I

The Ruin of an Empire

A SHRILL WHISTLE SHATTERED the silence of the snowy afternoon as the Red Cross train slowly steamed into the siding at Tarnopol. Weary soldiers, bundled against the freezing rain, shuffled noiselessly along the crowded platform, heads bent low, eyes hollow and resigned. Amid the sea of disconsolate faces, J. P. Demidov, muffled in a thick astrakhan coat and hat, made his way across the siding, jumped into a waiting motorcar, and left the despair of the station in his wake.

It was the first winter of the Great War. In the devastation of Russian-occupied Galicia, a rising tide of miseries threatened to overtake the Imperial Army. Four months earlier, poorly trained, uneducated peasants proudly wore their new uniforms as they marched west, toward the advancing German and Austro-Hungarian armies under the late summer sun; for many, the clean leather boots had been the first pair of decent shoes they owned. But the four months could have been four years for the changes they wrought. Uniforms were ragged, muddied, stained with food, sweat, urine, and their comrades' blood, and the new boots—so impressive in the bright August sunshine—revealed their shabby manufacture as the Imperial Army waded through the marshes of Poland and the Danube. Disease and dejection hung like specters over these men, slowly replacing the patriotic ideals and short conflict promised in the far-off days of summer.

Demidov's motorcar snaked through the streets of Tarnopol, clogged with refugees shuffling through the slush among the ruins of bombed buildings as they dodged piles of fallen brick and burned

timbers. The pale, expansive sky, dotted with leafless fingers of gnarled trees, disappeared into a shadowy stretch of swirling snow, broken only by ribbons of black crows that scattered and spread at the distant thud of enemy artillery fire. Misery was everywhere.

The Red Cross train on which Demidov arrived sat at the platform, angrily belching smoke into the winter sky. Dispatched by the Duma, the Russian parliament, it carried new bandages, linens, uniforms, supplies, and fresh medical personnel to replace the depleted Russian stores. Russia's presence in Galicia was hard-won, a much-needed boost to the nation following disastrous defeats in eastern Prussia. But the Galician campaign, waged by hungry and demoralized men slowly overwhelmed by growing discontent of war, marked the beginning of a weary bond shared by soldiers across the Continent.

As a deputy in the Duma, Demidov had supervised the legislature's Red Cross train on its journey across the vast sweep of the Russian Empire; having safely delivered it, he remained in Tarnopol, directing the distribution of supplies. One night he met a middle-aged woman, said to be a mystic. Without warning, she fell into a trance and began to murmur a string of prophecies. When Demidov asked about the war, she replied that the Russian army would suffer defeat in Galicia, soldiers giving themselves over to the enemy. The Allies would be victorious, but Russia would not last out the war.

"What about the emperor?" Demidov asked.

"I can see him in a room, on the floor, killed," she slowly answered.

"And the empress?" Demidov pressed.

"Dead, by his side," she replied.

"Where are the children, then?"

"I cannot see them," she announced. "But beyond the corpses of the emperor and the empress, I can see many more bodies."[1]

Demidov left, shaken. The following day he boarded a train and returned across the frozen winter landscape to Petrograd. The capital provided a stark contrast to the wretched scenes in Galicia: here, the wide boulevards were jammed with French motorcars and fashionable carriages, conveying privileged passengers to the pastel palaces lining the icy Neva River. Here, life carried on largely as before; in Galicia, it had ground to a tragic halt. But the tranquillity would not last. In twenty-six months the mighty Russian Empire collapsed, victim of a revolution that enveloped the glittering world of the imperial court. And the seer's vision of regicide became horrific fact only eighteen months later, when the 304-year-old Romanov Dynasty came to its bloody, inexorable end in a small cellar room in the Ural Mountains mining town of Ekaterinburg.

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THE ROMANOV DYNASTY had ruled Russia for nearly three hundred years when, in 1894, Nicholas II acceded to the imperial throne. As the empire entered the twentieth century, the decades of fear and respect enveloping the imperial house had eroded, replaced with antipathy and alienation. The dynasty languished on an ethereal plane, subsumed in its own Byzantine opulence and a sense of impending doom. Shortly after the last emperor came to the throne, the young writer Dimitri Merezhovskii ominously recorded: "In the House of the Romanovs . . . a mysterious curse descends from generation to generation. Murders and adultery, blood and mud. . . . Peter I kills his son; Alexander I kills his father; Catherine II kills her husband. And besides these great and famous victims there are the mean, unknown and unhappy abortions of the autocracy . . . suffocated like mice in dark corners, in the cells of the Schlusselburg Fortress. The block, the rope and poison—these are the true emblems of Russian autocracy. God's unction on the brows of the Tsars has become the brand of Cain."[2]

In their centuries of rule, the Romanovs had wavered between failed reforms and brutal repression, bourgeois domesticity interrupted by murderous family plots. Though rich in artistic and cultural wealth, their empire bore little resemblance to a modern industrial state. The vast majority of Russia's 140 million subjects were uneducated peasants, their lives governed by a centuries-old struggle for survival; the handful of privileged aristocrats lived in splendid isolation in their baroque and neoclassical palaces in St. Petersburg and Moscow, spoke French and English instead of Russian, and spent holidays gambling away fortunes in Baden-Baden, Nice, and Monte Carlo. Yet between these two extremes stretched a growing class of urbanized peasants seeking a better life as factory workers, only to discover poverty and despair; and the small intelligentsia of merchants, lawyers, and students who devoured philosophical works and questioned the autocracy.

Russia entered the twentieth century poised on the edge of a volcano, demanding a steady hand and firm character to guide it through the uncertain waters of the modern era. It was the empire's misfortune, and Nicholas II's personal tragedy, that he took the throne at this crucial moment. Hopelessly ill equipped to deal with the burdens of his exalted position, and incapable of decisive action in the face of impending catastrophe, he presided over the dynasty's last years as an impotent spectator, unwilling and unable to avoid the wave of horrors that swept over Russia and drowned his country and his family. Even his birth on May 6, 1868, seemed to hint at the tragedy to come. In the liturgical calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was the Feast of St. Job, an

ill omen to the impressionable Nicholas. With tragic fatalism, Nicholas passively ascribed every catastrophe that befell his empire, every terrible drama suffered in his private life, to "God's will."

He was the eldest of the six children born to the future emperor Alexander III and his wife, Marie Feodorovna, a daughter of King Christian IX of Denmark. A second son, Alexander, was born in 1869, but lived for less than a year.[3] In Nicholas's first fourteen years, the family grew rapidly. He was joined in the nursery by two brothers, Grand Duke George Alexandrovich, who was born in 1871, and Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, in 1878; and two sisters, Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, in 1875, and Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, in 1882. Raised in an atmosphere of familial love that stressed subservience as a cardinal virtue, Nicholas was unfailingly deferential, yet suffered under his father's heavy hand. Alexander made no attempt to disguise his disappointment in the shy, sensitive young boy who would one day follow him to the imperial throne. He "loathed everything that savored of weakness," recalled one official, and his eldest son bore the brunt of his wrath.[4] In an attempt to shape Nicholas in his own image, Alexander bullied him, crushing his instincts and even insulting him in front of his friends by yelling, "You are a little girlie!"[5]

Never one to argue, Nicholas simply accepted this treatment; with each passing year he became increasingly quiet and withdrawn, hampered by indecision and a lack of self-confidence, a situation his mother encouraged. Not particularly well educated, Marie Feodorovna was a clinging, possessive woman who spoiled Nicholas as much as her husband bullied him. She kept her son in an oppressive cocoon where he remained emotionally dependent. Friends and influences beyond this artificial world were regarded with suspicion, and allowed only with great reluctance. Happy though they may have been with this bourgeois family life, Alexander and Marie fatally crippled their eldest son. He passed into adulthood immature and incapable of reasoned judgment; instead, he was subject only to emotion, relying on instinct and on passion—whether familial love or religious fervor—when making important decisions.

This claustrophobic existence was heightened by the terrible uncertainty surrounding the imperial throne. At age twelve, Nicholas watched helplessly as his grandfather Alexander II bled to death before his eyes, victim of a revolutionary bomb. Six years later, on the anniversary of the tragedy, Nicholas and his family barely escaped assassination themselves when six men, carrying the workings of crude bombs, were discovered in the streets of St. Petersburg. An investigation found that they were part of a larger plot, driven by revolutionary students at St. Petersburg University; after a brief trial, the conspirators were found

guilty and hung, the last public executions in imperial Russia.[6] Among those who went to the gallows was a young man named Alexander Ulyanov, elder brother of the boy who would become Vladimir Lenin.

Such incidents seared Nicholas's own conception of his future, a situation exacerbated by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the political tutor who warned that violence was the natural outcome of any move toward democracy in Russia. The tutor made no intellectual distinction between the violent revolutionaries who engaged in acts of terror, and the majority of students and the intelligentsia who peacefully campaigned for reform, a dangerous and inaccurate foundation on which the young Nicholas built his few political views. Pobedonostsev emphasized the mystical nature of the Russian autocracy as a unique bond between sovereign and people. According to him, "real" Russians, loyal Russians, stood unquestionably behind the imperial throne, accepted the autocracy as divinely mandated, and prayed fervently for their sovereign. In turn, the emperor was endowed with divine grace, answerable to no one but his own conscience. Democratic concessions, Pobedonostsev declared, only disguised encroachment of the emperor's divine rights, a severing of this mystical relationship with the Russian people.

Nothing in Nicholas's education prepared him for what was to come. He had a passion for history; spoke Russian, French, German, Danish, and English; liked dancing; and impressed those whom he met with his quiet, thoughtful demeanor. Nor did his five-year career as an officer in the Preobrajensky Guards Regiment provide any intellectual or moral development. Rather than assume leadership, Nicholas reacted passively to military life, happy to take orders and follow a regimented routine with a rigidly defined hierarchy where his entire path was laid out for him by senior officers, leaving no unwelcome questions of choice. Even when he came to the imperial throne, at age twenty-six, Nicholas remained distinctly naive and immature, lacking the vision and force of will necessary to guide his country through the tumultuous decades that followed.

Nicholas and Alexandra, 1914.

Nicholas had a string of diverting youthful romances, but his true

passion lay elsewhere. He first met Princess Alix of Hesse and by Rhine when she attended the wedding of her sister Elizabeth, known as Ella, to his uncle Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich, in 1884. Within a week the sixteen-year-old tsesarevich was convinced of his love for the shy, twelve-year-old German princess, and this conviction deepened in the winter of 1889, when she stayed with her sister and brother-in-law in St. Petersburg. That winter, Nicholas was a handsome young officer with light brown hair and deep blue eyes, a dashing figure in his Imperial Guards uniform if, at five feet, seven inches tall, just slightly shorter than the princess herself. Alix, too, had blossomed into a quietly beautiful young woman, with golden hair and blue-gray eyes. The skating parties, balls, and dinners gave way to an extensive correspondence after she returned to her home in Darmstadt, and the young lovers found eager conspirators in Serge and Ella, who used their position at court to influence Alexander III and Marie Feodorovna.

In the case of Alix of Hesse, there was much to overcome. Beautiful though she was, she failed to win over the imperial couple during her visits to Russia. Confirmed into the Lutheran Church at age sixteen, Alix was preternaturally serious, and consumed with religious passion; coupled with a prim Victorian morality and distaste for frivolity, she left unfavorable impressions on those she encountered. Her emotions were guarded, her social skills undeveloped, creating a veneer of boredom, of disinterest, and of distinct unease. Her cousin Queen Marie of Romania later declared that Alix was "not of 'those who win'; she was too distrustful, too much on the defensive. . . . She had no warm feeling for any of us and this was of course strongly felt in her attitude, which was never welcoming. Some of this was no doubt owing to shyness, but the way she closed her narrow lips after the first rather forced greeting gave you the feeling that this was all she was ready to concede and that she was finished with you then and there. . . . She made you, in fact, feel an intruding outsider, which is of all sensations the most chilling and uncomfortable. The pinched, unwilling, patronizing smile with which she received all you said as if it were not worth while answering, was one of the most disheartening impressions I ever received. When she talked, it was almost in a whisper, and hardly moving her lips as though it were too much trouble to pronounce a word aloud. Although there was little difference in age between us, she had a way of making me feel as though I were not even grown up."[7]

After her mother's premature death in 1878, Alix found herself in a world dominated by forceful women. Grand Duke Ludwig IV, loving and devoted father though he was, had always been a submissive figure, and easily gave way to his mother-in-law, Queen Victoria, as she selected tutors and outlined lessons for her Hessian grandchildren.

Under her direction, as well as that of the tutor Margaret Jackson, Alix quickly developed into a shy, serious young woman, willful and stubborn, with an innate belief in the superiority of her own limited intellect. Her models were of feminine power and domination of weak men, a pattern that characterized her childhood, youth, and later married life.

A flurry of letters, as well as the tsesarevich's diaries, chronicled Nicholas's battle to win Alix's hand. Not only did his parents object, but also Alix herself refused to abandon the Lutheran faith for Orthodoxy, a necessity for the wife of the future emperor of Russia. Only in 1894, at the wedding of her brother, did she finally relent and agree to Nicholas's proposal. The marriage of Nicholas and Alexandra—the name Alix took on her conversion to the Russian Orthodox faith—rested on a peculiar foundation. Nicholas awakened in Alexandra a convergence of feelings. The longing in her heart was filled with a man who adored her, and needed her at his side. Like the other men in Alexandra's life, Nicholas was weak, accustomed to following the dictates of his father and especially his mother; in seeking Alexandra out, he supplied himself with a lover, substitute mother, stern nanny, and stronger will than he himself possessed. In turn, his shy, gentle character greatly appealed to her; she recognized his weakness, and came to believe that it was her role not only to support him, but also to prod—and provoke—him to greatness. As a man who would one day rule his great empire as an autocrat, regarded as God's anointed on earth, Nicholas engaged the deeply religious Alexandra. By marrying him, she assumed her proper place in the divinely inspired plan she was certain lay in store for them both.

On October 20, 1894, at 2:30 P.M., Alexander III died of nephritis at Livadia, in the Crimea. The emperor was only forty-nine; although he had been unwell for months, his premature death came as a shock to his empire, and no one was more overwhelmed than the new emperor himself. Nicholas II panicked at the thought of his crushing responsibilities. Isolated from affairs of state by his father, Nicholas himself had shown absolutely no interest in his future role until it was thrust on him. "To the end of his life," wrote Count Paul von Benckendorff, who knew Nicholas well, "he lacked balance, nor could he grasp the principles that are necessary for the conduct of so great an Empire. Hence his indecision, his limitations, and the fluctuations which lasted throughout his reign. He was very intelligent, understood things at once, and was very quick, but he did not know how to reconcile decisions with fundamental political principles, which he entirely lacked."[8]

Nicholas II left an enduring legacy as a faithful, loving husband; a devoted father; a modest, charming man marked with a deep religious faith equal to his undoubted patriotism. Colonel Eugene Kobylinsky,

who came to know him under less than ideal circumstances when he assumed command of the Special Detachment guarding the Romanovs after the Revolution, said that Nicholas "was a very clever man, well informed, and very interesting to talk with; he had a remarkable memory." He noted the emperor's passion for "physical labor" and recalled that he "was very modest in his needs."[9] At the same time, remembered Charles Sydney Gibbes, the English tutor at the imperial court, the emperor's "extremely honest character" and "compassionate heart" were balanced by a firm imperial reserve, a "hatred of any sort of familiarity."[10]

The emperor's private virtues, however, played little part in his disastrous reign. Though dedicated to his role as sovereign, and sincere in his attempts to rule as he thought best for Russia, Nicholas unwittingly acted as the chief architect of his empire's doom. Distrusting ministers and other officials, and resentful at the merest whisper of any infringement on what he considered his divine rights, Nicholas ruled his empire as a man might jealously guard his mistress, keeping secrets from his own government and neglecting to inform one ministry what the other was doing, in an attempt to maintain the illusion that only he truly remained in control. So complete was this jealousy that he would not even have a private secretary, for fear that another might come between him and his prerogatives.[11]

Nicholas did not understand the need for urgent reform if his empire was to survive the dramatic changes enveloping Russia at the turn of the century. The rapid industrialization of the nineteenth century created Russia's first working class, an unknown in a country where fewer than 5 percent of the population owned nearly everything, and where serfdom had existed only forty years earlier. Factory owners grew rich while their workers labored for up to eighteen hours a day under unsafe and frequently deadly conditions, paid a miserable wage from which their meager food and abysmal housing in disease-filled company barracks were deducted. Children as young as eight years worked alongside their parents, with conditions in the country's iron mines and oil fields much worse. Peasants in the countryside starved, or wallowed in cheap vodka, while officials of the Russian Orthodox Church, a body renowned for its corruption, happily accepted bribes and looked the other way.

The autocratic system was rotting away, yet Nicholas never sensed the inexorable explosion. Instead, he submerged himself in fantasy, basking in his own bucolic myth: happy peasants working in the fields, loyal to authority; an unseen population devoted to the throne; and a devout church dedicated to the principles of their Orthodox sovereign. It was as unreal as the portrait of Nicholas as a bloodthirsty tyrant

painted by the growing number of revolutionaries, yet one that Nicholas eagerly embraced.

Nicholas reigned by resignation, submersing himself in such myths and in the comforting delusion that his fate—and therefore that of his empire—was predestined by God. He believed fully in the Russian idea of *sudba*, an overwhelming, inexorable force controlling the destinies of an impotent humanity. *Sudba* decreed that misfortune was inescapable, to be passively accepted, and it became a signature of Nicholas's reign. When, in 1905, he learned that the Russian navy had mutinied at Kronstadt, he remarked to one official: "If you find me so little troubled, it is because I have the firm and absolute faith that the destiny of Russia, my own fate, and that of my family are in the hands of Almighty God, who has placed me where I am. Whatever may happen, I shall bow to his will."[12] By embracing disaster as his inexorable fate, Nicholas abdicated his responsibilities in favor of a philosophical delusion of convenience that absolved him of personal obligation for the misfortunes plaguing Russia. It was a view he shared with Alexandra as they willingly—almost enthusiastically—gave themselves and their children over to the fate of the Revolution. Even in exile, they questioned not the emperor's own lack of leadership, which had helped bring them to this point, but the will of an unfathomable God who saw fit to punish Russia for the sins of its citizens against the throne.

For the first time, under Nicholas II, the Russian autocracy became a spiritual, and not just a political, ideology, enshrined in an elaborate myth that it was an institution ordained by God, an earthly priesthood where the emperor acted as benevolent pastor to his secular flock. Thus Nicholas once declared: "I shall never, under any circumstances, agree to a representative form of government because I consider it harmful to the people whom God has entrusted to my care."[13] He never understood that the autocratic system had long passed into oblivion, and as Russia tumbled from catastrophe to catastrophe, his blind devotion to its principles drove the country headlong to revolution.

From his father's premature death, Nicholas's reign unfolded with tragedy at every turn. His hasty marriage to Princess Alix, just a week after Alexander III's funeral, earned her the epithet of "the funeral bride" as people whispered, "She has come to us behind a coffin. She brings misfortune with her."[14] Just three months after his accession, Nicholas dismissed the pleas of a provincial delegation asking for a larger role in self-governance as "senseless dreams," a devastating remark that resounded throughout the empire.

At Nicholas and Alexandra's coronation in May 1896, more than a thousand people were killed, crushed to death in a crowd awaiting the appearance of the imperial couple at an open-air feast. That same night,

they attended a previously scheduled ball given by the French ambassador, leaving an unfortunate image of a heartless imperial couple, dancing as their subjects died in Moscow's hospitals. Both Nicholas and Alexandra regarded such incidents as personal tragedies, yet as the reign progressed, the emperor sunk deeply into reaction, cementing unfavorable impressions and creating the turmoil threatening to overwhelm his empire. Gentle and modest though he may have been in his private life, Nicholas often urged repression and even bloodshed in an effort not only to maintain law and order but also to uphold the phantom principles of the autocracy itself.

Very quickly he alienated the country's growing base of industrial workers. In April 1895, employees at a textile factory in Yaroslavl went on strike over unsafe conditions; in response, a division of soldiers broke up their meeting, killing thirteen men. "I am very satisfied with the way the troops behaved at Yaroslavl during these factory uprisings," Nicholas commented on the official report.[15] While such comments contrast with the usual picture of Nicholas, they are not unique. In the first ten years of his reign, he responded to student disturbances with orders for exile and hard labor, ordering blood to flow after a wave of violent political assassinations struck the country between 1900 and 1904. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, an unhappy conflict largely brought about by the emperor's reckless Far Eastern policy, ended with nearly half a million dead, and Russia suffering a humiliating defeat.

Animosity against the imperial regime led to the Revolution of 1905, the culmination of a year filled with violence. On January 9 a group of striking factory workers had trudged over the frozen canals and down the windswept streets of St. Petersburg, intent on assembling in front of the Winter Palace and presenting Nicholas with a petition for better living conditions, an end to child labor, and a minor increase in pay. Thousands of men, women, and children—carrying icons and portraits of the emperor and singing hymns—crossed the snowy capital, to be met not by the emperor, who had retreated to his suburban palace at Tsarskoye Selo, but by his soldiers, who leveled their guns at the unarmed crowds and opened fire, leaving the early morning rent with the screams and the snow littered with bodies and spreading pools of blood. The massacre, called "Bloody Sunday," left several hundred dead, an unknown number injured, and helped demolish the traditional view of the emperor as paternalistic sovereign. Revolutionaries evoked the massacre as further evidence that Nicholas despised his people, treating them not as human beings but as cogs in the enormous wheel of empire, to be disposed of according to his own capricious moods. Those who fell on "Bloody Sunday" were not shot on the emperor's

orders, but many of the thousands who perished over the sixteen months that followed certainly were.

Within two weeks the emperor's uncle and brother-in-law, Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich, was killed by an anarchist's bomb in Moscow. Factory strikes, student protests, and mutinies in the army and navy launched a wave of violence that tore across Russia as peasants killed aristocratic landowners and burned their estates, and as officials were gunned down by terrorists. Such activities were brutally suppressed, often on Nicholas's direct orders. Reading a report that Cossacks in Saratov had "unfortunately" beaten a group of doctors suspected of assisting local peasants, Nicholas underlined the word "unfortunately," added a question mark, and wrote, "Very well done!"[16] Hearing that a revolt in the Caucasus had passed without bloodshed, Nicholas replied, "That is no good! In such cases one must always shoot!"[17] In the Baltic provinces, a certain Lieutenant Captain Richter began, on his own authority, to execute suspects without benefit of trials or even official arrests; learning this, Nicholas commented, "What a fine fellow!"[18] When a group of anarchists who had seized a small enclave surrendered their arms, Nicholas was beside himself with anger: "The town should have been destroyed!" he declared.[19] He expressed similar sentiments on learning that a group of demonstrators in Vladivostok had been dispersed without violence: "You should have shot them!" he told the official in charge.[20]

By the fall of 1905, Russia was in chaos. Railways had stopped running, and students and factory workers in all major cities were on strike. With the country collapsing around him, Nicholas finally took decisive action to save his throne. He favored declaring martial law, suspending all court trials, and appointing his uncle Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievich as dictator; on learning of this, the grand duke stormed into his nephew's study, brandishing a pistol and threatening to shoot himself on the spot unless the emperor granted a constitution. Faced with this, Nicholas reluctantly signed the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, which created Russia's first elected legislature, the Duma.

The sweep of a pen had transformed Russia from an autocracy to a constitutional monarchy, but Nicholas refused to accept the change. He stubbornly clung to the mistaken belief that he remained an autocrat, responsible to no one but God for his rule. He had nothing but contempt for the parliament he created; both the first and the second Dumas were illegally closed on Nicholas's orders when they insisted on launching investigations into government-sponsored pogroms.[21] In 1907, in anticipation of the third Duma, the emperor illegally altered the voting laws to prevent those he considered too liberal from winning seats.[22]

Another outcome of these troubled years was the rise of Russian anti-Semitism. The vast majority of Russia's Jews were restricted to the infamous Pale of Settlement, created by Catherine the Great in 1791 to house her most undesirable subjects.[23] Following Alexander II's assassination, his successor enacted the infamous "May Laws" of 1882, exacting punitive revenge on the Jews whom Alexander III despised. Thousands were killed in pogroms while officials looked on in approval; shops and houses were seized, and families were turned out into the street; education was restricted; and Jewish professionals were dismissed from their posts.

Nicholas II inherited both his father's personal anti-Semitism and his public anti-Semitic policies. He firmly believed in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy against the Russian empire in general and himself in particular.[24] He once denied an orchestra permission to perform in Yalta on the excuse that it contained Jewish musicians; on another occasion, learning that the widow of a Jewish doctor in Yalta had been evicted from her home and applied for permission to return, Nicholas dismissed her request by writing, "There are too many Yids already."[25]

The systematic pogroms of Nicholas II's reign were far more vicious than anything witnessed under Alexander III. The notorious Easter Massacre at Kishinev in 1903 was organized by Vyacheslav Plehve, the minister of the interior, with the emperor's knowledge and support. Alexei Lopukhin, director of the Imperial Police Department, recalled that leaflets inciting the violence were printed under Plehve's direction on Ministry of the Interior presses; the text had been personally approved by General Trepov on the emperor's behalf, and the costs borne by Nicholas himself.[26] Some fifty Jews were dragged from their houses and murdered in the streets, with another six hundred beaten and tortured with the assistance of the local police.[27] The world was stunned, and the slaughter at Kishinev was roundly condemned, though Nicholas himself was satisfied at the outcome. He fully approved, he told his minister of war, adding that the Jews "ought to be taught a lesson, that they have got above themselves and are taking the lead of the revolutionary movement."[28]

Kishinev set an ominous pattern for the wave of anti-Semitic violence that erupted during the Revolution of 1905. In eleven days alone—October 18–29—a total of 690 separate pogroms took place, leaving hundreds of Jews dead and tens of thousands homeless.[29] The single worst episode occurred in Odessa, where nearly 1,000 Jews were murdered, hacked to pieces with sabers and axes as their horrified families looked on, held back by police who did nothing to halt the slaughter.[30] Nicholas rarely raised a protest against such indiscriminate violence. He was never able to separate the minority of revolutionaries

who happened to be Jews from the vast majority of his Jewish citizens, even when the victims included women and children.[31]

Such violence played on the deep anti-Semitism of most Russians, codified into repressive law by Alexander III. In the fall of 1906 the Council of Ministers unanimously recommended that the most restrictive measures against the Jews be lifted. Nicholas, however, refused to give ground, explaining "an inner voice ever more insistently repeats to me that I should not take this decision upon myself. So far my conscience has never deceived me. Therefore, in this case also, I intend to follow its dictates. . . . I bear a terrible responsibility before God for all authorities set up by me and at any time I am ready to answer for them to Him."[32] Thus he justified the continued discrimination that marked the Jews out for violence on the whims of conscience.

The emperor's own anti-Semitic views were bolstered by the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a piece of literary fiction promoted by Alexandra's sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna. In 1900 Nicholas and Alexandra fell under the influence of Philippe Nazier-Vachot, a French mystic of dubious history and talent. Finding themselves increasingly shut out, Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich and his wife—loathe to lose their hold on the imperial couple—embarked on a scheme that played directly on the emperor's prejudices.

Versions of the *Protocols* had been in circulation for nearly a hundred years, but they first appeared in Russia shortly after 1901, greatly altered by the Okhrana, the Secret Police. On Serge and Ella's instructions, they were again rewritten, this time to include not only allegations against the Jews but also the Freemasons, a group with which Nazier-Vachot was known to be involved.[33] The grand duchess worked closely with Serge Nilus, a reactionary, ultra-Orthodox writer known for his controversial publications and, conveniently, married to one of her ladies-in-waiting. Together, Serge and Ella introduced him to influential members of the court and helped raise the necessary funds for his work.[34]

Nilus's book was published in 1903. Nicholas eagerly devoured it, though its intended mission failed. Philippe fell from favor at court, but only after he wrongly predicted several pregnancies for the empress. The seed, however, had been planted. Nicholas viewed the *Protocols* not as a clumsy forgery but as a statement of political and religious truth. "What depth of thought!" he wrote of Nilus's book. "Everywhere one sees the directing and destroying hand of Jewry!"[35] Two years later, the book was republished. Nilus called the new version *The Great in the Small and the Coming of the Antichrist as a Future Probability: The Protocols of the Zionist Elders*, declaring that the six-pointed Star of David was the biblical "mark of the Beast," foretold in the Book of Revelation. The

Protocols, he asserted, exposed the Jewish plan for world domination, a scheme whose principal aim was the introduction of Satan on earth and the destruction of Holy Orthodox Russia. With Nicholas's permission, Nilus dedicated the book to the emperor, who himself paid for its publication and distribution by the Court Chancellery at Tsarskoye Selo.[36]

An investigation ordered by Prime Minister Peter Stolypin eventually revealed the sordid plot, and with some reluctance Nicholas ordered his Chancellery to halt distribution, commenting, "A just cause cannot be defended through dirty means."[37] Yet he continued to believe that exposure of this alleged Jewish conspiracy was "a just cause." As a prisoner in Tobolsk he complained bitterly to one of his children's tutors that the "Yids" had incited the Russian people to revolution, and repeatedly turned to the pages of Nilus's fabrication, noting that it made for "very timely reading."[38]

In the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905 and the publication of the *Protocols*, Russian anti-Semitism became firmly entrenched, supported as it was by the emperor himself. Several odious groups, including the Black Hundreds and the Union of the Russian People, rose to the forefront of the movement, determined to uphold the vanished autocracy and promote devastating pogroms. To both groups, Jews were purely and simply evil, condemned in the speeches of their leaders, their bulletins, and in their propaganda, as collectively guilty of Russia's misfortunes and the rise in revolutionary activity. Jews, they warned, hoped to exploit peasants and workers, smash the Russian Orthodox Church, and overthrow the Romanov Dynasty; if these same bodies did not support their anti-Semitic policies, they would be engulfed when the tide of Jewish revolution swept across the empire.[39]

Both the Union and the Black Hundreds found an enthusiastic and ardent supporter in Nicholas II. Although at times he questioned their methods, he stood wholeheartedly behind their aims and believed fiercely in their views. On December 23, 1905, he happily received a deputation from the Union, accepting honorary membership for both himself and his infant son with these words: "Unite the Russian people—I am counting on you!"[40] He was likewise steadfast in his support for the Black Hundreds, once telling Count Konovnizin, their leader, "I know that Russian courts are too severe toward the participants in the pogroms. I give you my Imperial word that I shall always lighten their sentences, on the application of the Union of the Russian People, so dear to me."[41] The Union also received official support from the imperial government—in one year some 2.5 million rubles alone for their propaganda—while the emperor and empress sponsored its activities with private contributions that helped fund new pogroms.[42]

With pogroms favorably discussed in government-owned newspapers and local authorities inciting the masses to riot, a crisis was inevitable. It came in March 1911, when a thirteen-year-old boy from Kiev was found murdered, stabbed forty-seven times. The local press eagerly described it as established Jewish ritual slaughter, and crowds clamored for blood. Although an investigation found that the boy had been killed by a band of local Russian thieves, senior police officials told their men to "find a Yid" on whom to pin the crime.[43] Chaplinsky, the Kiev District prosecutor, candidly admitted that finding the real culprit was unimportant, urging that the crime be used to prove to the world that Jews practiced ritual murder.[44] It took some time, but the prosecutor, "with the personal blessing of the emperor," was finally able to uncover a "witness" of questionable honesty, who claimed to have seen a young Jew, Mendel Beilis, kidnap and murder the boy.[45] Beilis was arrested in August, but it took Chaplinsky two years to fabricate a case against him.[46] Nicholas II himself read the official reports of perjury and manufactured evidence, but refused to intervene as the case moved forward.[47] Worse still, even though he knew Beilis to be innocent, the emperor actively conspired with his government to frame him for the crime.[48] He sent the assistant public prosecutor of the St. Petersburg District to work with Chaplinsky in Kiev, where the pair bribed witnesses and forced the coroner to alter his official report.[49]

Shortly before the trial began, Nicholas summoned the presiding judge, handed him a gold watch, and promised a future promotion if the government won the case he knew to be fabricated.[50] When it came to trial, the case—as Duma official Paul Miliukov declared—embodied "all the falsehood of the regime, all its personal violence."[51] On October 28, 1913, as the prosecutor warned that "the Jews would destroy Russia!" the jury found Beilis not guilty. It was stunning news, received with disbelief within the imperial regime; the official government newspaper *Novyoe Vremya* even declared that "all Russia has suffered a defeat."[52]

The verdict came in the midst of celebrations marking the three-hundredth anniversary of Romanov rule, falling like a stone in a sea churning with discontent. Strikes and riots threatened to overwhelm the country: just six months before the festivities, hundreds of workers were massacred near Baku during a demonstration. The number of political arrests and forced exiles to Siberia increased dramatically, providing an ominous mise-en-scène for the celebrations.

Nicholas looked to the ceremonies—which included services and balls in both St. Petersburg and Moscow and a visit to the Ipatiev Monastery in Kostroma, where young Michael Romanov had been offered the vacant Russian throne in 1613—as a chance to evoke public

support for his faltering regime. The Revolution of 1905 and its aftermath left the empire uncertain, and the imperial family left their cloistered life in the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoye Selo rarely, exchanging its protections for their estate at Peterhof, on the Gulf of Finland; cruises aboard their favorite yacht, *Standart*, in the Finnish skerries; journeys west to their Polish hunting lodges; and holidays at the imperial compound of Livadia, in the Crimea. This pattern guaranteed that they remained hidden from the outside world.

It was all as Alexandra and, to a lesser extent, Nicholas himself, wished. They valued the sanctity of their family with a jealous passion, resenting public duties as an encroachment on their private lives. As historian Edward Crankshaw noted, the empress spent these years "trying to confine her children and Nicholas himself to a sort of everlasting cosy tea-party at Tsarskoye Selo."[53] They never realized, added Russian diplomat Dimitri Abrikossow, "that as Emperor and Empress, they were no longer private individuals with personal sympathies, that duty toward the country rather than absorption in family life should have been their prime consideration."[54] The former glories of the imperial court were abandoned, the enormous rooms of the magnificent Winter Palace cloaked in silence.

The empress forced herself through rare public appearances, though by 1913 she was increasingly unwell. Alexandra had never been particularly strong, inheriting her mother's fragile health, and even in her first years in Russia she suffered from innumerable complaints: sciatica, fatigue, shortness of breath, and incessant headaches. The sheer number of medical consultations was staggering: in 1898, when she was only twenty-six, Alexandra saw court doctors on more than two hundred separate occasions, and in 1900 there were more than a hundred examinations. In addition to her other complaints, by the beginning of the twentieth century Alexandra had been diagnosed with acute otitis.[55]

The symptoms were genuine, though the empress's ill health was rooted in her increasingly nervous condition, a diagnosis confirmed by Dr. Eugene Botkin, the court physician-in-ordinary who treated the family and shared their eventual assassination. In a letter to his brother Peter, Botkin reported: "I am very pained about the malady of the Empress; it is a nervousness of the heart related to the cardiac muscles. This is confirmed by physicians here who I have consulted. I spoke without restriction because I believed it to be in the best interests of the Empress. I like to let my imagination free to search for different names for the Empress's condition."[56]

Alexandra used her declining health to absolve herself of her ceremonial duties as empress, in much the same way that Nicholas eagerly looked on his self-declared fate as releasing him from responsibility as

the empire crumbled away. During World War I, however, the empress unwittingly revealed the true nature of her troubles. "I want to help others in life," she once explained, "to help them fight their battles and bear their crosses."[57] Cast into this role of caregiver, Alexandra completely forgot her own struggles and focused her energies on others. Thus, she attempted, often successfully, to impose her will on her husband—to help him bear "his cross" of ruling—and spent hours engaged in ordinary hospital work as a nursing sister, roles that freed her and at the same time allowed Alexandra to cloak herself in the mantle of champion of the sick; the downtrodden; and, in her husband's case, the weak.

In the empress's isolated world, where she saw few people, she purposely surrounded herself with a pair of trustworthy and uncritical women. Lili Dehn, wife of Karl Akimovich von Dehn, a Russian naval officer who commanded the cruiser *Varyag*, was the first and most astute; the second, Anna Vyrubova, offered the empress, as Pierre Gilliard wrote, a "fiery and sincere devotion." It was, he declared, just as Alexandra wished: "Imperious as she was, she wanted her friends to be hers, and hers alone. She only entertained friendships in which she was quite sure of being the dominating partner. Her confidence had to be rewarded by complete self-abandonment."[58]

Having gone voluntarily—or been subsumed by his wife's more forceful character—into this narrow world, Nicholas attempted to use the 1913 celebrations to promote the historical link between the Romanov Dynasty and the Russian people, and to assert his own vision of his role as emperor. As shortsighted as Nicholas could be, in one respect he was far ahead of his contemporary monarchs: with an uncanny sense of the value of his own family, he eagerly offered them up as paragons of modern morality, launching a propaganda war that continues to this day.

Nicholas took the unprecedented step of commissioning an authorized biography, published in Russian, English, and French, that portrayed him in glowing terms as the most pious, patriotic, and paternalistic Russian ever to occupy the imperial throne. To a large extent, the book focused on his private life, a previously forbidden subject now laid bare in an attempt to win back the affection of his subjects. He had lost control of Russia, been forced to grant the hated Duma, and bow repeatedly to his wife's wishes, yet there was one area over which he still remained master: the presentation of his family to the nation and the world, and Nicholas was not shy in using them, especially his beautiful daughters and handsome young son, to evoke patriotism and loyalty to the throne. Descriptions of their simple family life—complete with declarations that all enjoyed only Russian food, found comfort in the Russian Orthodox Church, and read only Russian

literature—crafted an image to accompany the hundreds of official photographs and postcards, creating a cult of personality that lingered far beyond the end of the Romanov Dynasty.

Despite the proliferation of photographs, postcards, and newsreels depicting them, the five children of Nicholas and Alexandra remained enigmas to Russia, unknown by all but a handful of court officials and infrequently seen relatives. After the murders in Ekaterinburg, their sad, sheltered lives were often portrayed in the most unrealistic terms: a closely knit, loving imperial family, doting parents and adoring children who did not resent their imposed isolation but, as Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, one of Alexandra's ladies-in-waiting, wrote, looked on their parents "as delightful companions."[59] Like any family, however, they endured struggles, fights, and insecurities, realities made all the more clear in their letters and diaries.

In her first six years of marriage, Alexandra gave birth to four daughters: the Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Marie, and Anastasia Nikolaievna. Enveloped though they were in privilege and surrounded by a bevy of fawning courtiers, they endured sad, shadowy lives made all the more tragic by the murders in Ekaterinburg. Weighed down by the burdens of office, Nicholas spent little more than an hour with them each evening, and often this, too, was sacrificed to the demands of the throne. Alexandra acted as their principal influence, a loving if obsessive mother who had difficulty allowing her children their foibles, mistakes, and pleasures. She retained a Victorian distaste for anything that hinted at idleness; from their earliest days her daughters were taught not to be frivolous, but to occupy themselves at all times with something useful, be it reading, writing letters, piano lessons, needlework, or painting. In such a narrow environment there was little opportunity for youthful high spirits, and as the girls grew older they frequently clashed with their forceful mother. "The children," Alexandra once complained to Nicholas, "with all their love still have quite other ideas and rarely understand my way of looking at things, the smallest, even, they are always right and when I say how I was brought up and how one must be, they can't understand, find it dull."[60]

In this repressive atmosphere, the children learned quickly that the empress ruled the palace. All except Tatiana favored their father, with whom they shared confidences and could act according to their vibrant characters; with their mother, they were often guarded, aware that any infraction might bring disapproval. Queen Marie of Romania remembered that the four grand duchesses "were natural, gay and pleasant and quite confidential with me when their mother was not present; when she was there, they always seemed to be watching her every expression so as to be sure to act according to her desires."[61]

With the empress often unwell, the girls, as Pierre Gilliard noted, "arranged matters in such a way that they could take turns of 'duty' with their mother, keeping her company for the day."[62] Increasingly, though, Alexandra interacted with her daughters only in brief letters, exchanged beneath the same roof. For such healthy girls, coping with both their mother's fragile mental and physical state and her passive acceptance of suffering as "God's will" took its toll. In 1908, thirteen-year-old Olga wrote, "So sorry that I never see you alone Mama dear, can not talk so should try to write to you what could of course better say, but what is to be done if there is no time, and neither can I hear the dear words which sweet Mama could tell me."[63] A year later, twelve-year-old Tatiana wrote to her mother: "I hope you won't be today very tired and that you can get up to dinner. I am always so awfully sorry when you are tired and when you can't get up."[64] This deliberate isolation began to take an emotional toll on the relationships. "Mother came over and lay down nearby," Olga candidly reported to her grandmother the dowager empress in 1913. "As usual, her heart isn't well. It's all so unpleasant."[65] And even Tatiana, the most subservient and dutiful of the four girls, once complained, "Mama, sweet, I am so awfully sad. I see so little of you. I hate going away for so long. Really, we never see you now."[66]

To these heartfelt letters, Alexandra usually replied with typical fatalism. To eleven-year-old Marie she once explained: "It is my great sorrow not to be able to be more with you all and to read and shout and play together—but we must bear all. He has sent His cross which must be borne. I know it's dull having an invalid mother but it teaches you all to be loving and gentle."[67] Such exhortations brought little comfort to the grand duchesses, who idolized their remote mother yet, as the years passed, grew increasingly distant from her.

Olga, the eldest daughter, was born in November 1895, one week before her parents' first wedding anniversary. She most resembled her father, with his light chestnut hair and deep blue eyes. Gleb Botkin, son of the imperial physician, recalled that she was "probably the least pretty of the four, but because of her personality, the most attractive."[68] It was this personality—"open, somewhat brisk," as Queen Marie recalled—that singled Olga out among the girls.[69] The quietest of all the children, she also was the most thoughtful. Well-read, she liked to retire by herself for hours with a book, or sit and ponder life. "She was by nature a thinker," Gleb Botkin remembered, "and as it later seemed to me, understood the general situation better than any member of her family, including even her parents. At least I had the impression that she had little illusions in regard to what the future held in store for them, and in consequence was often sad and worried."[70]

The four grand duchesses, 1914. From left: Marie, Anastasia, Tatiana, and Olga.

Olga struck many as intensely serious, an undoubted echo of her mother; Alexandra imbued all of her children with a sense of purpose, but Olga, as the first, seems to have borne the most criticism. The empress often lectured her "to be an example of what a good little obedient girlie ought to be. You are the eldest and must show the others how to behave. Learn to make others happy, think of yourself last of all. Be gentle and kind, never rough or rude. In manners, as well as in speech, be a real lady."[71]

As she grew older, Olga resented this oppression, and frequently clashed with her mother. Charles Sidney Gibbes, her English tutor, noted that Olga was "easily irritated" and that "her manners were a little harsh."[72] And Anna Vyrubova, who knew the grand duchesses well, wrote that Olga possessed "a hot temper" and "a strong will and singularly straightforward habit of thought and action. Admirable qualities in a woman, these same characteristics are often trying in childhood, and Olga as a little girl sometimes showed herself willful and even disobedient."[73] In her letters to Nicholas when he was at army headquarters during World War I, Alexandra often complained of her eldest daughter's behavior: "Olga is the whole time grumpy, sleepy, angry to put on a tidy dress and not nurse's [uniform] for the hospital and to go there officially—she makes everything more difficult by her humor," she once wrote.[74] She termed her "always most unamiable about every proposition" the empress made, writing that she "sulks with me" when corrected.[75] In turn, those who knew her agreed that Olga's relationship with her mother was strained. "She loved her father more than anybody else," Gibbes remembered, a sentiment echoed by Colonel Eugene Kobylinsky.[76]

Tatiana was born in 1897. With her long, lean figure and fine features, she most resembled her mother. "You could hardly find anyone so thin," recalled Gibbes.[77] Alexander Mossolov, head of the Imperial Chancellery, wrote that she was "the best looking of all the sisters."[78] Proud and exceptionally refined, Tatiana impressed everyone with her grace and soft character. "She was a poetical creature," recalled Lili Dehn, "always yearning for the ideal and dreaming of great friendships."[79]

In manner, Tatiana was "gentle and reserved," according to Anna Vyrubova, so protective of her siblings that they called her "the Governess."[80] Gilliard thought her "essentially well balanced," with "a will of her own, though she was less frank and spontaneous than her elder sister."[81] Gibbes, however, dissented, saying that Tatiana was "reserved, haughty, and not open hearted," though he also noted that she was "the most positive" of the imperial children. "She was always preoccupied and pensive and it was impossible to guess her thoughts."[82] And Colonel Kobylinsky, who got to know her well during the family's Siberian exile, perceptively added: "She was quite different from her sisters. You recognized in her the same features that were in her mother—the same nature and the same character. You felt that she was the daughter of an emperor. She had no liking for art. Maybe it would have been better for her had she been a man."[83]

Tatiana shared her mother's streak of melancholy, which only increased as she grew older. "It was impossible to guess her thoughts," recalled Gibbes.[84] Even so, Tatiana was, like her mother, the most decided in her opinions: she drew lines between those whom she liked and those whom she did not. It was Tatiana who inherited her mother's sense of purposeful authority and unquestioning acceptance of their privileged lives. In turn, Alexandra indulged her second daughter, treating her as an intimate in a way she found impossible with the headstrong Olga.

Above all, Tatiana was, as her mother wished, subservient to her wishes, dutiful and loyal. To please the empress, she tried to copy her religious piety, diligently recording conversations with Rasputin and his letters to the family.[85] But she was unable to exhibit the same depth of feeling. To Tatiana, said Gibbes, religion was a "duty" imposed on her, in contrast to her elder sister Olga, who felt it "in her heart."[86]

Unable to match Alexandra's religious fervor, Tatiana assumed the role of caretaker. "She was closest in sympathy to her mother and was the definite favorite of both her parents," recalled Baroness Buxhoeveden. "She was completely unselfish, always ready to give up her own plans to go for a walk with her father, to read to her mother, to do anything that was wanted."[87] And Gilliard noted that Tatiana "knew how to surround" the empress "with unwearying attentions and never

gave way to her own capricious impulses."[88] With Tatiana, the empress mirrored the behavior of her own aunt, Queen Alexandra, and had treated her daughter Princess Victoria like "a glorified maid," according to Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna.[89]

The two youngest daughters had only just begun to reveal their individual personalities and talents when the Revolution erupted. Marie, born in 1899, was the most beautiful of the sisters, "a typical Russian beauty," said Gleb Botkin, "rather plump and with cheeks red as apples."[90] With her thick, golden hair and deep blue eyes, she attracted many admirers, among them her cousin Prince Louis of Battenberg, later Lord Mountbatten, who kept her photograph beside his bed until his assassination in 1979.[91]

Broadly built, Marie inherited her grandfather Alexander III's strength, and liked to amuse herself by grabbing her male tutors and lifting them up in the air.[92] Modest and simple, she was generous and gregarious, the most unassuming of the children and who continually flirted with the young officers surrounding the family. She often would sneak away from the palace and slip into the guards' dining room, chatting with the soldiers who told her of their lives, their wives, and their children. "All the intimate affairs in such cases were always known to her," recalled Kobylinsky.[93] Her greatest desire, she often declared, was to one day marry and raise a large family.[94]

Marie passionately adored her father, and as a young girl constantly followed him about the palace; she felt less affection for her mother. As the third daughter, Marie believed she had been unwanted and was unloved, a situation unwittingly exacerbated by the empress. When Marie once confided her insecurities to her mother, Alexandra responded in typical though far from reassuring fashion. Rather than speak to her troubled daughter, she composed a letter to the eleven-year-old girl in which she urged her daughter to "try to be good," promising that "then all will love you."[95] The mere fact that, in the midst of this emotional crisis, the empress felt compelled, through habit or discomfort, to confine her assurances to paper speaks volumes of the emotional distance between Alexandra and her children. Nor did her response, promising that her daughter would be loved provided she behaved, prove any more comforting to the sensitive young girl. Marie, in turn, replied with a pleading, childish letter of her own, which resulted not in personal assurances but a second letter from the empress, who lacked the necessary parental skills to successfully navigate this common dilemma: "Your letter made me quite sad. Sweet child, you must promise me never again to think that nobody loves you. How did such an extraordinary idea get into your little head? Get it quickly out again. We all love you very tenderly, only when too wild and

naughty and won't listen then must be scolded; but to scold does not mean that one does not love, on the contrary, one does it so as that you may cure your faults and improve. You generally keep away from the others, think that you are in the way and remain alone . . . instead of being with them; now you are getting a big girl it is good that you should be more with them. Now do not think any more about it, and remember that you are just as precious and dear as the other four and that we love you with all our heart."[96]

The fourth and youngest daughter, Anastasia, was born in 1901. The idea that she, too, had been unwanted undoubtedly led to Anastasia's famously roguish behavior. She was the rebel of the family, her small, boyish frame well suited to her wild pursuits. She climbed trees, then refused to come down; terrorized her tutors with practical jokes; and made frequent, often barbed comments at the expense of those around her. Once, when discussing portraits of her children with a visiting artist, the empress declared, "It is Anastasia who will give you trouble."[97] Gleb Botkin thought Anastasia "witty, vivacious, hopelessly stubborn, delightfully impertinent, and in general a perfect enfant terrible," noting that "she undoubtedly held the record for punishable deeds in her family, for in naughtiness she was a true genius."[98] Although generally good-natured, Tatiana Botkin recalled that Anastasia also was "full of a good dose of mischief."[99] This "mischief" often took the form of purposefully mean-spirited and obnoxious behavior, particularly with her young cousins. One, Princess Nina Georgievna, later declared that Anastasia was "considered nasty to the point of being evil," and recalled long afternoons of play where she cheated, kicked, and scratched to get her own way, a "frightfully temperamental" girl, "wild and rough" who resented any challenge.[100]

Short and somewhat overweight, Anastasia was described by one tutor as the only ungraceful member of the imperial family.[101] Her auburn, shoulder-length hair, as Gibbes remembered, "was not wavy and soft, but lay flat on her forehead."[102] Of all the children, it was Anastasia, as Tatiana Botkin recalled, who had "the most extraordinary blue eyes of the Romanovs, of great luminescence."[103]

Deprived of true confidantes, the grand duchesses befriended the young women who comprised the household within the palace—the maids, dressers, and nurses. "They took the greatest interest in the Household from the highest to the lowest," recalled Baroness Buxhoeveden, "and were considerate in little ways, often doing things for themselves so as to enable their maids to go out."[104] Although they occasionally played with their Romanov cousins, none of the girls had any real friendships.[105] Olga, remembered Tatiana Botkin, "longed pathetically" for real friends, yet none were ever allowed.[106] Their

closest companions were two of their mother's young ladies-in-waiting, Anastasia Hendrikova, who acted as a sort of unofficial governess, and Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, who, at age twenty-eight, was appointed one of their mother's ladies-in-waiting in 1913. The latter noted sadly that "no young girls were ever asked to the Palace."[107]

For the girls, these friendships became their only contact with the outside world. "The Empress thought that the four sisters should be able to entertain one another," commented Buxhoeveden.[108] Such unfortunate circumstances soon became widely known. In 1912, the author of an American magazine article titled "Royal Mothers and Their Children" referred to the children as "inmates of the imperial nursery," watched over by their "nerve-wracked mother" who suffered from "abnormal fears" for their futures.[109]

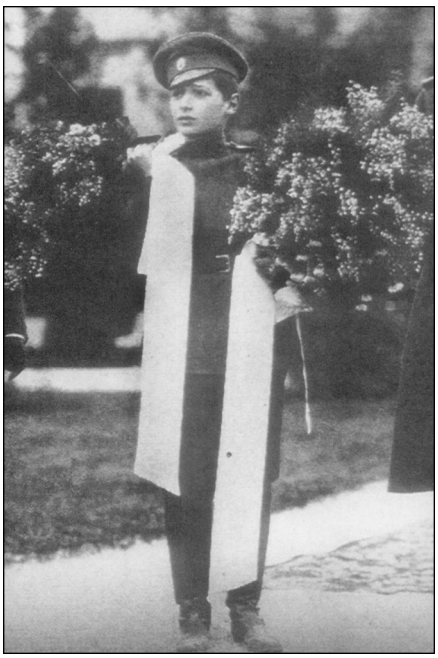
Their upbringing, coupled with the isolation imposed by their mother, meant that none of the girls was prepared to face the harsher realities of the world that lay beyond their palace gates, a world into which they were plunged after the Revolution. As Alexandra wished, the girls were certainly unaffected by their positions, yet this innocence came at a price: not only did the empress deny her daughters any semblance of a normal youth, but also, in so doing, she deprived them of the healthy interaction that led to maturation. "I never heard the slightest word suggestive of the modern flirtation," recalled Alexander Mossolov. "Even when the two eldest had grown into real young women, one might hear them talking like little girls of ten or twelve."[110] And while they could behave properly when the occasion demanded, Elizabeth Naryshkina-Kuryakina, the empress's mistress of the robes, wrote that "they generally behaved like young savages."[111]

As loved as the girls were, Romanov succession laws demanded a male heir. Both Nicholas and Alexandra grew frantic, seeking the intervention of a number of dubious holy men such as Nazier-Vachot, and reputed saints. When their only son, Tsesarevich Alexei, was born in 1904, their joy was replaced with despair on learning that he had inherited hemophilia from his mother, who, in turn, had received the defective gene through Queen Victoria. The discovery shattered the couple's lives. Nicholas submissively accepted his son's illness as another manifestation of "God's will," but Alexandra, her physical and mental health devastated by the knowledge that she had passed the disease to her only son, turned to mystics for comfort.

When, in 1905, Gregory Rasputin first appeared, the imperial couple were so emotionally overwrought that they readily accepted him and his mysterious ability to relieve their son's illness. Born in the small Siberian village of Pokrovskoye, Rasputin, contrary to popular legend, was never a monk, but rather a starets, a pilgrim who wandered the

empire in search of God. On arriving in St. Petersburg, he impressed the Orthodox hierarchy with his piety and growing reputation as a powerful healer. Rasputin never shed his peasant roots, and he moved through this world of gilded palaces and aristocratic admirers with undisguised pride, openly boasting of his influence over the imperial couple, who increasingly relied on his apparent power to relieve their son's suffering. Surrounded by those seeking power, often drunk, and finding no shortage of women willing to share his bed, the peasant fell victim to intrigues and to his own inability to resist the temptations of his privileged position. Alexei's illness remained a carefully guarded secret. The public knew only that the heir to the throne was frequently ill; no one understood the true nature of the disease, and rumor replaced fact. The reasons for the imperial couple's reliance on Rasputin were never revealed, and his scandals and sexual indiscretions attached themselves to Nicholas and Alexandra, doing much to undermine the last remaining vestiges of public affection for the Romanovs.

"Alexei was the center of this united family, the focus of all its hopes and affections," wrote tutor Pierre Gilliard. "His sisters worshipped him. He was his parents' pride and joy. When he was well, the palace was transformed. Everyone and everything in it seemed bathed in sunshine."[112] A handsome baby when he was born, Alexei grew into a tall, thin young boy, closely resembling his mother. "He had a long, finely-chiseled face," recalled Pierre Gilliard, "delicate features, auburn hair with a coppery glint in it, and large blue-grey eyes like his mother's."[113]



The heir Tsesarevich Alexei Nikolaievich, 1914.

The tsesarevich constantly struggled against the barriers his hemophilia placed on his life, begging his parents for a bicycle or to row or play tennis; but such activities were dangerous, and Alexei was almost always refused.[114] He grew up sheltered and isolated, denied even the most common of childhood pleasures. His parents surrounded him with two sailors, Derevenko and Nagorny, referred to as diadkas,

who followed the boy everywhere, watched while he played, warned him when he overexerted himself, and spent long hours carrying him about when he was unable to walk owing to his illness. Derevenko, the older of the pair, was a large man, and the young boy seemed to take particular delight in ridiculing the sailor's efforts to keep up with him. He habitually called Derevenko "The Fat One," and often would humiliatingly yell loudly, "Look at Fatty run!" as the sailor struggled to keep up in public processions.[115]

Alexei was undoubtedly affected by his illness. He had great empathy for those who also suffered, and could be unusually thoughtful for a boy of his young age. He rarely complained about his own health, just the restrictions his illness placed on how he could live. "Disagreeable things he bore silently and without grumbling," recalled Gibbes. "He was kind hearted and during the last period of his life he was the only one who liked to give things away."[116]

Although usually polite, Alexei also possessed more than a hint of autocratic temperament and could behave imperiously. "Influenced only through his emotions," wrote Gibbes, "he rarely did what he was told, but he obeyed his father; his mother, loving him passionately, could not be firm with him, and through her, he got most of his wishes granted."[117] Wild and uncorrected, he could embarrass family members with his undisciplined behavior. Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, after his wife lunched with the imperial family, recorded in his diary, "He wouldn't sit up, ate badly, licked his plate and teased the others. The Emperor often turned away, perhaps to avoid having to say anything, while the Empress rebuked her elder daughter Olga, who sat next to her brother, for not restraining him. But Olga cannot deal with him."[118]

Indulgence, in Alexei's case, often led to bad manners and temper tantrums that left his young Romanov cousins startled. One day, at Livadia, he sent a message to the youngest sons of Grand Duchess Xenia to come have tea with him; at the appointed hour they arrived, but Prince Rostislav, Alexei's favorite cousin, was being punished and remained behind. When he saw that Rostislav was not present, Alexei rudely told his other cousins, "You can all go home!" and walked back inside the palace.[119]

Catherine Mikhailovna Frolova-Bagreeva, whose family had a small dacha just down the hill from Livadia, recalled that "it was not always pleasant to see the Heir coming, because he was a 'mischievous' child as our parents taught us to say. He liked to greet people who bowed to him with a bloody nose by hitting them in the face as they bowed. I remember one day his sailor-nanny taking him by the hand so that he couldn't greet people with a bloody nose, and so the Heir greeted us, in public, with very

bad language."[120] Eventually Alexei began to grow out of such behavior, but neither of his parents did much to correct the problem. Nicholas saw his children far less than he wished, and the empress indulged her son and could not bring herself to scold him, even when he behaved in the most appalling fashion. "While I fully shared the general devotion to him," wrote Gleb Botkin, "his manners seemed to me considerably worse than those of his sisters, and his restlessness rather depressing."[121]

Heartbreakingly, the five children remained hopeful and naive, their early years behind palace walls having drained them of the ability to judge character and recognize the darker forces gathering in their father's empire. Once, in the midst of an English history lesson on Llewellyn, Olga optimistically declared, "I really think people are much better now than they used to be. I'm very glad I live now when people are so kind."[122] Only in the last year of her life, having watched her father abdicate and herself and her family imprisoned first by the Provisional Government then by the Bolsheviks, did Olga come to understand just how ugly people could be.

At 7:10 p.m. on august 1, 1914, Germany declared war on Russia. There was great optimism for a swift victory in the first days, when both the British and French presses dubbed their ally "the Russian steamroller."[123] But all the Imperial Army had in its favor was sheer manpower: in 1914 it stood at 3.1 million men.[124] To every yard of railway track in Russia, Germany had ten, and the kaiser's factories outnumbered the emperor's by the hundreds. Ammunition was in short supply: after soldiers fired their stock, they had to wait for resupply, under bombardment of German artillery. Each Russian soldier traveled an average of eight hundred miles to the front, compared to two hundred for the Germans.[125]

Initial enthusiasm temporarily dispelled the growing discontent with the imperial regime and, for the first time in his reign, Nicholas found himself enveloped in popular adulation. It was not to last. In September two hundred thousand Russian troops surged through the bogs and marshes of Poland and eastern Prussia. Led by cavalry swinging their sabers, General Paul Rennenkampf's First Imperial Army and General Alexander Samsonov's Second Imperial Army marched into the forests at Tannenberg, to be mowed down by enemy artillery.[126] Samsonov was so humiliated that he rode off into the woods and shot himself.[127] Within a few months the Germans managed to rout the Second Imperial Army; by the time they retreated, the Russians had lost nearly half of their men.[128] Most Russian soldiers had never seen the weapons they now used, and knew nothing of the modern world; on

seeing airplanes for the first time, some peasants took it as a sign that God was fighting on the side of the enemy and fled their positions.[129] By the end of 1914 the Russians had lost some 1 million men.[130]

In March 1915 the Russians captured Austria-Hungary's strongest fortress, Przemsyl, and a month later held most of the Carpathian Mountains. But Germany came to Austria's aid with heavy artillery, and the Russians lost—killed and wounded—more than fifteen thousand men in just four hours.[131] "The retreat from Galicia was one vast tragedy for the Russian Army," recalled General Anton Denikin. "The German heavy artillery swept away whole lines of trenches, and their defenders with them. We hardly replied—there was nothing with which we could reply. Our regiments, although completely exhausted, were beating off one attack after another by bayonet. . . . Blood flowed unendingly, the ranks became thinner and thinner; the number of graves constantly multiplied."[132]

More disaster followed near the end of the summer, when Warsaw fell. Much of Russian Poland had to be evacuated in advance of the German offensive, and, as the kaiser's armies marched toward the Baltic provinces, there was even talk to possible occupation of the imperial capital itself. As summer turned to fall, nearly half of the Russian army of the previous year was gone: 1.4 million killed or wounded, and 976,000 prisoners.[133]

The fall of Warsaw was a major strategic and moral blow to the Russians, and prompted Nicholas II to take over as supreme commander of the Imperial Army himself. He was prompted and supported by the empress, who believed that the former supreme commander, Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievich, deliberately undermined her husband's prestige and power to win laurels for himself.[134] The emperor took up residence at Stavka, the military headquarters that had been established at Mogilev, hundreds of miles from the actual front. In truth, the move was largely symbolic: important decisions were made by General Michael Alexeiev, the emperor's chief of staff, and Nicholas did little more than review troops, inspect field hospitals, and preside over military luncheons.

Nicholas's assumption of the post as supreme commander made little difference in the conduct of the war, but the damage proved fatal—if not in fact, then certainly in perception. He abandoned the capital, leaving Alexandra responsible for reviewing reports and receiving ministers on his behalf. Had Nicholas remained at Tsarskoye Selo, it is unlikely he would have followed a different course in the unfolding political drama of those years, subject as he would still have been to his wife's exhortations and advice. Members of the government, however, together with a majority of his subjects, saw it as evidence of the

imperial couple's gross incompetence, and believed that this single decision hastened the end of the monarchy. In this case, perception—however inaccurate—became accepted reality. All the misfortunes that followed, both political and military, were laid at the feet of the emperor, the empress, and Rasputin, who, it was assumed, controlled them both and dictated Russian policy.

It all came to its unbelievable, incredible end in the early morning hours of December 17, 1916, when Rasputin was murdered by a group of conspirators led by Felix Yusupov, the wealthy, flamboyant homosexual prince married to Nicholas II's niece Princess Irina Alexandrovna. Rasputin's death, like his life, became legend, the conspirators convinced that in their cold-blooded act of poisoning, stabbing, beating, shooting, and finally drowning the peasant, they would be hailed as Russia's saviors, that his elimination would somehow cause a sudden and radical shift in Nicholas II's policies. Such reasoning was as ill-conceived as the murder itself, and nothing changed. Nicholas remained obdurate, bowing to the wishes of his stronger wife, who failed to suffer the complete physical and moral collapse the assassins had predicted.

Rasputin's murder was the provocation that many had anticipated in an autumn of discontent. The war staggered from disaster to disaster, soldiers were demoralized, and arms shortages increased daily. Unwisely, the government poured all effort and energy into the struggle, neglecting the swelling tide of misery in the cities. The situation was particularly bad in Petrograd, as Nicholas had patriotically renamed St. Petersburg at the beginning of the war. Inflation rose to incredible heights, making daily life a struggle; the hungry factory workers, exhausted from their grueling shifts, trudged through banks of snow to wait in long lines for the meager food a few kopecks could purchase, only to discover the shelves empty. "In a country teeming with food," reported Robert Wilton of the *Times* of London, "we are bereft of the most elementary necessities of life."[135]

Trains carried not food to Petrograd, but arms away from its factories to the distant front, blocking regular supplies to the capital. As winter set in, fuel was scarce, and food growing more so. The wealthy still managed to give splendid parties in their palaces along the frozen Neva River: lavish ballrooms scented with the aroma of fresh flowers, diamonds and gold braid flashing through the haze of blue cigarette smoke as guests plucked glasses of champagne from silver trays held aloft by liveried footmen. Beyond their windows, however, the suffering multiplied, the misery grew, the hunger rose among the silent masses.

The inevitable crisis finally erupted in late February, when starving factory workers and social unrest converged in the frozen streets. Daily demonstrations led to general strikes, followed by looting, open calls

for the emperor's abdication, and imperial guards abandoning their regiments to join the revolutionaries. Events moved quickly, and within a week the imperial regime had collapsed, replaced by a Provisional Government. Nicholas, trying to return to Petrograd from Mogilev, found his train blocked by rebel garrisons; he eventually ordered it to Pskov, to learn that the new Provisional Government and his generals insisted on his immediate abdication.

The succession laws in 1917 dictated that the throne should go to Alexei. In the early afternoon of March 2, 1917, this is exactly what Nicholas did, abdicating for his twelve-year-old son, with Nicholas's brother Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich as regent. The decision was inevitable; he had learned that two representatives from the Provisional Government, Alexander Guchkov and Vassili Shulgin, were already on their way to Pskov, to demand that he do so; rather than appear to bow to the pressure of the Revolution, Nicholas acted himself. Having signed the manifesto, the former emperor could do nothing but wait, a long winter afternoon and evening interrupted by a conversation with one of Alexei's doctors. Contrary to Nicholas's expectations, he was told that he would almost certainly be separated from his son and forced, with his family, into some form of external exile.[136]

Hearing this, Nicholas—indecisive to the last—changed his mind, abdicating a second time, for himself and for Alexei, in favor of his brother Michael. This was illegal; Nicholas did not possess the power to alter the succession law in such a way, though no one challenged him. The abdication manifesto, for whose patriotism and dignity Nicholas II was personally praised, was, in fact, written not by the emperor but by Prince Nicholas Basily.[137] Although the final version was signed at 11:40 P.M. on March 2, it was given a time of 3:00 P.M., to preserve the illusion that Nicholas had not acted under pressure from the government.[138] The following day, Michael refused to accept the throne unless called on to do so by a representative body, ending the 304-year-old rule of the Romanov Dynasty.

On March 8, General Lavr Kornilov arrived at the Alexander Palace with orders from the Provisional Government to arrest the empress. He told her that the emperor would return on the following day and that both would be placed under the protection of the Provisional Government.[139] In her diary, Alexandra wrote: "From now on, we are to be considered prisoners: shut up—may see nobody from outside."[140] Nicholas's arrival at Tsarskoye Selo on March 9 marked the first of 481 days of imprisonment for the Romanovs, ending only on July 17, 1918, with their assassination.[141]

The former imperial family passed their first five months as prisoners in the Alexander Palace. The circumstances of their confinement

were marked with minor annoyances rather than real fear. All doors were locked and sealed, and only the new palace commandant had a set of keys. Telephone lines were severed, and all correspondence was subject to censorship. Though restricted to a small portion of the imperial park, the Romanovs had ample provisions; enjoyed wine from the imperial cellars; and continued to be attended by nearly a hundred members of their suite and household.[142]

As the weeks wore on, no one knew what to expect. "Our captivity in Tsarskoye Selo did not seem likely to last long," Pierre Gilliard wrote, "and there was talk about our imminent transfer to England. Yet the days passed and our departure was always being postponed."[143] Nicholas had hoped for exile to England; the day after his abdication, he sent a formal request to Prince George Lvov, prime minister in the new Provisional Government, asking for safe passage for his family from Murmansk, and he made frequent mention in his diary of packing his belongings in anticipation of leaving Russia.[144]

King George V of Great Britain was a first cousin to both Nicholas and Alexandra, and the imperial couple expected to find sanctuary in his country. The king, however, wanted nothing to do with his Russian cousins, and forced his government to withdraw its offer of asylum. The question of what to do with the former sovereign and his family fell to Alexander Kerensky, who became prime minister of the Provisional Government after an abortive Bolshevik coup d'état in July 1917. In Petrograd's long, pale "white nights," he wrestled with the difficulties posed by their continued presence near the capital. There was some talk of the Crimea as a possible destination, but, like England, this, too, vanished.

In the end, Kerensky selected the small Siberian town of Tobolsk as a place of exile. Being isolated, it promised a brief respite from the chaos of the Revolution until he could arrange for their safe transport out of Russia. In addition, as Kerensky himself noted, it boasted a large residence, the Governor's House, which would be suitable for the Romanovs and their servants. After placing Colonel Eugene Kobylinsky, a former officer in the Petrograd Imperial Life Guards Regiment, in charge of the three hundred soldiers of the Special Detachment who would guard the Romanovs, Kerensky broke the news to the prisoners, who quickly began packing their belongings.

The afternoon of July 31, 1917, hung heavily over the Alexander Palace, its lemon-yellow facade and white Corinthian colonnade washed by the soft northern sunlight. Within, the imperial family wandered through the deserted rooms; shafts of light sliced across the marble and wooden floors, bathing the dust-covered furniture and draped crystal chandeliers in the pale evening glow. "After supper we waited for

our constantly postponed hour of departure to be set," Nicholas wrote in his diary.[145] With their rooms locked, they gathered in the semicircular hall, with tall French doors opening onto the park beyond, the marble floor covered with luggage and steamer trunks.[146]

Kerensky arrived shortly after eleven that night.[147] He found the empress, dressed in a traveling suit, sitting in a corner weeping "like any ordinary woman and mother."[148] "We have not suffered enough for all the faults we have committed," she commented bitterly.[149] Trucks finally arrived 1:30 A.M. to convey the luggage to the train on which the Romanovs would travel. As the night wore on, and the family waited, the anxiety only increased. "The Tsesarevich," wrote Kerensky, "was full of excitement and exceedingly frolicsome. He kept on trying to escape from the inner rooms into our room, to find out what was going on in the Emperor's Study."[150] Midway through the night, however, the pressure overwhelmed him, and he burst into tears, crying, "Why don't they kill us at once, and be done with it? It would be better than murdering us slowly in this way!"[151] Nicholas stood quietly in a corner, incessantly smoking cigarette after cigarette, while the four grand duchesses, clad in white summer dresses, "wept copiously."[152]

Two o'clock passed, then three, yet no train had arrived. After making several telephone calls, Kerensky learned that rail workers in Petrograd had prevented its departure. Throughout the long night, Kerensky hovered over the telephone, trying to negotiate an uneasy truce. All through the pale, half light of the northern night, figures moved in and out of the Alexander Palace, silhouetted against the glow from the tall windows. At 5:15 A.M., Kerensky finally learned that the train had arrived at the Alexandrovsky Station at Tsarskoye Selo.[153]

A string of motorcars pulled into the driveway and up to the ramp, and Nicholas and Alexandra, followed by their children, walked through the doors and climbed into the open vehicles. Alexandra's face, recalled one witness, "was ashy white as she went out of the door of her home for the last time."[154] Above, the sky had turned a fiery pink, and shafts of early-morning sun slanted through the tops of the tall trees. As the cars drove away, the family turned and watched as the Alexander Palace shrunk away in the distance; thirty minutes later, their train steamed off in the pale morning light, toward Siberia.[155]

"History," commented one Bolshevik historian, "probably can record no criminal furnished by his jailers with such a vast staff of servants as Nicholas enjoyed with the personal consent of Kerensky."[156] In all, forty-two persons accompanied the Romanovs into exile, including Adjutant General Count Ilya Tatischev; Prince Vassili Dolgoruky, who served as grand marshal of the imperial court in exile; Countess Anastasia Hendrikova, lady-in-waiting to the empress; Mademoiselle Catherine

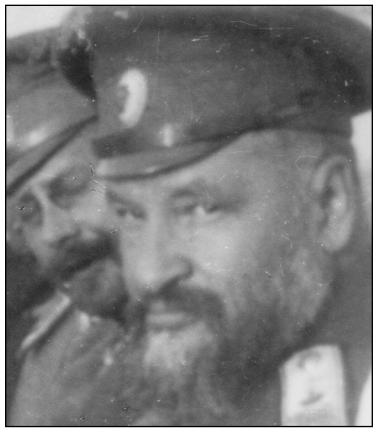
Schneider, the court lectrice; two physicians, Dr. Eugene Botkin and Dr. Vladimir Derevenko; Pierre Gilliard, tutor of French to the imperial children; ladies' maids Marie Tutelberg, Anna Demidova, and Elizabeth Ersberg; Alexandra Tegleva, nursery assistant; Terenty Chemodurov, the emperor's valet; Alexei Volkov, valet de chambre to the empress; Ivan Sednev, footman to the grand duchesses; Klementy Nagorny, the tsesarevich's attendant; seven additional footmen, including Alexei Trupp; a kitchen superintendent; four cooks, including Ivan Kharitonov; Leonid Sednev, kitchen assistant; Alexander Kirpichnikov, a secretary; a hairdresser; and a sommelier. In the fall and winter of 1917, six others arrived in Tobolsk to share the imperial family's captivity: Charles Sydney Gibbes, tutor of English to the children; Klaudia Bittner, brought in to instruct the children in music; Madeleine Zanotti, the empress's dresser; the maids Anna Romanova and Anna Utkin; and Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, who arrived in December 1917. These last three were not admitted to the house where the Romanovs were confined.[157]

Prince Vassili Dolgoruky, who acted as adjutant during the imprisonment at Tsarskoye Selo, was the stepson of Count Paul von Benckendorff, grand marshal of the imperial court; in Siberia he assumed his stepfather's place as grand marshal of the nonexistent court. Tatischev, like Dolgoruky, was an aristocrat, a member of the suite who remained dedicated to the Romanovs. "A better and more loyal man than he it would be hard to find," wrote Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich.[158]

Of the women who formed the imprisoned suite, the eldest was Mademoiselle Catherine Schneider. A niece of the former imperial physician Dr. Hirsch, as a young lady she was charged with helping Alexandra's sister Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna learn Russian, a task she repeated for the empress in her position as lectrice. "She adored the Empress and her children," recalled one official. "She was infinitely sweet tempered and good hearted."[159] She shared the empress's strict morality, once forbidding the grand duchesses from staging a play that contained the word "stockings."[160] Countess Anastasia Hendrikova, who served at court with the rank of freilina, or lady-in-waiting, was of aristocratic stock, daughter of a master of ceremonies under Alexander II and Alexander III. Like Mademoiselle Schneider, she remained faithful to the Romanovs to the end, paying for her loyalty with her life at the hands of the Bolsheviks.

The third of the court ladies who remained was Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, who became a freilina in 1913 at age twenty-nine.[161] As one of the youngest women at court, she often accompanied the grand duchesses on their official engagements, taking the place of their frequently ill mother. The girls, especially Olga and Tatiana, looked on her

as a confidante, calling her "Isa" and treating her with the friendship their mother prevented them from extending to any girls their own age. Illness prevented her from accompanying the Romanovs on their journey to Tobolsk; when she eventually arrived, in December, she was denied permission to join them in the Governor's House.



Eugene Sergeievich Botkin, court doctor.

Of the two doctors who shared the imperial family's confinement, the most important and devoted was Eugene Sergeievich Botkin. Born in 1865, Botkin came from a family whose great passion was medicine. His father, Serge Botkin, had served as court physician to both Alexander II and Alexander III, and his brother Serge also became a doctor. They took advantage of early marketing, and "Botkin's Powder's" and various other cures were widely manufactured and distributed across Russia.

Botkin's brother Peter memorialized him as a living saint, a man who embodied all known virtues: "From a very tender age, his beautiful and noble nature was complete," he wrote. "He was never like other children. Always sensitive, of a delicate, inner sweetness of extraordinary soul, he had a horror of any kind of struggle or fight. We other boys would fight with fury. He would not take part in our combats, but when our pugilism took on a dangerous character he would stop the combatants at the risk of injuring himself. He was very studious and conscientious in his studies. For a profession he chose medicine: to help, to succor, to soothe, to heal without end."[162]

Eugene Botkin studied medicine at the University of St. Petersburg before taking courses at the Universities of Berlin and Heidelberg. When he returned to Russia he was appointed chief physician at St. Georgievsky Hospital in St. Petersburg, and frequently lectured on medical matters at the Academy of Medical Sciences.[163] During the Russo-Japanese War he served with distinction as a volunteer aboard the St. Georgievsky Hospital Red Cross train.[164]

In 1908 Botkin received an appointment as personal physician-in-ordinary to the imperial family. "My responsibility is great but this is not only vis-à-vis the family," he wrote to his brother Peter. "I find myself with a great burden, a responsibility toward not only the family but the whole country."[165] Botkin was one of the few members of the imperial suite conversant in languages, often speaking to the empress in

her native German, and occasionally acting as her translator when she had to receive Russian delegations.[166] The imperial family relied heavily on Botkin, and he was a favorite among the children. "Your brother is a true friend to me," Nicholas once said to Peter Botkin, "we take everything to heart, and we feel comfortable describing our maladies to him."[167]

Botkin married "a poor young woman," in the words of his brother Peter.[168] The couple had four children who survived: three boys—Dimitri, Yuri, and Gleb; and one daughter, Tatiana. In time the Botkin marriage became strained: with the empress's increasingly bad health, Dr. Botkin sacrificed his own family life to look after his imperial patients, and his wife, feeling neglected, began a scandalous affair with a German tutor, eventually demanding a divorce, which her husband granted with some reluctance.[169]

At the beginning of World War I, both of the eldest Botkin sons, Dimitry and Yuri, joined the army. Dimitry, recently graduated from the elite Corps des Pages in St. Petersburg, became a lieutenant in a Cossack regiment assigned to the Eastern Front, where he was killed in December 1914.[170] Botkin was devastated by his son's death, and Gleb noticed an increasing fatalism: "He grew more and more orthodox in his religious conceptions," he wrote, "and developed a veritable abhorrence of the 'flesh.'"[171]

By the time of the Revolution, Botkin was a saddened, prematurely aged man, tall and stout. Habitually attired in an immaculate waistcoat, jacket, trousers, stiff shirt, and tie, he wore a gold-rimmed pince-nez perched midway down his nose. His one indulgence was his love of scent: the grand duchesses used to tease him by chasing him around the palace, sniffing the air to follow his trail.[172]

Botkin's colleague Dr. Vladimir Derevenko owed his position at court to his fellow physician, who had hired him as an assistant to help care for the tsesarevich. Before this Derevenko had served as physician to the emperor's Cossack *Konvoi* regiment.[173] "A capable surgeon he was," Gleb Botkin recalled, "however, of peasant stock and showed it only too clearly in his manners and speech."[174] Derevenko remained with the Romanovs after the Revolution and followed them into exile, but he was intensely bitter. "Some job you've found for me, I'm telling you!" he often shouted at Botkin.[175] His loyalty to the Romanovs was always pliable; he owed his devotion first and foremost to his own family, who followed him into Siberian exile. His son Nicholas Vladimirovich was one of the few playmates allowed to the tsesarevich. Known as Kolya, he was born in 1906, two years after Alexei Nikolaievich, and attended the Emperor Nicholas Gymnasium in Tsarskoye Selo. Alexei adored him, and in Siberia he and Kolya became close friends.

At the time of the imperial family's departure for Siberia, only one of the children's tutors, Pierre Gilliard, lived with them, and he was the only tutor allowed to accompany them to Tobolsk. Gilliard, of Swiss nationality, had joined the imperial court in 1905, having previously worked for Duke George of Leuchtenberg.[176] Although undoubtedly devoted to the imperial family, Gilliard was, Gleb Botkin recalled, "a very ordinary type of French teacher," and whatever abilities he brought to his position were largely constrained by both the empress's attitudes and the children's own educational disinterest.[177] Gilliard later married Alexandra Tegleva, nursery maid to the tsesarevich, described by Gleb Botkin as "a very nice woman but a complete nonentity."[178]

Gilliard's English colleague, Charles Sydney Gibbes, who lived in a wing of the Catherine Palace, tried unsuccessfully to gain admission to the Alexander Palace after the Revolution.[179] Born in Yorkshire, he came to the imperial court a few years after Gilliard, attempting, not altogether successfully, to teach the children English. Having received Kerensky's permission to join the Romanovs, he arrived in Tobolsk shortly before the Bolshevik Revolution in October. The third tutor, Klaudia Bittner, had not held any court position, but obtained her place in the household through the influence of Colonel Kobylinsky, whom she later married.

The female members of the empress's household who followed their mistress into exile were led by Madeleine Zanotti, who held the rank of Ober-Kamer-Jungferi, a post roughly equivalent to first lady's maid and imperial dresser. At the beginning of the Revolution, when offered the chance by General Kornilov to leave the Alexander Palace, Zanotti declared proudly, "In good times we served the family. Never will we forsake them now!"[180] Arriving in Tobolsk in December, she was not allowed to share their captivity in the Governor's House. Her two assistants, Maria Tutelberg and Elizabeth Ersberg, who held the ranks of second and third Kamer-Jungferi (ladies' maids), respectively, traveled with the Romanovs to Tobolsk, but were denied permission to follow them into the Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg; later they assisted White Army investigators in identifying the imperial family's belongings.

The only female member of the household who did follow the Romanovs to both Tobolsk and into the Ipatiev House was Anna Stepanovna Demidova. Born in 1878, Demidova was a tall, statuesque woman, with light blond hair and blue eyes, and came to court after the intercession of her friend Elizabeth Ersberg, who secured her a position as komnatnoye devyushki, or parlor maid. The pair became inseparable, and Demidova soon fell in love with Ersberg's brother Nicholas Nikolaievich, who was an official for the State Railway Inspection Board; at one point they were engaged, but for unknown reasons, the

Anna Stepanovna Demidova, Alexandra's last maid.

proposed marriage fell through.[181] During her service at court, Demidova became enamored of Charles Sydney Gibbes, the young English tutor to the imperial children. The homosexual Gibbes, however, took no notice; he once described her as "of a singularly timid and shrinking disposition."[182]

Of the emperor's household, only one man remained with the Romanovs and accompanied them into the Ipatiev House, Terenty Chemodurov. Born in 1849, Chemodurov came to the imperial court by way of the army, as did so many members of the household. In 1908 the emperor appointed the fifty-nine-year-old man as his valet. During their Siberian exile Chemodurov became increasingly senile, and was finally removed from the Ipatiev House to a local hospital just three weeks after the Romanovs arrived in Ekaterinburg.[183]

Alexei Volkov was born to a peasant family in Tambov Province in 1859; at sixteen he joined the Imperial Army, and eventually he came to the Pavlovsky Guards Regiment. In this capacity he became valet to the emperor's uncle Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich. After Paul's morganatic marriage and European exile in 1902, Volkov was given a position in the emperor's household, though he eventually switched and became the empress's Kammer-diner, or valet de chambre.[184]

The tsesarevich's diadka, his male sailor-nanny who remained with him after the Revolution, was Klementy Nagorny. Nagorny was twenty-nine, a tall, muscular man with jet-black hair and, as one man recalled, "guileless honesty and clarity in his gray eyes."[185] Tall and thin, with light, closely cropped red hair, Nagorny was a striking figure, with "skin as clear and delicate as that of a woman," as one guard later declared.[186] Throughout the imperial family's exile in Tobolsk, it was Nagorny who patiently attended to Alexei, and carried him when he was unable to walk. One guard recalled that Nagorny had "huge shoulders. His face bore the slavish expression of a peasant in uniform, though this particular peasant also had an infinite patience and tenderness in his face."[187]

An uncle and a nephew also accompanied the Romanovs into exile and finally into the Ipatiev House. Ivan Dimitrievich Sednev was born in 1886 in Yaroslavl; at age eighteen he joined the crew of the imperial yacht *Standart*, acting as an orderly. At twenty-five he left the yacht to

join the imperial household as kammer-diner (valet de chambre) to the grand duchesses. Sednev had cut a striking figure in his court livery: he was exceptionally tall, with red hair and a neatly trimmed Vandyke beard and mustache. Like so many others who followed the Romanovs into exile, he paid the ultimate price, being shot by the Bolsheviks in Ekaterinburg, leaving behind a wife and three children.

Sednev's brother died when he himself began service at the imperial court, leaving a young son, Leonid Ivanovich, called Lenka by his family. Ivan arranged for the young boy to live with him. Though two years younger than the tsesarevich, Leonid Sednev was, in many ways, infinitely more mature, and, in exile, displayed remarkable patience with, and concern for, Alexei, whom he befriended. The young boy was described by one guard as "tall for his age, thin," with a pale face and jet black hair.[188]

Two other male servants followed the imperial family to both Tobolsk and into the Ipatiev House, where they were murdered with the Romanovs. Alexei Trupp, fifty-nine at the time of the Revolution, had been a colonel in the military before joining the imperial household, where he served as a footman. Trupp was distinguished by his great height and sturdy build.[189] Ivan Kharitonov, forty-five at the time of the Revolution, served in the imperial kitchen as a cook. His wife and small daughter accompanied him into Siberian exile, but remained behind in Tobolsk when he went to Ekaterinburg.[190] He was somewhat small, though powerfully built, with, as Proskuryakov recalled, "black hair and a small black mustache."[191] On his left cheek, a mole sprouted thick hairs if he neglected to shave it.[192]

Alexei Igorovich Trupp, footman.

Ivan Mikhailovich Kharitonov, chef.

In Tobolsk, the Romanovs lived in the former Governor's House, with members of their extensive suite and household scattered between this residence and the Kornilov House, a large, ornate villa across the street. Tobolsk was a quiet town, protected from the tide of revolutionary ardor by its isolation. The closest railway connection was in the town of Tyumen, itself

separated by a hundred miles of desolate taiga, and linked by the Irtysh and Tobol Rivers, frozen from late October until early May. Here the former imperial family passed the long, uneventful autumn and winter, events unfolding in distant Petrograd as Lenin and the Bolsheviks overthrew Kerensky's Provisional Government and came to power. Their incarceration was not as comfortable as it had been in Tsarskoye Selo. The harsh Siberian winter kept the house cold, and unpleasant incidents increased as the months passed: the imperial family was forbidden to attend religious services; the members of the Special Detachment demanded that the emperor remove the epaulettes from his coats; and the prisoners were subjected to unwelcome searches and growing hostility from their guards.

Isolated, the Romanovs fell victim to a number of shadowy conspiracies, led by monarchists and double agents. Within two months of their captivity in Tobolsk, the money provided by the Provisional Government for the upkeep of both the prisoners and the members of the Special Detachment ran out. Kobylinsky, together with Tatischev and Dolgoruky, was forced to sign a bill of personal responsibility to local merchants to ensure continued provisions.[193]

In Petrograd, Count Paul von Benckendorff, the former grand marshal of the imperial court, gradually raised funds to support the prisoners. The largest amount came from Karol Yaroshinsky, a wealthy industrialist who had been one of the principal benefactors of the military hospital under the patronage of Grand Duchesses Marie and Anastasia Nikolaievna. Between November 1917 and April 1918, Yaroshinsky donated some 175,000 rubles toward the imperial family's upkeep in Siberia.[194] The majority of this money was sent to Siberia through Benckendorff, as the latter indicated in his memoirs.[195] But other money also was being gathered in the fall of 1917, both to help maintain the Romanovs in Tobolsk and to finance a rescue attempt. The two prime figures behind this secondary collection of funds were the empress's two closest friends, Lili Dehn and Anna Vyrubova.

In the autumn of 1917, Lili Dehn, in her attempts to assist the Romanovs in their Siberian exile, fell in with a thoroughly disreputable man, Nicholas Markov, known as Markov II, an extreme reactionary and former member of the Imperial State Duma. His beliefs were simple: the Jews, Masons, and Bolsheviks were all working together to destroy Russia. He collected funds necessary to enact the rescue operation he freely described to all he met, including a young officer, Serge Markov, formerly cornet of the Crimean Horse Guards Regiment under the patronage of the empress herself. Markov II warned that the chief task was "to raise larger sums, for there was no lack of faithful and reliable men; they were all well organized and ready to start for Tobolsk

at a moment's notice." He claimed that an agent, Nicholas Sedov, was already in Tobolsk, gathering men.[196]

Serge Markov realized that Markov II's chief concern was money. Before they parted, he asked the young officer to introduce him to Anna Vyrubova; when they met, Markov II insisted that "he was the only person who had made any attempt to try to organize a rescue." He repeated his assertion that trusted men awaited his orders, and warned that Vyrubova "must trust in him and help him out."[197]

A third man tied to the Romanovs' tenure in Tobolsk was Boris Soloviev, the twenty-seven-year-old son of a former treasurer of the Holy Synod and trusted friend of both Rasputin and Anna Vyrubova.[198] After the transfer of the Romanovs to Tobolsk, Soloviev married the peasant's younger daughter Maria Rasputin, and the pair set off for her home village of Pokrovskoye in Siberia.[199] In November 1917 Soloviev traveled to Tobolsk to investigate the Romanovs' position.[200] He met with the highest ecclesiastical authorities, including Bishop Hermogen and Father Alexei Vassiliev, priest at the Church of the Annunciation, where the imperial family had attended irregular services, handing over a number of letters and a large sum of money; Vassiliev promised to deliver them to the Romanovs.[201]

Soloviev told both men that a rescue effort was being prepared, adding that Rasputin's "family and his friends are active."[202] Hermogen himself volunteered the services a certain Staff Captain Lepilin, head of the Local Assembly of Soldiers of the Front, in any rescue.[203] All of this talk was built on a precarious foundation. Soloviev himself related that some three hundred faithful former officers were gathering to enact the attempt; when this news reached the empress, she asked that the organization be named the Brotherhood of St. John of Tobolsk.[204]

When Soloviev returned to Tobolsk on February 2, 1918, his story took a dramatic turn. For eighty-five years, Soloviev has been condemned as an adventurer, the Brotherhood of St. John of Tobolsk labeled a deliberate fabrication on his part, designed to win the confidence of the Romanovs and those acting on their behalf to further his own financial ends. In fact, Soloviev, while inept, was himself nothing more than Markov II's scapegoat in the latter's own nefarious schemes involving the Romanovs.

Soloviev had brought with him another installment of money and letters for the prisoners. When he met with Hermogen and Vassiliev and asked how the rescue plans were progressing, the clerics were confused. Neither had ever heard of Markov II or his assistant Nicholas Sedov, whom Markov II had claimed was organizing the three hundred men in Tobolsk. Nor had they received any of the money Markov II had collected in Petrograd.[205] Soloviev was stunned to learn that nothing

had been done.[206] Markov II's Brotherhood of St. John of Tobolsk, declared to be under Sedov's organization, had been nothing more than a financial shield used to drain the accounts of those gullible enough to hand over their funds. Soloviev had known nothing of this when he first informed Hermogen and Vassiliev of the plans Markov II had related. Now Soloviev realized the extent of the swindle.[207]

Shaken, Soloviev handed over 50,000 rubles he had brought from the capital. Some of this money reached the Romanovs through the valet Volkov, who was in close contact with Vassiliev, for on February 4 the empress wrote in a letter to Vyrubova: "Tenderly we thank through you K. Yarochinsky. Really it is touching that even now we are not forgotten."[208] Vassiliev, however, apparently kept most of it for himself.

When Alexandra learned that Soloviev was in Tobolsk, she hastily wrote him: "Let us know what you think of our situation. Our common wish is to achieve the possibility of living tranquilly, like an ordinary family, outside politics, struggle and intrigue. Write frankly, for I will accept your letter with faith in your sincerity."[209] Realizing the full extent of Markov's betrayal, Soloviev responded: "Deeply grateful for the feelings and trust expressed. The situation is on the whole very serious and could become critical, and I am certain that it will take the help of devoted friends, or a miracle, for everything to turn out all right, and for you to get your wish for a tranquil life. Your sincerely devoted Boris."[210]

Soloviev returned to Petrograd, where he met with Anna Vyrubova and Lili Dehn, telling them what he had learned from Hermogen and Vassiliev. Both women were horrified to discover that Markov II had apparently kept, for his own use, money intended to help the prisoners.[211] Before he left Petrograd, Soloviev apparently was given 200,000 rubles, collected by Count Paul von Benckendorff for the prisoners.[212] In his book, Benckendorff did not reveal the name of the courier, simply writing that "the money reached its destination, thanks to the devotion and energy of X."[213] Maria Rasputin later recalled: "Just before the Bolsheviks moved the capital, Boris was in Petrograd to collect a rather substantial sum for Their Majesties. This he did and conveyed it into trusted hands."[214]

Soloviev was back in Tobolsk on February 21, when he turned over the 200,000 rubles to a certain "Mademoiselle X, a lady of the court," as Serge Markov called her. This mysterious woman was, Markov said, ill at the time the Romanovs were originally sent to Tobolsk, arrived at a later date, but "the guards refused her entry to the Governor's House." She lived in her own apartment in town.[215] Markov clearly meant Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, the only "lady of the court" who had not joined the imperial family due to illness; who later came to

Tobolsk; who was refused admission to the Governor's House; and who had her own apartment in the town. "I left the money and letters with her," Soloviev later said, "which she promised to give to Volkov next day. We made arrangements for a meeting the following evening and I went home full of bright hopes." When he returned the following day, Buxhoeveden told him that everything had already been smuggled in to the prisoners, with the exception of a few books and some cologne. Believing the issue closed, Soloviev returned to Pokrovskoye.[216]

That Soloviev turned this money over to Buxhoeveden on February 21 is confirmed by four separate sources: Soloviev himself; Serge Markov; Maria Rasputin; and by Staff Captain Lepilin, Hermogen's envoy.[217] Yet Buxhoeveden did not hand over the money to Volkov, as she had claimed. On February 27, just six days after Soloviev gave Buxhoeveden the packages, the prisoners learned that as of March 1 they would all be put on ordinary soldiers' rations. According to Kobylinsky, who had assumed responsibility for the Romanovs' finances, the move came just in time as, "by the beginning of March, all of the money previously sent had vanished, and no more arrived for us."[218]

No further sums were ever turned over to the Romanovs or those imprisoned with them. In April, as Prince Vassili Dolgoruky told his stepfather Count von Benckendorff, the Bolsheviks learned that a member of the former suite living in Tobolsk had a large sum of the money intended for the imperial family. This led to an increase in surveillance on the prisoners and ultimately, he believed, to their transfer to the Urals.[219] In fact, early on the morning of April 25, Buxhoeveden and her companion Miss Annie Mather were awakened by a contingent of Bolshevik soldiers, who spent two hours searching their small apartment. An hour after the first group left, a second squad arrived, carrying "all kinds of murderous weapons." They, too, insisted on searching the entire apartment.[220]

Buxhoeveden herself offered no explanation for this nocturnal raid, though it is likely the men knew of Soloviev's funds. Buxhoeveden's behavior in swindling the Romanovs was starkly at odds with the devoted young woman who acted as confidante to the grand duchesses and who, in exile, wrote three lovingly detailed books on the imperial family and the Russian Empire. Yet this would not be her only act of treachery during the imperial family's Siberian captivity.

A tide of uncertainty was gathering around the Romanovs. Members of the Special Detachment, initially friendly to the prisoners, were dismissed, replaced by men who, having suffered the horrors of World War I and the brutalities of prison and political exile, held no affection for their former sovereign. By the spring of 1918 the Romanovs began to attract the unwelcome attention of revolutionaries

in Siberia's larger cities, who complained about the relative comfort of their life in the provincial town. Amid the swirling Siberian snows, the Romanovs looked from their windows to see mounted patrols of Bolshevik soldiers arriving daily, faces unknown and rifles at their side as they scrutinized the prison compound.

As these events played themselves out, the Romanovs grew increasingly nervous. When they left Tsarskoye Selo, they had brought an immense cache of jewelry with them. Charles Sydney Gibbes later estimated that the empress and her daughters had not less than 1 million rubles' worth of jewelry in Tobolsk (£3,000,000, or $4,890,000 in 2003 currency).[221] In fact, a portion of this collection of tiaras, diadems, brooches, bracelets, necklaces, and other jeweled objets d'art held by the prisoners in the Governor's House was later valued at some 2,662,528 rubles (£7,987,584, or $13,0197,619 in 2003 currency). Another 216,402 rubles (£649,206, or $1,058,206 in 2003 currency) of jewelry was found in Ekaterinburg after the imperial family's murder, representing a total of 2,878,930 rubles' (£8,636,790, or $14,077,968 in 2003 currency) worth of jewels in the Romanovs' possession in Tobolsk.[222]

The imperial family could easily have used this vast fortune in jewels to purchase their safe release. Colonel Kobylinsky was kindly disposed toward a rescue attempt, and for the first five months of captivity the members of the Special Detachment were chiefly concerned with money, not punishment of their former sovereign. Instead, however, the Romanovs began to disperse the larger pieces of jewelry to trusted servants. Brooches, diadems, and jeweled sabers were carefully wrapped in paper and cloth, concealed in packages or beneath the clothing of those who had access to the Governor's House, and smuggled out to Vassiliev at the Abalatsky Monastery; to Hermogen in the Bishop's Palace; to the nuns of the nearby Ivanovsky Convent; and to members of the suite.[223]

An uneasy tension settled over the Governor's House as the days passed, heightened by the sea of strange faces parading through the streets of Tobolsk. No one knew what to expect, though everyone sensed the growing menace. Unknown to the Romanovs, as they shivered through the last days of the harsh Siberian winter, two rival groups of Bolsheviks were engaged in a struggle whose outcome would seal the fate of the prisoners.