

fur cap in his hand and made the Sign of the Cross—involuntarily I did the same.

Nevertheless, the gay and gorgeous life of the Court of Petersburg pulsed merrily on. There were balls, dances, dinner parties, and assemblies; there was hardly an evening but I was whisked off to some lordly mansion to meet beautiful Russian women, highly placed soldiers and naval officers, diplomatic figures, and those who then emphatically made up the ruling class.

One day there came to my hotel one of those travelling monks so often met with in Russia; this man was a close friend of the Monk Heliodor, who with Hermogen, Bishop of Saratov, had great power in all ecclesiastical matters.

Heliodor himself was a cultured, gentle mystic, who was deeply learned in occult matters. The Monk, who called on me, said that Heliodor had exercised considerable influence over the Czar, and was profoundly interested in the study of the Kabalistic System of Numbers, together with Astrology. Several times the Monk came in to have a talk with me, and on one occasion he brought the ill-fated Stolypin to see me.

The black-bearded burly statesman, who tried to rule Russia with a rod of iron, at first pretended to be indifferent when I suggested I would examine his hands. He became interested when I showed him the "broken Line of Life" that was marked clear and distinct on his right hand. I foresaw a violent death. He laughed at my fears, he told me he was guarded night and day by the agents of the *Ochrana*, or secret police, yet it is a matter of history that he was shot down through the treachery of one of the secret police whom he employed.¹

One day the Monk came to me.

"Cheiro," he said, "I want to bring to you a colleague of mine who seems to have extraordinary occult powers. For reasons of my own, I want you to read his hands, even if he should appear to pose as a sceptic."

Later on that afternoon in January 1905, the Monk opened my sitting-room door, and behind him strode a figure that could not fail to make a powerful impression upon me. Habited as a kind of peasant monk, corresponding to the old-time wandering friars in England, he walked with long strides across the carpeted floor, halted in front of me, and speaking a few words in very bad French, then rapidly in Russian, which the Monk translated, scornfully said something to the effect that he did not believe in hand-reading—but he believed in Fate.

This was my first view of the now notorious Gregory Rasputin, who at the time was at the head of an extraordinary sect known as

¹ In August 1906, a bomb was exploded at his villa, which was practically destroyed, seriously injuring one of his daughters. But all attempts to kill him proved futile until 1911 when he was shot in a theatre in Kieff on September 14th, before the eyes of the Imperial Family, by a Jew named Mordka Bogrov. Stolypin died of his wounds September 18th, 1911.

the Khaysty, at first composed of poor people, but now spreading its influence into Court circles. This sect held the strange doctrine that in order to obtain perfect forgiveness they must commit sin. Rasputin had not long come back from Jerusalem where he had made a pilgrimage; he had struck up a friendship with Heliodor, and through his Court influence had already begun that amazing course which culminated in his violent death, and contributed so largely to the downfall of the House of Romanoff.

There was no mistaking the fact that my visitor was an unusual man. His height was not noticeable owing to his broad-shouldered, powerfully built figure, clad in a heavy brown cassock; round his waist was a girdle which the Monk told me he said he had brought from holy Mount Athos.

His features were large and coarse, his eyes brilliant, his mouth mobile and the lips full and red. He wore an overgrown light brown beard, partly reddish, and his head was covered with a tangled mass of unkempt hair. On his forehead was a dark patch-like scar of an old wound. His voice was deep, authoritative, and sonorous.

He allowed me, after some demur, to examine his hands. They were thick and coarse and very dirty; the lines were strongly marked. The Fate Line showed unusual vicissitudes, the Line of Life appeared cut through ominously, half-way down the hand.

While I was looking at his left and right hands, he suddenly roared:

"I know the Future—you do not; my Future is to redeem the People, and save the Emperor from himself."

I hardly knew what to reply to this arrogant statement, but at length I said quietly:

"Would you care for me to tell you anything about the Future?" He smiled scornfully.

"I shall laugh at whatever it is. I am called to be the Saviour of Russia. Fate is in my keeping. I am the maker of Destiny."

I wondered for the moment whether the man was mad. My profession had brought me in contact with not a few crazy individuals, yet his eyes were clear enough. Besides, I was in "Holy Russia," where all sorts of mystical creatures were then at large. But I must confess that what I saw in the hand before me was baffling in its extraordinary message.

"You have before you," I began, "a future that is filled with wonders! You have been raised from the lowest to associate with the highest, from the utmost poverty you will command wealth, you are destined to wield enormous power over others—but it will be a power for evil—do you want to hear more?"

While I had been speaking, he had listened attentively.

"Yes, yes!" he said impatiently; then correcting himself, he added grandly:

"But, of course, I knew all this before; I am a prophet, and a greater one than you. I know all things."

"But what of the Future?" asked the Monk, who was listening with rapt attention.

I remained silent. Dare I reveal the terrible vision of blood that seemed to have formed before my mind. As I studied the hands of the boastful man seated before me, I seemed to see him gliding from the Cabinet of the Emperor, with an evil smile upon his dark face, insinuating himself into the deepest confidences of the Empress who knelt reverently before him, and hailed him as "Holy Father," and at last yielding up his life mid a scene of terrible ferocity.

"Well, what is it, Seer?" asked Rasputin, in a taunting voice.

"I foresee for you a violent end within a palace. You will be menaced by poison, by knife, and by bullet. Finally I see the icy waters of the Neva closing above you."

There was silence for a few seconds. My words had evidently made an impression upon the Monk, because before this I had sketched out his early home life—how he had married a woman much better off than himself.¹

I told him that he had two daughters and one son, and that the latter would turn against him—which came true shortly after I made the prediction.

Moreover, I told him that he had turned against his wife, and had allied himself with a woman who was destined to work great harm. At this he had smiled cunningly, and uttered his famous formula that afterwards became the watchword of his sect:

"A particle of the divine is incarnated in me! Only through me can they hope to find salvation. The manner of their salvation is this: They must be united with me, *body and soul*! The virtue that goes out from me is the destruction of sin."

As he uttered these astounding words, he drew himself up to the full height of his powerful figure, folded his arms upon his massive chest, and his great haunting eyes seemed to fill with almost supernatural fire.

When I had finished speaking of the terrible picture that had formed in my mind, our eyes met across the table at which we sat. Those piercing eyes wanted to strike terror into my soul. For some reason which I cannot explain, I felt no fear whatever. I returned his gaze without flinching. The Monk passing behind me, slipped the large silver Cross he always carried, between us; he expected some tragedy to happen and wanted to protect me.

The sight of the Cross broke the spell. Rasputin sprang to his feet, giving vent to a torrent of words I could not understand; his companion rapidly translating them, he roared:

"Who are you who can predict the end of Rasputin! Rasputin can never die. Knife, nor bullet, nor poison can harm him."

Then drawing himself to his full height, he said slowly and impressively:

¹ Olga Chaningoff.

"I am the Saviour of my people. I am the Protector of the Czar. I am greater than the Czar."

With that he left the room, while the Monk making the Sign of the Cross slipped out after him.

Whether I made an enemy of this extraordinary man or not, I cannot say.

I do not know whether he saw in me a rival to his occult powers or not, but later on I underwent an experience that showed that he would have caused me injury if he could.

The following year I was back in St. Petersburg in connection with a very large financial operation. Returning one day to my hotel, I found that some of my most important papers had been stolen.

I went at once to my friend, Monsieur Isvolsky, at the Foreign Office and protested. He listened, smiled his enigmatical smile, and said:

"Take my card to the Chief of Police and explain the loss of your papers to him."

I must confess I was astounded at the deadly swiftness of the movements of the Russian police when animated by the highest powers. Within twenty minutes I was shown into the presence of the Chief. By the time I returned to my hotel, the police were already at each entrance to prevent anyone leaving. Within an hour my papers were restored; a secret agent of Rasputin joined a Siberian chain-gang that night, and never again was I subjected to any molestation.

When I first met Rasputin, I could not help but realize—although I had no idea who my visitor was—that I was in the presence of one of those extraordinary men who are born into the world as instruments of Fate. There was no question about his overpowering will-power and magnetism, but it was what I might call "animal magnetism." By his luminous compelling eyes he attempted from the first moment to hypnotize me as he had done so many hundreds of others. It was only my long experience of such things that saved me. Instead of looking into his eyes, I concentrated my attention on a point between his eyebrows, with the result that he could have no power over me.

But what defence could the gentle Czar or the religious emotional Czarina have against such a man? Absolutely none.

They were as helpless as a bird fascinated by a snake into whose jaws it was about to fall.

About this time I was introduced to one of the mystery women of the Imperial Court, one who was largely responsible for the introduction of Rasputin to the notice of the Czar.

Many rumours have been afloat in Europe as to the identity of the woman often spoken of as "Madame X," who was for some years famous as a medium in St. Petersburg. Her real name was Madame Gutjen Sund, a Swedish woman who married a German officer, who

afterwards was a prominent assistant under Herr Stanmiers, the chief of the great Spy Bureau in the Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin.

This woman had undoubtedly remarkable occult gifts. When King Edward visited the Czar at Reval, Madame Sund was brought into the circle of notables after dinner and was invited to read the future of those present. The Czar himself told me on that evening when I dined with him at Peterhof how impressed he had been by what she had said. One statement that filled him with especial sorrow; it was she who told him that "the little Czarevich would not live to reign."

Madame Sund, for some time before the coming of Rasputin, occupied a very extraordinary position in the Court, and was daily consulted by the Emperor and Empress. Most of the Grand Dukes hated her, for she worked against their influence; twice she narrowly escaped death by poison.

By some means she became acquainted with Rasputin, who immediately exercised over her a fatal influence that set in motion a whole train of significant events. Knowing how the mind of the Imperial pair had been influenced by her prediction, Rasputin prevailed upon Madame Sund to go to the Empress and to tell her that she was mistaken; that she had been converted by a wonderful saintly Father who could work miracles, and who had the power to save the life of the Czarevich.

The Empress sent for Rasputin. He came, arrogant, dirty and impressive, striding into the presence and crying in his bell-like voice: "Repent, ye who wear purple; repent, ye who are clothed in garments of gold and silver."

The Empress was so impressed that she fell upon her knees, and the Court entourage witnessed the amazing spectacle of the Consort of the Emperor of Russia kneeling before a dirty peasant.

Rasputin told her positively that he alone could restore her son to health. After that, the Imperial pair were as clay in the hands of the so-called Monk, and when the Imperial child fell ill shortly afterwards, and was apparently at the point of death, Rasputin dismissed all the physicians and announced that "faith alone would prevail."

It was one of the doctors who described the scene to me: "I was in attendance with other Court physicians grouped around the bed of the heir to the throne, who was gasping for breath. Suddenly Rasputin strode in, made no sign that he saw the Czarina, but shouted:

"Away, unbelievers! Away! This is the work of faith!"

"The startled physicians drew back as the Empress came forward, and kneeling before Rasputin cried: 'My Father—save my child!' —'Turn out these dogs,' cried the Monk, sweeping his fiery glances round their outraged faces. At a look from the Empress nearly all the doctors left the apartment, even Imperial etiquette hardly restraining them from shrugging their shoulders with disgust.

"Then, like Elisha the Prophet who raised the widow's son, Rasputin bowed his great form over the fevered little Czarevich. He stretched himself in the form of a cross upon the Hope of Imperial Russia. Those present stood petrified with amazement. The Empress, her hair falling about her shoulders, knelt at the foot of the bed, her breast heaving, her maternal tears falling like rain.

"Then the miracle happened.

"The physicians had said that natural sleep alone would save the child. Rasputin rose and stood before the Empress.

"Behold thy son!' he cried, his voice booming through the great apartment. The Czarevich was sleeping peacefully, his little hands relaxed upon the gorgeous coverlet, the fiery flush of fever dying to a rose-pink upon his cheeks.

"That night the news flew through the capital, and spread through Russia that Rasputin was responsible for a miracle—that the heir had been dead, and that he had raised him up.

"In a burst of gratitude, the Czar presented Rasputin with a million roubles; the Czarina loaded him with gifts, but even more, his influence was fixed; nothing could shake it. Once in power, he threw off Madame Sund. She died after a short mysterious illness, and Rasputin pronounced her epitaph. 'She had finished, my work has commenced.'"

THE REAL STORY OF RASPUTIN. HIS INFLUENCE OVER THE CZARINA.
THE TRUE CAUSE OF RUSSIA'S DOWNFALL

I will not be out of place, I think, if I relate in as brief a way as possible, the real story of Rasputin. I have gathered my facts from reliable sources. As this man was decidedly one of the most extraordinary personalities and one who was instrumental in bringing about the fall of the great Romanoff dynasty, the world is entitled to know as much about him as possible.

Rasputin, or to give him his real name, Gregory Effimovitch, was born in the little village of Petrovskoie in Siberia, on July 7th, 1872.

His father was a notorious horse thief and the worst drunkard in the place. He was nicknamed "Rasputin," which means, in Russian, "corrupt." His son inherited this nickname, and according to the police records, well merited this distinctive title. Dr. Litchernoff, who was called in to treat him for smallpox, gave the following account of his patient:

"He was," he said, "a fine, dark child, with such an ardent expression in the eyes that even I felt strangely affected by it. He was thickset and strongly built and soon became the terror of the district. I remember how Father Alexis, the priest of Petrovskoie, used to give him ten kopecks every week to keep him away from church on Sundays."

At fourteen years of age he robbed an old man of his savings after nearly murdering him. For this he received twenty strokes of a whip in the presence of all the inhabitants in the village in the market-place. The extraordinary thing was that this public flogging roused in him one of those fits of religious fervour so associated with him in later years, and was the commencement of his fanaticism.

From this out he began to visit churches and monasteries in the neighbourhood, and was often to be seen on his knees on the roadside lashing his body with thistles and reciting long incomprehensible prayers.

This religious fervour was as suddenly brought to an end as it had begun by an assault he made on an old beggar woman. After the police enquiry that was held over this affair, he abandoned religion and threw himself whole-heartedly into thieving and drink. According to the official register of Petrovskoie, he was about this time arrested for horse-stealing.

In spite of his reputation, he had the good fortune to marry in 1895, when he was twenty-three years old, a charming innocent girl named Olga Chaningoff, who brought him as a dowry "a pair of horses, a cart, three thousand roubles, and a few acres of land."

Three children were the result of this strange union, two daughters, Mariska and Zenia, and in 1899 a son whom he called Michel Gregorovitch.

One night in the middle of the winter, February 5th, 1903, he was

forced as a carrier to drive a priest to the seminary of Teoumene, which event completely changed his career and led to the remarkable adventures that followed.

En route the priest, who was named Zaborovsky, persuaded him to abandon his drunken habits and go and make a penitence at the monastery of Verkhotourie. He remained here for some weeks; on his return to his home, he declared that St. Michael had appeared to him and had commanded him to build a great church to the name of the Archangel.

From this moment he was a changed man. He went from village to village, and from monastery to monastery, collecting money for the future church and so earned the name of a "Staretz," or holy man.

On his return to the little village of Petrovskoie, he refused to live with his wife and children, but lived by himself in a small cottage surrounded by sacred icons he had collected in his travels and numberless wax candles that had come into his possession.

From all sides people came to hear his words, the words of a prophet, they said, who had once been a demon.

Men, as well as women, begged to be allowed to kiss the hem of his raiment, and in return for gifts of money they were allowed such a privilege.

It was during this stage of his career that he conceived his extraordinary doctrine of "Sin for Salvation," which of all religious revivals that perhaps the world has ever seen, had in the end the most far-reaching results.

Across the dreary wastes of Siberia the slogan, "Sin for Salvation," spread like a battle-cry, and the name of "the holy Rasputin" echoed far and wide.

While on a pilgrimage to Kazan, in April 1904, Rasputin met for the first time a wealthy widow named Lydia Bachmakow, who became another rung in his ladder of ambition.

This lady had just passed the dangerous age of forty, when her husband was considerate enough to die and leave her his fortune. She thanked God for the end of what she called "her conjugal martyrdom" and threw herself into every form of religious fanaticism.

With the most passionate devotion, she journeyed from monastery to monastery, squandering her money wherever she went, and submitting herself to the severest penance that could be imposed.

In spite of all her piety, charity, and devotion, she had not found the satisfaction she sought and was about to abandon all religious persuasion, when at this psychological crisis Rasputin entered her life.

"Sin for Salvation," he whispered, "and the Gates of Heaven are yours to enter."

Lydia Bachmakow had never dreamt of such a wonderful creed; she had tried every other—she would now try it. She declared this doctrine must have been made expressly for her benefit, so without reserve, she placed herself and her money in the hands of "the holy Rasputin."

Like the usual run of converts, she commenced to have "visions," the most important being that the days of pilgrimage by foot were ended, so she carried Rasputin off in one of the most magnificent motor-cars that money could buy in Russia.

The new pilgrimage started at Kazan; helped by the splendour of the millionaire widow, every door was thrown open for "the chosen of the Lord." Even Rasputin's bad manners were turned into a blessing; it showed, his followers said, that a "holy man" was above the petty details of convention and because he disdained forks and ate with his fingers, he was declared to be "the apostle of simplicity."

It was here at Kazan that Rasputin came in contact with Sturmer, who was at that moment Inspector General at the Ministry of the Interior, and in a position to be of great use to Rasputin.

Rasputin arrived at St. Petersburg, as it was then called, on the evening of December 5th, 1904. (I was then living at the Hôtel de l'Europe, and within about a month of Rasputin's arrival I met him, as I have related in the previous chapter.)

Madame Bachmakow rented a magnificent apartment in the best part of the Nevsky Prospect and when it was suitably furnished with every luxury, she installed "the holy father," as she now began to call him.

As an advance agent the millionaire widow was without an equal; she had already sent reports on miracles worked by Rasputin to Bishop Hermogene, John of Cronstadt, the monk Heliodor, and the principal newspapers.

In less than a few months, his apartment in the Nevsky Prospect was besieged by members of the highest aristocracy of St. Petersburg. In a police report dated April 12th, 1905, it is noted:

"Crowds assemble at Rasputin's place, people have to wait two or three days before being able to approach the 'Monk' (he never was a monk or had holy orders of any kind). He works miracles when it pleases him to do so. He has been seen to take a handful of earth and by simply breathing upon it, to turn it into a magnificent rose tree covered with flowers."

The writer of this report counted more than four hundred women before Rasputin's house in a single afternoon. As a rule, the report proceeded, "he receives only the young and pretty ones, because, he says, the others have fewer sins to be forgiven."

"Rasputin makes considerable sums of money. He has no fixed price for his consultations, but his secretary, a man called Striapcheff, never introduces anyone to him without first receiving at least one hundred roubles.¹

"Those who give more get special attention. A certain Madame Narukine offered a thousand roubles to be received. These amounts are said to be put on one side for the church in honour of St. Michael that Rasputin has promised at Petrovskoie."

¹ About £10 in English money.

If a police report could say so much one may easily imagine the reports that were circulated in ordinary society.

There are two versions of the way in which Rasputin reached the Palace. One gives the credit to Madame Sund, as I have already related—the other relates that the Czarina sent her confidential companion, Anna Vyronbova, to consult him. Which account is the true one does not greatly matter.

Rasputin, there is no doubt, converted this rather ordinary woman. His wonderful doctrine of "Sin for Salvation" made an instant appeal to her senses.

He very quickly made an *entente* with her. He threw over the millionaire widow, Madame Bachmakow, and gave Anna Vyronbova the title of "Sister-in-Chief" as a reward for her promise to open the gates of the Czar's Palace and establish him in the favour of the Czarina.

It was Anna who taught him to give up the name Rasputin and take the name "Novy," meaning innovator—as she explained the name Rasputin was not pleasing to the Imperial ears.

Shortly after her first visit Anna made the arrangement that he could come to the Palace whenever he pleased.

About this time the widow, Madame Bachmakow, received an order from the police to leave St. Petersburg at once.

From this moment Rasputin's influence over the Czarina and the Court was established.

In 1908, for some unexplained reason, except that of vanity, he spent the summer months at his old village of Petrovskoie.

He was at first received by the simple peasants as a god who had returned to save them, but the twelve young and beautiful "sisters" who accompanied him caused a scandal that reached the ears of the Czarina, who recalled him to St. Petersburg.

Many stories at this time became circulated about his drunken orgies, so much so that the Archbishop commanded him to present himself before an ecclesiastical tribunal composed of a bishop, two canons, and three important officials of the Civil Courts.

Near the conclusion of this investigation, at the moment when a unanimous verdict was about to be pronounced against him, Anna Vyronbova called on the judges and informed them that it was the express wish and command of the Czarina that "the holy man" should be found "Not Guilty."

Rasputin was acquitted on the spot, the Tribunal saying that they accepted his own statement that the charges brought against him were false.

The day after the mock verdict the Czarina sent for him to come to the palace of Tsarskoie-Selo. As he entered her presence, she bowed to kiss his hands and begged forgiveness for the annoyance his enemies had caused.

The Czar asked if he could show him some special favour.

Rasputin thought for a moment and gravely requested that the friend of his youth, Barnaby, the gardener, might be made Bishop of Tobolsk—and within two days this was done.

Rasputin's next step was to be appointed "Spiritual Adviser" to the young Princesses and the Czarovich, but after the bishop incident anything equally grotesque could only be expected.

The day after the attempt on his life by the young girl, Kheone Gousseva, who on June 28th, 1914, shot him in the stomach, the Czar sent a special telegram to the Governor of Tobolsk commanding him to see that nothing should be left undone "to save the life of one of the best friends of the Crown!"

A month later the Great War broke out. Rasputin was absent recovering from his wound. The Czarina wrote to the Innovator, as she always called him, as follows:

"I am happy, my beloved master, to be able to inform you that 'Niky' has realized the importance of your dear presence at Tsarskoie-Selo. Come back quickly, as my poor heart suffers to know you are so far away and I feel lost if I cannot hold your hands in mine and find, in your eyes, the light of my soul.

"I hope this time our troubles are at an end and that we shall never be separated again. As for me, I shall thank God if He allows me to die with you and gain—in your company—the heavenly paradise for which you have so prepared me.

"I am not the only one wishing for your return. Anna is also dying of impatience.

"Take pity on two women who adore you and can no longer live without you.

"Give me, in your thoughts, your most ardent blessing, in anticipation of being able to give it to me in person, my whole being in touch with yours.

"Your daughter who cherishes you.

A."

Rasputin returned and his influence at the Palace was greater than ever. He now determined to turn it to good account. Although he had received rich presents from both the Czar and Czarina—on one occasion His Imperial Majesty gave him a diamond valued at thirty thousand roubles that had been given to him at his coronation—he determined to take advantage of the War to increase his wealth. Large orders for munitions by his influence were passed to those who paid him for his trouble, one order alone bringing him 360,000 roubles.

Judging by extracts from the diary of Anna Vyronbova which came into the hands of officials after the revolution, there is no doubt that from April 1915 Rasputin used his influence over the Czarina to make peace with Germany at any price. What his reward was to be has never been disclosed, but had he lived, no doubt it would have been very considerable.

About this time, Count Tolstoi, the Grand Master of Ceremonies in charge of the crown jewels at the Hermitage, made the amazing discovery that the real stones had been abstracted and paste put in their place. The blue diamonds that edged the saddle of Alexander II, the priceless garnets of Catherine the Great, the matchless pearls of the Crown of Ivan the Terrible, all these and others equally valuable had been stolen and replaced by worthless imitations.

The Czar was furious with rage when this news was first broken to him, yet the next day he wrote in his own handwriting to Count Tolstoi: "Do not continue the inquiry about the Hermitage. Let it remain a profound secret."

The only comment I make about this is that a woman named Cecilia Werner, an Austrian and intimate friend of Rasputin, was furnished with a diplomatic passport which enabled her to travel every few months to Stockholm without the inconvenience of *having her trunks opened*.

As I am not writing a life of Rasputin, I must pass over many episodes of his career and come to the dramatic end that I had so clearly indicated when I first made his acquaintance at the Hôtel de l'Europe in the Nevsky Prospect.

I heard the details of his horrible death from one of those who assisted at it, and as many versions have been made public, it may interest my readers to have, what I have every reason to believe is, the true one.

I have dealt with Rasputin's career at some length, on account of the remarkable role he played on Russia's lurid stage, leading up to the fall of the curtain on the great and all-powerful Romanoff dynasty.

It is my firm belief that if this man had not come into the Czarina's life, the revolution would never have occurred, and the lives of many millions of people would have escaped the horror and destruction that fell on them like an avalanche of disaster.

That strange word "if" is, however, the pivot on which so many lives turn, that it becomes the Key of Destiny in all languages, to unlock the future for good or evil.

If—Judas Iscariot had not been born, the tragedy of Calvary would not have happened.

If—Rasputin had not crossed the Russian stage, how different things might have been.

Speculation is useless—nations rise and fall—men and women are but threads on the loom of Fate—the weaving of the pattern lies in the hands of Design, before which one can only bow the head and murmur: "Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

Like Napoleon, the ex-Kaiser, or the late Nicholas of Russia, Rasputin was but a servant of Destiny; as such, he obeyed those unknown forces of Life that make themselves manifest in all, whether born in poverty or under the greatness of a throne.

Rasputin was born a peasant, the very lowest kind at that, so

ignorant that he could scarcely read or write—yet this man became a power that destroyed a dynasty, wrecked a civilization, and caused more ruin and upheaval than any other man of the age.

In the short period of twelve years from that night of February 5th, 1903, when the words of a young priest changed the current of his life, Rasputin strode boldly across the Russian stage, until he reached the climax of his career in 1915. In that brief period, he had turned a gardener into a bishop, amassed wealth, built a church to the honour of St. Michael, and brought an Emperor and Empress to his feet.

In 1915, he brought about the dismissal of the Grand Duke Nicholas, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. By his influence a man named Khvostov succeeded Prince Tcherbatoff as Minister of the Interior, and Sturmer became Prime Minister.

By 1915, Rasputin, masquerading under a monk's robe, was the undisputed Master of Russia.

If he had been a clever man, he might have kept his position, but that "if" I have already spoken about, was switching over the points of doom on the railroad of Fate.

Vanity, his besetting sin, blinded his eyes, drink and boastfulness did the rest.

One night in a restaurant in Petrograd, surrounded by some of the pawns he had placed in power, exhilarated by champagne and flattery, his sonorous voice rang out in criticism of everything Russian.

People sitting at nearby tables were horrified, others laughed, some encouraged the wild-eyed man to go still further.

Looking round like a mad bull, he may have noticed at a table not far away, the Grand Duke Dimitri, first cousin to the Czar, the Prince Youssouppoff, and three other guests.

"I don't care a damn for all the Grand Dukes in Russia," Rasputin roared, "nor for the Holy Synod, or all the Generals of the Army."

The Grand Duke Dimitri rose to his feet—he was about to accept the challenge, there and then—when a member of the Duma entered the restaurant and passed between the two tables.

Turning towards Rasputin this man, the well-known Pourichkievitch, sneered: "Care for nothing, vile impostor. Your reign of terror is nearing its end. Blind yourself with drink and orgies, before long some man will rise to rid Russia of your presence."

To the amazement of the other diners, Rasputin made no answer—turning deadly pale, he got up and left the restaurant with the members of his party.

Prince Youssouppoff crossed to the table of the new arrival and held out his hand.

"Thank you, Pourichkievitch," he said, "you have expressed the wish that a man may be found to rid our country of this infamous impostor. I offer myself as that man."

The Grand Duke Dimitri joined the party. "Count on me also," he said. "We have all put up with this moujik to the breaking-point.

Let us pledge ourselves here to-night, to redeem Russia by ridding her of the presence of this monster."

In the corner of this restaurant, in the heart of Petrograd, a solemn oath was taken. Fate had forsaken her favourite—the doom of Rasputin was sealed.

It took some months to prepare the stage for the last act.

On December 15th, 1916, by the Russian calendar, all was ready. The principal actors had already arrived, the Grand Duke Dimitri, Prince Youssouppoff, Pourichkievitch, another man, and the beautiful Karali, the dancer whom Rasputin had for a long time pestered with his attentions. The scene was set in Prince Youssouppoff's palace in the Moskva.

Karali was to be the inducement for Rasputin to come to supper. The other conspirators were to keep in the background until their presence became necessary.

The bells of St. Isaac's Cathedral struck eleven.

An automobile stopped at the private entrance to the house in the Officerskaia.

Rasputin got out, he dismissed his motor, he looked up and down the deserted street, he hesitated some time before he rang the bell.

A presentiment of danger, perhaps, passed through his mind—the thought of the beautiful Karali overcame all prudence—he pressed the bell.

The door was opened by the Prince himself.

"I have allowed the servants to be away to-night," he said. "I promised you to take every precaution that your romance would never be known. Come in and wait for her, I am sure she will not be late."

Together they entered the dining-room; an appetizing supper was set out on the table.

Two exquisitely carved decanters held the famous red Crimean wine from the Youssouppoff estate; one placed at Rasputin's chair contained enough cyanide of potassium to kill any six men, while on a solid gold plate on his right, were some zakouskies, also treated with the same poison.

Rasputin would neither eat nor drink.

"Time enough," he said, "when Karali comes. My brain must be kept cool if I am to taste the most exquisite morsel of womanhood that I have ever seen. What can I do for you, Prince, in return? Name any honour you wish to have and I promise you the Czar will sign the decree before to-morrow night."

"Let us drink to to-morrow then," the Prince laughed, "it would take more wine than is in that bottle for such a man as you to fail to do justice to a pretty woman."

The flattery did its work; Rasputin filled his glass and finished it in one gulp. He then took another; turning his attention to the zakouskies he cleared the plate in a few minutes.

And yet nothing happened.

The Prince got nervous, beads of perspiration glistened across his forehead.

"Have a cigarette," he said, as he pushed his jewelled case across the table.

"No," the monk said, "some women object to the smell of tobacco; I cleaned my teeth for the first time in my life to-day."

"Karali would be flattered if she knew that," the Prince smiled.

If at that moment Rasputin had looked round he would have seen in the shadow of the staircase going to the next floor, the gleaming eyes of Karali and her clenched hands.

Behind her a little higher up, stood the other men, one of them with a revolver in his hand.

"Don't care much for your famous Crimean wine," Rasputin sneered, "it seems to me to have a bitter taste."

"You are not accustomed to its flavour," the Prince answered, "it is famed as a tonic and gives strength; finish the decanter and let us have some more."

Rasputin emptied the bottle—and yet nothing happened!

The Prince could hardly hide his nervousness; in order to regain his self-possession, he made an excuse and went up the staircase to where the others were waiting.

He really went up to get his revolver—on his return he found Rasputin pacing up and down the floor.

"I don't feel well," he said, "those zakouskies have upset me. I won't wait for Karali, when she comes tell her she can go to the devil, she is the first woman that Rasputin has ever waited for," and he reached for his fur coat.

"Don't be impatient," the Prince said, "she will arrive any moment now, but while waiting come and see this wonderful bit of carving and which, if you like, you can take away with you to-night."

Rasputin was never known to refuse a present.

He took it in his hands, it was an exquisite ivory crucifix, he bent over a light to examine it closely.

At that moment Prince Youssoupoff passed his revolver from his left to his right hand and fired straight at the monk's heart.

Rasputin, with a groan, fell in a huddled mass on the floor.

The Grand Duke Dimitri went to get his automobile—it was decided they would take Rasputin's body and throw it into the Neva.

They went as far as the street door, they were overjoyed at the success of their plan.

"Russia, Holy Russia is at last free," they said.

"Listen," someone said—a noise came from the dining-room.

No! it could not be possible.

Rasputin, with his monk's robe open—with blood streaming from him, was clutching at the back of a chair in the centre of the room.

Before they could recover their senses he had already walked out into the garden in an effort to gain the private entrance.

Blood marked every step he took in the snow.

He reached the door, his hand was already on the catch.

Pourichkievitch and Youssoupoff fired together.

Rasputin fell without a word.

The body was taken in the motor to the Petrovsky Bridge.

With a great effort they raised it to the top of the balustrade.

Horror of horrors—the monk was still alive—with his right hand he clutched the epaulette on the shoulder of one of the officers and tore it from the uniform.

Fate could not, however, be cheated at such a moment. Four strong men with grim faces pushed him over, the body rebounded on the stone buttress below, crashed on a block of ice and rolled over into the swirling icy waters of the Neva.