

made against her are false. Wicked lies are being told about her. But I shall know how to make her respected."

Early in March, after two months of rest with his family, Nicholas's spirits began to improve. He was optimistic that the army, equipped with new arms from Britain and France, could finish the war by the end of the year. Complaining of the "poisoned air" of Petrograd, he was anxious to return to *Stavka* to plan the spring offensive.

Protopopov, meanwhile, sensing the approach of a crisis, tried to mask his fears by recommending forcible countermeasures. Four cavalry regiments of the Guard were ordered from the front to Petrograd, and the city police began training in the use of machine guns. The cavalry never arrived. At *Stavka*, General Gurko was disgusted at the prospect of fighting the people and countermanded the order. On March 7, the day before the Tsar left for Headquarters, Protopopov arrived at the palace. He saw the Empress first; she told him that the Tsar insisted on spending a month at the front and that she could not change his mind. Nicholas entered the room and, taking Protopopov aside, said that he had decided to return in three weeks. Protopopov in agitation said, "The time is such, Sire, that you are wanted both here and there. . . . I very much fear the consequences." Nicholas, struck by his minister's alarm, promised if possible to return within a week.

There was one moment, according to Rodzianko, when Nicholas wavered in his determination to refuse a responsible ministry. On the eve of his departure, the Tsar summoned several of his ministers, including Prince Golitsyn, the Prime Minister, and announced that he intended to go to the Duma the next day and personally announce the appointment of a responsible government. That same evening, Golitsyn was summoned again to the palace and told that the Tsar was leaving for Headquarters.

"How is that, Your Majesty?" asked Golitsyn, amazed. "What about a responsible ministry? You intended to go to the Duma tomorrow."

"I have changed my mind," said Nicholas. "I am leaving for the *Stavka* tonight."

This conversation took place on Wednesday, March 7. Five days later, on Monday, March 12, the Imperial government in Petrograd collapsed.

Massie

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Revolution: March 1917

IN the grip of an intense thirty-five-degree-below-zero cold, the people of Petrograd shivered and were hungry. Outside the bakeries, long lines of women stood for hours waiting for their daily ration of bread while the snow fell gently on their coats and shawls. Workers, whose factories had closed for lack of coal, milled in the streets, worried, grumbling and waiting for something to happen. In their stuffy, smoke-filled barracks, soldiers of the garrison gathered around stoves and listened from supper until dawn to the speeches and exhortations of revolutionary agitators. This was Petrograd in the first week of March 1917, ripening for revolution.

On February 27, the Duma reconvened and Kerensky shouted defiance not only at the government but at the Tsar. "The ministers are but fleeting shadows," he cried. "To prevent a catastrophe, the Tsar himself must be removed, by terrorist methods if there is no other way. If you will not listen to the voice of warning, you will find yourselves face to face with facts, not warnings. Look up at the distant flashes that are lighting the skies of Russia." Incitement to assassination of the Tsar was treason, and Protopopov began proceedings to deprive Kerensky of his parliamentary immunity so that he could be prosecuted. Rodzianko told Kerensky privately, however, "Be sure we shall never give you up to them."

In the mood which lay over the capital, even Kerensky's inflammatory speech did not seem abnormal. On the very day of the speech, Buchanan, whose political antennae were acutely sensitive, concluded that the city was quiet enough for him to slip away on a much-needed ten-day holiday in Finland.

The underlying problem was the shortage of food and fuel. The war had taken fifteen million men off the farms, while at the same time the army was consuming huge quantities of food. The railroads which brought supplies into the capital were collapsing. Barely adequate in peacetime, the Russian railroads had now the added load of supplying six million men at the front with food and ammunition, as well as moving the men themselves according to the dictates of Army Headquarters. In addition, hundreds of coal trains had necessarily been added to the overtaxed system. Before the war, the entire St. Petersburg industrial region, with its giant metallurgical industries, had used cheap Cardiff coal imported up the Baltic. The blockade required that coal be brought by train from the Donets basin in the Ukraine. Creaking under this enormous military and industrial load, the railroads' actual capacity had drastically decreased. Russia began the war with 20,071 locomotives; by early 1917, only 9,021 were in service. Similar deterioration had reduced the number of cars from 539,549 to 174,346.

The cities, naturally, suffered more than the countryside, and Petrograd, farthest from the regions producing food and coal, suffered most. Scarcities sent prices soaring: an egg cost four times what it had in 1914, butter and soap cost five times as much. Rasputin, closer to the people than either the Tsar or his ministers, had seen the danger long before. In October 1915, Alexandra had written to her husband: "Our Friend . . . spoke scarcely about anything else for two hours. It is this: that you must give an order that wagons with flour, butter and sugar should be obliged to pass. He saw the whole thing in the night like a vision, all the towns, railway lines, etc. . . . He wishes me to speak to you about all this very earnestly, severely even. . . . He would propose three days no other trains should go except those with flour, butter and sugar—it's even more necessary than meat or ammunition."

In February 1917, winter weather dealt Russia's railroads a final blow. In a month of extreme cold and heavy snowfall, 1,200 locomotive boilers froze and burst, deep drifts blocked long sections of track and 57,000 railway cars stood motionless. In Petrograd, supplies of flour, coal and wood dwindled and disappeared.

Ironically, there were not, in the winter of 1917, any serious revolutionary plans among either workers or revolutionaries. Lenin, living in Zurich in the house of a shoemaker, felt marooned, depressed and defeated. Nothing he tried seemed to succeed. The pamphlets he

wrote drew little response, while the hair oil which he bought in quantity and rubbed assiduously into his skull failed to stimulate even the slightest growth of hair.* In January 1917, addressing a group of Swiss workers, he gloomily declared that while "popular risings must flare up in Europe within a few years . . . we older men may not live to see the decisive battles of the approaching revolution." Kerensky, the Duma's most vociferous advocate of revolution, said later, "No party of the Left and no revolutionary organization had made any plan for a revolution." None was needed. Revolutionary plots and political programs became insignificant in the face of the growing hunger and bitterness of the people. "They [the revolutionaries] were not ready," wrote Basil Shulgin, a monarchist deputy, "but all the rest was ready."

On Thursday, March 8, as Nicholas's train was carrying him away from the capital back to Headquarters, the silent, long-suffering breadlines suddenly erupted. Unwilling to wait any longer, people broke into the bakeries and helped themselves. Columns of protesting workers from the industrial Vyborg section marched across the Neva bridges toward the center of the city. A procession, composed mainly of women chanting "Give us bread," filled the Nevsky Prospect. The demonstration was peaceful; nevertheless, at dusk a squadron of Cossacks trotted down the Nevsky Prospect, the clatter of their hoofs sounding the government's warning. Despite the disorders, no one was seriously alarmed. At the French Embassy that night, the guests threw themselves into a passionate argument as to which of the reigning ballerinas of the Imperial Ballet—Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina or Mathilde Kschessinska—was supreme in her art.

On Friday morning, March 9, the crowds poured into the streets in greater numbers. More bakeries were sacked and again the Cossack patrols appeared, although without their whips, the traditional instrument of mob control in Russia. The crowd, noting this absence, treated the Cossacks cheerfully and parted readily to let them pass. The

* Krupskaya's mother died while Lenin was in Switzerland. There is a story that one night Krupskaya rose exhausted from her vigil beside her dying mother and asked Lenin, who was writing at a table, to awaken her if her mother needed her. Lenin agreed and Krupskaya collapsed into bed. The next morning she awoke to find her mother dead and Lenin still at work. Distraught, she confronted Lenin, who replied, "You told me to wake you if your mother needed you. She died. She didn't need you."

Cossacks, in turn, bantered with the crowd and assured them, "Don't worry. We won't shoot."

On Saturday, most of the workers of Petrograd went on strike. Trains, trolley cars and cabs stopped running, and no newspapers appeared. Huge crowds surged through the streets, carrying, for the first time, red banners and shouting, "Down with the German woman! Down with Protopopov! Down with the war!" A sense of alarm began to speed through the city. That night the violinist Georges Enesco gave a recital in the concert hall of the Maryinsky Theatre. The theatre was practically empty; not more than fifty people sat in the audience, and there were wide gaps in the orchestra. Enesco came up to a corner of the huge stage and played an intimate, private concert for the few people sitting close together in the front of the deserted hall.

The Cabinet, trying desperately to solve the problem of food supply, met all day and through the night. By telegram, they begged Nicholas to return. With the exception of Protopopov, the entire Cabinet also offered to resign, urging the Tsar to appoint a new ministry acceptable to the Duma. Nicholas refused. Five hundred miles away, misinformed by Protopopov as to the seriousness of the situation, believing the crisis to be only another of the turbulent strikes which had plagued his entire reign, he replied to Prince Golitsyn, the Prime Minister, that Cabinet resignations were out of the question. To General Khabalov, Military Governor of Petrograd, he telegraphed brusquely: "I order that the disorders in the capital, intolerable during these difficult times of war with Germany and Austria, be ended tomorrow. Nicholas."

The Tsar's order clearly meant that, where necessary, troops were to be used to clear the streets. The sequence, arranged by Protopopov, entailed meeting disorders first with the police, then with Cossacks wielding whips and, as a last resort, with soldiers using rifles and machine guns. Ultimately, of course, the plan and the security of the capital depended on the quality of the troops available.

As it happened, the quality of the troops in Petrograd could not have been worse. The regular soldiers of the pre-war army—the proud infantry and the cavalry of the Imperial Guard, the veteran Cossacks and regiments of the line—had long since perished in the icy wastes of Poland and Galicia. The best men who remained were still in the trenches facing the Germans. The Petrograd garrison in the winter of 1917 consisted of 170,000 men, most of them raw recruits crowded

into training barracks. The Cossacks of the garrison were young country boys, fresh from the villages, wholly inexperienced in street fighting. Many of the infantry recruits were older men, in their thirties and forties, drawn in part from the working-class suburbs of Petrograd itself. Poor fighting material, not wanted by the generals at the front, they were left in the capital, where it was hoped that their proximity to home would keep them from stirring up trouble. There were too few officers; those on hand had been invalidated back from the front or were boys from military schools incapable of maintaining discipline in a crisis. Lacking both officers and rifles, many units of the garrison never bothered to train.

Despite the caliber of his garrison, General Khabalov prepared to obey the Tsar's command. Early risers, venturing into the city's streets on Sunday morning, found huge posters bearing Khabalov's orders: All assemblies and public meetings were forbidden and would be dispersed by force. All strikers who were not back at their jobs the following morning would be drafted and sent to the front.

The posters were ignored completely. Huge crowds swarmed from the Vyborg quarter across the Neva bridges into the city. In response, lines of soldiers began issuing silently from their barracks. At 4:30 p.m. there was shooting on the Nevsky Prospect opposite the Anitchkov Palace. Fifty people were killed or wounded; throughout the city that day, two hundred people died. Many of the soldiers were bitter, and only reluctantly obeyed orders. Before the Nicholas Station, a company of the Volinsky Regiment refused to fire into a crowd, and emptied its rifles into the air. A company of the Pavlovsky Life Guards refused to fire at all and, when its commander insisted, turned and shot the officer instead. The situation was quickly restored when a loyal company of the crack Preobrajensky Guard moved in to disarm the mutineers and send them back to their barracks.

That night, Rodzianko, who had been meeting with the helpless ministers, sent an anguished telegram to the Tsar: "The position is serious," he said. "There is anarchy in the capital. The government is paralyzed. Transportation of food and fuel is completely disorganized. . . . There is disorderly firing in the streets. A person trusted by the country must be charged immediately to form a ministry." Rodzianko ended with a heartfelt plea: "May the blame not fall on the wearer of the crown." Nicholas, scornful of what he considered hysterics, turned to Alexeiev and declared, "That fat Rodzianko has sent me some nonsense which I shall not even bother to answer."

Instead of concessions, Nicholas decided to send reinforcements. He ordered General Ivanov, an elderly commander from the Galician front, to collect four of the best regiments from the front line, march on the capital and subdue it by force, if necessary. He telegraphed Prince Golitsyn to instruct Rodzianko that the Duma session was to be suspended. And he decided to return to Petrograd himself within a few days. "Am leaving day after tomorrow [the 13th]," he telegraphed Alexandra. "Have finished here with all important questions. Sleep well. God bless you." In Petrograd that night, although two hundred people lay dead, most of the city was quiet. Buchanan, returning at last from his Finnish holiday, noted that "the part of the city through which we passed on our short drive to the Embassy was perfectly quiet and, except for a few patrols of soldiers on the quays and the absence of trams and cabs, there was nothing unusual." Paléologue, returning home at eleven p.m., passed the Radziwill mansion, blazing with the lights of a gala party. Outside, among a long line of elegant cars and carriages, Paléologue happened to spot the car of Grand Duke Boris.

Monday, March 12, was the turning point in Petrograd. On Monday morning, the Tsar's government still clung to a last shred of power. By Monday night, power had passed to the Duma.

The key to this swift, overwhelming change was the massive defection of the Petrograd soldiery. Many of the workers had had enough of going to the Nevsky Prospect to be killed. Indeed, on Sunday night, Iurenev, the leader of the Bolshevik Party in Petrograd, had gloomily concluded that the uprising had failed. "The Reaction is gaining strength," he said to a group of extreme Left party leaders meeting in Kerensky's study. "The unrest in the barracks is subsiding. Indeed, it is clear that the working class and the soldiery must go different ways. We must not rely on day dreams . . . for a revolution, but on systematic propaganda at the works and the factories in store for better days."

Iurenev was wrong: the unrest in the barracks was not subsiding. On Sunday afternoon, the Volinsky Regiment, which had displayed reluctance to fire on the crowd, had retreated to its barracks in confusion and anger. All night the soldiers argued. Then, at six in the morning, a Volinsky sergeant named Kirpichnikov killed a captain who had struck him the previous day. The other officers fled from the barracks and, soon after, the Volinsky marched out, band playing, to join the revolution. The mutiny spread quickly to other famous

regiments, the Semonovsky, the Ismailovsky, the Litovsky, the Oranienbaum Machine Gun Regiment and, finally, to the legendary Preobrajensky Guard, the oldest and finest regiment in the army, created by Peter the Great himself. In all of these cases, the units that went over were recruit battalions of inferior quality; nevertheless, they carried the colors and wore the uniforms of the proudest regiments of the Russian army.

In most parts of the city, the morning of March 12 broke with deadly stillness. From a window of the British Embassy, Meriel Buchanan, the Ambassador's daughter, stared out at "the same wide streets, the same great palaces, the same gold spires and domes rising out of the pearl-colored morning mists, and yet . . . everywhere emptiness, no lines of toiling carts, no crowded scarlet trams, no little sledges. . . . [Only] the waste of deserted streets and ice-bound river . . . [and] on the opposite shore the low grim walls of the Fortress and the Imperial flag of Russia that for the last time fluttered against the winter sky."

A few minutes later, from a window in his own Embassy, Paléologue witnessed the dramatic scene when the army confronted the mob: "At half past eight this morning just as I finished dressing, I heard a strange and prolonged din which seemed to come from the Alexander Bridge. I looked out; there was no one on the bridge which usually presents a busy scene. But almost immediately, a disorderly mob carrying red flags appeared at the end . . . on the right bank of the Neva and a regiment came towards them from the opposite side. It looked as if there would be a violent collision, but on the contrary, the two bodies coalesced. The army was fraternizing with the revolution."

Two hours later, General Knox heard "that the depot troops of the garrison had mutinied and were coming down the street. We went to the window. . . . Craning our necks, we first saw two soldiers—a sort of advance guard—who strode along the middle of the street, pointing their rifles at loiterers to clear the road. . . . Then came a great disorderly mass of soldiery, stretching right across the wide street and both pavements. They were led by a diminutive but immensely dignified student. All were armed and many had red flags fastened to their bayonets. . . . What struck me most was the uncanny silence of it all. We were like spectators in a gigantic cinema."

A few minutes later, Paléologue, trying to find out what was happening, went out into the street: "Frightened inhabitants were scat-

tering through the streets. . . . At one corner of the Liteiny, soldiers were helping civilians to erect a barricade. Flames mounted from the Law Courts. The gates of the Arsenal burst open with a crash. Suddenly, the crack of machine-gun fire split the air; it was the regulars who had just taken up position near the Nevsky Prospect. . . . The Law Courts had become nothing but an enormous furnace; the Arsenal on the Liteiny, the Ministry of the Interior, the Military Government Building . . . the headquarters of the Okhrana and a score of police stations were in flames, the prisons were open and all the prisoners had been liberated." By noon, the Fortress of Peter and Paul had fallen with its heavy artillery, and 25,000 soldiers had joined the revolution. By nightfall, the number had swollen to 66,000.

During Monday morning, the Imperial Cabinet held its last meeting. Protopopov, who was present, was urged to resign. He rose and walked out of the room, melodramatically mumbling, "Now there is nothing left to do but shoot myself." The Tsar's younger brother Grand Duke Michael arrived and, after listening to the ministers, decided to appeal to Nicholas himself. Leaving the meeting, he telephoned directly to Headquarters and urged the immediate appointment of a government which could command the nation's confidence. General Alexeiev, at the other end of the line, asked the Grand Duke to wait while he spoke to the Tsar. Forty minutes later, Alexeiev called back: "The Emperor wishes to express his thanks," he said. "He is leaving for Tsarskoe Selo and will decide there." Hearing this, the Cabinet simply gave up. It adjourned itself—forever, as it turned out—and the ministers walked out of the building. By nightfall, most of them had arrived at the Tauride Palace to have themselves arrested and placed under the protection of the Duma.

At the Duma, events were moving with breathtaking speed. The Imperial order suspending the Duma had reached Rodzianko the previous night. At eight the next morning, he summoned the leaders of all the political parties to a meeting in his office. There it was decided that, in view of the collapse of law and order, the Imperial order should be ignored and the Duma kept in session. At half past one, the first large crowds of workers and soldiers, carrying red banners and singing the "*Marseillaise*," arrived at the Duma to offer their support and to ask for instructions. Swarming through the unguarded doors, they surged through the corridors and chambers and engulfed the parliament. It was a motley, exuberant mob. There were

soldiers, tall and hot in their rough wool uniforms; students shouting exultantly; and here and there a few gray-bearded old men, just released from prison, their knees trembling, their eyes shining.

"I must know what I can tell them," Kerensky cried to Rodzianko, as the mob jostled and crowded the uncertain deputies. "Can I say that the Imperial Duma is with them, that it takes the responsibility on itself, that it stands at the head of the government?"

Rodzianko had little choice but to agree. Still personally loyal to the Tsar, he protested to Shulgin, a monarchist deputy, "I don't want to revolt." Shulgin, a realist as well as a monarchist, overrode him, saying, "Take the power . . . if you don't, others will." Reluctantly, Rodzianko mounted a platform which creaked under his bulk, and assured the crowd that the Duma would refuse to be dissolved and would accept the responsibilities of government. At three in the afternoon, the Duma met and appointed a temporary executive committee for the purpose of restoring order and gaining control over the mutinous troops. The committee included the leaders of all the parties of the Duma except the extreme Right.

Nor was the collapse of the Imperial government and the rise of the Duma all that happened on that remarkable day. On the same day, there arose a second, rival assembly, the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies, consisting of one delegate from each company of revolutionary soldiers and one delegate for each thousand workers. Incredibly, by nightfall, the Soviet was sitting under the same roof as the Duma.

It was Kerensky who created this astonishing situation. As he explained it later: "The entire garrison had mutinied and . . . the troops were marching towards the Duma. . . . Naturally a question arose . . . as to how and by whom the soldiers and workmen were to be led; for until then their movement was completely unorganized, uncoordinated and anarchical. 'A Soviet?' The memory of 1905 prompted this cry. . . . The need of some kind of center for the mass movement was realized by everyone. The Duma itself needed some representatives of the rebel populace; without them, it would have been impossible to reestablish order in the capital. For this reason the Soviet was formed quickly and not by any means as a matter of class war: simply about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, the organizers applied to me for suitable premises; I mentioned the matter to Rodzianko and the thing was arranged."

The Tauride Palace, an eighteenth-century building presented by

Catherine the Great to her favorite Prince Potemkin, possessed two large wings; one was the chamber of the Duma, the other, formerly the budget committee room of the Duma, was given to the Soviet. Thereafter, wrote Kerensky, "two different Russias settled side by side: the Russia of the ruling classes who had lost (though they did not realize it yet) . . . and the Russia of Labor, marching towards power, without suspecting it."

Although Rodzianko assumed the chairmanship of the temporary Duma committee, from the first it was Kerensky who became the central figure. Only thirty-six years old, he became the bridge between the Soviet and the Duma committee. He was elected Vice-Chairman of the Soviet; within three days, he was also Minister of Justice in the new Provisional Government. "His words and his gestures were sharp and clear-cut and his eyes shone," wrote Shulgin. "He seemed to grow every minute." A stream of important prisoners—Prince Golitsyn, Stürmer, the Metropolitan Pitirim, all the ministers of the Cabinet—were brought in or presented themselves for arrest. It was Kerensky who saved their lives. "Ivan Gregorovich," he said, striding up to one prisoner and speaking in a ringing tone, "you are arrested. Your life is not in danger. The Imperial Duma does not shed blood."

With justification, Kerensky later took credit for averting a massacre. "During the first days of the Revolution, the Duma was full of the most hated officials of the monarchy . . .," he wrote. "Day and night the revolutionary tempest raged around the arrested men. The huge halls and endless corridors of the Duma were flooded with armed soldiers, workmen and students. The waves of hatred . . . beat against the walls. If I moved a finger, if I had simply closed my eyes and washed my hands of it, the entire Duma, all St. Petersburg, the whole of Russia might have been drenched in torrents of human blood as [it was] under Lenin in October."

Toward midnight, Protopopov came to ask for protection. After leaving the final meeting of the Council, he had spent the night hiding in a tailor shop. He arrived now in a makeshift disguise: an overlong overcoat and a hat down over his eyes. Sighting Kerensky in one of the corridors, he crept alongside and whispered, "It is I, Protopopov." Shulgin, at that moment, was in the adjoining room. "Suddenly," he wrote, "there was coming something especially exciting; and at once the reason was whispered to me. 'Protopopov is arrested,' and at that moment I saw in the mirror the door burst open violently and Kerensky broke in. He was pale and his eyes shone, his arm was raised; with

this stretched out arm, he seemed to cut through the crowd; everyone recognized him and stood back on either side. And then in the mirror I saw that behind Kerensky there were soldiers with rifles and, between the bayonets, a miserable little figure with a hopelessly harassed and sunken face—it was with difficulty that I recognized Protopopov. 'Don't dare touch that man!' shouted Kerensky—pushing his way on, pallid, with impossible eyes, one arm raised, cutting through the crowd, the other tragically dropped, pointing at 'that man.' . . . It looked as if he were leading him to execution, to something dreadful. And the crowd fell apart. Kerensky dashed past like the flaming torch of revolutionary justice and behind him they dragged that miserable little figure in the rumpled greatcoat surrounded by bayonets."

By Tuesday morning, March 13, except for a last outpost of tsarism in the Winter Palace, which General Khabalov held with 1,500 loyal troops, the city was in the hands of the revolution. In the afternoon, the revolutionaries in the Fortress of Peter and Paul across the river gave Khabalov's men twenty minutes to abandon the palace or face bombardment; having lost all hope, the dejected loyalists marched out and simply melted away.

In the anarchy that followed, wild celebrations were mingled with violent outbursts of mob fury. In Kronstadt, the naval base outside the city, the sailors brutally slaughtered their officers, killing one and burying a second, still living, side by side with the corpse. In Petrograd, armored cars, with clusters of rebel soldiers perched on their tops, roared up and down the streets, flying red flags. Firemen, arriving to put out the fires blazing in public buildings, were driven away by soldiers and workmen who wanted to see the buildings burn. Kschessinska's mansion was sacked by the mob from top to bottom, the grand piano smashed, the carpets stained with ink, the bathtubs filled with cigarette butts.*

On Wednesday, March 14, even those who had wavered flocked to join the victors. That morning saw the mass obeisance to the Duma of the Imperial Guard. From his Embassy window, Paléologue watched three regiments pass on their way to the Tauride Palace: "They marched in perfect order," he wrote, "with their band at the

* One elegant Petrograd mansion was saved by the quick wits of its owner, the artful Countess Kleinmichel. Before the mob arrived, she barred her doors, shuttered her windows and placed in front of her house a sign which read: "No trespassing. This house is the property of the Petrograd Soviet. Countess Kleinmichel has been taken to the Fortress of St. Peter and Paul." Inside, Countess Kleinmichel then packed her bags and planned her escape.

head. A few officers came first, wearing a large red cockade in their caps, a knot of red ribbon on their shoulders and red stripes on their sleeves. The old regimental standard, covered with icons, was surrounded by red flags." Behind came the Guard, including units from the garrison at Tsarskoe Selo. "At the head were the Cossacks of the Escort, those magnificent horsemen who are the flower . . . and privileged elite of the Imperial Guard. Then came His Majesty's Regiment, the sacred legion which is recruited from all the units of the Guard and whose special function it is to secure the personal safety of their sovereigns."

Even more spectacular was the march of the Marine Guard, the *Garde Equipage*, most of whom had served aboard the *Standart* and personally knew the Imperial family. At the head of the marines strode their commanding officer, Grand Duke Cyril. Leading his men to the Tauride Palace, Cyril became the first of the Romanovs publicly to break his oath of allegiance to the Tsar, who still sat on the throne. In the presence of Rodzianko, Cyril pledged allegiance to the Duma. Then, returning to his palace on Glinka Street, he hoisted a red flag over his roof. Writing to his Uncle Paul, Cyril coolly explained, "These last few days, I have been alone in carrying out my duties to Nicky and the country and in saving the situation by my recognition of the Provisional Government." A week later, Cyril gave an interview to a Petrograd newspaper: "I have asked myself several times if the ex-Empress were an accomplice of William [the Kaiser]," he said, "but each time forced myself to recoil from the horror of such a thought."

Cyril's behavior drew a terse, prophetic comment from Paléologue: "Who can tell whether this treacherous insinuation will not before long provide the foundation for a terrible charge against the unfortunate Empress. The Grand Duke Cyril should . . . be reminded that the most infamous calumnies which Marie Antoinette had to meet when she faced the Revolutionary Tribunal, first took wing at the elegant suppers of the Comte d'Artois [the jealous younger brother of Louis XVI]."

Petrograd had fallen. Everywhere in the city, the revolution was triumphant. At the Tauride Palace, two rival assemblies, both convinced that tsarism was ended, were embarking on a struggle for survival and power. Yet, Russia was immense and Petrograd only a

tiny, artificial mound, scarcely Russian, in a corner of the Tsar's empire. The two million people of Petrograd were only a fraction of the scores of millions of subjects; even in Petrograd, the revolutionary workers and soldiers were less than a quarter of the city's population. A week had gone by since Nicholas had left for Headquarters and the first disorders had broken out. In that week, he had lost his capital, but still he kept his throne. How much longer could he keep it?

The Allied ambassadors, desperately concerned that the fall of tsarism would mean Russia's withdrawal from the war, clung to the hope that the Tsar would not topple. Buchanan still talked in terms of Nicholas "granting a constitution and empowering Rodzianko to select the members of a new government." Paléologue thought that the Tsar had a chance if he pardoned the rebels, appointed the Duma committee as his ministers and "appeared in person . . . and solemnly announced on the steps of Our Lady of Kazan that a new era is beginning for Russia. But if he waits a day it will be too late." It was Knox who sensed more accurately the ominous future. Standing at a corner of the Liteiny Prospect, watching the burning of the district court across the street, he heard a soldier say, "We have only one wish: to beat the Germans. We will begin with the Germans here and with a family that you know called Romanov."

Abdication

NICHOLAS, leaving home for Headquarters on the night of March 7, was subdued and downhearted. Twice, from the train, he sent melancholy telegrams tinged with the loneliness that overwhelmed him on leaving his family after two months at Tsarskoe Selo. In Mogilev, he missed the buoyant presence of the Tsarevich. "Here in the house it is so still," he wrote to Alexandra. "No noise, no excited shouts. I imagine him sleeping—all his little things, photographs and knickknacks, in exemplary order in his bedroom."

Nicholas's last letters as Tsar, written as it were from the brink of the abyss, have often been cited as evidence of his incorrigible stupidity. The most famous remark of all, invariably quoted in even the briefest estimate of Nicholas's character, is the line: "I shall take up dominoes again in my spare time." Taken by itself, the remark is devastating. Any tsar with so little wit as to sit playing dominoes while his capital revolts deserves nothing: neither his throne nor understanding.

Yet, there is more to it than that. It was the Tsar's first night back at Army Headquarters and he was writing to his wife of familiar things. Immediately before this much-quoted line, he is talking about his son. He says that he will greatly miss the games they had played every evening; in lieu of them, he will take up dominoes again to relax in his spare moments. Even more significantly, the letter was written not against a backdrop of revolution, but at a moment when Nicholas believed that the capital was quiet. The date on the letter is March 8, the day on which the first bread riots occurred in the city. The first reports of these disorders arrived at Headquarters on the morning

of the 9th; Nicholas did not learn until the 11th that anyone in Petrograd considered them serious.

Despite the weeks of rest with his family, Nicholas returned to Mogilev still mentally fatigued and physically exhausted. A vivid warning signal on the state of his health flashed on Sunday morning, March 11. As he stood in church, Nicholas suffered "an excruciating pain in the chest" which lasted for fifteen minutes. "I could hardly stand the service out," he wrote, "and my forehead was covered with drops of perspiration. I cannot understand what it could have been because I had no palpitation of the heart. . . . If this occurs again, I shall tell Fedorov [the doctor]." The symptoms are those of a coronary occlusion.

If the revolution in the streets of Petrograd came as a shock to everyone in the city, it is not entirely surprising that the Tsar, at Headquarters five hundred miles away, was neither more alert nor more prescient. Indeed, Nicholas had less information than those who continued blithely to attend dinners, parties and concerts in the capital. He depended on reports passed to him through a chain of officials which included Protopopov in Petrograd and General Voeikov at Headquarters. Both Protopopov and Voeikov served him badly, deliberately underplaying the seriousness of the situation as it developed. Protopopov was defending his own position; disorders which he could not control were a damning reflection on his abilities as Minister of Interior. Voeikov, at the other end of the line, was a conservative, unimaginative man who simply could not face the prospect of walking into the presence of the Tsar and announcing a revolution.

From Thursday, March 8, until Sunday, the 11th, Nicholas heard nothing which caused him serious alarm. He was told that the capital was afflicted with "street disorders." "Street disorders" were not a matter to worry Nicholas: he had faced them innumerable times in the twenty-three years of his reign. There were officials to deal with them: Khabalov, the Military Governor, and above him Protopopov, the Minister of Interior. The Tsar of all the Russias, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, need not bother himself with an affair which was a matter for the city police.

On the night of the 11th, after the troops had been called out and had fired into the crowd and two hundred people lay dead, Nicholas was told that the "street disorders" were becoming nasty. Reacting quickly, he sent an order to Khabalov commanding that the disorders, "intolerable in these difficult times of war with Germany and Austria,"

be ended immediately. That same night, he wrote to Alexandra, "I hope Khabalov will be able to stop these street disorders. Protopopov must give him clear and definite instructions."

On Monday, the 12th, the news was much worse. "After yesterday's news from town, I saw many frightened faces here," Nicholas wrote. "Fortunately, Alexeiev is calm, but he thinks it is necessary to appoint a very energetic man, so as to compel the ministers to work out the solution of the problems—supplies, railways, coal, etc." Late that night, a jolting telegram arrived from the Empress—"Concessions inevitable. Street fighting continues. Many units gone over to the enemy. Alix." At midnight he ordered his train, and at five a.m. he was under way for Tsarskoe Selo. Nevertheless, even at this point Nicholas did not proceed straight to the capital. Knowing that the most direct route was heavily used by troop supply trains, he chose a longer route to avoid dislocations. He still could not believe that his presence was so urgently required that supplies for the army and hungry civilians should be shunted aside.

As the Imperial train traveled north on Tuesday, the 13th, rumbling through village stations where local dignitaries still stood saluting on the platform to honor the passage of the Tsar, the grim news continued to come. Telegrams from the capital announced the fall of the Winter Palace and the formation of an executive committee of the Duma under Rodzianko. At two a.m. on the morning of the 14th, the train was at Malaya Vishera, just a hundred miles south of the capital, when it was slowed to a halt. An officer boarded the train and informed Voeikov that revolutionary soldiers with machine guns and artillery were just up the track. Nicholas was awakened, and in the middle of the night, alternative possibilities were discussed. If they could not go north to Petrograd and Tsarskoe Selo, they might go east to Moscow, south to Mogilev or west to Pskov, headquarters of the Northern Group of Armies, commanded by General Ruzsky. The discussion leaned in the last direction. Nicholas concurred and declared, "Well, then, to Pskov."

It was eight o'clock in the evening when the Imperial train glided slowly into the station at Pskov. The platform, usually lined with a guard of honor, was deserted except for General Ruzsky and his deputy, General Danilov. Ruzsky, entering the Tsar's car, brought more bad news: the entire garrison of Petrograd and Tsarskoe Selo had gone over, including the Guard, the Cossack Escort and the *Garde Equipage* with Grand Duke Cyril marching in front. Ivanov's

expedition, sent ahead to restore order, had reached Tsarskoe Selo earlier in the day, where the trains had stopped and been surrounded by revolutionary soldiers calling on Ivanov's men to join them. Ivanov himself had received a telegram from Alexeiev advising that order had been restored in the capital, and that if there was no further bloodshed, the monarchy might be saved. Alexeiev had suggested that he withdraw; Ivanov had done so, and his little force had quickly melted away.

The report that his personal guard had defected was a heavy blow to Nicholas. Along with the revelation of personal betrayal, it clearly indicated the end of hope for support from within the city, while the loss of Ivanov's men displayed the futility of sending more troops from the front. Nicholas's freedom of action was narrowing rapidly, and as he sat listening to Ruzsky, he made a decision. He asked Ruzsky to telephone to Rodzianko and offer what he had so long refused: a ministry acceptable to the Duma, with a prime minister, presumably Rodzianko, who would have full power over internal affairs. Ruzsky left the railway car and hurried to the telegraph.

Rodzianko, answering Ruzsky's message, was surrounded by people pushing, shouting, asking advice and yelling instructions. Above the din, the harassed Rodzianko wired melodramatically to Ruzsky: "His Majesty and yourself apparently are unable to realize what is happening in the capital. A terrible revolution has broken out. Hatred of the Empress has reached a fever pitch. To prevent bloodshed, I have been forced to arrest all the ministers. . . . Don't send any more troops. I am hanging by a thread myself. Power is slipping from my hands. The measures you propose are too late. The time for them is gone. There is no return."

Rodzianko spoke truly in describing his own position. A compromise reached that morning between the Duma committee and the Soviet had produced the nucleus of a Provisional Government. Miliukov, leader of the Cadet Party in the Duma, was Foreign Minister; Kerensky, representing the Soviet, became Minister of Justice; Guchkov, leader of the Octobrists, was War Minister. The Prime Minister, however, was not Rodzianko, to whom the Soviet would not agree, but Prince George Lvov, the liberal and popular chairman of the Zemstvo Red Cross. Rodzianko continued to take part in the government's discussions, but his influence, like that of the Duma itself, faded rapidly.

Rodzianko was entirely accurate when he said that it was too late

for concessions. Already the Duma committee and the Soviet had agreed that Nicholas must abdicate in favor of his son, with the Tsar's brother Grand Duke Michael as Regent. Even those on the committee who wished to preserve the throne—Guchkov, Miliukov and Basil Shulgin, a Right-wing deputy who participated in all the discussions—had concluded that if the Imperial system and the Romanov dynasty were to be saved, Nicholas would have to be sacrificed. "It is of vital importance that Nicholas II should not be overthrown by violence," declared Guchkov. "The only thing which can secure the permanent establishment of a new order, without too great a shock, is his voluntary abdication."

On this matter, the leaders of the new government in Petrograd already had been in touch with the leaders of the army. On the 14th, as the Tsar's train was approaching Pskov, Rodzianko had talked to Alexeiev at Headquarters. Alexeiev himself found abdication the only solution and agreed to collect the opinions of the generals commanding the different fronts. By the morning of the 15th, these replies had come back to Alexeiev and were forwarded to Ruzsky in Pskov. They were grimly unanimous: Nicholas must abdicate. Admiral Nepenin of the Baltic Fleet had stated: "It is only with the greatest difficulty that I keep the troops and fleet under my command in check." Grand Duke Nicholas, in the Caucasus, telegraphed that he begged "on my knees" for his cousin's abdication.

In Pskov, after breakfast on the morning of March 15, Ruzsky brought the generals' telegrams to the Imperial train and laid them before the Tsar. Nicholas was overwhelmed. His face became white, he turned away from Ruzsky and walked to the window. Absent-mindedly, he lifted the shade and peeped out. Inside, the car was absolutely still. No one spoke, and most of those present could scarcely breathe.

If the anguish felt by Nicholas at this last, climactic moment of his reign is impossible to know, the logic of his reasoning is relatively clear. If he rejected the advice of the political leaders in Petrograd and of his generals, what could he do next? He knew from the defection of the Guard and from Ivanov's experience that it would not be easy to find loyal regiments to march on the city; without the support of his generals, it probably would be impossible. If he could find the men and fighting broke out, there was a risk to his family, still at Tsarskoe Selo, now firmly in the hands of the Provisional Government. On top of this, Nicholas had no real stomach for a bloody,

pitched battle in the streets of his capital. Years of rule, years of war, years of personal strain and anguish had left him few inner resources with which to face the prospect of plunging his country into civil war.

Ultimately, the factor which swung the Tsar's decision was the advice of his generals. For Nicholas, each one of these telegrams was more significant than a dozen messages from Rodzianko. These were his fellow soldiers, his comrades, his brothers-in-arms. Nicholas loved the army, and he truly loved his country. He cared far more about winning the war than he did for his crown. To start a civil war, with Russians killing Russians while the hated Germans looked on, would be a negation of all that he deeply believed. If it was the advice of his generals that the highest act of patriotism he could perform would be to abdicate, then it became impossible for Nicholas to refuse.

All at once, with a sudden movement, the Tsar spun around from the window and announced in a clear, firm voice, "I have decided that I shall give up the throne in favor of my son, Alexis." Nicholas made the sign of the cross, and the others in the car crossed themselves. "I thank you gentlemen for your distinguished and faithful service," he continued. "I hope it will continue under my son."

A form of abdication, prepared at Alexeiev's direction and forwarded from Headquarters, was produced. Nicholas signed it, and the document was dated 3 p.m., March 15. The throne had passed from father to son, as prescribed by law. His Imperial Majesty Tsar Alexis II, aged twelve, was the Autocrat of all the Russias.

At this point, with the signing completed, a confusion in procedure arose. The night before, in Petrograd, the monarchists on the governing committee had decided that Guchkov and Shulgin should be present to witness the signing and to bring the document back to Petrograd. A train for them was provided at dawn, and throughout that day the two delegates were traveling toward Pskov. As they were not expected before evening, Ruzsky was instructed simply to hold on to the document which Nicholas already had signed.

This interval—almost six hours—gave Nicholas time to reflect on the consequences of the act he had just performed. For himself, the shedding of power came as a relief. He assumed that he would be allowed to retire with his family to Livadia, that Alexis would remain with them at least until he had finished his education, and that the actual responsibility of government would pass to his brother Michael as Regent. It was a conversation with Fedorov, the doctor, which

caused Nicholas to change his mind. Sending for Fedorov, Nicholas first asked for a frank estimate of Alexis's prospects with hemophilia.

Fedorov, fully aware of the political significance of the question, replied carefully, "Science teaches us, Sire, that it is an incurable disease. Yet those who are afflicted with it sometimes reach an advanced old age. Still, Alexis Nicolaievich is at the mercy of an accident." The young Tsar would never be able to ride, the doctor explained, and he would be forced to avoid all activity which might tire him and strain his joints. Then Fedorov went beyond a purely medical opinion. He pointed out that Nicholas, once off the throne, would almost certainly be exiled with the Empress from Russia. If that happened, the new government would never allow its sovereign to be educated abroad by the deposed parents. Even if the entire family was allowed to remain in Russia, Alexis's upbringing was certain to be transferred to other hands.

Fedorov's words confronted Nicholas with a heart-breaking dilemma. As Tsar, he knew that his son was the rightful heir to the Russian throne; as a father, he could not bring himself to abandon his beloved child to strangers ignorant of all the ramifications of his disease. For the second time that fateful day, Nicholas was forced to a dramatic decision, a decision which would affect not only the fate of himself and his family, but the history of Russia.

At nine in the evening, Guchkov and Shulgin arrived in Pskov and were led across the tracks to the brightly lit Imperial train. Nicholas, wearing a simple gray tunic, greeted them with a handshake and invited them to sit. With his own back to the green silken wall of the drawing-room car, he listened as Guchkov began to explain why the abdication was necessary. Before Guchkov had finished, Nicholas interrupted. "This long speech is unnecessary," he said calmly, almost apologetically. "I have decided to renounce my throne. Until three o'clock today, I thought I would abdicate in favor of my son, Alexis. But now I have changed my decision in favor of my brother Michael. I trust you will understand the feelings of a father." As Nicholas spoke this last sentence, his voice dropped into a low, hushed tone.

When the Tsar had spoken, Guchkov handed him a new text prepared in Petrograd. Nicholas took it and left the room. Some time afterward, he reappeared with a document which he had written himself, editing in several points from Guchkov's text. This final version was splendidly and yet pathetically illuminated by the patriotism of its author:

In this great struggle with a foreign enemy, who for nearly three years had tried to enslave our country, the Lord God has been pleased to send down on Russia a new, heavy trial. The internal popular disturbances which have begun, threaten to have a disastrous effect on the future conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honor of our heroic army, the good of the people, the whole future of our dear country demand that whatever it cost, the war should be brought to a victorious end.

The cruel enemy is gathering his last forces, and already the hour is near when our gallant army, together with our glorious allies, will be able finally to crush the enemy.

In these decisive days in the life of Russia, we have thought it a duty of conscience to facilitate for our people a close union and consolidation of all national forces for the speedy attainment of victory; and, in agreement with the Imperial Duma, we have thought it good to abdicate from the throne of the Russian State, and to lay down the supreme power.

Not wishing to part with our dear son, we hand over our inheritance to our brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and give him our blessing to mount the throne of the Russian State. We bequeath it to our brother to direct the forces of the State in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative institutions, on those principles which will by them be established.

In the name of our dearly loved country, we call on all faithful sons of the Fatherland to fulfill their sacred duty to him by obedience to the Tsar at a heavy moment of national trials, to help him, together with the representatives of the people, to bring the Russian State on to the road of victory, prosperity, and glory.

May the Lord God help Russia!

Nicholas

The historic scene was almost concluded. Before it broke up, Nicholas's signature was obtained on two final appointments nominated by the Provisional Government. The first was Prince Lvov as premier, the other was Grand Duke Nicholas, who once again was appointed commander-in-chief of the armies. When this was done, Nicholas rose. At this point, Shulgin, whose heart was bursting with affection and pity for the man who had just been humbled, moved with Nicholas into a corner of the car. "The Emperor looked at me," wrote Shulgin,

"and perhaps he read in my eyes the feelings which were distressing me, because in his own there was something like an invitation to speak and my words came of themselves: 'Oh, Your Majesty, if you had done all this earlier, even as late as the last summoning of the Duma, perhaps all that . . . ' and I could not finish. The Tsar looked at me in a curiously . . . [unaffected] way: 'Do you think it might have been avoided?'"

The meeting was over. A coat of varnish was placed over Nicholas's signature on the abdication, and Guchkov and Shulgin left immediately for Petrograd. At 1 a.m. on March 16, after thirty hours in Pskov, the Imperial train left the silent railway platform, bound for Mogilev, where Nicholas would say goodbye to his armies. Through the long day when, with a stroke of his pen, he had removed two Romanovs from the throne of Russia, he had remained calm and almost kindly to those around him. That night in his diary, normally a repository of only the most cryptic and phlegmatic observations on the day's events, Nicholas finally uttered a heartfelt cry: "For the sake of Russia, and to keep the armies in the field, I decided to take this step. . . . Left Pskov at one in the morning. All around me I see treason, cowardice and deceit."

The Tsar had fallen. It was an event of gigantic significance, and yet, neither in Russia nor abroad was this significance more than dimly understood. On the Sunday following the abdication, Paléologue visited three Petrograd churches: "The same scene met me everywhere; a grave and silent congregation exchanging grave and melancholy glances. Some of the *moujiks* looked bewildered and horrified and several had tears in their eyes. Yet even among those who seemed the most moved I could not find one who did not sport a red cockade or armband. They had all been working for the Revolution; all of them were for it, body and soul. But that did not prevent them from shedding tears for their Father, the Tsar. Buchanan had the same impression: "It was not so much the Emperor as the regime of which the nation as a whole was weary. As a soldier remarked . . . 'Oh yes, we must have a Republic, but we must have a good Tsar at the head.'" Far away in a peasant village on the steppe of southern Russia, the peasants clustered around the notice of abdication. "Well, so he's gone, just think of that," said one, "and he's been our Tsar for God knows how many years, and when he leaves us everything will be the

same as ever. I suppose he will go to manage his estates somewhere; he always liked farming." "Poor man," said an old woman, "he never did anyone any harm. Why did they put him away?"

"Shut thy mouth, old fool," she was told. "They aren't going to kill him. He's run away, that's all."

"Oh, but he was our Tsar, and now we have *no one!*"

If anything, the governments of England, France and the United States had even less understanding of the event than the Russian peasants. In England, where the Tsar was seen as the tyrant wielding the knout, most Liberals and Laborites were exuberant. In the House of Commons, Andrew Bonar Law, leader of the House, quoted Wordsworth: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven." From Paris, the French Socialist Minister of Munitions, Albert Thomas, telegraphed Kerensky his "congratulations and fraternal greetings."

In the United States, the news was greeted even more extravagantly. On March 22, only one week after the abdication, the United States became the first foreign government to recognize the Provisional Government. For America, on the verge of entering the war because of the German policy of unrestricted U-boat sinkings, the fall of tsarism removed the taint of fighting beside an autocratic Russia. On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war and make the world "safe for democracy." In the same speech, he spoke glowingly of "the wonderful and heartening things that have been happening within the last few weeks in Russia. . . . The autocracy . . . has been shaken off and the great, generous Russian people have been added in all their naïve majesty and might to the forces that are fighting for freedom in the world, for justice and for peace. Here is a fit partner for a League of Honor."

This almost universal ardor and optimism was not shared by the brilliantly erratic Englishman whose mercurial career had been temporarily blighted by the failure of his special brainchild, the attack on Gallipoli. Even a decade later, when the wartime role of Nicholas II and Imperial Russia still was ignored or derided, Winston Churchill, alone in his viewpoint, gave this estimate:

"It is the shallow fashion of these times to dismiss the Tsarist regime as a purblind, corrupt, incompetent tyranny. But a survey of its thirty months' war with Germany and Austria should correct these loose impressions and expose the dominant facts. We may measure the strength of the Russian Empire by the battering it had endured, by

the disasters it had survived, by the inexhaustible forces it had developed, and by the recovery it had made. In the governments of states, when great events are afoot, the leader of the nation, whoever he be, is held accountable for failure and vindicated by success. No matter who wrought the toil, who planned the struggle, to the supreme responsible authority belongs the blame or credit.

"Why should this stern test be denied to Nicholas II? He had made many mistakes, what ruler has not? He was neither a great captain nor a great prince. He was only a true, simple man of average ability, of merciful disposition, upheld in all his daily life by his faith in God. But the brunt of supreme decisions centered upon him. At the summit where all problems are reduced to Yea or Nay, where events transcend the faculties of man and where all is inscrutable, he had to give the answers. His was the function of the compass needle. War or no war? Advance or retreat? Right or left? Democratise or hold firm? Quit or persevere? These were the battlefields of Nicholas II. Why should he reap no honor from them? The devoted onset of the Russian armies which saved Paris in 1914; the mastered agony of the munitionless retreat; the slowly regathered forces; the victories of Brusilov; the Russian entry upon the campaign of 1917, unconquered, stronger than ever; has he no share in these? In spite of errors vast and terrible, the regime he personified, over which he presided, to which his personal character gave the vital spark, had at this moment won the war for Russia.

"He is about to be struck down. A dark hand, gloved at first in folly, now intervenes. Exit Tsar. Deliver him and all he loved to wounds and death. Belittle his efforts, asperse his conduct, insult his memory; but pause then to tell us who else was found capable. Who or what could guide the Russian state? Men gifted and daring; men ambitious and fierce, spirits audacious and commanding—of these there were no lack. But none could answer the few plain questions on which the life and fame of Russia turned."

Inevitably, members of the Imperial family greeted news of the Tsar's abdication with dismay. Some, thinking only of the awkwardness of their own situation, leaped to attack. "Nicky must have lost his mind," wrote Grand Duke Alexander. "Since when does a sovereign abdicate because of a shortage of bread and partial disorders in his

capital? . . . He had an army of fifteen million men at his disposal. The whole thing . . . seemed ludicrous."

Far more widely criticized was Nicholas's decision to sign away the rights of his son. Shulgin and Guchkov, both strong monarchists, were surprised by the change from Alexis to Michael. They knew it would make trouble, but in the emotion of the moment on the train, they bowed to a "father's feelings." Among the legalistic, bureaucratic classes whose main concern was to obey whatever government was properly legal, and among the devout monarchists, faithful to tradition, who might have rallied to the legitimate heir, the change created consternation. "The immediate accession of the Tsarevich was the only means of stopping the Revolution," declared Nicholas Basily, an official at Headquarters, who had drafted the first abdication document and been shocked to see the switch from son to brother. "In the first place, the young Alexis Nicolaievich would have had the law on his side. He would also have benefited by the sympathetic feeling of the nation and army towards him."

Even those who had served Nicholas long and faithfully failed to completely understand that the Tsar was also the father of a delicate twelve-year-old boy. Sazonov, who had been Nicholas's Minister of Foreign Affairs for some years, spoke of the matter to Paléologue. "I needn't tell you of my love for the Emperor and with what devotion I have served him," he said with tears in his eyes. "But as long as I live, I shall never forgive him for abdicating for his son. He had no shadow of right to do so. Is there a body of law in the world which allows the rights of a minor to be abandoned? And what's to be said when those rights are the most sacred and august on earth? Fancy destroying a three-hundred-year-old dynasty, and the stupendous work of Peter the Great, Catherine II and Alexander I. What a tragedy! What a disaster!"

With Nicholas and Alexis both removed, Michael now was Tsar. There was an old Russian legend that when Tsar Michael II sat on the throne, Russia would win her eternal goal, Constantinople. There had been no tsar named Michael since the founder of the Romanov dynasty; Nicholas's younger brother, therefore, would be Michael II. There were other propitious omens. Britain and France, which always before had blocked Russia's advance to the south, now were her allies, and had promised Constantinople as a prize of victory. If Michael

took the throne and the Allies won the war, the ancient legend might at last be fulfilled.

As it happened, the reign of the new Tsar Michael was ludicrously brief. The news burst upon him at Gatchina in a telegram from his older brother: "To His Majesty the Emperor Michael: Recent events have forced me to decide irrevocably to take this extreme step. Forgive me if it grieves you and also for no warning—there was no time. Shall always remain a faithful and devoted brother. Now returning to Headquarters where hope to come back shortly to Tsarskoe Selo. Fervently pray God to help you and our country. Nicky."

Michael, now thirty-nine, was wholly unprepared for this abrupt transformation. Before the birth of the Tsarevich, he had for six years been Heir to the Throne. During Alexis's periods of illness, he had faced the possibility of becoming Heir again. But he had never dreamed that both his brother and his nephew would be removed simultaneously and that, with the arrival of a telegram, he would suddenly find himself Tsar. Michael was no coward; he had won the St. George Cross commanding troops in the Carpathians. Nor was he politically insensitive: watching the disintegration of the government earlier that winter, he had come to Rodzianko to see what he could do to help. But he was not a bold, decisive man with extraordinary energies and will power, and it was a man of this character who was required. Nevertheless, taking leave of his wife, now beside herself with excitement at the prospect of becoming the consort of an emperor, Michael traveled from Gatchina into Petrograd to make his historic decision.

In Petrograd, the anti-monarchical tide was running strong. Even as Guchkov and Shulgin were in Pskov obtaining Nicholas's abdication, the Soviet had decided that replacing one tsar with another was not enough. "No more Romanovs! We want a Republic!" became their cry. Guchkov and Shulgin, returning to Petrograd with the document of abdication, were invited to address the railway workers at the station. Shulgin, believing it would please them to hear of Nicholas's abdication, fervently shouted, "Long live the Emperor Michael!" To his horror, the workers were outraged. Closing the doors, they attempted to seize both Guchkov and Shulgin, who barely managed to slip away to a waiting automobile. From the station, the two delegates drove straight to a private house where the new government was meeting. Rodzianko was present, and in an armchair at the head of

the table, waiting to hear the advice of the men who would become his ministers if he accepted the throne, sat Michael.

The debate that followed was waged with passionate intensity. Miliukov, Guchkov and Shulgin pleaded that Michael had no right to evade the throne. They argued that the monarchy was the single unifying force in Russia, without which Russia would be destroyed. With equal force and conviction on the other side, Rodzianko and Kerensky threatened that if a new tsar took the throne against the people's will, a new torrent of revolution would be released. The first victim, they predicted, would be Michael himself. "He asked me point-blank whether I could vouch for his life if he accepted the crown," Rodzianko wrote later, "and I was compelled to answer in the negative because there was no armed force I could rely on."

Kerensky was even more vehement than Rodzianko. Knowing the fury that the proclamation of a new tsar would rouse in the Soviet, he declared, "In any case, I cannot answer for the life of Your Highness." Michael asked for a few minutes to think the matter over and left the room with Rodzianko and Prince Lvov. Five minutes later, he returned and announced, "I have decided to abdicate." He added that he would accept the throne later only if invited to do so by a constituent assembly.

Kerensky was overjoyed. "Monseigneur, you are the noblest of men," he shouted. The second deed of abdication was typed out on the desk of a children's schoolroom in the house next door, and Michael signed it.

Three hundred and four years after a shy sixteen-year-old boy had reluctantly accepted the throne at the plea of the Russian nation, his descendant, also named Michael, had given it back. The Romanov dynasty was swept away.

Although it was the defection of his trusted generals which ultimately swung his decision to abdication, Nicholas could not abandon the throne without saying goodbye to the army. In Pskov, immediately after signing the abdication, Nicholas applied for permission to return to Headquarters. The Provisional Government agreed without hesitation. Nicholas was not hostile but submissive; at Headquarters, Alexeiev was with them; at all the battlefronts, the commanding generals had united to urge the abdication. The likelihood that Nicholas would suddenly change his mind, revoke his abdication, rally his troops and march on the capital simply did not exist.

As the train approached Mogilev, Alexeiev sent Basily to meet the Tsar. "He was absolutely calm, but it shocked me to see him with a haggard look and hollow eyes," Basily wrote of his former sovereign. ". . . I took the liberty of saying that we at the *Stavka* were greatly distressed because he had not transferred his crown to the Tsarevich. He answered quietly: 'I cannot be separated from my son.' A few minutes later dinner was served. It was a melancholy meal. All of us felt our hearts bursting; we couldn't eat or drink. Yet the Emperor retained wonderful self-control and asked me several questions about the men who form the Provisional Government; but he was wearing a rather low collar and I could see that he was continually choking down his emotion."

In Mogilev, Alexeiev met the train at the station and drove with the Tsar in an open car back to the governor's house. Sitting down at his desk, Nicholas drafted as an Order of the Day his farewell to the army:

"My dearly beloved troops," he wrote, "I address you for the last time. Since my abdication, for myself and my son, from the throne of Russia, the power has passed to the Provisional Government, which has arisen on the initiative of the Imperial Duma. . . . Submit yourselves to the Provisional Government, obey your commanders. . . . May the Lord God bless you and may the Holy Martyr and Conqueror St. George lead you to victory." Sadly, the message never reached the troops. Forwarded for approval to Petrograd, it was suppressed by the same Provisional Government which Nicholas was so loyally recommending. The Soviet, sitting under the same roof of the Tauride Palace, had let it be known that it did not favor the issuance of Orders of the Day by deposed monarchs.

During these last five days in Mogilev, Nicholas exhibited the same steady restraint and self-control which he had been taught since boyhood. At a ceremonial farewell arranged by Alexeiev, the main hall of the house was packed with officers of the Headquarters staff. Nicholas, appearing at the front of the crowded room, quietly thanked the officers for their loyalty, begged them to forget all feuds and lead the army and Russia to victory. His modesty made a vivid impression; when he had finished, the room burst into loud cheers and most of those present wept openly. But none spoke up to urge him to change his mind, and Nicholas quietly bowed and left.

Alone in his room, he said goodbye to the foreign military observers. General Hanbury-Williams found Nicholas in a khaki uniform, looking

tired and pale, with large black lines under his eyes. He smiled and got up from his desk to join his guest on the sofa. "He said that he had meant to carry out . . . [reforms]," wrote Hanbury-Williams, "but that matters had advanced so quickly and it was too late. The proposal that the Tsarevich should take his place with a regent he could not accept as he could not bear the separation from his only son, and he knew that the Empress would feel the same. He . . . hoped that he would not have to leave Russia. He did not see that there would be any objection to his going to the Crimea . . . and if not, he would sooner go to England than anywhere. . . . He . . . added that the right thing to do was to support the present Government, as that was the best way to keep Russia in the alliance to conclude the war. . . . He feared the revolution would ruin the armies. . . . As I said 'Good-bye' . . . he turned to me and added: 'Remember, nothing matters but beating Germany.'"

The change in his status was tactfully concealed by the continuing personal courtesies with which he was treated. It appeared, nevertheless, in the little matters of procedure and ceremony which are the visible trappings of power. On the morning following his last meeting with the staff, the same officers assembled to take the oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government. While Nicholas sat alone in his room, his suite, the staff and the troops of his escort lined up outside the house and pronounced the new oath in an audible chorus. In the prayers that followed, for the first time in hundreds of years the names of the Tsar and the Imperial family were omitted. The town of Mogilev greeted the abdication with noisy celebrations. At night, the town was illuminated and excited crowds stayed up shouting in the streets. From the windows of the local city hall, just opposite Nicholas's window, two large red flags were draped. One by one, as the days moved along, the officers of the suite began removing the Tsar's initials from their epaulets and cutting away the golden shoulder knots which marked them as aides-de-camp. Nicholas reacted gracefully to this melancholy sight: on March 21, Alexeiev telegraphed Brusilov: "The deposed Emperor understands and has given permission to remove initials and shoulder knots immediately."

On the second day of Nicholas's stay at Headquarters, his mother, the Dowager Empress, arrived from her home in Kiev. "The news of Nicky's abdication came like a thunderbolt," wrote the Tsar's sister Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, who was with her mother in Kiev. "We were stunned. My mother was in a terrible state. She kept telling

me it was the greatest humiliation of her life. . . . She blamed poor Alicky for . . . everything." In Mogilev, the Dowager Empress's train was brought to the Imperial platform and a few minutes later Nicholas drove up in his automobile. He said good morning to the two Cossacks standing at the entrance to Marie's car and went inside. For two hours, mother and son were alone. Then Grand Duke Alexander, who had accompanied Marie, entered the car. He found the Dowager Empress collapsed in a chair, sobbing aloud, while Nicholas stood smoking quietly and staring at his feet.

For three days, Marie remained in Mogilev, living aboard her train. She and Nicholas spent most of their time together, going for long drives in the afternoon and dining together every evening. It was the son who comforted the mother. Marie, always gay, witty, brilliant, decisive and totally in control of her emotions, had lost the regal bearing which was her emblem; for once she was frightened, ashamed and miserable. It was Nicholas, the son she had always lectured on behavior, who carefully steered his mother back toward courage and self-control.

While at Mogilev, Nicholas had only the scantiest communication with his family at Tsarskoe Selo. Anxious to return to them as soon as possible, he applied for permission to the Provisional Government, which again had no objections. In Petrograd, however, the position of the Imperial family had deteriorated. Rumors circulated through the city that Nicholas had returned to Headquarters to lead the army against the revolution or to "let the Germans in." Newspapers were filled with garish accounts of the sexual relationship of Rasputin and the Empress, along with stories detailing the Empress's "treason." On March 20, therefore, primarily to assure their own safety, the Provisional Government resolved "to deprive the deposed emperor and his consort of their liberty." The Empress was to be arrested at Tsarskoe Selo on March 21. That same day, Nicholas was to be arrested at Mogilev and then, escorted by four commissioners sent by the Government, brought back to his family at Tsarskoe Selo.

On March 21, the Tsar, knowing that he was to become a prisoner, had lunch alone with his mother. At three p.m., the express from Petrograd arrived, bearing the government envoys. At a quarter to four, the delegation, accompanied by Alexeiev, arrived to claim the Tsar. Nicholas stood up and tenderly kissed his mother goodbye. Neither could guess the future; both hoped that they would soon be reunited either in the Crimea or in England. Nevertheless, Marie

cried unrestrainedly. Nicholas left her car, walked across the platform and entered the drawing-room car of his own train, which stood on the adjacent track. Whistles blew, there was a lurch and the Tsar's train started to move. Nicholas, standing at the window, smiled and waved his hand; Marie, still in tears, made the sign of the cross. A few minutes later, when his train was only a blur of smoke on the northern horizon, her car rolled out of the station headed southwest for Kiev. Neither could know it at the time, but the proud Empress and her quiet eldest son were never to meet again.

On the platform a few minutes before, as the Tsar's train was leaving, Alexeiev and other officers of the Headquarters staff had stood at attention as the train bearing their former sovereign departed. As the car carrying the Tsar moved past him, Alexeiev saluted. A second later, as the last car of the same train, bearing the representatives of the Duma, rolled by, Alexeiev took off his cap and made a deep bow.