referred to his successor, Prince Alexis Obolensky, as a man in whose head "three cocks were crowing at the same time."

To Witte's despair, rather than getting better, the situation grew steadily worse. The Right hated him for degrading the autocracy, the Liberals did not trust him, the Left feared that the revolution which it was anticipating would slip from its grasp. "Nothing has changed, the struggle goes on," declared Paul Miliukov, a leading Russian historian and Liberal. Leon Trotsky, writing in the newly formed *Izvestia*, was more vivid: "The proletariat knows what it does not want. It wants neither the police thug Trepov [commander of the police throughout the empire] nor the liberal financial shark Witte: neither the wolf's snout, nor the fox's tail. It rejects the police whip wrapped in the parchment of the constitution."

In parts of Russia, the Manifesto, by stripping the local police of many of their powers, led directly to violence. In the Baltic states, the peasants rose against their German landlords and proclaimed a rash of little village republics. In the Ukraine and White Russia, bands of Ultra-Rightists, calling themselves Black Hundreds, turned against the familiar scapegoats, the Jews. In Kiev and Odessa, pogroms erupted, often with the open support of the Church. In the Trans-Caucasus, similar attacks, under the guise of patriotism and religion, were made on Armenians. In Poland and Finland, the Manifesto was taken as a sign of weakness; there was a sense that the empire was crumbling, and mass demonstrations clamored for autonomy and independence. At Kronstadt on the Baltic and Sevastopol on the Black Sea, there were naval mutinies. In December, the Moscow Soviet led two thousand workers and students to the barricades. For ten days they held off government forces, proclaiming a new "Provisional Government." The revolt was crushed only by bringing from St. Petersburg the Semenovsky Regiment of the Guard, which cleared the streets with artillery and bayonets. During these weeks, Lenin

slipped back into Russia to lead the Bolsheviks; the police soon found his trail and he was forced to flit secretly from place to place, diminishing his effectiveness. Still, he was gleeful. "Go ahead and shoot," he cried. "Summon the Austrian and German regiments against the Russian peasants and workers. We are for a broadening of the struggle, we are for an international revolution."

Nicholas, meanwhile, waited impatiently for his experiment in constitutionalism to produce results. As Witte stumbled, the Tsar became bitter. His letters to his mother mark the progression of his disillusionments:

November 9: "It is strange that such a clever man [Witte] should be wrong in his forecast of an easy pacification."

November 23: "Everybody is afraid of taking courageous action. I keep trying to force them—even Witte himself—to behave more energetically. With us nobody is accustomed to shouldering responsibility, all expect to be given orders which, however, they disobey as often as not."

December 14: "He [Witte] is now prepared to arrest all the principal leaders of the outbreak. I have been trying for some time past to get him to do it, but he always hoped to be able to manage without drastic measures."

January 25, 1906: "As for Witte, since the happenings in Moscow he has radically changed his views; now he wants to hang and shoot everybody. I have never seen such a chameleon of a man. That, naturally, is the reason why no one believes in him any more."

Feeling his status slipping, Witte tried to recapture the Tsar's good will by cynically chopping away most of the strength from the Manifesto he had only recently written. Without waiting for the Duma to be elected, Witte arbitrarily drafted a series of Fundamental Laws based on the declaration: "To the Emperor of all the Russias belongs the supreme autocratic power." To make the government financially independent of Duma appropriations, Witte used his own great personal reputation abroad to obtain from France a massive loan of over two billion francs.

Despite these efforts, Sergius Witte took no part in the affairs of the Russian parliament which he had helped to create. On the eve of its first meeting, Nicholas asked for his resignation. Witte pretended to be pleased by the move. "You see before you the happiest of mortals," he said to a colleague. "The Tsar could not have shown me greater mercy than by dismissing me from this prison where I have

been languishing. I am going abroad at once to take a cure. I do not want to hear about anything and shall merely imagine what is happening over here. All Russia is one vast madhouse." This was nonsense, of course; for the rest of his life, Witte itched to return to office. His hopes were illusory. "As long as I live, I will never trust that man again with the smallest thing," said Nicholas. "I had quite enough of last year's experiment. It is still like a nightmare to me." Eventually, Witte returned to Russia, and Nicholas made him a grant of two hundred thousand roubles from the Treasury. But in the nine years which were to pass before Witte died, he would see the Tsar only twice again, each time for a brief interview of twenty minutes.

In all these months of war with Japan and the 1905 Revolution, Nicholas and Alexandra had had only one brief moment of unshadowed joy. On August 12, 1904, Nicholas wrote in his diary: "A great never-to-be-forgotten day when the mercy of God has visited us so clearly. Alix gave birth to a son at one o'clock. The child has been called Alexis."

The long-awaited boy arrived suddenly. At noon on a hot summer day, the Tsar and his wife sat down to lunch at Peterhof. The Empress had just managed to finish her soup when she was forced to excuse herself and hurry to her room. Less than an hour later, the boy, weighing eight pounds, was born. As the saluting cannon at Peterhof began to boom, other guns sounded at Kronstadt. Twenty miles away, in the heart of St. Petersburg, the batteries of the Fortress of Peter and Paul began to thunder—this time the salute was three hundred guns. Across Russia, cannons roared, churchbells clanged and flags waved. Alexis, named after Tsar Alexis, Nicholas's favorite, was the first male heir born to a reigning Russian tsar since the seventeenth century. It seemed an omen of hope.

His Imperial Highness Alexis Nicolaievich, Sovereign Heir Tsarevich, Grand Duke of Russia, was a fat, fair baby with yellow curls and clear blue eyes. As soon as they were permitted, Olga, nine, Tatiana, seven, Marie, five, and Anastasia, three, tiptoed into the nursery to peek into the crib and inspect their infant brother.

The christening of this august little Prince was performed in the Peterhof chapel. Alexis lay on a pillow of cloth of gold in the arms of Princess Marie Golitsyn, a lady-in-waiting who, traditionally, carried

Imperial babies to the baptismal font. Because of her advanced age, the Princess came to the ceremony especially equipped. For greater support, the baby's pillow was attached to a broad gold band slung around her shoulders. To keep them from slipping, her shoes were fitted with rubber soles.

The Tsarevich was christened in the presence of most of his large family, including his great-grandfather King Christian IX of Denmark, then in his eighty-seventh year. Only the Tsar and the Empress were absent; custom forbade parents to attend the baptism of their child. The service was performed by Father Yanishev, the elderly priest who had served for years as confessor to the Imperial family. He pronounced the name Alexis, which had been carried by the second Romanov Tsar, Alexis the Peaceful, in the seventeenth century. Then he dipped the new Alexis bodily into the font, and the Tsarevich screeched his fury. As soon as the service was over, the Tsar hurried into the church. He had been waiting anxiously outside, hoping that the aged Princess and the elderly priest would not drop his son into the font. That afternoon, the Imperial couple received a stream of visitors. The Empress, lying on a couch, was seen to smile frequently at the Tsar, who stood nearby.

Six weeks later, in a very different mood, Nicholas wrote again in his diary: "Alix and I have been very much worried. A hemorrhage began this morning without the slightest cause from the navel of our small Alexis. It lasted with but a few interruptions until evening. We had to call . . . the surgeon Fedorov who at seven o'clock applied a bandage. The child was remarkably quiet and even merry but it was a dreadful thing to have to live through such anxiety."

The next day: "This morning there again was some blood on the bandage but the bleeding stopped at noon. The child spent a quiet day and his healthy appearance somewhat quieted our anxiety."

On the third day, the bleeding stopped. But the fear born those days in the Tsar and his wife continued to grow. The months passed and Alexis stood up in his crib and began to crawl and to try to walk. When he stumbled and fell, little bumps and bruises appeared on his arms and legs. Within a few hours, they grew to dark blue swellings. Beneath the skin, his blood was failing to clot. The terrifying suspicion of his parents was confirmed. Alexis had hemophilia.

This grim knowledge, unknown outside the family, lay in Nicholas's

heart even as he learned of Bloody Sunday and Tsushima, and when he signed the Manifesto. It would remain with him for the rest of his life. It was during this period that those who saw Nicholas regularly, without knowing about Alexis, began to notice a deepening fatalism in the Tsar. Nicholas had always been struck by the fact that he was born on the day in the Russian calendar set aside for Job. With the passage of time, this fatalism came to dominate his outlook. "I have a secret conviction," he once told one of his ministers, "that I am destined for a terrible trial, that I shall not receive my reward on this earth."

It is one of the supreme ironies of history that the blessed birth of an only son should have proved the mortal blow. Even as the saluting cannons boomed and the flags waved, Fate had prepared a terrible story. Along with the lost battles and sunken ships, the bombs, the revolutionaries and their plots, the strikes and revolts, Imperial Russia was toppled by a tiny defect in the body of a little boy. Hidden from public view, veiled in rumor, working from within, this unseen tragedy would change the history of Russia and the world.

## PART TWO