

Le Queux William

Rasputin the Rascal Monk



William Le Queux

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Содержание

Preface	5
Chapter One	6
Chapter Two	14
Chapter Three	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

Le Queux William Rasputin the Rascal Monk / Disclosing the Secret Scandal of the Betrayal of Russia by the Mock-Monk Grichka and the Consequent Ruin of the Romanoffs. With official documents revealed and recorded for the first time

Preface Why this Book is Written

In the following pages I have attempted to take the reader behind the veil of the Imperial Russian Court, and to disclose certain facts which, in this twentieth century, may appear almost incredible.

As one who knows Russia, who has traversed the Empire from Virballen to the Pacific coast, and who has met personally both the ex-Emperor and his consort, as well as many of the persons herein mentioned, I confess that I myself have often been astounded when examining the mass of documents which this dirty Siberian peasant – the convicted horse-stealer who rose to be the secret adviser of Nicholas II – had happily secreted in the safe in his cellar in the Gorokhovaya, in Petrograd, so that the real truth of his traitorous dealings with the Kaiser might be chronicled in history.

I had hoped to be able to reproduce many of the cipher telegrams and letters in facsimile, but the present shortage of paper has precluded this, and it could only be done if this book were issued in expensive form.

To me, it seems best that the British public should have access to it in a cheap and popular form, and hence I have abandoned the idea of facsimiles.

I here publish the story of the mock-monk's amazing career as a further contribution to the literature upon Germany's spy system and propaganda so cleverly established as an insidious adjunct to her military attack upon the civilisation of our times.

The conversations herein recorded have been disclosed by patriotic Russians, the truth has been winnowed out of masses of mere hearsay, and the cipher telegrams and letters I have copied from the de-coded originals placed at my disposal by certain Russians, Allies of ours, who desire, for the present, to remain anonymous.

*William Le Queux.
Devonshire Club, London, S. W.
November, 1917.*

Chapter One

The Cult of the “Sister-Disciples.”

The war has revealed many strange personalities in Europe, but surely none so sinister or so remarkable as that of the mock-monk Gregory Novikh – the middle-aged, uncleanly charlatan, now happily dead, whom Russia knew as Rasputin.

As one whose duty it was before the war to travel extensively backwards and forwards across the face of Europe, in order to make explorations into the underworld of the politics of those who might be our friends – or enemies as Fate might decide – I heard much of the drunken, dissolute scoundrel from Siberia who, beneath the cloak of religion and asceticism, was attracting a host of silly, neurotic women because he had invented a variation of the many new religions known through all the ages from the days of Rameses the Great.

On one occasion, three years before the world-crisis, I found myself at the obscure little fishing-village called Alexandrovsk, on the Arctic shore, a grey rock-bound place into which the black chill waves sweep with great violence and where, for four months in the year, it is perpetual night. To-day, Alexandrovsk is a port connected with Petrograd by railway, bad though it be, which passes over the great marshy tundra, and in consequence has been of greatest importance to Russia since the war.

While inspecting the quays which had then just been commenced, my friend Volkhovski, the Russian engineer, introduced me to an unkempt disreputable-looking “pope” with remarkable steel-grey eyes, whose appearance was distinctly uncleanly, and whom I dismissed with a few polite words.

“That is Grichka (pronounced Greesh-ka), the miracle-worker!” my friend explained after he had ambled away. “He is one of the very few who has access to the Tsar at any hour.”

“Why?” I asked, instantly interested in the mysterious person whose very name the Russian Censor would never allow to be even mentioned in the newspapers.

My friend shrugged his broad shoulders and grinned. “Many strange stories are told of him in Moscow and in Petrograd,” he said. “No doubt you have heard of his curious new religion, of his dozen wives of noble birth who live together far away in Pokrovsky!”

I glanced back at the receding shock-haired figure in the long black clerical coat and high boots, little dreaming that I had met the mock-Saint whose evil influence was to cause the downfall of the Imperial House of Romanoff.

Strange it is that to-day I have before me the amazing official reports of his career from revolutionary and private sources – reports from which I intend to here set out certain astounding facts.

First, it is quite beyond question that the Pravoslavny Church, with its malign influences and filthy practices, is, in the main, responsible for Gregory Novikh’s success as a worker of bogus “miracles.” The evil-minded libertine upon whom his fellow-villagers in Pokrovsky, in the Siberian Province of Tobolsk, bestowed the name of Rasputin (or in Russian, “Ne’er-do-well-son),” was a fisherman who possessed an inordinate fondness for the village lasses, and also for vodka. A mere illiterate mujik, disgusting in his habits and bestial in his manners, he grew lazy and dissolute, taking to theft and highway-robbery, for which, according to the official report of the Court of Tobolsk, before me, he was imprisoned twice, and a third time was publicly flogged and so degraded that he was compelled to bid farewell to Pokrovsky, much to the relief of the villagers. Behind him he left a peasant wife, a little son, named Dmitri, and two daughters. He also left behind him a handsome young peasant woman known as Guseva, a person who was destined to contribute a few years later in no small measure to his dramatic death. Sins always follow the sinners.

After a year or two of wandering as a rogue and vagabond, committing thefts where he could, and betraying any woman he came across, he suddenly conceived the brilliant idea of posing as a

“holy man.” This idea came to him because, while in Pokrovsky, he had had as boon companion and fellow-drunkard a certain market-gardener who had joined the Pravoslavny Church and is to-day by his influence actually a bishop!

In most Eastern countries, especially in India and China, there are many wandering “holy men,” and modern Russia is no exception. To lead a “gospel life” of endless pilgrimages to “holy” places and to collect money for nonexistent charities appealed to the fellow as an easy mode of lazy sensual self-indulgence. Therefore he adopted it, being aided by the ex-market-gardener, who was already in the Church. So both prospered exceedingly well.

Rasputin had by this time discovered himself possessed of quite extraordinary powers. Indeed a report upon him written by a great Russian alienist who knew him intimately, has recently reached London, and from its voluminous pages which I have had before me, I gather that both physiologically and psychically he was abnormal, while his natural hypnotic influence was marked by the rare power he possessed of being able to contract the pupils of his steel-grey eyes at will, regardless of sunlight or shadow. Few persons can do this. It is a sign well known to alienists that the person is a criminal degenerate. Rasputin never smiled, even when he drank heavily. He could consume three bottles of champagne and still be quite sober! With vodka, his favourite spirit, he became talkative, but never indiscreet. He was a lunatic of an intensely erotic type; a satyr who possessed a truly appalling influence over women of all ages, and even at his word men in high positions did not hesitate to cast off their brilliant uniforms and decorations and mortify their flesh!

From this man, crafty, cunning and elusive, a fiendish satyr whose hypnotic influence was irresistible, no woman, however high-born, high-minded, or highly religious was safe. He lived upon his wits, and lived well. With that amazing cunning usual in such criminals he affected a deep piety, so that at the various monasteries where he sought hospitality he was welcomed. In Russia many of the religious houses still unfortunately savour of the most disgraceful debauchery, as they did in England before the Reformation, and at such institutions Rasputin became a popular figure. At certain convents the mock-monk, with the connivance of the Pravoslavny Church, was eagerly entertained by the dissolute nuns, more especially at Novo Tchevkask, on the Don, as well as at Viatka, and at Saratov, in Kasan.

From the convent of Novo Dievichy (The Convent of the Virgins) near the last-mentioned town, a great place which overlooks the Volga half way to Wolgsk, some terrible scandals leaked out, when the Mother-Superior, probably to save herself from the public indignation, brought in four sturdy mujiks from the countryside, who pitched the “Saint” out into the road, and administered such a severe kicking that the “Holy Father” – as the Tsaritzza afterwards called him – could only creep about in pain for many days after!

Two months later, according to a report countersigned by Paul Dragomrioff, superintendent of the Secret Police of Moscow – a screed which, being somewhat ill-written, is difficult of translation – Rasputin was in that city. I here quote from it: —

“Report of Ivan Obroutcheff, Police-agent, Number 1287, of the 2nd Division, Secret Police, stationed at Moscow. April 2nd: —

“According to instructions from Police Headquarters, I visited at orders of Superintendent Dragomrioff, Number 136, Tverskaia, next to Loukonture’s papier-maché factory at 1:35 a.m. to-day. I there found in a carpeted but barely furnished room an assembly of the cult of the Naked Believers kneeling before the monk, Gregory Novikh. Twenty-eight persons, all being women, fourteen of them ladies of birth and education, were present, and as I entered with my eight assistants the ‘holy man’ stood at the lectern, reading passages from the Gospel of St. Luke, interspersed with his own exhortations of the trials of the flesh. The walls of the room were decorated with disgusting pictures of a nature which would shock the modesty of all but the *demi-monde*, while behind the monk Novikh hung a copy of the Holy Ikon of Novgorod.

“In accordance with instructions all present were arrested after they had dressed, and I ordered them to be conducted to the Central Police Bureau, where their names and addresses were taken, and they were interrogated singly. Most of the midnight worshippers expressed indignation, and more especially the ‘Saint’ Rasputin, who demanded in the name of the Tsar that he might telegraph to the Empress. My superior officer, Nemiloff, Chief of Secret Police of Moscow, could not deny him this privilege. The result has been that by eleven o’clock next day an order came from the Tsar for the release of all the prisoners, and orders that no facts should be permitted to appear in the Press. Grichka has left for the capital by the 4:15 express this afternoon.

“Signed: Ivan Obroutcheff.”

The report above quoted shows Rasputin in the early stages of his shameless debauchery. In London we have had the notorious Swami, with her male accomplice, practising similar acts upon innocent girls, but in Moscow the drunken and verminous monk with his hair-shirt, a rope around his waist and sandals upon his bulging feet, had attracted a select *coterie* of society women, daughters and wives of some of the greatest nobles of Russia, who, in secret and with gold in their hands, vowed themselves as docile followers of this Siberian fisherman whom nature had equipped as a satyr of such a type that happily none has ever been known in Britain in all its glorious years of history.

I readily admit that the career of Grichka, the man whose name the Censor does not allow to be mentioned, the sinister power that later on so suddenly appeared behind the Russian throne and whose true story I am here revealing, will appear incredible to my readers. I have written many works of fiction which some, of you may have read. But no work of mine has ever contained facts so extraordinary as the real life of this unwashed charlatan who, under the active protection of his debauched Church – and I write here with a true and reverent sense of our Christian religion – succeeded in establishing himself in the apartments of the favourite lady-in-waiting upon the Empress, and further, to teach his horrible “religion” to the innocent daughters of the Tsar in turn!

Much has already appeared in the newspapers regarding the sturdy unkempt rogue, but the greater part of it has emanated from the brains of writers who have not had access to official documents.

In these present articles my intention is to tell the British public the bare unvarnished truth culled from documentary evidence at my disposal, and to leave them to form their own conclusions. Russia, our great Ally, is, alas, still mysterious and much behind the times. True, she has a press, a Duma, and many modern social institutions. Yet her civilisation is only upon the surface. The Empire is, unfortunately, still the same as England was under the Tudors, an underworld of profligacy, plotting, and strange superstitions. The latter have, of course, been recently revived in London, as is proved by the prosecution of the fortune-tellers of Regent Street and St. John’s Wood. Again, were not the scandals of the “Abode of Love” much the same as that of Rasputin’s dozen-wived harem which he established in Pokrovsky?

The criminal records of Holy Russia teem with amazing stories of this “holy” scoundrel who from a drunken Siberian fisherman rose, by erotic suggestion, to become the greatest consolation to the Empress, and the lever by which “Nikki the Autocrat” was flung from his throne.

I remember how, when in Sofia, in the pre-war days with Sir George Buchanan, then our Minister to Bulgaria, and now ambassador to Russia, a cultured and clever diplomat to whom Great Britain owes more than she can ever know, and hence cannot acknowledge, we discussed the mystery of Russia and of the subtle influences near the Throne.

Little did either of us dream that he would now be ambassador to the Russian Court, and I would be writing this exposure of the evil life of the blasphemous satyr Rasputin.

The cult established by the pilgrimages of this illiterate peasant grew apace. The “holy father” whose disgraceful past is recorded in the police *dossiers* at Tyumen and Tobolsk had, by his astounding power of hypnotism, gathered around him a crowd of “Sister-disciples,” mostly of the upper and leisured classes, to whom the new religion of nature strongly appealed.

Upon his constant pilgrimages to Jaroslav, Vologda, Vitebsk, Orel and other places, he made converts everywhere. He declared that no woman could obtain favour of the Almighty without first committing sexual sin, because that sin was the one which was forgiven above all others. At his weekly séances at which, strange to say, the highest born ladies in the Empire attended in secret, the most disgraceful scenes were witnessed, the dirty unwashed monk, a most repellent creature to all save his “disciples,” acting as the high-priest of this erotic sisterhood.

Soon the disgusting rogue began to perform “miracles.” Into his confidence he took a young man named Ilya Kousmitch – who, be it said, afterwards made certain statements to those who at last meted out justice and who provided me with certain details – and with the young fellow’s connivance he succeeded in bamboozling a number of perfectly respectable and honest women in Petrograd, as well as in Moscow and Kiev, where he effected some really mysterious “cures.”

In one instance at the house of a certain Madame Litvinoff, in the Sergiyevskaya, the most fashionable quarter of Petrograd, the man known as “the Stareb,” or “Grichka,” held a select meeting of his followers. The shameless charlatan treated the ladies who had assembled to worship him and to contribute lavishly to his imaginary charities, with the greatest disdain and most brutal contempt. This man, guilty of the most appalling vices, addressed them as usual in a strange illiterate jumble, urging them to follow the new religion which he called “the trial of the flesh,” interspersing his remarks with occult jargon from works upon black magic, interlarded with those self-same scriptural quotations which will be found marked in that big Bible used by the Swami and her fellow-criminal – a volume now preserved in the Black Museum at Scotland Yard.

One of the women present, a certain Baroness Korotki, was suffering from acute rheumatism. The “Saint” placed his hands upon her, looked into her eyes with that intense unwavering stare of his, uttered some strange incantation, and lo! the pains left her, and she declared herself healed! The effect was electrical. Others declared themselves suffering from various imaginary maladies, and after performing certain rites as laid down by the “Holy Father,” he laid hands upon them one after the other, and hypnotised them into a belief that they were cured.

Next day reports of these amazing “cures” ran like wildfire through Petrograd, and the superstitious lower-classes were at once seized by a belief that the Saint “Grichka,” head of the fast-growing organisation of thinly disguised sensuality, was really a holy man and could work miracles. Around him crowded the halt and maimed and the blind, and aided by his accomplice Ilya Kousmitch, he not only pretended to effect cures, but succeeded in making many more converts among the lower-class women by declaring, as he had told the society dames, that there was in him a portion of the Divine with whom, as he put it, “all that would be saved must be one in the flesh and in the spirit!”

At one of his reunions, held a week or so later at Madame Litvinoff’s, there attended Madame Vyubova, the handsome leading lady-in-waiting at Court, and the chamber-confidante of both Tsar and Tsaritzza. Like the others, this intriguing woman at once fell beneath the mock-monk’s inexplicable spell. His new religion of the flesh appealed to her erotic temperament, and she at once became one of his most passionate devotees, a few days later introducing him at Court with astonishing result.

The subtle intrigues of Madame Vyubova were many.

As chamber-confidante of both Emperor and Empress she had for a long time assisted in the spiritualistic séances which were given in private at Tsarskoe-Selo by a Russian monk named Helidor and his French friend, known as “Philippe.” The young Tsarevitch was in a state of fast-declining health, and Helidor, as a “holy man,” had, at Madame’s suggestion, been called in to pray for him. Spiritualistic practices followed in strictest secrecy, and the credulous Empress first believed that the “holy man’s” dealings with the unseen were resulting in a beneficial effect upon the weakly lad.

At last, however, owing to Court intrigue, Helidor fell out of favour. It was just after this when Anna Vyubova first met and fell beneath the evil influence of Rasputin. Grichka was a “miracle-worker,” and might, she thought, perhaps restore the Tsarevitch to health! She knew that the Empress,

a shallow-minded, ephemeral woman, lived for one object alone, namely, to secure for her son the crown of Romanoff. But the physicians gave but little hope of this. In a year – perhaps before – he must die, they had whispered. Helidor had been dismissed. Would Rasputin be more successful?

Madame sought out the charlatan who was busy with many “cures,” and suggested that he should accompany her to the Palace, but with lordly disdain the drunken fisherman from Pokrovsky declared that to him all men and women were equal.

To a friend, a certain Madame Kovalenko, wife of one of the high Court officials, Madame Vyubova described this interview. It took place in Petrograd at the house of a rich merchant living in the Tavritsheskaya, opposite the gardens. When the lady-in-waiting, who had, like so many others, fallen beneath his spell, had made the suggestion that the master should be introduced to the Court circle, he placed his left hand behind his back, a favourite attitude of his, drew himself up and began to address her in that strange jargon which she hardly understood – quotations from the “Lives of the Saints” jumbled up with lewd suggestions, high phrases, and meaningless sentences. As conclusion to this speech, however, the wily fellow added:

“I care nothing for the rulers of earth, but only for the Ruler of Heaven, who has bestowed upon me His blessing, and has led me into the path of honour, righteousness and peace. The rulers, of earth worship in their chapels and their tinsel cathedrals, but I worship everywhere, in the air, in the woods, in the streets, and you, lady, worship with me in body and in soul.” And he raised his cold eyes upward, his right hand with its bulgy joints and broken dirty finger nails being placed across his breast. Then he sighed, as he added: “Ah! you do not yet understand! God has placed within me the power to smite – as well as to heal.”

Madame Vyubova, fascinated by his strange hypnotic glance, fell upon her knees before the “Saint,” and kissing his bulgy unclean hand begged of him again and again to see the Empress.

But the artful scoundrel remained obdurate. He knew of Helidor’s disgrace, and did not intend to hold himself at all cheaply.

The result was that Madame Vyubova sought him next day and, handed him an autograph note from the Empress inviting him to come to the Winter Palace and see the Grand Duke Alexis. He read it, secretly much gratified, for he knew that not only had his latest devotee prevailed upon the Empress to seek the aid of another Russian monk to succeed the degraded Helidor, but that the Pravoslavny Church, the most powerful influence of State governance, had also been responsible for the invitation he held within his dirty fingers.

From that moment Rasputin’s power became assured – a power he wielded for evil from that hour until the day of his well-deserved end.

When that grey afternoon the unkempt libertine was introduced to the small white-and-gold private salon of the Empress, which overlooks the gardens and the Neva on the northern wing of the palace, the Princess Obolensky, Princess Orbeliani and Countess Hendrikoff, maids-of-honour, were with Her Majesty, curious to see what manner of man it was who could perform miracles, and whom so many of the Society women in Petrograd and Moscow now acknowledged and addressed as “Master.”

Upon the threshold the mock-monk halted, and in that dramatic attitude, struck in order to impress his hearers, he stood with his left arm behind him, erect, with his unkempt head thrown back, his face stern and relentless, his grey eyes sharp and piercing.

For some moments he remained there in statuesque silence, well-knowing how women were impressed by that pose. The hypnotism of those grey eyes few of the opposite sex could withstand. His conquests, or “conversions” as he termed them – were in every direction, and in every city. The Cult of the Naked Believers had rapidly spread everywhere. He was besieged by female disciples eager to hold meetings, for without the actual presence of the Saint true worship of the erotic could not take place.

“Great Lady!” he exclaimed at last in his deep, heavy voice, still that of the Siberian mujik, “you desire me here? I have come!”

The Empress rose and stretching out her hand eagerly welcomed the unholy charlatan into the Court circle, and half-an-hour later introduced him to fully a dozen of the highest-born women of the Empire, all of whom were at once impressed by his affected piety and humility. But a “dark force” had now entered the very heart of Russia, and later that afternoon, in a luxuriously furnished bedroom the miracle-worker was shown the poor little Heir to the Throne lying upon his sick couch, he placed hands upon him, and Her Majesty herself fell victim to that strange spell which other women had found so indescribable and so inexplicable.

“I will cure your son,” said Rasputin slowly, after he had knelt beside him and looked long and earnestly into his eyes without uttering a word.

Madame Vyrubova was present and exchanged glances of relief with the Empress. To the latter, easily impressionable as she was, though all believed her to be a staid mother of a family, Rasputin became at once a Saint, a Divine agent, a miraculous guide. He had cured the poor; why could he not, if he willed it, cure her son?

Then in the days that followed “incidents” occurred in the Palace. At select assemblies of one or two of the Empress’s confidantes – parties, of course, arranged by Madame Vyrubova, Rasputin expounded his shameless “religion.” His jargon, the jumbled phrases of an illiterate peasant who knew not the meaning of what he uttered, his exhortations to commit sin so that it might be forgiven, his declaration of self-divinity, and his odds and ends of scripture mixed with the foulest vocabulary of Russian, was listened to with bated breath. Why?

Because, strange though it may seem, the health of the young Grand Duke Alexis had taken a sudden turn for the better. Even his physicians were compelled to acknowledge it!

Whether the latter were in any way under the influence of Rasputin by means of money-payment – for the fellow had by this time acquired a considerable fortune from his dupes – has not yet been ascertained. One thing, however, is shown in the documents before me, namely, that the mock-monk’s “miracles” were often effected by means of secret drugs of which he had quite a curious extensive knowledge. How this was acquired is again a mystery, save that he was very friendly with a certain student of Chinese and Thibetan medicine, named Badmayeff, and that this person regularly furnished him at high prices with certain little-known drugs from the Far East.

With the gradual improvement of the health of the poor little Grand Duke, Rasputin’s ascendancy over the Empress rapidly increased. He had been introduced to the Emperor, who, though regarding him with askance, tolerated him merely because his beloved son was improving beneath his daily prayerful treatment. Meanwhile, the canker-worm of Rasputin’s religion had, fostered by the Empress’s favourite lady-in-waiting, entered into the Court circle, and many secret meetings were held in the Palace where under the pseudo-religious cloak certain ladies of the Russian Court became devotees of the “Holy Father,” and practised abominations absolutely incredible.

Official reports contain both dates and names of those who gave themselves into the unscrupulous hands of this man who claimed the Divine right and thus worshipped as “Believers.”

Rasputin was too clever a scoundrel to allow matters to proceed quite smoothly. Several chance conversations with the Emperor and with Stolypin convinced him that he might ultimately share the same obscurity as Helidor. He therefore one day pretended to be offended at some words of the Empress – whom he now addressed by the familiar terms of “thee” and “thou” which he used to his disciples, though even the Grand Dukes and Duchesses would have hesitated so to address the Empress – and after a dramatic farewell, he took himself off to the wonderful and luxurious monastery which, according to his statement to the Empress, he had built at his native Pokrovsky with the money he had collected upon his various pilgrimages.

To the female section of Petrograd society he had been never tired of describing the beauties of this monastery where his fellow-monks lived a life of severe asceticism and constant prayer, therefore

at his sudden resolve to leave, the capital – or the better-class women of it – grew tearful and the Empress most of all.

Within four days of his departure for Siberia the little Tsarevitch was taken suddenly ill, and the Empress, beside herself at having expressed any words of doubt concerning the unkempt Saint who had so entirely entered into her life, telegraphed wildly to him. This message, since unearthed by the Revolutionary Party, which ran as follows: —

“I cannot bear your absence. Life is so grey and hopeless without you, my dear comforter, my master. Alexis has been taken ill. Do not take any notice of Kokovtsov. He is responsible for my hasty words to you and shall suffer for it. Forgive me. Return – for my sake and for the life of Alexis-Alec.”

But the crafty mujik was not to be thus entrapped. He had been guest of the Minister Kokovtsov, a week before, and his host and his friends had made him roaring drunk. In his cups he had made certain revelations. What they were the Saint could not recollect. Hence he had absented himself from Court, in order to maintain his Divine dignity – and to plot further.

At this point it is necessary to make a critical remark.

For two years Rasputin had been speaking of his monastery at Pokrovsky. In the salons and boudoirs of Moscow and Kiev as well as in Petrograd, society spoke of the institute, discussed it and declared that indeed Grichka was a holy man. The Metropolitan with his rich robes and jewels, and all the bishops were as common clay in comparison with the “Holy Father” who could cure by the laying-on of hands, who walked in humility and who devoted himself to good works. Curiously enough it had occurred to nobody, not even to the ever-ubiquitous police of Petrograd, to investigate the story told by Rasputin regarding his monastery at far-off Pokrovsky.

The world of Russia did not, of course, know that in that Siberian village there still lived Rasputin’s peasant-wife with her children, or that his life had been so evil, a career of drink and profligacy which even in Siberia stood out in letters of scarlet in the police *dossiers* of Tobolsk. It, however, remained for a female spy of the Revolutionary Party – a certain lady named Vera Aliyeff, from whose report I am writing – to travel to that sordid Siberian village and watch the Court charlatan in his home. I may here say that to the untiring efforts of Mademoiselle Aliyeff is in a great measure due the downfall and assassination of the terribly sinister influence which cost the Tsar Nicholas his throne, and hundreds of women their good name – as I shall afterwards show.

But to relate matters in their proper sequence as history I may here quote from the report of this patriotic woman-revolutionary who travelled to Rasputin’s home in disguise, because he knew her, and as she was good-looking, he had already endeavoured to induce her to join the Cult of the Naked Believers. She reports: —

“I found the great monastery of Pokrovsky to be a dirty repellent hamlet of mujiks of the worst and most illiterate type. There was no trace of the marble palace which Rasputin had described as having erected as the main building of the monastery. The latter was, I found, a large, cheaply built, ordinary-looking house, three rooms of which were given up to the ‘Saint’s’ peasant-wife, his son Dmitri and the younger of his two daughters, while in the other part of the house lived twelve women of varying ages – the youngest being sixteen – who were his fascinated devotees and who had given up their lives in Europe to enter the seclusion of that sordid home and become his spiritual brides.”

Here Mademoiselle Aliyeff had an interview with the woman Guseva, and later on after an inspection of the police records at Tobolsk and Tyumen, she returned to Petrograd and reported the result of her visit to the Right Party in the Duma.

Meanwhile, the Empress and also her favourite lady-in-waiting telegraphed to Rasputin urgently imploring him to return to Petrograd. But the verminous libertine was in too comfortable quarters with his dozen devotees to stir out far from his nest, and while going about the village standing drinks to all and sundry and ingratiating himself everywhere, he at the same time treated his old and ugly wife with brutal unconcern, and refused even to reply to the Imperial demand.

At last he grew weary of his retirement – for, truth to tell, he usually retired there whenever he disappeared upon his many pretended pilgrimages in Russia – whereupon he one day sent a telegram to the Empress saying that he had at last been directed by a Divine call to again return to the bedside of the Tsarevitch. This message was received with the greatest joy at Tsarskoe-Selo, where it set a-flutter hearts in which beat the noblest blood of Russia.

“The Holy Father is on his way back to us!” Such was the message whispered along the long stone corridors of the Winter Palace, the many windows of which look out upon the grey Neva. The Empress went to her son’s bedroom and told him the glad news, laying a tender hand upon the poor lad’s brow.

And Madame Vyubova meeting the Emperor as he came out of his private cabinet chatting with the Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and the Minister Protopopoff, whispered the news into his ear.

The Tsar smiled happily. Little did His Majesty dream that by that return of the unwashed scoundrel whom the most delicately nurtured women worshipped, he was doomed to lose his throne.

On Rasputin’s arrival some intensely dramatic scenes ensued – scenes that would be deemed fantastic if any modern novelist had dared to describe them even as fiction.

But from these voluminous reports and the *dossier* before me I shall attempt to describe them.

Chapter Two

Scandals at the Winter Palace

The rascalities of Rasputin were unparalleled, even in Russia.

The mock-monk, much against his will, returned to the Winter Palace where the Court had gone for a few days and only because of the Divine call, as he pretended. He treated the distracted Tsaritzza with utter disdain when early one wintry morning he drove in from the Dvortsovy Square, passed the Palace Guards, and ascended the wide black-and-white marble staircase of the Great Hall, where she stood eager to receive him.

“Ah! Forgive me! Forgive me, my Master!” implored the Empress in a low agonised tone. “I was thoughtless and foolish.”

“Take me to Alexis,” said the charlatan roughly interrupting her. “He is ill – very ill – and God has sent me to him.”

Eagerly the Empress conducted him to the bedside of her son, the little Tsarevitch. Madame Vyubova, the mistress of Rasputin, was awaiting him, together with two nurses and a physician named Letchitzki.

With rough deep-voiced dismissal the unkempt profligate sent everyone from the room, including the Empress herself. He wished to pray by the sick lad’s bedside, he explained.

This he did, Madame Vyubova alone remaining. When the door was closed the blasphemous rascal quickly bent over the Heir to ascertain that he was sleeping, then he raised his own dirty hands for Madame to kiss, crossing himself at the same time, and whispering “The drug? It seems to have acted well – eh? Where is it?” She slipped a tiny green-glass phial from her cream silk blouse and handed it to him, saying: “Yes, Badmayeff was right! Each time I gave it to him in his milk, he grew worse.”

“Ah!” laughed the verminous fellow, his sensuous face bearded and blotchy with drink. “Now that I have returned Divine Providence will restore him. He will not get his six drops each day!” The dastardly charlatan and poisoner of Russia’s heir concealed the Thibetan drug in the folds of his ample habit, and whispering in his rough uncouth peasant way, “Now let the fools in again!” he threw himself upon his knees by the bedside commencing a fervent prayer.

“O God – the Great! the Merciful! the Giver of all Bounties, the Creator, and the Death-giver – the Maker of Kings and the Destroyer of Nations – to Thee we pray – and of Thee we ask – ”

And as he uttered those blasphemous words the favourite lady-in-waiting opened the long white-and-gold door to admit the Imperial mother of the poor half-conscious elder son of the great House of Romanoff – the boy whose life was being trifled with by the administration of those pernicious drugs which, at any moment, when “Rasputin” willed, might cause death from haemorrhage.

The fellow Novikh, the low-born thief and blackmailer from the far-off wilds of Siberia, had planted himself in the Winter Palace as a divinity to be worshipped. The Court circle of silly women in search of sensation, and headed by the Empress herself, had fallen entirely beneath his baneful influence, believing that only by first practising his disgusting rites could they offer prayers to the Almighty. Another of the Empress’s intimates who had joined the Palace circle of Believers was Countess Ignatieff, who had also become a most devout follower of Rasputin and who exerted all her great influence in officialdom for his benefit and protection.

War had broken out, and while the newspapers of the Allies were full of Russia’s greatness and the irresistible power of her military “steamroller,” the world was in utter ignorance that the Empress was actually educating her own daughters to enter the secret cult of the “Believers,” a suggestion which they eventually obeyed! Such was the truly horrible state of affairs at Court. Thus in a few

brief months that unmasked thief whom the workers of Petrograd contemptuously called “Grichka,” and whose very name Rasputin meant “the ne’er-do-well” had, by posing as a holy man, and a worker of mock “miracles,” become a power supreme at Court.

Daily at eleven each morning this verminous libertine, whose weekly reunions were in reality orgies as disgraceful as any organised by the Imperial satyr Tiberius, knelt at the bedside of the poor little Tsarevitch to drone his blasphemous appeals to God, while the Empress, always present, knelt humbly in a corner listening to that jumble of exhortations, threats, and amazing assertions of his own divine right as high-priest of the Believers. The Empress had fallen completely beneath the hypnotism of the grey steely eyes, the hard sphinx-like countenance that never smiled, and those long dirty knotted fingers, the nails of which were never cleaned. To her, filth, both moral and personal, was synonymous with godliness.

Then, after each prayer, Madame Vyubova would assist the mock-monk to rise and declare — “The Holy Father is, alas! tired,” and then lead him off into the adjoining ante-room overlooking the Neva where a silk-stockinged flunkey stood ready to serve the scoundrel with his usual bottle of Heidsieck monopole – the entire contents of which he would quickly empty and smack his lips over in true peasant manner.

Mademoiselle Sophie Tutcheff, governess of the Tsar’s daughters, very quickly perceived a change in the demeanour of her charges. They were no longer the charming ingenuous girls they were before. She had overheard whispered conversations between the Grand Duchess Tatiana and her sister, Marie. Rasputin, moreover, had now been given luxurious apartments in the Palace, close to the rooms occupied by Madame Vyubova, and each day he came to the schoolroom in which the three younger Princesses, Tatiana, Marie and Anastasia were prosecuting their studies.

It did not take Mademoiselle Tutcheff long to discern the true state of affairs. The monk one day used the most lewd language while chatting with the three young Grand Duchesses, whereupon Mademoiselle, who belonged to one of the highest families in Russia, went off to the Empress in disgust and indignation. Her protests were, as may be imagined, met with withering scorn.

“I am Empress and the Holy Father is our guest in the Palace,” exclaimed the Tsaritzza, who was taking tea with two ladies of the Court who were her fellow-Believers. “What you have said is an insult to him. You are dismissed in disgrace.”

And an hour later poor Mademoiselle left the Palace without her pupils being allowed to bid her farewell.

This, however, was but one illustration of the power which the rascally ex-highwayman had secured over the Imperial Court, and hence over the great Russian Empire itself. His influence was more powerful than that of all the Grand Dukes, the Council of the Empire, and the Council of Ministers put together. True, His Majesty was Tsar, but Gregory Rasputin was equally powerful, if not more so, because of his innate craftiness, his pseudo-divinity, his mock miracles, and the support he received from a certain section of the Church.

Possessed of the curious cunning of the erotic criminal lunatic, Rasputin never allowed matters to run calmly for very long. He was much too clever for that, well knowing, that while Protopopoff, Minister of the Interior was his friend, he had as powerful enemies, both Stolypin and Miliukoff – who, later on, became Minister for Foreign Affairs. Both the latter he feared, as well as the Grand Duke Nicholas Michailovitch.

The latter had secretly learnt much concerning the ex-thief of the far-off Siberian village – more, indeed, than Rasputin had ever dreamed. One day, a week after the departure of Mademoiselle Sophie Tutcheff, the Grand Duke attended a great reception at the Winter Palace. The usual brilliant throng had assembled; the usual Imperial procession had taken place down the great Nicholas Hall, that famous salon wherein three thousand people can dance at one time – the salon the walls of which are adorned with golden plates, and where on the night of a Court ball the assembly is indeed a

gorgeous one of stars, medals, exquisite dresses and brilliant uniforms. Though Russia was at war, the Empress had given the ball, and all Russian Court Society had assembled.

Among the throng were two men the Bishop Teofan, of the Pravoslavny Church, and with him the monk, silent and unbending, upon whom the eyes of all the women were turned. Naturally there were many strange whisperings among those who were “Believers” and those who had not been initiated into the cult of the “Sister-disciples,” whispers among the old and young – whispers which were not meant for any male ear.

Bishop and monk passed down the great ballroom, through the beautiful winter-garden beyond, where many men and women were chatting beneath the palms, and then into the Oriental gallery, a place decorated with those engraved golden and silver plates which Catherine the Great received with bread and salt from those who came to do her homage.

Thence the pair disappeared into one of the side rooms to what is known as the Jordan Entrance.

A tall, bald-headed man with heavy brow, moustache, small round beard, and wearing a brilliant white uniform with many decorations had followed the pair from the ball-room. With him walked a young, clean-shaven, dark-haired man in uniform, erect and determined.

The elder was the Grand Duke Nicholas Michailovitch, the younger the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch.

They entered the small room unceremoniously, and confronted the illiterate Bishop and the peasant charlatan.

“We have come to turn you out of the Palace!” exclaimed the elder man firmly. “Your presence is obnoxious to us, especially the charlatan of Pokrovsky. We are Grand Dukes of Russia, and we have no intention to mix with convicted thieves and beguilers of women! Come!” His Imperial Highness cried, “Go! You are not wanted here!”

“And pray by what right do you speak thus?” asked the Starets with offensive insolence.

“By the right of my position,” was the Grand Duke’s reply.

In response, Rasputin spat upon the pale blue carpet in defiance.

In a moment the young Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch, an athletic young officer who had only the day before returned from the German Front where he had been with von Rennenkampf, took the dirty monk by the scruff of his neck and flung him outside into the big marble hall, administering to him a severe kick in the presence of a dozen of the astonished Palace guards.

“Put this scoundrel outside!” he commanded the men, and two minutes later, Rasputin, with his dirty black habit badly torn, found himself flung down the steps headlong into the snow.

Meanwhile the Grand Duke Nicholas had administered to the dissolute Bishop – whose sister, by the way, was one of Rasputin’s “spiritual brides” at his monastery, or harem, at Pokrovsky – a very severe castigation and with his own hands had torn the big crucifix from his neck and cast it across the room.

Then, when at last the Bishop emerged into the Hall, he shared, at the Grand Duke’s order, the same indignity that had befallen the dissolute blackguard whom the Empress caressed and called her “Holy Father.”

Of this episode Rasputin made no mention to Her Majesty. It, however, caused him considerable misgivings and before morning he had decided upon a dramatic course of action.

Next afternoon, a Wednesday, was the day fixed for the usual performance of the bi-weekly secret rites. He took luncheon with the Emperor and Empress in their private apartments, Madame Vyubova alone being the only other person at table.

Suddenly the monk who had been talking with the Emperor, using his uncouth Siberian expressions, and even eating with his fingers, clasped his knotted, peasant fingers together and turning to the Empress, announced:

“To-night, Great Lady, I go upon a pilgrimage. Divine God has called me to Moscow, where work there awaits me. I know not what it is, but when I arrive there I shall receive His divine direction.

Alexis will be well in my absence, and will improve, for twice each day he will have my prayers. God has called me – I cannot remain.”

“Not even this afternoon?” gasped the unnerved hysterical woman who was Empress of Russia in this our Twentieth Century.

“No. I must take leave of you, great lady, to obey the call,” was his deep answer.

And by that night’s express he left in a luxurious sleeping-berth for Moscow where, truth to tell, the Countess Ignatieff was awaiting him.

The only “call” the licentious blackguard had received was the news that two very prepossessing young girls, named Vera and Xénie, daughters of the late Baroness Koulomzine, of Moscow, had expressed their desire to Countess Ignatieff to join the secret cult. The Countess had shown him their photographs and the libertine, in pretence of performing a pilgrimage, travelled to Moscow in order to initiate them. Next day, at the Convent of the Ascension, where the libertine had spent the night, he interviewed the two young gentlewomen. Before an ikon with flowers upon the altar and in the presence of the Lady-Superior, he exorcised their sins according to his prescribed rite.

It was a strange scene. The penitents in the dimly-lit chapel each touched their forehead and breast with thumb and forefinger, gazing immobile and fascinated at the miracle-working “Master,” their lips moving in proper response to the prayers of the Heaven-sent confessor.

At what subsequently transpired I can only hint. According to the official report before me the girls confessed to two officers, their half-brothers, that after the benediction the verminous monk induced them both to go to the Turkish baths together, for “purification” as he put it.

Well, the mock-monk found himself under arrest, and only by the most strenuous efforts of the Countess Ignatieff was he released, after spending forty hours in a cell.

But Rasputin merely smiled. He knew his own power. Next day he returned to Petrograd, and within twelve hours of his arrival Plestcheff, Chief of Police of Moscow, had, at the instance of the Empress, been relieved of his post in disgrace.

Rasputin’s exploits in Moscow brought him very nearly to disaster.

Master-criminal that he was and as my intention is to show, he calmly reviewed his position, and saw that by cleverly playing his cards – now that the Empress and her easily gulled Court had become so completely enthralled by his “wonder-working” – he might assume his own position as the most powerful man in the Empire.

His personal magnetism is indisputable. I can personally vouch for that. On the occasion when I met him in that grey cold repellent village on the Arctic shore, I myself felt that there was something strangely indescribable, something entirely uncanny about the fellow. Those grey eyes were such as I had never before seen in all my long cosmopolitan experience. In those moments when we had exchanged greetings and bowed to each other he seemed to hold me beneath a weird curious spell. He was demon rather than man. Therefore I can quite conceive that the ordinary Russian woman of any class would easily succumb to his blasphemous advances and his assertions that he was possessed of a divinity as the deliverer of Russia. Within the Russian soul, two centuries behind the times, of to-day, mysticism is still innate, and the mock-monk had already proved up to the hilt to his own complete satisfaction that, by pretending to fast, yet having a good square meal in secret; by pretending to make pilgrimages – but really throwing off his monkish “habits” and as a gay man about town taking a joy-ride in a motor car – and by crossing himself continuously and bowing low before every ikon at which he secretly sneered, he could gull the average woman whether she wore pearls or tended the pigs.

Rasputin, a low-born immoral brute, by reason of the discovery of his own hypnotic powers, treated womenkind with the most supreme and utter contempt, and it seems that while clearly masquerading beneath that cloak of extreme piety and aided by his gardener-friend, the Bishop Teofan – a fellow-adventurer from Pokrovsky – he resolved after his Moscow adventure, to make a bold bid for further power.

Most men in such circumstances as these would have been both cowed and careful. Against him he had Stolypin, at that moment one of the most powerful men in the Empire, as well as the Grand Dukes Nicholas and Dmitri Pavlovitch, M. Gutchkoff – a bearded man in gold pince-nez with whom I had had before the war many interesting chats in Paris and in Petrograd, and who subsequently became Minister of War and Marine – M. Miliukoff, the whole-hearted Deputy for Petrograd in the Duma, and what was far more serious, he had fifty or more wildly irate husbands and fathers, all eager and anxious to bring about the scoundrel's downfall.

Traps were laid for him, but, with the amazing cunning of the erotic lunatic, he eluded them all. Back in Petrograd, in the salons of the highest in the Empire, he lived in luxury, with cars always at his disposal. The “Holy Father” who had his own suite in the private apartments of the Imperial family was welcomed everywhere he deigned to go. His creature, Ilya Kousmitch, warned him of the pitfalls that were being set. Even his dissolute crony the Bishop Teofan – whom, through the Empress, he had himself created – grew grave. But the “Saint” merely bit his dirty finger nails, as is the habit of the Siberian peasant, and replied:

“Gregory Novikh has been sent to Russia by Divine Providence. He has no fear!”

Soon after his narrow escape in Moscow he received a letter from the father of the two young girls who had so completely fallen beneath his pious blandishments – a letter in which the angry father declared that he would shoot him at sight.

To that letter Rasputin, with the overbearing impudence of one who smoked and spat upon the carpet actually in the Empress's presence, and, who had the audacity to prompt the Tsar in making his appointments and dealing with the affairs of State, replied by telegram – a message still upon record – sent over the private wire from the Winter Palace:

“Shoot – and God will reward your daughters bountifully. – Gregory.”

Though Rasputin presented a remarkably calm exterior, he no doubt, was much perturbed by that threat. A single false step would certainly land him either in oblivion or in prison. But criminal lunatics of his sort are notoriously clever and astute. “Jack-the-Ripper” was of exactly similar type, and he defied the whole detective police of the world.

The Secret Police of Russia, the wiles of which have been so vaunted by the modern novelist, were as childish idiots when their brains became pitted against those of the uncouth Siberian peasant, who, calling himself a “saint,” could induce every silly woman to follow his immoral directions.

Just then the Empress, whose shallow impressionable mind led her to adopt any new craze, and to seek any new sensation, met a person in whom she indiscreetly placed her trust – a treacherous, long-bearded political adventurer, named Boris Stürmer. This man was a boon companion of the “Saint” in his debaucheries in the midnight wilds of Petrograd, for Rasputin, when believed to be absent for a week of prayer and self-denial, usually bathed himself, and wearing a well-cut evening-suit plunged into the gay midnight life at the Old Donon, the Belle Vue, or the Bouffes, on the Fontanka. Thus Boris Stürmer, a strong pro-German who had many family connections with the enemy – and the bosom friend of Rasputin – actually became Prime Minister of Russia, such being the mock-monk's astounding influence over the Imperial Autocrat, whose wife and family were, alas! as but clay within his filthy hands.

This latest triumph proved conclusively to Rasputin that his power was as great as that of the Emperor – indeed, to certain of his intimates he used laughingly to declare himself to be the uncrowned Tsar!

“I live in the Palace,” he would declare. “The Empress does my bidding; her daughters are as my children; the Court bows to me; Nikki only smiles as an idiot – therefore, am I not the real Emperor of Russia?”

Discovering his own overwhelming influence this sinister favourite of both Tsar and Tsaritzza suddenly resolved upon a further move, the cleverness of which was indeed well within keeping with his marvellously astute reasoning. He decided not to be dependent upon the charity of the Imperial

pair, whom the Bishop Teofan had one day declared kept him in the Winter Palace as a tame saint. His friend's taunt stung him to the quick.

In consequence, he took a luxurious house in the Gorokhovaya, just beyond the Moyka, and close to the Palace, and while still retaining his apartments in the Palace, he lived mostly in his new abode, where in future he announced that the bi-weekly meeting of his disciples for prayer and consolation would be held.

Like wildfire the decision of the "wonder-worker" ran through the salons of Society. There was now a chance for others to enter the cult of the "Sister-disciples," and to become as one flesh with the Saint, and to be cured by Divine agency of any ill.

Hundreds of society women were frantically anxious to enter this new sisterhood.

His house was an expensive one, but only a few of the rooms were well furnished. The dining-room on the ground floor was a large rather bare-looking place, with cheap chairs set round and equally cheap tables of polished walnut. On the walls were portraits of the Tsar, the Tsaritzza and himself. Upstairs was his study, a large luxurious apartment, and from it led the bedroom of the "holy" man, which even eclipsed the study in luxury. To this house the smart band of society converts who called themselves the "Sister-disciples" went regularly twice each week to hear the "miracle-worker" descant upon the beauties of his new religion.

Among the members of this degenerate group were: – the pretty fluffy-haired little Princess Boyarski, Madame Pistolcohrse, sister of Madame Vyubova, a certain Countess Yepantchine, whose splendid house was in the Sergiyevskaya, the most fashionable quarter without equal in Petrograd, as well as the Grand Duchess Olga, daughter of the Tsaritzza, and many others.

Though the blasphemous discourses were delivered and the disgusting secret rites practised twice each week at Rasputin's house, as well as also twice weekly in secret at Tsarskoe-Selo, many women seeking knowledge of the new religion – after having fallen beneath the spell of the mock-saint's eyes – went to the monk alone by appointment, and there had what the blackguard termed "private converse" with him in his upstairs study adjoining his luxurious sleeping apartment.

The uncouth peasant's actions, his open immorality, and the cold-blooded manner in which he turned wife from husband, and betrothed from her lover, had now become open gossip at the street corners. Whenever the mock-saint went forth in any car or carriage of his female admirers or of the Court, the people grinned and recognising the lady, would whisper —

"Look! Grichka has taken yet another bride!"

At some of the mysterious meetings Rasputin's old friend the dissolute Bishop Teofan was present, and on one occasion a dramatic incident occurred.

The little Princess Boyarski had apparently grown jealous of the "Saint" because he had paid too great attention to a new convert, a certain Mademoiselle Zernin, just turned twenty. High words arose in the select circle of worshippers, and the Bishop with his big golden cross on his breast endeavoured to quell the dispute. The Princess then turned furiously upon the Bishop, expressing the deepest resentment that he should have been admitted to their private conference at all, and vowed that she would use all her influence to get him turned out of the Church he had dishonoured.

Rasputin and his friend ridiculed her threats, but two days later both grew extremely uneasy, for Teofan was already extremely unpopular with the Court circle, and all were only too ready to effect his dismissal and disgrace. Indeed, forty-eight hours after the Princess had uttered those threats, she, with the Countess Kleinmichel, contrived to secure his expulsion from the Church. Only after Rasputin had threatened the Empress that he would leave Petrograd, and in that case the Tsarevitch would, he declared, die, that he secured the re-installment of his fellow-criminal. Such was the scoundrel's influence at Court in these present war-days!

By various tricks, in which he was assisted by the young servant, the man Ilya, the charlatan still performed "miracles" upon the poor, which naturally caused his fame to spread all over Russia, while his sinister influence was now being felt both in the Orthodox Church, and in the conduct of

the war. Contrary to what is generally supposed, he had never been ordained a priest, while he never attended church nor observed any of the forms of religious worship, save the immoral practices of his own invention.

He claimed a semi-divinity, and thus declared himself to be above all man-made laws.

In those scandalous discourses, in which he made use of the most erotic suggestions, he always urged his female devotees that only through his own body could they seek the protection and forgiveness of the Almighty.

“I show you the way!” he would constantly say as he stood with his hand behind his back, his other hand upon the Bible. “I am here to give you salvation.”

Such was his power in ecclesiastical matters in Russia that the most lucrative posts in the Church were now filled by men who had paid him for their nominations, and he boasted that the Procurator of the Holy Synod was merely his puppet. From certain evidence before me I am inclined to believe this to be the truth, for some of the supposed “miracles” could never have been “worked” without the Procurator’s connivance.

Daily, smart society women came to Rasputin’s house for “private converse.” Sometimes one of the circle of his elect would bring with her a young society girl who had heard vaguely of “the disciples,” and whose curiosity was naturally aroused, to meet the wonderful wonder-worker. At others, women went alone. But in each case the result was the same.

One afternoon the young wife of the wealthy Count Ivanitski went there in secret, attired in one of her maid’s dresses, so as to escape observation, passing through the servants’ entrance. The Count, however, had heard whispers of this intended visit and, awaiting her return, followed her back to the Furshtavkaya, where they lived in a handsome house a few doors from the Liteyny Prospect. He then coolly called his servants and compelled her to confess before them all that had happened to her in Rasputin’s house. Afterwards he drew a revolver and shot her dead. Then he walked out and gave himself up to the police. Within an hour news of the affair was brought to the Empress and to Rasputin, who were dining together in the Palace.

The monk made a sarcastic grimace when he heard of the murder of the woman who had that afternoon been his victim.

“Poor fool!” he exclaimed, his glass of wine in his hand. “The Countess had already become a devoted disciple.”

But the Empress at once bestirred herself in fear of public indignation being aroused against the Holy Father, and telephoning to the Minister of the Interior, ordered the Count’s immediate release.

On another occasion, a week later, a young lieutenant of cavalry named Olchowski, who had been with von Rennenkampf at Brest-Litovsk, had returned to Petrograd, being met at the railway station by his devoted young wife, a mere chit of a girl, the daughter of a Baroness living at Ostroff. They returned home together, whereupon somebody slipped into his hand an anonymous letter, stating that his pretty young wife Vera had become one of the “spiritual brides” who attended the bi-weekly meetings in the Gorokhovaya. The Lieutenant said nothing, but watching next afternoon he followed her to the meeting place of the “Naked Believers,” and having satisfied himself that during his absence at the front his beloved wife had fallen beneath the “saint’s” spell, he concealed himself in the porch of a neighbouring house until after the worshippers had all departed. Then Rasputin presently descended the steps to enter one of the Imperial carriages which had called for him as was usual each day.

In an instant the outraged husband, half-mad with fury, flung himself upon the “holy” libertine and plunged a long keen knife into his breast.

But Rasputin, whose strength was colossal, simply tossed his assailant away from him without a word, and entered the carriage.

Beneath his monkish hair-shirt he had for some time, at the Empress’s urgent desire, worn another shirt which she had had specially made for him in Paris, as also for the Tsar – a light but most effective shirt of steel-mail.

Chapter Three

How Rasputin Poisoned the Tsarevitch

The dark forces established so ingeniously by the Kaiser behind the Russian throne in April, 1914, had now become actively at work.

The small but all-powerful clique of which Rasputin was the head because he practically lived with the Imperial family and ate at their table – the little circle which the Russians called “The Camarilla” – were actively plotting for the betrayal of the Allies and a separate peace with Germany. Stürmer, the Austrian who had been pushed into the office of Prime Minister of Russia by his boon companion and fellow *bon-viveur*, the mock-monk of Pokrovsky, had already risen in power. The man whose long goatee-beard swept over the first button of his gorgeous uniform, all true loyal Russians in their unfortunate ignorance cheered wildly as he drove swiftly with the *pristyazhka*, or side-horse, along the Nevski, for he was believed to be “winning the war.” Russia, alas! to-day knows that with German gold flowing freely into his pocket he was in secret doing all he could to prevent ministers arriving from Great Britain, and laughing up his sleeve at his success in ordering a mock-railway from Alexandrovsk to be built in order to connect Petrograd to an ice-free port – a line which subsequently had to be taken up and relaid!

Even our British journalists were cleverly bamboozled, for they returned from Russia and wrote in our newspapers of her coming great offensive, when they would sweep back the Kaiser’s hordes and be into Berlin ere we should know it. In Petrograd one heard of Rasputin as the Shadowy Somebody. But most people declared that he was only a monk, a pious person whom silly women admired, as women so often admire a fashionable preacher even in our own country, and further because of “something,” the Censor refused to allow his name to appear in any paper.

In Russia the censorship is full of vagaries. My own novels came under his ban twenty years ago, because as correspondent of *The Times*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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