

# ABBOTT JACOB

PETER THE  
GREAT

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*Peter the Great:*

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### **PREFACE**

There are very few persons who have not heard of the fame of Peter the Great, the founder, as he is generally regarded by mankind, of Russian civilization. The celebrity, however, of the great Muscovite sovereign among young persons is due in a great measure to the circumstance of his having repaired personally to Holland, in the course of his efforts to introduce the industrial arts among his people, in order to study himself the art and mystery of shipbuilding, and of his having worked with his own hands in a ship-yard there. The little shop where Peter pursued these practical studies still stands in Saardam, a ship-building town not far from Amsterdam. The building is of wood, and is now much decayed; but, to preserve it from farther injury, it has been incased in a somewhat larger building of brick, and it is visited annually by great numbers of curious travelers.

The whole history of Peter, as might be expected from the indications of character developed by this incident, forms a narrative that is full of interest and instruction for all.

# CHAPTER I.

## THE PRINCESS SOPHIA.

### 1676-1684

Parentage of Peter—His father's double marriage—Death of his father—The princesses—Their places of seclusion—Theodore and John—Sophia uneasy in the convent—Her request—Her probable motives—Her success—Increase of her influence—Jealousies—Parties formed—The imperial guards—Their character and influence—Dangers—Sophia and the soldiers—Sophia's continued success—Death of Theodore—Peter proclaimed—Plots formed by Sophia—Revolution—Means of exciting the people—Poisoning—Effect of the stories that were circulating—Peter and his mother—The Monastery of the Trinity—Natalia's flight—Narrow escape of Peter—Commotion in the city—Sophia is unsuccessful—Couvansky's schemes—Sophia's attempt to appease the soldiers—No effect produced—Couvansky's views—His plan of a marriage for his son—Indignation of Sophia—A stratagem—Couvansky falls into the snare—Excitement produced by his death—Galitzin—Measures adopted by him—They are successful

The circumstances under which Peter the Great came to the throne form a very remarkable—indeed, in some respects, quite

a romantic story.

The name of his father, who reigned as Emperor of Russia from 1645 to 1676, was Alexis Michaelowitz. In the course of his life, this Emperor Alexis was twice married. By his first wife he had two sons, whose names were Theodore and John,<sup>1</sup> and four daughters. The names of the daughters were Sophia, Catharine, Mary, and Sediassa. By his second wife he had two children—a son and a daughter. The name of the son was Peter, and that of the daughter was Natalia Alexowna. Of all these children, those with whom we have most to do are the two oldest sons, Theodore and John, and the oldest daughter, Sophia, by the first wife; and Peter, the oldest son by the second wife, the hero of this history. The name of the second wife, Peter's mother, was Natalia.

Of course, Theodore, at his father's death, was heir to the throne. Next to him in the line of succession came John; and next after John came Peter, the son of the second wife; for, by the ancient laws and usages of the Muscovite monarchy, the daughters were excluded from the succession altogether. Indeed, not only were the daughters excluded themselves from the throne, but special precautions were taken to prevent their ever having sons to lay claim to it. They were forbidden to marry, and, in order to make it impossible that they should ever violate this rule, they were all placed in convents before they arrived at a marriageable age, and were compelled to pass their lives there in seclusion. Of course, the convents where these princesses

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<sup>1</sup> The Russian form of these names is Foedor [Transcriber's note: Feodor?] and Ivan.

were lodged were very richly and splendidly endowed, and the royal inmates enjoyed within the walls every comfort and luxury which could possibly be procured for them in such retreats, and which could tend in any measure to reconcile them to being forever debarred from all the pleasures of love and the sweets of domestic life.

Now it so happened that both Theodore and John were feeble and sickly children, while Peter was robust and strong. The law of descent was, however, inexorable, and, on the death of Alexis, Theodore ascended to the throne. Besides, even if it had been possible to choose among the sons of Alexis, Peter was at this time altogether too young to reign, for at his father's death he was only about four years old. He was born in 1672, and his father died in 1676.

Theodore was at this time about sixteen. Of course, however, being so young, and his health being so infirm, he could not take any active part in the administration of government, but was obliged to leave every thing in the hands of his counselors and ministers of state, who managed affairs as they thought proper, though they acted always in Theodore's name.

There were a great many persons who were ambitious of having a share of the power which the young Czar thus left in the hands of his subordinates; and, among these, perhaps the most ambitious of all was the Princess Sophia, Theodore's sister, who was all this time shut up in the convent to which the rules and regulations of imperial etiquette consigned her. She was

very uneasy in this confinement, and wished very much to get released, thinking that if she could do so she should be able to make herself of considerable consequence in the management of public affairs. So she made application to the authorities to be allowed to go to the palace to see and take care of her brother in his sickness. This application was at length complied with, and Sophia went to the palace. Here she devoted herself with so much assiduity to the care of her brother, watching constantly at his bedside, and suffering no one to attend upon him or to give him medicines but herself, that she won not only his heart, but the hearts of all the nobles of the court, by her seemingly disinterested sisterly affection.

Indeed, it is not by any means impossible that Sophia might have been at first disinterested and sincere in her desire to minister to the wants of her brother, and to solace and comfort him in his sickness. But, however this may have been at the outset, the result was that, after a time, she acquired so much popularity and influence that she became quite an important personage at court. She was a very talented and accomplished young woman, and was possessed, moreover, of a strong and masculine character. Yet she was very agreeable and insinuating in her manners; and she conversed so affably, and at the same time so intelligently, with all the grandees of the empire, as they came by turns to visit her brother in his sick chamber, that they all formed a very high estimate of her character.

She also obtained a great ascendancy over the mind of



Theodore himself, and this, of itself, very much increased her importance in the eyes of the courtiers. They all began to think that, if they wished to obtain any favor of the emperor, it was essential that they should stand well with the princess. Thus every one, finding how fast she was rising in influence, wished to have the credit of being her earliest and most devoted friend; so they all vied with each other in efforts to aid in aggrandizing her.

Things went on in this way very prosperously for a time; but at length, as might have been anticipated, suspicions and jealousies began to arise, and, after a time, the elements of a party opposed to the princess began to be developed. These consisted chiefly of the old nobles of the empire, the heads of the great families who had been accustomed, under the emperors, to wield the chief power of the state. These persons were naturally jealous of the ascendancy which they saw that the princess was acquiring, and they began to plot together in order to devise means for restricting or controlling it.

But, besides these nobles, there was another very important power at the imperial court at this time, namely, the army. In all despotic governments, it is necessary for the sovereign to have a powerful military force under his command, to maintain him in his place; and it is necessary for him to keep this force as separate and independent as possible from the people. There was in Russia at this time a very powerful body of troops, which had been organized by the emperors, and was maintained by them as an imperial guard. The name of this body of troops was the

Strelitz; but, in order not to encumber the narrative unnecessarily with foreign words, I shall call them simply the Guards.

Of course, a body of troops like these, organized and maintained by a despotic dynasty for the express purpose, in a great measure, of defending the sovereign against his subjects, becomes in time a very important element of power in the state. The officers form a class by themselves, separate from, and jealous of the nobles of the country; and this state of things has often led to very serious collisions and outbreaks. The guards have sometimes proved too strong for the dynasty that created them, and have made their own generals the real monarchs of the country. When such a state of things as this exists, the government which results is called a military despotism. This happened in the days of the Roman empire. The army, which was originally formed by the regular authorities of the country, and kept for a time in strict subjection to them, finally became too powerful to be held any longer under control, and they made their own leading general emperor for many successive reigns, thus wholly subverting the republic which originally organized and maintained them.

It was such a military body as this which now possessed great influence and power at Moscow. The Princess Sophia, knowing how important it would be to her to secure the influence of such a power upon her side, paid great attention to the officers, and omitted nothing in her power which was calculated to increase her popularity with the whole corps. The result was that the

Guards became her friends, while a great many of the old nobles were suspicious and jealous of her, and were beginning to devise means to curtail her increasing influence.

But, notwithstanding all that they could do, the influence of Sophia increased continually, until the course of public affairs came to be, in fact, almost entirely under her direction. The chief minister of state was a certain Prince Galitzin, who was almost wholly devoted to her interests. Indeed, it was through her influence that he was appointed to his office. Things continued in this state for about six years, and then, at length, Theodore was taken suddenly sick. It soon became evident that he could not live. On his dying bed he designated Peter as his successor, passing over his brother John. The reason for this was that John was so extremely feeble and infirm that he seemed to be wholly unfit to reign over such an empire. Besides various other maladies under which he suffered, he was afflicted with epilepsy, a disease which rendered it wholly unsuitable that he should assume any burdens whatever of responsibility and care.

It is probable that it was through the influence of some of the nobles who were opposed to Sophia that Theodore was induced thus to designate Peter as his successor. However this may be, Peter, though then only ten years old, was proclaimed emperor by the nobles immediately after Theodore's death. Sophia was much disappointed, and became greatly indignant at these proceedings. John was her own brother, while Peter, being a son of the second wife, was only her half-brother. John, too, on account of his

feeble health, would probably never be able to take any charge of the government, and she thought that, if he had been allowed to succeed Theodore, she herself might have retained the real power in her hands, as regent, as long as she lived; whereas Peter promised to have strength and vigor to govern the empire himself in a few years, and, in the mean time, while he remained in his minority, it was natural to expect that he would be under the influence of persons connected with his own branch of the family, who would be hostile to her, and that thus her empire would come to an end.

So she determined to resist the transfer of the supreme power to Peter. She secretly engaged the Guards on her side. The commander-in-chief of the Guards was an officer named Couvansky. He readily acceded to her proposals, and, in conjunction with him, she planned and organized a revolution.

In order to exasperate the people and the Guards, and excite them to the proper pitch of violence, Sophia and Couvansky spread a report that the late emperor had not died a natural death, but had been poisoned. This murder had been committed, they said, by a party who hoped, by setting Theodore and his brother John aside, to get the power into their hands in the name of Peter, whom they intended to make emperor, in violation of the rights of John, Theodore's true heir. There was a plan also formed, they said, to poison all the principal officers of the Guards, who, the conspirators knew, would oppose their wicked proceedings, and perhaps prevent the fulfillment of them if they were not

put out of the way. The poison by which Theodore had been put to death was administered, they said, by two physicians who attended upon him in his sickness, and who had been bribed to give him poison with his medicine. The Guards were to have been destroyed by means of poison, which was to have been mixed with the brandy and the beer that was distributed to them on the occasion of the funeral.

These stories produced a great excitement among the Guards, and also among a considerable portion of the people of Moscow. The guards came out into the streets and around the palaces in great force. They first seized the two physicians who were accused of having poisoned the emperor, and killed them on the spot. Then they took a number of nobles of high rank, and officers of state, who were supposed to be the leaders of the party in favor of Peter, and the instigators of the murder of Theodore, and, dragging them out into the public squares, slew them without mercy. Some they cut to pieces. Others they threw down from the wall of the imperial palace upon the soldiers' pikes below, which the men held up for the purpose of receiving them.

Peter was at this time with his mother in the palace. Natalia was exceedingly alarmed, not for herself, but for her son. As soon as the revolution broke out she made her escape from the palace, and set out with Peter in her arms to fly to a celebrated family retreat of the emperor's, called the Monastery of the Trinity. This monastery was a sort of country palace of the Czar's, which, besides being a pleasant rural retreat, was also, from its religious

character, a sanctuary where fugitives seeking refuge in it might, under all ordinary circumstances, feel themselves beyond the reach of violence and of every species of hostile molestation.

Natalia fled with Peter and a few attendants to this refuge, hotly pursued, however, all the way by a body of the Guards. If the fugitives had been overtaken on the way, both mother and son would doubtless have been cut to pieces without mercy. As it was, they very narrowly escaped, for when Natalia arrived at the convent the soldiers were close upon her. Two of them followed her in before the doors could be closed. Natalia rushed into the church, which formed the centre of the convent inclosure, and took refuge with her child at the foot of the altar. The soldiers pursued her there, brandishing their swords, and were apparently on the point of striking the fatal blow; but the sacredness of the place seemed to arrest them at the last moment, and, after pausing an instant with their uplifted swords in their hands, and uttering imprecations against their victims for having thus escaped them, they sullenly retired.

In the mean time the commotion in the city went on, and for several days no one could foresee how it would end. At length a sort of compromise was effected, and it was agreed by the two parties that John should be proclaimed Czar, not alone, but in conjunction with his brother Peter, the regency to remain for the present, as it had been, in the hands of Sophia. Thus Sophia really gained all her ends; for the retaining of Peter's name, as nominally Czar in conjunction with his brother, was of no

consequence, since her party had proved itself the strongest in the struggle, and all the real power remained in her hands. She had obtained this triumph mainly through Couvansky and the Guards; and now, having accomplished her purposes by means of their military violence, she wished, of course, that they should retire to their quarters, and resume their habits of subordination, and of submission to the civil authority. But this they would not do. Couvansky, having found how important a personage he might become through the agency of the terrible organization which was under his direction and control, was not disposed at once to lay aside his power; and the soldiers, intoxicated with the delights of riot and pillage, could not now be easily restrained. Sophia found, as a great many other despotic rulers have done in similar cases, that she had evoked a power which she could not now control. Couvansky and the troops under his command continued their ravages in the city, plundering the rich houses of every thing that could gratify their appetites and passions, and murdering all whom they imagined to belong to the party opposed to them.

Sophia first tried to appease them and reduce them to order by conciliatory measures. From the Monastery of the Trinity, to which she had herself now retreated for safety, she sent a message to Couvansky and to the other chiefs of the army, thanking them for the zeal which they had shown in revenging the death of her brother, the late emperor, and in vindicating the rights of the true successor, John, and promising to remember, and in due time to

reward, the great services which they had rendered to the state. She added that, now, since the end which they all had in view in the movement which they had made had been entirely and happily accomplished, the soldiers should be restrained from any farther violence, and recalled to their quarters.

This message had no effect. Indeed, Couvansky, finding how great the power was of the corps which he commanded, began to conceive the idea that he might raise himself to the supreme command. He thought that the Guards were all devoted to him, and would do whatever he required of them. He held secret conferences with the principal officers under his command, and endeavored to prepare their minds for the revolution which he contemplated by representing to them that neither of the princes who had been proclaimed were fit to reign. John, he said, was almost an imbecile, on account of the numerous and hopeless bodily infirmities to which he was subject. Peter was yet a mere boy; and then, besides, even when he should become a man, he would very likely be subject to the same diseases with his brother. These men would never have either the intelligence to appreciate or the power to reward such services as the Guards were capable of rendering to the state; whereas he, their commander, and one of their own body, would be both able and disposed to do them ample justice.

Couvansky also conceived the design of securing and perpetuating the power which he hoped thus to acquire through the army by a marriage of his son with one of the princesses



of the imperial family. He selected Catharine, who was Sophia's sister—the one next in age to her—for the intended bride. He cautiously proposed this plan to Sophia, hoping that she might be induced to approve and favor it, in which case he thought that every obstacle would be removed from his way, and the ends of his ambition would be easily and permanently attained.

But Sophia was perfectly indignant at such a proposal. It seemed to her the height of presumption and audacity for a mere general in the army to aspire to a connection by marriage with the imperial family, and to a transfer, in consequence, of the supreme power to himself and to his descendants forever. She resolved immediately to adopt vigorous measures to defeat these schemes in the most effectual manner. She determined to kill Couvansky. But, as the force which he commanded was so great that she could not hope to accomplish any thing by an open contest, she concluded to resort to stratagem. She accordingly pretended to favor Couvansky's plans, and seemed to be revolving in her mind the means of carrying them into effect. Among other things, she soon announced a grand celebration of the Princess Catharine's fête-day, to be held at the Monastery of the Trinity, and invited Couvansky to attend it.<sup>2</sup> Couvansky joyfully accepted

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<sup>2</sup> These celebrations were somewhat similar to the birthday celebrations of England and America, only the day on which they were held was not the birth-day of the lady, but the fête-day, as it was called, of her patron saint—that is, of the saint whose name she bore. All the names for girls used in those countries where the Greek or the Catholic Church prevails are names of saints, each one of whom has in the calendar a certain day set apart as her fête-day. Each girl considers the saint from whom she is

this invitation, supposing that the occasion would afford him an admirable opportunity to advance his views in respect to his son. So Couvansky, accompanied by his son, set out on the appointed day from Moscow to proceed to the monastery. Not suspecting any treachery, he was accompanied by only a small escort. On the road he was waylaid by a body of two hundred horsemen, whom Galitzin, Sophia's minister of state, had sent to the spot. Couvansky's guard was at once overpowered, and both he and his son were taken prisoners. They were hurried at once to a house, where preparations for receiving them had already been made, and there, without any delay, sentence of death against them both, on a charge of treason, was read to them, and their heads were cut off on the spot.

The news of this execution spread with great rapidity, and it produced, of course, an intense excitement and commotion among all the Guards as fast as it became known to them. They threatened vengeance against the government for having thus assassinated, as they expressed it, their chief and father. They soon put themselves in motion, and began murdering, plundering, and destroying more furiously than ever. The violence which they displayed led to a reaction. A party was formed, even among the Guards, of persons that were disposed to discountenance these excesses, and even to submit to the government. The minister Galitzin took advantage of these

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named as her patron saint, and the fête-day of this saint, instead of her own birth-day, is the anniversary which is celebrated in honor of her.

dissensions to open a communication with those who were disposed to return to their duty. He managed the affair so well that, in the end, the great body of the soldiers were brought over, and, finally, they themselves, of their own accord, slew the officers who had been most active in the revolt, and offered their heads to the minister in token of their submission. They also implored pardon of the government for the violence and excess into which they had been led. Of course, this pardon was readily granted. The places of Couvansky and of the other officers who had been slain were filled by new appointments, who were in the interest of the Princess Sophia, and the whole corps returned to their duty. Order was now soon fully restored in Moscow, rendering it safe for Sophia and her court to leave the monastery and return to the royal palace in the town. Galitzin was promoted to a higher office, and invested with more extended powers than he had yet held, and Sophia found herself finally established as the real sovereign of the country, though, of course, she reigned, in the name of her brothers.

# CHAPTER II.

## THE PRINCESS'S DOWNFALL.

### 1684-1869

Sophia at the height of her power—Military expeditions—The Cham of Tartary—Mazeppa—Origin and history—His famous punishment—Subsequent history—The war unsuccessful—Sophia's artful policy—Rewards and honors to the army—The opposition—Their plans—Reasons for the proposed marriage—The intended wife—Motives of politicians—Results of Peter's marriage—Peter's country house—Return of Galitzin—The princess's alarm—The Cossacks—Sophia's plot—The commander of the Guards—Prince Galitzin—Details of the plot—Manner in which the plot was discovered—Messengers dispatched—The sentinels—The detachment arrives—Peter's place of refuge—Sophia's pretenses—The Guards—Sophia attempts to secure them—They adhere to the cause of Peter—Sophia's alarm—Her first deputation—Failure of the deputation—Sophia appeals to the patriarch—His mission fails—Sophia's despair—Her final plans—She is repulsed from the monastery—The surrender of Thekelavitaw demanded—He is brought to trial—He is put to the torture—His confessions—Value of them—Modes of torture applied—Various punishments inflicted—Galitzin is banished—His son shares his fate—Punishment of Thekelavitaw—

Decision in respect to Sophia—Peter's public entry into Moscow—He gains sole power—Character and condition of John—Subsequent history of Sophia

The Princess Sophia was now in full possession of power, so that she reigned supreme in the palaces and in the capital, while, of course, the ordinary administration of the affairs of state, and the relations of the empire with foreign nations, were left to Galitzin and the other ministers. It was in 1684 that she secured possession of this power, and in 1689 her regency came to an end, so that she was, in fact, the ruler of the Russian empire for a period of about five years.

During this time one or two important military expeditions were set on foot by her government. The principal was a campaign in the southern part of the empire for the conquest of the Crimea, which country, previous to that time, had belonged to the Turks. Poland was at that period a very powerful kingdom, and the Poles, having become involved in a war with the Turks, proposed to the Russians, or Muscovites, as they were then generally called, to join them in an attempt to conquer the Crimea. The Tartars who inhabited the Crimea and the country to the northeastward of it were on the side of the Turks, so that the Russians had two enemies to contend with.

The supreme ruler of the Tartars was a chieftain called a Cham. He was a potentate of great power and dignity, superior, indeed, to the Czars who ruled in Muscovy. In fact, there had been an ancient treaty by which this superiority of the Cham

was recognized and acknowledged in a singular way—one which illustrates curiously the ideas and manners of those times. The treaty stipulated, among other things, that whenever the Czar and the Cham should chance to meet, the Czar should hold the Cham's stirrup while he mounted his horse, and also feed the horse with oats out of his cap.

In the war between the Muscovites and the Tartars for the possession of the Crimea, a certain personage appeared, who has since been made very famous by the poetry of Byron. It was Mazeppa, the unfortunate chieftain whose frightful ride through the tangled thickets of an uncultivated country, bound naked to a wild horse, was described with so much graphic power by the poet, and has been so often represented in paintings and engravings.

Mazeppa was a Polish gentleman. He was brought up as a page in the family of the King of Poland. When he became a man he mortally offended a certain Polish nobleman by some improprieties in which he became involved with the nobleman's wife. The husband caused him to be seized and cruelly scourged, and then to be bound upon the back of a wild, ungovernable horse. When all was ready the horse was turned loose upon the Ukrain, and, terrified with the extraordinary burden which he felt upon his back, and uncontrolled by bit or rein, he rushed madly on through the wildest recesses of the forest, until at length he fell down exhausted with terror and fatigue. Some Cossack peasants found and rescued Mazeppa, and took care of him in one of their

huts until he recovered from his wounds.

Mazeppa was a well-educated man, and highly accomplished in the arts of war as they were practiced in those days. He soon acquired great popularity among the Cossacks, and, in the end, rose to be a chieftain among them, and he distinguished himself greatly in these very campaigns in the Crimea, fought by the Muscovites against the Turks and Tartars during the regency of the Princess Sophia.

If the war thus waged by the government of the empress had been successful, it would have greatly strengthened the position of her party in Moscow, and increased her own power; but it was not successful. Prince Galitzin, who had the chief command of the expedition, was obliged, after all, to withdraw his troops from the country, and make a very unsatisfactory peace; but he did not dare to allow the true result of the expedition to be known in Moscow, for fear of the dissatisfaction which, he felt convinced, would be occasioned there by such intelligence; and the distance was so great, and the means of communication in those days were so few, that it was comparatively easy to falsify the accounts. So, after he had made peace with the Tartars, and began to draw off his army, he sent couriers to Moscow to the Czars, and also to the King in Poland, with news of great victories which he had obtained against the Tartars, of conquests which he made in their territories, and of his finally having compelled them to make peace on terms extremely favorable. The Princess Sophia, as soon as this news reached her in Moscow, ordered

that arrangements should be made for great public rejoicings throughout the empire on account of the victories which had been obtained. According to the custom, too, of the Muscovite government, in cases where great victories had been won, the council drew up a formal letter of thanks and commendations to the officers and soldiers of the army, and sent it to them by a special messenger, with promotions and other honors for the chiefs, and rewards in money for the men. The princess and her government hoped, by these means, to conceal the bad success of their enterprise, and to gain, instead of losing, credit and strength with the people.

But during all this time a party opposed to Sophia and her plans had been gradually forming, and it was now increasing in numbers and influence every day. The men of this party naturally gathered around Peter, intending to make him their leader. Peter had now grown up to be a young man. In the next chapter we shall give some account of the manner in which his childhood and early youth were spent; but he was now about eighteen years old, and the party who adhered to him formed the plan of marrying him. So they proceeded to choose him a wife.

The reasons which led them to advocate this measure were, of course, altogether political. They thought that if Peter were to be married, and to have children, all the world would see that the crown must necessarily descend in his family, since John had no children, and he was so sickly and feeble that it was not probable that even he himself would long survive. They knew very well,



therefore, that the marriage of Peter and the birth of an heir would turn all men's thoughts to him as the real personage whose favor it behooved them to cultivate; and this, they supposed, would greatly increase his importance, and so add to the strength of the party that acted in his name.

It turned out just as they had anticipated. The wife whom the councilors chose for Peter was a young lady of noble birth, the daughter of one of the great boiars, as they were called, of the empire. Her name was Ottokessa Federowna. The Princess Sophia did all in her power to prevent the match, but her efforts were of no avail. Peter was married, and the event greatly increased his importance among the nobles and among the people, and augmented the power and influence of his party. In all cases of this kind, where a contest is going on between rival claimants to a throne, or rival dynasties, there are some persons, though not many, who are governed in their conduct, in respect to the side which they take, by principles of honor and duty, and of faithful adherence to what they suppose to be the right. But a vast majority of courtiers and politicians in all countries and in all ages are only anxious to find out, not which side is right, but which is likely to be successful. Accordingly, in this case, as the marriage of Peter made it still more probable than it was before that he would in the end secure to his branch of the family the supreme power, it greatly increased the tendency among the nobles to pay their court to him and to his friends. This tendency was still more strengthened by the expectation which

soon after arose, that Peter's wife was about to give birth to a son. The probability of the appearance of a son and heir on Peter's side, taken in connection with the hopeless childlessness of John, seemed to turn the scales entirely in favor of Peter's party. This was especially the case in respect to all the young nobles as they successively arrived at an age to take an interest in public affairs. All these young men seemed to despise the imbecility, and the dark and uncertain prospects of John, and to be greatly charmed with the talents and energy of Peter, and with the brilliant future which seemed to be opening before him. Thus even the nobles who still adhered to the cause of Sophia and of John had the mortification to find that their sons, as fast as they came of age, all went over to the other side.

Peter lived at this time with his young wife at a certain country palace belonging to him, situated on the banks of a small river a few miles from Moscow. The name of this country-seat was Obrogensko.

Such was the state of things at Moscow when Prince Galitzin returned from his campaigns in the Crimea. The prince found that the power of Sophia and her party was rapidly waning, and that Sophia herself was in a state of great anxiety and excitement in respect to the future. The princess gave Galitzin a very splendid reception, and publicly rewarded him for his pretended success in the war by bestowing upon him great and extraordinary honors. Still many people were very suspicious of the truth of the accounts which were circulated. The partisans

of Peter called for proofs that the victories had really been won. Prince Galitzin brought with him to the capital a considerable force of Cossacks, with Mazeppa at their head. The Cossacks had never before been allowed to come into Moscow; but now, Sophia having formed a desperate plan to save herself from the dangers that surrounded her, and knowing that these men would unscrupulously execute any commands that were given to them by their leaders, directed Galitzin to bring them within the walls, under pretense to do honor to Mazeppa for the important services which he had rendered during the war. But this measure was very unpopular with the people, and, although the Cossacks were actually brought within the walls, they were subjected to such restrictions there that, after all, Sophia could not employ them for the purpose of executing her plot, but was obliged to rely on the regular Muscovite troops of the imperial Guard.

The plot which she formed was nothing else than the assassination of Peter. She saw no other way by which she could save herself from the dangers which surrounded her, and make sure of retaining her power. Her brother, the Czar John, was growing weaker and more insignificant every day; while Peter and his party, who looked upon her, she knew, with very unfriendly feelings, were growing stronger and stronger. If Peter continued to live, her speedy downfall, she was convinced, was sure. She accordingly determined that Peter should die.

The commander-in-chief of the Guards at this time was a man named Theodore Thekelavitaw. He had been raised to

this exalted post by Sophia herself on the death of Couvansky. She had selected him for this office with special reference to his subserviency to her interests. She determined now, accordingly, to confide to him the execution of her scheme for the assassination of Peter.

When Sophia proposed her plan to Prince Galitzin, he was at first strongly opposed to it, on account of the desperate danger which would attend such an undertaking. But she urged upon him so earnestly the necessity of the case, representing to him that unless some very decisive measures were adopted, not only would she herself soon be deposed from power, but that he and all his family and friends would be involved in the same common ruin, he at length reluctantly consented.

The plan was at last fully matured. Thekelavitaw, the commander of the Guards, selected six hundred men to go with him to Obrogensko. They were to go in the night, the plan being to seize Peter in his bed. When the appointed night arrived, the commander marshaled his men and gave them their instructions, and the whole body set out upon their march to Obrogensko with every prospect of successfully accomplishing the undertaking.

But the whole plan was defeated in a very remarkable manner. While the commander was giving his instructions to the men, two of the soldiers, shocked with the idea of being made the instruments of such a crime, stole away unobserved in the darkness, and ran with all possible speed to Obrogensko to warn Peter of his danger. Peter leaped from his bed in consternation,

and immediately sent to the apartments where his uncles, the brothers of his mother, were lodging, to summon them to come to him. When they came, a hurried consultation was held. There was some doubt in the minds of Peter's uncles whether the story which the soldiers told was to be believed. They thought it could not possibly be true that so atrocious a crime could be contemplated by Sophia. Accordingly, before taking any measures for sending Peter and his family away, they determined to send messengers toward the city to ascertain whether any detachment of Guards was really coming toward Obrogensko.

These messengers set off at once; but, before they had reached half way to Moscow, they met Thekelavitaw's detachment of Guards, with Thekelavitaw himself at the head of them, stealing furtively along the road. The messengers hid themselves by the wayside until the troop had gone by. Then hurrying away round by a circuitous path, they got before the troop again, and reached the palace before the assassins arrived. Peter had just time to get into a coach, with his wife, his sister, and one or two other members of his family, and to drive away from the palace before Thekelavitaw, with his band, arrived. The sentinels who were on duty at the gates of the palace had been much surprised at the sudden departure of Peter and his family, and now they were astonished beyond measure at the sudden appearance of so large a body of their comrades arriving at midnight, without any warning, from the barracks in Moscow.

Immediately on his arrival at the palace, Thekelavitaw's men

searched every where for Peter, but of course could not find him. They then questioned the sentinels, and were told that Peter had left the palace with his family in a very hurried manner but a very short time before. No one knew where they had gone.

There was, of course, nothing now for Thekelavitaw to do but to return, discomfited and alarmed, to the Princess Sophia, and report the failure of their scheme.

In the mean time Peter had fled to the Monastery of the Trinity, the common refuge of the family in all cases of desperate danger. The news of the affair spread rapidly, and produced universal excitement. Peter, from his retreat in the monastery, sent a message to Sophia, charging her with having sent Thekelavitaw and his band to take his life. Sophia was greatly alarmed at the turn which things had taken. She, however, strenuously denied being guilty of the charge which Peter made against her. She said that the soldiers under Thekelavitaw had only gone out to Obrogensko for the purpose of relieving the guard. This nobody believed. The idea of taking such a body of men a league or more into the country at midnight for the purpose of relieving the guard of a country palace was preposterous.

The excitement increased. The leading nobles of the country began to flock to the monastery to declare their adhesion to Peter, and their determination to sustain and protect him. Sophia, at the same time, did all that she could do to rally her friends. Both sides endeavored to gain the good-will of the Guards. The princess caused them to be assembled before her palace in Moscow,

and there she appeared on a balcony before them, accompanied by the Czar John; and the Czar made them a speech—one, doubtless, which Sophia had prepared for him. In this speech John stated to the Guards that his brother Peter had retired to the Monastery of the Trinity, though for what reason he knew not. He had, however, too much reason to fear, he said, that he was plotting some schemes against the state.

"We have heard," he added, "that he has summoned you to repair thither and attend him, but we forbid your going on pain of death."

Sophia then herself addressed the Guards, confirming what John had said, and endeavoring artfully to awaken an interest in their minds in her favor. The Guards listened in silence; but it seems that very little effect was produced upon them by these harangues, for they immediately afterward marched in a body to the monastery, and there publicly assured Peter of their adhesion to his cause.

Sophia was now greatly alarmed. She began to fear that all was lost. She determined to send an embassy to Peter to deprecate his displeasure, and, if possible, effect a reconciliation. She employed on this commission two of her aunts, her father's sisters, who were, of course, the aunts likewise of Peter, and the nearest family relatives, who were equally the relatives of herself and of him. These ladies were, of course, princesses of very high rank, and their age and family connection were such as to lead Sophia to trust a great deal to their intercession.

She charged these ladies to assure Peter that she was entirely innocent of the crime of which she was suspected, and that the stories of her having sent the soldiers to his palace with any evil design were fabricated by her enemies, who wished to sow dissension between herself and him. She assured him that there had been no necessity at all for his flight, and that he might now at any time return to Moscow with perfect safety.

Peter received his aunts in a very respectful manner, and listened attentively to what they had to say; but, after they had concluded their address to him, he assured them that his retreat to the monastery was not without good cause: and he proceeded to state and explain all the circumstances of the case, and to show so many and such conclusive proofs that a conspiracy to destroy him had actually been formed, and was on the eve of being executed, that the princesses could no longer doubt that Sophia was really guilty. They were overwhelmed with grief in coming to this conviction, and they declared, with tears in their eyes, that they would not return to Moscow, but would remain at the monastery and share the fortunes of their nephew.

When Sophia learned what had been the result of her deputation she was more alarmed than ever. After spending some time in perplexity and distress, she determined to apply to the patriarch, who was the head of the Church, and, of course, the highest ecclesiastical dignitary in the empire. She begged and implored him to act as mediator between her and her brother, and he was at length so moved by her tears and entreaties that



he consented to go.

This embassy was no more successful than the other. Peter, it seems, was provided with proof, which he offered to the patriarch, not only of the reality of the conspiracy which had been formed, but also of the fact that, if it had been successful, the patriarch himself was to have been taken off, in order that another ecclesiastic more devoted to Sophia's interests might be put in his place. The patriarch was astonished and shocked at this intelligence, and was so much alarmed by it that he did not dare to return to Sophia to make his report, and decided, as the ladies had done before him, to take up his abode with Peter in the monastery until the crisis should be passed.

The princess was now almost in a state of despair. Prince Galitzin, it is true, still remained with her, and there were some others in the palace who adhered to her cause. She called these few remaining friends together, and with them held a sorrowful and anxious consultation, in order to determine what should now be done. It was resolved that Thekelavitaw and one or two others who were deeply implicated in the plot for the assassination of Peter should be secured in a place of close concealment in the palace, and then, that the princess herself, accompanied by Galitzin and her other leading friends, should proceed in a body to the Monastery of the Trinity, and there make a personal appeal to Peter, in hopes of appeasing him, and saving themselves, if possible, from their impending fate. This plan they proceeded to carry into effect; but before Sophia, and those who were with her,

had reached half way to the palace, they were met by a nobleman who had been sent from the monastery to intercept them, and order them, in Peter's name, to return to Moscow. If the princess were to go on, she would not be received at the monastery, the messenger said, but would find the gates closed against her.

So Sophia and her train turned, and despairingly retraced their steps to Moscow.

The next day an officer, at the head of a body of the Guards three hundred in number, was dispatched from the monastery to demand of the Princess Sophia, at her palace, that she should give up Thekelavitaw, in order that he might be brought to trial on a charge of treason. Sophia was extremely unwilling to comply with this demand. She may naturally be supposed to have desired to save her instrument and agent from suffering the penalties of the crime which she herself had planned and had instigated him to attempt; but the chief source of her extreme reluctance to surrender the prisoner was her fear of the revelations which he would be likely to make implicating her. After hesitating for a time, being in a state during the interval of great mental distress and anguish, she concluded that she must obey, and so Thekelavitaw was brought out from his retreat and surrendered. The soldiers immediately took him and some other persons who were surrendered with him, and, securing them safely with irons, they conveyed them rapidly to the monastery.

Thekelavitaw was brought to trial in the great hall of the monastery, where a court, consisting of the leading nobles,

was organized to hear his cause. He was questioned closely by his judges for a long time, but his answers were evasive and unsatisfactory, and at length it was determined to put him to torture, in order to compel him to confess his crime, and to reveal the names of his confederates. This was a very unjust and cruel mode of procedure, but it was in accordance with the rude ideas which prevailed in those times.

The torture which was applied to Thekelavitaw was scourging with a knout. The knout was a large and strong whip, the lash of which consists of a tough, thick thong of leather, prepared in a particular way, so as greatly to increase the intensity of the agony caused by the blows inflicted with it. Thekelavitaw endured a few strokes from this dreadful instrument, and then declared that he was ready to confess all; so they took him back to prison and there heard what he had to say. He made a full statement in respect to the plot. He said that the design was to kill Peter himself, his mother, and several other persons, near connections of Peter's branch of the family. The Princess Sophia was the originator of the plot, he said, and he specified many other persons who had taken a leading part in it.

These statements of the unhappy sufferer may have been true or they may have been false. It is now well known that no reliance whatever can be placed upon testimony that is extorted in this way, as men under such circumstances will say any thing which they think will be received by their tormentors, and be the means of bringing their sufferings to an end.

However it may have been in fact in this case, the testimony of Thekelavitaw was believed. On the faith of it many more arrests were made, and many other persons were put to the torture to compel them to reveal additional particulars of the plot. It is said that one of the modes of torment of the sufferers in these trials consisted in first shaving the head and tying it in a fixed position, and then causing boiling water to be poured, drop by drop, upon it, which in a very short time produced, it is said, an exquisite and dreadful agony which no mortal heroism could long endure.

After all these extorted confessions had been received, and the persons accused by the wretched witnesses had been secured, the court was employed two days in determining the relative guilt of the different criminals, and in deciding upon the punishments. Some of the prisoners were beheaded; others were sentenced to perpetual imprisonment; others were banished. The punishment of Prince Galitzin was banishment for life to Siberia. He was brought before the court to hear his sentence pronounced by the judges in form. It was to this effect, namely, "That he was ordered to go to Karga, a town under the pole, there to remain, as long as he lived, in disgrace with his majesty, who had, nevertheless, of his great goodness, allowed him threepence a day for his subsistence; but that his justice had ordained all his goods to be forfeited to his treasury."

Galitzin had a son who seems to have been implicated in some way with his father in the conspiracy. At any rate, he was sentenced to share his father's fate. Whether the companionship

of his son on the long and gloomy journey was a comfort to the prince, or whether it only redoubled the bitterness of his calamity to see his son compelled to endure it too, it would be difficult to say. The female members of the family were sent with them too.

As soon as the prince had been sent away, officers were dispatched to take possession of his palace, and to make an inventory of the property contained in it. The officers found a vast amount of treasure. Among other things, they discovered a strong box buried in a vault, which contained an immense sum of money. There were four hundred vessels of silver of great weight, and many other rich and costly articles. All these things were confiscated, and the proceeds put into the imperial treasury.

Thekelavitaw, the commander-in-chief of the Guards, had his head cut off. The subordinate officer who had the immediate command of the detachment which marched out to Obrogensko was punished by being first scourged with the knout, then having his tongue cut out, and then being sent to Siberia in perpetual banishment, with an allowance for his subsistence of one third the pittance which had been granted to Galitzin. Some of the private soldiers of the detachment were also sentenced to have their tongues cut out, and then to be sent to Siberia to earn their living there by hunting sables.

Peter was not willing that the Princess Sophia, being his sister, should be publicly punished or openly disgraced in any way, so it was decreed that she should retire to a certain convent, situated in a solitary place a little way out of town, where she could be

closely watched and guarded. Sophia was extremely unwilling to obey this decree, and she would not go to the convent of her own accord. The commander of the Guards was thereupon directed to send a body of armed men to convey her there, with orders to take her by force if she would not go willingly; so Sophia was compelled to submit, and, when she was lodged in the convent, soldiers were placed not only to keep sentinel at the doors, but also to guard all the avenues leading to the place, so as effectually to cut the poor prisoner off from all possible communication with any who might be disposed to sympathize with her or aid her. She remained in this condition, a close prisoner, for many years.

Two days after this—every thing connected with the conspiracy having been settled—it was determined that Peter should return to Moscow. He made a grand triumphant entry into the city, attended by an armed escort of eighteen thousand of the Guards. Peter himself rode conspicuously at the head of the troops on horseback. His wife and his mother followed in a coach.

On arriving at the royal palace, he was met on the staircase by his brother John, who was not supposed to have taken any part in Sophia's conspiracy. Peter greeted his brother kindly, and said he hoped that they were friends. John replied in the same spirit, and so the two brothers were reinstated again as joint possessors, nominally, of the supreme power, but, now that Sophia was removed out of the way, and all her leading friends and partisans were either beheaded or banished, the

whole control of the government fell, in fact, into the hands of Peter and of his counselors and friends.

John, his brother Czar, was too feeble and inefficient to take any part whatever in the management of public affairs. He was melancholy and dejected in spirit, in consequence of his infirmities and sufferings, and he spent most of his time in acts of devotion, according to the rites and usages of the established church of the country, as the best means within his knowledge of preparing himself for another and happier world. He died about seven years after this time.

The Princess Sophia lived for fifteen years a prisoner. During this period several efforts were made by those who still adhered to her cause to effect her release and her restoration to power, but they were all unsuccessful. She remained in close confinement as long as she lived.

# **CHAPTER III.**

## **THE CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH OF PETER.**

### **1677-1688**

Troublous times in the family—Peter's first governor—His qualifications—Peter's earliest studies—His disposition and character—Sophia's jealousy of him—Her plans for corrupting his morals—The governor is dismissed—New system adopted—Sophia's expectations—Peter's fifty playmates—The plot does not succeed—Peter organizes a military school—Peter a practical mechanic—His ideas and intentions—His drumming—His wheelbarrow—Progress of the school—Results of Peter's energy of character

We must now go back a little in our narrative, in order to give some account of the manner in which the childhood and early youth of Peter were spent, and of the indications which appeared in this early period of his life to mark his character. He was only eighteen years of age at the time of his marriage, and, of course, all those contests and dissensions which, for so many years after his father Alexis's death, continued to distract the family, took place while he was very young. He was only about nine years old when they began, at the time of the death of his father.



The person whom Peter's father selected to take charge of his little son's education, in the first instance, was a very accomplished general named Menesius. General Menesius was a Scotchman by birth, and he had been well educated in the literary seminaries of his native country, so that, besides his knowledge and skill in every thing which pertained to the art of war, he was well versed in all the European languages, and, having traveled extensively in the different countries of Europe, he was qualified to instruct Peter, when he should become old enough to take an interest in such inquiries, in the arts and sciences of western Europe, and in the character of the civilization of the various countries, and the different degrees of progress which they had respectively made.

At the time, however, when Peter was put under his governor's charge he was only about five years old, and, consequently, none but the most elementary studies were at that time suited to his years. Of course, it was not the duty of General Menesius to attend personally to the instruction of his little pupil in these things, but only to see to it that the proper teachers were appointed, and that they attended to their duties in a faithful manner.

Every thing went on prosperously and well under this arrangement as long as the Czar Alexis, Peter's father, continued to live. General Menesius resided in the palace with his charge, and he gradually began to form a strong attachment to him. Indeed, Peter was so full of life and spirit, and evinced so much

intelligence in all that he did and said, and learned what was proper to be taught him at that age with so much readiness and facility, that he was a favorite with all who knew him; that is, with all who belonged to or were connected with his mother's branch of the family. With those who were connected with the children of Alexis' first wife he was an object of continual jealousy and suspicion, and the greater the proofs that he gave of talent and capacity, the more jealous of him these his natural rivals became.

At length, when Alexis, his father, died, and his half-brother Theodore succeeded to the throne, the division between the two branches of the family became more decided than ever; and when Sophia obtained her release from the convent, and managed to get the control of public affairs, in consequence of Theodore's imbecility, as related in the first chapter, one of the first sources of uneasiness for her, in respect to the continuance of her power, was the probability that Peter would grow up to be a talented and energetic young man, and would sooner or later take the government into his own hands. She revolved in her mind many plans for preventing this. The one which seemed to her most feasible at first was to attempt to spoil the boy by indulgence and luxury.

She accordingly, it is said, attempted to induce Menesius to alter the arrangements which he had made for Peter, so as to release him from restraint, and allow him to do as he pleased. Her plan was also to supply him with means of pleasure and indulgence very freely, thinking that a boy of his age would not

have the good sense or the resolution to resist these temptations. Thus she thought that his progress in study would be effectually impeded, and that, perhaps, he would undermine his health and destroy his constitution by eating and drinking, or by other hurtful indulgences.

But Sophia found that she could not induce General Menesius to co-operate with her in any such plans. He had set his heart on making his pupil a virtuous and an accomplished man, and he knew very well that the system of laxity and indulgence which Sophia recommended would end in his ruin. After a considerable contest, Sophia, finding that Menesius was inflexible, manoeuvred to cause him to be dismissed from his office, and to have another arrangement made for the boy, by which she thought her ends would be attained. So Menesius bade his young charge farewell, not, however, without giving him, in parting, most urgent counsels to persevere, as he had begun, in the faithful performance of his duty, to resist every temptation to idleness or excess, and to devote himself, while young, with patience, perseverance, and industry to the work of storing his mind with useful knowledge, and of acquiring every possible art and accomplishment which could be of advantage to him when he became a man.

After General Menesius had been dismissed, Sophia adopted an entirely new system for the management of Peter. Before this time Theodore had died, and Peter, in conjunction with John, had been proclaimed emperor, Sophia governing as regent in their

names. The princess now made an arrangement for establishing Peter in a household of his own, at a palace situated in a small village at some distance from Moscow, and she appointed fifty boys to live with him as his playmates and amusers. These boys were provided with every possible means of indulgence, and were subject to very little restraint. The intention of Sophia was that they should do just as they pleased, and she had no doubt that they would spend their time in such a manner that they would all grow up idle, vicious, and good for nothing. There was even some hope that Peter would impair his health to such an extent by excessive indulgences as to bring him to an early grave.

Indeed, the plot was so well contrived that there are probably not many boys who would not, under such circumstances, have fallen into the snare so adroitly laid for them and been ruined; but Peter escaped it. Whether it was from the influence of the counsels and instructions of his former governor, or from his own native good sense, or from both combined, he resisted the temptations that were laid before him, and, instead of giving up his studies, and spending his time in indolence and vice, he improved such privileges as he enjoyed to the best of his ability. He even contrived to turn the hours of play, and the companions who had been given to him as mere instruments of pleasure, into means of improvement. He caused the boys to be organized into a sort of military school, and learned with them all the evolutions, and practiced all the discipline necessary in a camp. He himself began at the very beginning. He caused himself to be taught to

drum, not merely as most boys do, just to make a noise for his amusement, but regularly and scientifically, so as to enable him to understand and execute all the beats and signals used in camp and on the field of battle. He studied fortification, and set the boys at work, himself among them, in constructing a battery in a regular and scientific manner. He learned the use of tools, too, practically, in a shop which had been provided for the boys as a place for play; and the wheelbarrow with which he worked in making the fortification was one which he had constructed with his own hands.

He did not assume any superiority over his companions in these exercises, but took his place among them as an equal, obeying the commands which were given to him, when it came to his turn to serve, and taking his full share of all the hardest of the work which was to be done.

Nor was this all mere boys' play, pursued for a little time as long as the novelty lasted, and then thrown aside for something more amusing. Peter knew that when he became a man he would be emperor of all Russia. He knew that among the populations of that immense country there were a great many wild and turbulent tribes, half savage in habits and character, that would never be controlled but by military force, and that the country, too, was surrounded by other nations that would sometimes, unless he was well prepared for them, assume a hostile attitude against his government, and perhaps make great aggressions upon his territories. He wished, therefore, to prepare himself for

the emergencies that might in future arise by making himself thoroughly acquainted with all the details of the military art. He did not expect, it is true, that he should ever be called upon to serve in any of his armies as an actual drummer, or to wheel earth and construct fortifications with his own hands, still less to make the wheelbarrows by which the work was to be done; but he was aware that he could superintend these things far more intelligently and successfully if he knew in detail precisely how every thing ought to be done, and that was the reason why he took so much pains to learn himself how to do them.

As he grew older he contrived to introduce higher and higher branches of military art into the school, and to improve and perfect the organization of it in every way. After a while he adopted improved uniforms and equipments for the pupils, such as were used at the military schools of the different nations of Europe; and he established professors of different branches of military science as fast as he himself and his companions advanced in years and in power of appreciating studies more and more elevated. The result was, that when, at length, he was eighteen years of age, and the time arrived for him to leave the place, the institution had become completely established as a well-organized and well-appointed military school, and it continued in successful operation as such for a long time afterward.

It was in a great measure in consequence of the energy and talent which Peter thus displayed that so many of the leading

nobles attached themselves to his cause, by which means he was finally enabled to depose Sophia from her regency, and take the power into his own hands, even before he was of age, as related in the last chapter.

# CHAPTER IV.

## LE FORT AND MENZIKOFF.

### 1689-1691

Conditions of success in life—The selection of agents—Building a house—Secret of success—Peter's youth—Le Fort and Menzikoff—Merchants of Amsterdam—Le Fort in the counting-house—He goes to Copenhagen—He becomes acquainted with military life—The ambassador—Le Fort an interpreter—He attracts the attention of the emperor—His judicious answers—Gratification of the emperor—The ambassador's opinion—The glass of wine—Le Fort given up to the emperor—His appointment at court—His subsequent career—Uniforms—Le Fort's suggestion—An ambassador's train—Surprise and pleasure of the Czar—Le Fort undertakes a commission—Making of the uniforms—He enlists a company—The company appears before the emperor—The result—New improvements proposed—Changes—Remodeling of the tariff—Effects of the change—The finances—Carpenters and masons brought in—New palace—Le Fort's increasing influence—His generosity—Peter's violent temper—Le Fort an intercessor—Prince Menzikoff—His early history—He sets off to seek his fortune—His pies and cakes—Negotiations with the emperor—Menzikoff in Le Fort's company—Menzikoff's real character—Quarrel between



Peter and his wife—Cause of the quarrel—Ottokesa's cruel fate—Grave faults in Peter's character

Whatever may be a person's situation in life, his success in his undertakings depends not more, after all, upon his own personal ability to do what is required to be done, than it does upon his sagacity and the soundness of his judgment in selecting the proper persons to co-operate with him and assist him in doing it. In all great enterprises undertaken by men, it is only a very small part which they can execute with their own hands, and multitudes of most excellently contrived plans fail for want of wisdom in the choice of the men who are depended upon for the accomplishment of them.

This is true in all things, small as well as great. A man may form a very wise scheme for building a house. He may choose an excellent place for the location of it, and draw up a good plan, and make ample arrangements for the supply of funds, but if he does not know how to choose, or where to find good builders, his scheme will come to a miserable end. He may choose builders that are competent but dishonest, or they may be honest but incompetent, or they may be subject to some other radical defect; in either of which cases the house will be badly built, and the scheme will be a failure.

Many men say, when such a misfortune as this happens to them, "Ah! it was not my fault. It was the fault of the builders;" to which the proper reply would be, "It *was* your fault. You should not have undertaken to build a house unless, in addition to being

able to form the general plan and arrangements wisely, you had also had the sagacity to discern the characters of the men whom you were to employ to execute the work." This latter quality is as important to success in all undertakings as the former. Indeed, it is far more important, for good *men* may correct or avoid the evils of a bad plan, but a good plan can never afford security against the evil action of bad men.

The sovereigns and great military commanders that have acquired the highest celebrity in history have always been remarkable for their tact and sagacity in discovering and bringing forward the right kind of talent for the successful accomplishment of their various designs.

When Peter first found himself nominally in possession of the supreme power, after the fall of the Princess Sophia, he was very young, and the administration of the government was really in the hands of different nobles and officers of state, who managed affairs in his name. From time to time there were great dissensions among these men. They formed themselves into cliques and coteries, each of which was jealous of the influence of the others. As Peter gradually grew older, and felt stronger and stronger in his position, he took a greater part in the direction and control of the public policy, and the persons whom he first made choice of to aid him in his plans were two very able men, whom he afterward raised to positions of great responsibility and honor. These men became, indeed, in the end, highly distinguished as statesmen, and were very prominent and

very efficient instruments in the development and realization of Peter's plans. The name of the first of these statesmen was Le Fort; that of the second was Menzikoff. The story which is told by the old historians of both of these men is quite romantic.

Le Fort was the son of a merchant of Geneva. He had a strong desire from his childhood to be a soldier, but his father, considering the hardships and dangers to which a military life would expose him, preferred to make him a merchant, and so he provided him with a place in the counting-house of one of the great merchants of Amsterdam. The city of Amsterdam was in those days one of the greatest and wealthiest marts of commerce in the world.

Very many young men, in being thus restrained by their fathers from pursuing the profession which they themselves chose, and placed, instead, in a situation which they did not like, would have gone to their duty in a discontented and sullen manner, and would have made no effort to succeed in the business or to please their employers; but Le Fort, it seems, was a boy of a different mould from this. He went to his work in the counting-house at Amsterdam with a good heart, and devoted himself to his business with so much industry and steadiness, and evinced withal so much amiableness of disposition in his intercourse with all around him, that before long, as the accounts say, the merchant "loved him as his own child." After some considerable time had elapsed, the merchant, who was constantly sending vessels to different parts of the world, was on one

occasion about dispatching a ship to Copenhagen, and Le Fort asked permission to go in her. The merchant was not only willing that he should go, but also gave him the whole charge of the cargo, with instructions to attend to the sale of it, and the remittance of the proceeds on the arrival of the ship in port. Le Fort accordingly sailed in the ship, and on his arrival at Copenhagen he transacted the business of selling the cargo and sending back the money so skillfully and well that the merchant was very well pleased with him.

Copenhagen is the capital of Denmark, and the Danes were at that time quite a powerful and warlike nation. Le Fort, in walking about the streets of the town while his ship was lying there, often saw the Danish soldiers marching to and fro, and performing their evolutions, and the sight revived in his mind his former interest in being a soldier. He soon made acquaintance with some of the officers, and, in hearing them talk of their various adventures, and of the details of their mode of life, he became very eager to join them. They liked him, too, very much. He had made great progress in learning the different languages spoken in that part of the world, and the officers found, moreover, that he was very quick in understanding the military principles which they explained to him, and in learning evolutions of all kinds.

About this time it happened that an ambassador was to be sent from Denmark to Russia, and Le Fort, who had a great inclination to see the world as well as to be a soldier, was seized with a strong desire to accompany the expedition

in the ambassador's train. He already knew something of the Russian language, and he set himself at work with all diligence to study it more. He also obtained recommendations from those who had known him—probably, among others, from the merchant in Amsterdam, and he secured the influence in his favor of the officers in Copenhagen with whom he had become acquainted. When these preliminary steps had been taken, he made application for the post of interpreter to the embassy; and after a proper examination had been made in respect to his character and his qualifications, he received the appointment. Thus, instead of going back to Amsterdam after his cargo was sold, he went to Russia in the suite of the ambassador.

The ambassador soon formed a very strong friendship for his young interpreter, and employed him confidentially, when he arrived in Moscow, in many important services. The ambassador himself soon acquired great influence at Moscow, and was admitted to quite familiar intercourse, not only with the leading Russian noblemen, but also with Peter himself. On one occasion, when Peter was dining at the ambassador's—as it seems he was sometimes accustomed to do—he took notice of Le Fort, who was present as one of the party, on account of his prepossessing appearance and agreeable manners. He also observed that, for a foreigner, he spoke the Russian language remarkably well. The emperor asked Le Fort some questions concerning his origin and history, and, being very much pleased with his answers, and with his general air and demeanor, he asked him whether he should

be willing to enter into his service. Le Fort replied in a very respectful manner, "That, whatever ambition he might have to serve so great a monarch, yet the duty and gratitude which he owed to his present master, the ambassador, would not allow him to promise any thing without first asking his consent."

"Very well," replied the Czar; "*I* will ask your master's consent."

"But I hope," said Le Fort, "that your majesty will make use of some other interpreter than myself in asking the question."

Peter was very much pleased with both these answers of Le Fort—the one showing his scrupulous fidelity to his engagements in not being willing to leave one service for another, however advantageous to himself the change might be, until he was honorably released by his first employer, and the other marking the delicacy of mind which prompted him to wish not to take any part in the conversation between the emperor and the ambassador respecting himself, as his office of interpreter would naturally lead him to do, but to prefer that the communication should be made through an indifferent person, in order that the ambassador might be perfectly free to express his real opinion without any reserve.

Accordingly, the Czar, taking another interpreter with him, went to the ambassador and began to ask him about Le Fort.

"He speaks very good Russian," said Peter.

"Yes, please your majesty," said the ambassador, "he has a genius for learning any thing that he pleases. When he came to

me four months ago he knew very little of German, but now he speaks it very well. I have two German interpreters in my train, and he speaks the language as well as either of them. He did not know a word of Russian when he came to my country, but your majesty can judge yourself how well he speaks it now."

In the mean time, while Peter and the ambassador were talking thus about Le Fort, he himself had withdrawn to another part of the room. The Czar was very much pleased with the modesty of the young gentleman's behavior; and, after finishing the conversation with the ambassador, without, however, having asked him to release Le Fort from his service, he returned to the part of the room where Le Fort was, and presently asked him to bring him a glass of wine. He said no more to him at that time in respect to entering his service, but Le Fort understood very well from his countenance, and from the manner in which he asked him for the wine, that nothing had occurred in his conversation with the ambassador to lead him to change his mind.

The next day Peter, having probably in the mean time made some farther inquiries about Le Fort, introduced the subject again in conversation with the ambassador. He told the ambassador that he had a desire to have the young man Le Fort about him, and asked if he should be willing to part with him. The ambassador replied that, notwithstanding any desire he might feel to retain so agreeable and promising a man in his own service, still the exchange was too advantageous to Le Fort, and he wished him too well to make any objection to it; and besides,

he added, he knew too well his duty to his majesty not to consent readily to any arrangement of that kind that his majesty might desire.

The next day Peter sent for Le Fort, and formally appointed him his first interpreter. The duties of this office required Le Fort to be a great deal in the emperor's presence, and Peter soon became extremely attached to him. Le Fort, although we have called him a young man, was now about thirty-five years of age, while Peter himself was yet not twenty. It was natural, therefore, that Peter should soon learn to place great confidence in him, and often look to him for information, and this the more readily on account of Le Fort's having been brought up in the heart of Europe, where all the arts of civilization, both those connected with peace and war, were in a much more advanced state than they were at this time in Russia.

Le Fort continued in the service of the emperor until the day of his death, which happened about ten years after this time; and during this period he rose to great distinction, and exercised a very important part in the management of public affairs, and more particularly in aiding Peter to understand and to introduce into his own dominions the arts and improvements of western Europe.

The first improvement which Le Fort was the means of introducing in the affairs of the Czar related to the dress and equipment of the troops. The Guards had before that time been accustomed to wear an old-fashioned Russian uniform, which



was far from being convenient. The outside garment was a sort of long coat or gown, which considerably impeded the motion of the limbs. One day, not long after Le Fort entered the service of the emperor, Peter, being engaged in conversation with him, asked him what he thought of his soldiers.

"The men themselves are very well," replied Le Port, "but it seems to me that the dress which they wear is not so convenient for military use as the style of dress now usually adopted among the western nations."

Peter asked what this style was, and Le Fort replied that if his majesty would permit him to do so, he would take measures for affording him an opportunity to see.

Accordingly, Le Fort repaired immediately to the tailor of the Danish ambassador. This tailor the ambassador had brought with him from Copenhagen, for it was the custom in those days for personages of high rank and station, like the ambassador, to take with them, in their train, persons of all the trades and professions which they might require, so that, wherever they might be, they could have the means of supplying all their wants within themselves, and without at all depending upon the people whom they visited. Le Fort employed the tailor to make him two military suits, in the style worn by the royal guards at Copenhagen—one for an officer, and another for a soldier of the ranks. The tailor finished the first suit in two days. Le Fort put the dress on, and in the morning, at the time when, according to his usual custom, he was to wait upon the emperor in his chamber, he went

in wearing the new uniform.

The Czar was surprised at the unexpected spectacle. At first he did not know Le Fort in his new garb; and when at length he recognized him, and began to understand the case, he was exceedingly pleased. He examined the uniform in every part, and praised not only the dress itself, but also Le Fort's ingenuity and diligence in procuring him so good an opportunity to know what the military style of the western nations really was.

Soon after this Le Fort appeared again in the emperor's presence wearing the uniform of a common soldier. The emperor examined this dress too, and saw the superiority of it in respect to its convenience, and its adaptedness to the wants and emergencies of military life. He said at once that he should like to have a company of guards dressed and equipped in that manner, and should be also very much pleased to have them disciplined and drilled according to the western style. Le Fort said that if his majesty was pleased to intrust him with the commission, he would endeavor to organize such a company.

The emperor requested him to do so, and Le Fort immediately undertook the task. He went about Moscow to all the different merchants to procure the materials necessary—for many of these materials were such as were not much in use in Moscow, and so it was not easy to procure them in sufficient quantities to make the number of suits that Le Fort required. He also sought out all the tailors that he could find at the houses of the different ambassadors, or of the great merchants who came from western

Europe, and were consequently acquainted with the mode of cutting and making the dresses in the proper manner. Of course, a considerable number of tailors would be necessary to make up so many uniforms in the short space of time which Le Fort wished to allot to the work.

Le Fort then went about among the strangers and foreigners at Moscow, both those connected with the ambassadors and others, to find men that were in some degree acquainted with the drill and tactics of the western armies, who were willing to serve in the company that he was about to organize. He soon made up a company of fifty men. When this company was completed, and clothed in the new uniform, and had been properly drilled, Le Fort put himself at the head of them one morning, and marched them, with drums beating and colors flying, before the palace gate. The Czar came to the window to see them as they passed. He was much surprised at the spectacle, and very much pleased. He came down to look at the men more closely; he stood by while they went through the exercises in which Le Fort had drilled them. The emperor was so much pleased that he said he would join the company himself. He wished to learn to perform the exercise personally, so as to know in a practical manner precisely how others ought to perform it. He accordingly caused a dress to be made for himself, and he took his place afterward in the ranks as a common soldier, and was drilled with the rest in all the exercises.

From this beginning the change went on until the style of

dress and the system of tactics for the whole imperial army was reformed by the introduction of the compact and scientific system of western Europe, in the place of the old-fashioned and cumbrous usages which had previously prevailed.

The emperor having experienced the immense advantages which resulted from the adoption of western improvements in his army, wished now to make an experiment of introducing, in the same way, the elements of western civilization into the ordinary branches of industry and art. He proposed to Le Fort to make arrangements for bringing into the country a great number of mechanics and artisans from Denmark, Germany, France, and other European countries, in order that their improved methods and processes might be introduced into Russia. Le Fort readily entered into this proposal, but he explained to the emperor that, in order to render such a measure successful on the scale necessary for the accomplishment of any important good, it would be first requisite to make some considerable changes in the general laws of the land, especially in relation to intercourse with foreign nations. On his making known fully and in detail what these changes would be, the emperor readily acceded to them, and the proposed modifications of the laws were made. The tariff of duties on the products and manufactures of foreign countries was greatly reduced. This produced a two-fold effect.

In the first place, it greatly increased the importations of goods from foreign countries, and thus promoted the intercourse of the Russians with foreign merchants, manufacturers, and artisans,

and gradually accustomed the people to a better style of living, and to improved fashions in dress, furniture, and equipage, and thus prepared the country to furnish an extensive market for the encouragement of Russian arts and manufactures as fast as they could be introduced.

In the second place, the new system greatly increased the revenues of the empire. It is true that the tariff was reduced, so that the articles that were imported paid only about half as much in proportion after the change as before. But then the new laws increased the importations so much, that the loss was very much more than made up to the treasury, and the emperor found in a very short time that the state of his finances was greatly improved. This enabled him to take measures for introducing into the country great numbers of foreign manufacturers and artisans from Germany, France, Scotland, and other countries of western Europe. These men were brought into the country by the emperor, and sustained there at the public expense, until they had become so far established in their several professions and trades that they could maintain themselves. Among others, he brought in a great many carpenters and masons to teach the Russians to build better habitations than those which they had been accustomed to content themselves with, which were, in general, wooden huts of very rude and inconvenient construction. One of the first undertakings in which the masons were employed was the building of a handsome palace of hewn stone in Moscow for the emperor himself, the first edifice of that kind which had ever

been built in that city. The sight of a palace formed of so elegant and durable a material excited the emulation of all the wealthy noblemen, so that, as soon as the masons were released from their engagement with the emperor, they found plenty of employment in building new houses and palaces for these noblemen.

These and a great many other similar measures were devised by Le Fort during the time that he continued in the service of the Czar, and the success which attended all his plans and proposals gave him, in the end, great influence, and was the means of acquiring for him great credit and renown. And yet he was so discreet and unpretending in his manners and demeanor, if the accounts which have come down to us respecting him are correct, that the high favor in which he was held by the emperor did not awaken in the hearts of the native nobles of the land any considerable degree of that jealousy and ill-will which they might have been expected to excite. Le Fort was of a very self-sacrificing and disinterested disposition. He was generous in his dealings with all, and he often exerted the ascendancy which he had acquired over the mind of the emperor to save other officers from undeserved or excessive punishment when they displeased their august master; for it must be confessed that Peter, notwithstanding all the excellences of his character, had the reputation at this period of his life of being hasty and passionate. He was very impatient of contradiction, and he could not tolerate any species of opposition to his wishes. Being possessed himself of great decision of character, and delighting,

as he did, in promptness and energy of action, he lost all patience sometimes, when annoyed by the delays, or the hesitation, or the inefficiency of others, who were not so richly endowed by nature as himself. In these cases he was often unreasonable, and sometimes violent; and he would in many instances have acted in an ungenerous and cruel manner if Le Fort had not always been at hand to restrain and appease him.

Le Fort always acted as intercessor in cases of difficulty of this sort; so that the Russian noblemen, or boyars as they were called, in the end looked upon him as their father. It is said that he actually saved the lives of great numbers of them, whom Peter, without his intercession, would have sentenced to death. Others he saved from the knout, and others from banishment. At one time, when the emperor in a passion, was going to cause one of his officers to be scourged, although, as Le Fort thought, he had been guilty of no wrong which could deserve such a punishment, Le Fort, after all other means had failed, bared his own breast and shoulders, and bade the angry emperor to strike or cut there if he would, but to spare the innocent person. The Czar was entirely overcome by this noble generosity, and, clasping Le Fort in his arms, thanked him for his interposition, at the same time allowing the trembling prisoner to depart in peace, with his heart full of gratitude toward the friend who had so nobly saved him.

Another of the chief officers in Peter's service during the early part of his reign was the Prince Menzikoff. His origin was very humble. His Christian name was Alexander, and his father was

a laboring man in the service of a monastery on the banks of the Volga. The monasteries of those times were endowed with large tracts of valuable land, which were cultivated by servants or vassals, and from the proceeds of this cultivation the monks were supported, and the monastery buildings kept in repair or enlarged.

Alexander spent the early years of his life in working with his father on the monastery lands; but, being a lad of great spirit and energy, he gradually became dissatisfied with this mode of life; for the peasants of those days, such as his father, who tilled the lands of the nobles or of the monks, were little better than slaves. Alexander, then, when he arrived at the age of thirteen or fourteen, finding his situation and prospects at home very gloomy and discouraging, concluded to go out into the world and seek his fortune.

So he left his father's hut and set out for Moscow. After meeting with various adventures on the way and in the city, he finally found a place in a pastry-cook's shop; but, instead of being employed in making and baking the pies and tarts, he was sent out into the streets to sell them. In order to attract customers to his merchandise, he used to sing songs and tell stories in the streets. Indeed, it was the talent which he evinced in these arts, doubtless, which led his master to employ him in this way, instead of keeping him at work at home in the baking.

The story which is told of the manner in which the emperor's attention was first attracted to young Menzikoff is very curious,



but, as is the case with all other such personal anecdotes related of great sovereigns, it is very doubtful how far it is to be believed. It is said that Peter, passing along the street one day, stopped to listen to Menzikoff as he was singing a song or telling a story to a crowd of listeners. He was much diverted by one of the songs that he heard, and at the close of it he spoke to the boy, and finally asked him what he would take for his whole stock of cakes and pies, basket and all. The boy named the sum for which he would sell all the cakes and pies, but as for the basket he said that belonged to his master, and he had no power to sell it.

"Still," he added, "every thing belongs to your majesty, and your majesty has, therefore, only to give me the command, and I shall deliver it up to you."

This reply pleased the Czar so much that he sent for the boy to come to him, and on conversing with him farther, and after making additional inquiries respecting him, he was so well satisfied that he took him at once into his service.

All this took place before Le Fort's plan was formed for organizing a company to exhibit to the emperor the style of uniform and the system of military discipline adopted in western Europe, as has already been described. Menzikoff joined this company, and he took so much interest in the exercises and evolutions, and evinced so great a degree of intelligence, and so much readiness in comprehending and in practicing the various manoeuvres, that he attracted Le Fort's special attention. He was soon promoted to office in the company, and ultimately he

became Le Fort's principal co-operator in his various measures and plans. From this he rose by degrees, until in process of time he became one of the most distinguished generals in Peter's army, and took a very important part in some of his most celebrated campaigns.

In reading stories like these, we are naturally led to feel a strong interest in the persons who are the subjects of them, and we sometimes insensibly form opinions of their characters which are far too favorable. This Menzikoff, for example, notwithstanding the enterprising spirit which he displayed in his boyhood, in setting off alone to Moscow to seek his fortune, and his talent for telling stories and singing songs, and the interest which he felt, and the success that he met with, in learning Le Fort's military manoeuvres, and the great distinction which he subsequently acquired as a military commander, may have been, after all, in relation to any just and proper standards of moral duty, a very bad man. Indeed, there is much reason to suppose that he was so. At all events, he became subsequently implicated in a dreadful quarrel which took place between Peter and his wife, under circumstances which appear very much against him. This quarrel occurred after Peter had been married only about two years, and when he was yet not quite twenty years old. As usual in such cases, very different stories are told by the friends respectively of the husband and the wife. On the part of the empress it was said that the difficulty arose from Peter's having been drawn away into bad company, and especially the company

of bad women, through the instrumentality of Menzikoff when he first came into Peter's service. Menzikoff was a dissolute young man, it was said, while he was in the service of the pastry-cook, and was accustomed to frequent the haunts of the vicious and depraved about the town; and after he entered into Peter's service, Peter himself began to go with him to these places, disguised, of course, so as not to be known. This troubled Ottokesa, and made her jealous; and when she remonstrated with her husband he was angry, and by way of recrimination accused her of being unfaithful to him. Menzikoff too was naturally filled with resentment at the empress's accusations against him, and he took Peter's part against his wife. Whatever may have been the truth in regard to the grounds of the complaints made by the parties against each other, the power was on Peter's side. He repudiated his wife, and then shut her up in a place of seclusion, where he kept her confined all the remainder of her days.

Besides the unfavorable inferences which we might justly draw from this case, there are unfortunately other indications that Peter, notwithstanding the many and great excellences of his character, was at this period of his life violent and passionate in temper, very impatient of contradiction or opposition, and often unreasonable and unjust in his treatment of those who for any reason became the objects of his suspicion or dislike. Various incidents and occurrences illustrating these traits in his character will appear in the subsequent chapters of his history.

# CHAPTER V.

## COMMENCEMENT OF THE REIGN. 1691-1697

Peter's unlimited power—Extent of his dominions—Character—His wishes in respect to his dominion—Embassy to China—Siberia—Inhospitable climate—The exiles—Western civilization—Ship-building—The Dutch ship-yards—Saardam—The barge at the country palace—The emperor's first vessels—Sham-fights—Azof—Naval operations against Azof—Treachery of the artilleryman—Defeat—New attempt—The Turkish fleet taken—Fall of Azof—Fame of the emperor—His plans for building a fleet—Foreign workmen—Penalties—His arbitrary proceedings—He sends the young nobility abroad—Opposition—Sullen mood of mind—National prejudices offended—The opposition party—Arguments of the disaffected—Religious feelings of the people—The patriarch—An impious scheme—Plan of the conspirators—Fires—Dread of them in Moscow—Modern cities—Plan for massacring the foreigners—The day—The plot revealed—Measures taken by Peter—Torture—Punishment of the conspirators—The column in the market-place

Peter was now not far from twenty years of age, and he was in full possession of power as vast, perhaps—if we consider both the extent of it and its absoluteness—as was ever claimed by any European sovereign. There was no written constitution to limit his prerogatives, and no Legislature or Parliament to control him by laws. In a certain sense, as Alexander Menzikoff said when selling his cakes, every thing belonged to him. His word was law. Life and death hung upon his decree. His dominions extended so far that, on an occasion when he wished to send an ambassador to one of his neighbors—the Emperor of China—it took the messenger more than *eighteen months* of constant and diligent traveling to go from the capital to the frontier.

Such was Peter's position. As to character, he was talented, ambitious, far-seeing, and resolute; but he was also violent in temper, merciless and implacable toward his enemies, and possessed of an indomitable will.

He began immediately to feel a strong interest in the improvement of his empire, in order to increase his own power and grandeur as the monarch of it, just as a private citizen might wish to improve his estate in order to increase his wealth and importance as the owner of it. He sent the ambassador above referred to to China in order to make arrangements for increasing and improving the trade between the two countries. This mission was arranged in a very imposing manner. The ambassador was attended with a train of twenty-one persons, who went with him in the capacity of secretaries, interpreters, legal councilors, and

the like, besides a large number of servants and followers to wait upon the gentlemen of the party, and to convey and take care of the baggage. The baggage was borne in a train of wagons which followed the carriages of the ambassador and his suite, so that the expedition moved through the country quite like a little army on a march.

It was nearly three years before the embassy returned. The measure, however, was eminently successful. It placed the relations of the two empires on a very satisfactory footing.

The dominions of the Czar extended then, as now, through all the northern portions of Europe and Asia, to the shores of the Icy Sea. A very important part of this region is the famous Siberia. The land here is not of much value for cultivation, on account of the long and dreary winters and the consequent shortness of the summer season. But this very coldness of the climate causes it to produce a great number of fine fur-bearing animals, such as the sable, the mink, the ermine, and the otter; for nature has so arranged it that, the colder any climate is, the finer and the warmer is the fur which grows upon the animals that live there.

The inhabitants of Siberia are employed, therefore, chiefly in hunting wild animals for their flesh or their fur, and in working the mines; and, from time immemorial, it has been the custom to send criminals there in banishment, and compel them to spend the remainder of their lives in these toilsome and dangerous occupations. Of course, the cold, the exposure, and the fatigue, joined to the mental distress and suffering which the thought of

their hard fate and the recollections of home must occasion, soon bring far the greater proportion of these unhappy outcasts to the grave.

Peter interested himself very much in efforts to open communications with these retired and almost inaccessible regions, and to improve and extend the working of the mines. But his thoughts were chiefly occupied with the condition of the European portion of his dominions, and with schemes for introducing more and more fully the arts and improvements of western Europe among his people. He was ready to seize upon every occasion which could furnish any hint or suggestion to this end.

The manner in which his attention was first turned to the subject of ship-building illustrated this. In those days Holland was the great centre of commerce and navigation for the whole world, and the art of ship-building had made more progress in that nation than in any other. The Dutch held colonies in every quarter of the globe. Their men-of-war and their fleets of merchantmen penetrated to every sea, and their naval commanders were universally renowned for their enterprise, their bravery, and their nautical skill.

The Dutch not only built ships for themselves, but orders were sent to their ship-yards from all parts of the world, inasmuch as in these yards all sorts of vessels, whether for war, commerce, or pleasure, could be built better and cheaper than in any other place.

One of the chief centres in which these ship and boat building operations were carried on was the town of Saardam. This town lies near Amsterdam, the great commercial capital of the country. It extends for a mile or two along the banks of a deep and still river, which furnish most complete and extensive facilities for the docks and ship-yards.



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