FOURTH PERIOD

EXTINCTION OF THE HOUSE OF RURIK. -- USURPATIONS AND CIVIL WARS

(From 1581 to 1613.)

Ivan IV, after having successively married five wives, left only two sons, Feodor or Theodore and Demetrius. Feodor had been called to the empire by the formal will of the czar; inheritance of the throne had long been a recognized right. Feodor was thirty-seven years old; there was therefore nothing in question with regard to him; however, the rights which no longer existed for the nation were still represented, and the deputies of the towns, chosen from among the most considerable members of the nobility, were seen to come to Moscow to entreat Feodor to accept the sovereign power.

Feodor was as weak in mind as in body, and his feeble minority, by giving access to ambitions which his father had suppressed, prepared new heartbreaks in the State.

Upon dying, Ivan IV had appointed three boyars to act as advisers to Feodor. A fourth lord, whom historians call Boydau Belski, had been appointed tutor to the young prince. This ambitious one, aspiring to the throne, undertook to have the Czar Feodor excluded, to put in his place the young Demetrius or Dmitri, and to reign under the name of this child. His plan having failed, he was simply condemned to exile.

More skillful, but not less ambitious, another lord, Boris Godunov, brother of czarina widow of Ivan IV, plotted with more success. It is true that he knew how to employ those decisive means which alone can lead quickly to the goal: we mean iron, poison, supposed conspiracies, denouncements obtained at the price of gold and confessions extracted by torture. The three boyars, advisers to the young prince, successively succumbed to the traps set for them. Those who did not perish had their heads shaved and were confined in a monastery. It was then in Russia, as in almost all the other countries of Europe, a way of killing people politically.

Boris, delivered from those who could stand in the way of his ambition, saw only one crime to be committed, the greatest of all. He had the young Czarевич Dmitri assassinated on 15 May 1591, around midday. Some authors claim that it was during the night, a circumstance which would have made it possible to substitute another victim for the prince. Be that as it may, this name of Dmitri or Demetrius, rightly claimed or usurped by imposture, became the pretext for the bloodiest debates.

Boris constituted himself the avenger of the blood he had caused to be shed; the principal inhabitants of Uglich, where the attempt had taken place, were proscribed or imprisoned. As for the assassins, after being pointed out to the people, they were stoned on the spot.
The weak Feodor died a short time later, either as a result of his premature infirmities, or because Boris had hastened the end of this prince by a crime before which he could not recoil, after the assassination of Demetrius.

The race of Rurik died out in the person of Feodor. This house is called, by Russian historians, the great dynasty, and it is with good reason, since it had enjoyed omnipotence for eight whole centuries, that it had given fifty-two sovereigns to the empire, and that it had, so to speak, founded Russia.

Having thus cleared his way to the throne, Boris seemed, by an excess of hypocrisy, to refuse to ascend it. He knew that the state, torn by factions, needed a leader. He saw the great, jealous of each other, ready to buy the favor of a new master at will. After having been prayed for a long time, in the name of the fatherland, by the various orders of the nation, he accepted. His election took place with solemnity in the palace of the patriarch. It was in this way that this man, devoured by an ambition hidden under the appearance of the purest disinterestedness, ascended a throne which he had coveted by so many crimes.

Without ceding it, in cruelty, to any of his predecessors, Boris brought to the exercise of the supreme power more moderation, that is to say, more skill. He also possessed some of those qualities which cast that sort of brilliancy which seldom fails its effect upon the multitude.

There were hardly any public executions during the reign of this prince. He knew how to secretly stifle some conspiracies, because he did not feel his power was legitimate enough to erect scaffolds in broad daylight; but the executioners, who were constantly at his orders, took advantage of the darkness to bring death to domestic hearths. He called to his aid informers and paid the informers: the thirst for money brought them forth in droves. From then on discretion was considered a crime.

However, Boris appeared to be loved by the nation, whom he deceived by means of false pretences; but it must be said that he pacified the empire, that he maintained and even enlarged its limits. He renewed previous treaties with neighboring powers, concluded new alliances, favored trade and industry, and finally appeared worthy of the power he had usurped.

So much prudence, so much care, did not, however, avert the storm which was forming against him. From the depths of a dark cloister came the avenger of Feodor and Demetrius.

A young man of noble family, child of a boyar, devoted to the monastic state by abuse of paternal power, but called, by his inclinations, to another kind of life, conceived the bold project of reviving Demetrius. It is said that it was at the instigation of one of his superiors, who had founded the hope of the success of the imposture on striking traits of resemblance between the young monk and Prince Dmitri, assassinated at Uglish. Be that as it may, Jashko (sic, normally Grigory) Otrpyev or Otrpcia, after having changed monastery several times, just as a bad soldier changes regiment, was at Moscow, in the palace of the patriarch, who employed him as a copyist, when he began, after carefully studying his role, to give himself secretly for Prince Dmitri, who was thought to be dead. At first, he passed for a young madman; and Boris, being informed of his remarks, contented himself with ordering that he should be sent to a much more
distant monastery, and recommended to the strict supervision of the superior. Warned of the danger he was running, Otrepyev managed to escape and took refuge in Poland.

The governor of Kiev received him and placed him in a famous monastery. Despite the austere rule of the order and the practice of the Greek rite, Otrepyev ate meat... For this irremissible crime, he was abandoned by his protector and forced to leave this convent. As he had not given up on his project, this new disgrace became an additional reason for executing it, but he first needed an asylum and support. He sought and found a protector in the person of Prince Adam Wiśniowiecki, who received him among his servants. It was from this moment that he carried out his design with marvelous skill.

As soon as his pretended secret began to spread, the Poles understood all the advantage they could derive from this incident, true or false, to bring disorder to Russia. The King of Poland, so as not to infringe the last treaty, did not give patent assistance to the impostor, but he left it to the nobles, who espoused his cause with enthusiasm. One of them, Mniszech, Palatine of Sandomierz, gave him his daughter in marriage; and the Diet of Poland having opened meanwhile, he introduced him there as the legitimate heir to the throne of Russia. In this imposing assembly, presided over by King Sigismund, Otrepyev recounted his adventures, shed tears and made most of his listeners sharing the pain and the feelings with which he seemed to be imbued: the illusion of lying can sometimes go so far as to deceive the one who invents it. Was this Polish nobility the dupe or accomplice of a daring fable? that is what we cannot decide; but, what is certain, is that on leaving the diet, Sigismund treated the pretended Dmitri with all the honors due to the rank that was supposed to be his. Perhaps the impostor had promised to dismember some province of the empire in his favor. It has been pretended that he had engaged to reunite Russia with the Roman Church, and that he had already consented to receive the instructions of a Jesuit.

This news reached Moscow and terrified Boris.

Russia, under the yoke of this prince, was neither calm nor satisfied; the nobles, whom he had decimated, persecuted, and executed; so they hastened to foment revolt, and when the false Dmitri appeared on the frontier, at the head of the army which the palatines of Poland, the cities of Chernigov, Novgorod, Seversky, and several others had raised for him, declared themselves in his favor. The Cossacks of the Don sent their hetman to him: the sound of the resurrection of the unfortunate Demetrius had shaken the whole empire.

Otrepyev, his Poles and Cossacks, were defeated twice in a row. If the Russian generals had taken advantage of the trouble which these first setbacks had thrown at him, it would have been done of the impostor and the imposture; as neither gave time to recognize him, and the fire of the rebellion soon reached the capital; then Boris resorted to the patriarch, and to the great ones who remained faithful to his cause, to bring the people back to duty; but the intervention of the lower clergy and the nobility was powerless. An unhappy people are always strong when they have ideas of law and legitimacy for themselves.

Boris died in the meantime. Seizing violent pains as he came out of the table, and feeling that his end was near, he hastily put on a monastic robe, to die holy. It was an atonement in vogue at
the time. Some authors believed that Boris, warned of his ruin by a premonition, poisoned himself, to leave the throne only with life. This resolution would seem quite natural on the part of a usurping bold; but she would have been nobler if he had died at gunpoint.

After the death of Boris, the clergy, the boyars, and the various orders of the state proclaimed Feodor, his son, scarcely sixteen years of age; but this weak heir could not hinder Dmitri's fortune. The inhabitants of the capital, raised in favor of the latter, arrested the young tsar, his mother, and all that belonged to the family of the usurper by blood ties or those of affection, and delivered them to Otrepyev, who had him put to death. The widow Czarina was strangled, and Feodor suffocated. Xenia, daughter of Boris, was alone spared because of her beauty; but she was locked up in a convent. Boris' body, outrageously exhumed, remained for a long time exposed to the insults of a savage population.

The imposter entered Moscow triumphantly, followed by the armies of the two nations and a large procession of the highest nobility (1603). All he needed to do was be recognized by the Czarina, Ivan's widow, who was to be his mother. The so-called recognition took place; and there were tender hugs and weeping on both sides. All doubts had to be dispelled; however, there were still some.

Plots were formed almost immediately against the new ruler. At the head of one of those who were discovered was Prince Vasily Ivanovich Shuisky. Judged by the people, the tsar forgave them; but this out-of-season generosity prepared for his downfall. This Shuisky, devoted to Boris, had been commissioned to execute Dmitri's murder. He needed to know, better than anyone, whether the rightful heir had perished or not. In either case, he could not fail to be the enemy of the one who reappeared under the name of Dmitri and claimed his rights.

Otrepyev, intoxicated with his fortune, soon abused it. After concluding an alliance with Poland, he asked for the hand of the daughter of the Palatine of Sandomierz, brought ten thousand Poles into Moscow, and placed the crown of the tsars on the head of this foreign beauty. The presence in the capital of the empire of these irreconcilable enemies of the nation, and their irreverence in the churches, outraged the people. The new ruler, for his part, was rapidly losing, by his shameful excesses, the favor of this people who had once proclaimed it with transport. Shuisky was spying on the moment to rekindle the civil war. He entered the city in favor of the fissures of Dmitri's marriage, and suddenly, on the night of 17-18 May 1606, the rumor spread that the Poles who came as a result of Sandomierz's daughter had plotted the intention to massacre all the people of Moscow. All suddenly armed themselves; running tumultuously into the district of the Poles; the doors pushed open ... Surprised in their sleep, they were mercilessly slaughtered. The same movement of fury led the people to the palace, where Dmitri, almost without guards, rested in reckless security, though he was said to have been warned of the revolt which was being prepared. Imposter or not, his last moments were horrible. When the conspirators broke down the doors of the royal mansion, Shuisky walked at their head, a dagger in one hand and a crucifix in the other. Otrepyev wanted to speak in vain; his voice being misunderstood, he jumped through a window and broke his leg in his fall, while the servants were being massacred who had remained faithful to him. Gathered together, pity seemed for a moment to suspend the popular fury; the streltsy were already preparing to defend him, and were talking about dying for him, when at the same moment came the deputation who had been sent to
the czarina, Ivan's widow, to announce that she disowned the wretched man who had dared to call her mother: "I recognized him," she said, "for fear of death." At this disastrous confession, the fury of the assailants knew no bounds, and the unfortunate Otrepyev expired, pierced with blows. His body, on display in Moscow's public square, was then thrown into a pyre and reduced to ashes.

Shuisky, proclaimed by his faction, crowned in the cathedral church of Moscow the following month (June 1606), took his place on this bloody throne. But the ground does not take long to tremble under his feet, the rumor was still spreading that Dmitri was not dead and that it is one of his officers who has been massacred in his place. A part of Russia rises in favor of this new impostor. By this jingle of revolutions, by this inconceivable readiness for revolt, one can have the measure of the degree of happiness which the people enjoyed under such masters, usurpers or legitimate.

This new pretender was overthrown and almost immediately replaced by another calling himself the son of Feodor, whom the Cossacks had put at their head. After a fight, this impostor was defeated, taken, and perished like the first.

Finally, one last fake Dmitri appeared on the scene and still found many supporters. It was neither savage Cossacks nor a handful of malcontents who recognized him, but entire towns. There must have been in Russia at that time a contagion of audacity and credulity. The Poles set out to support the latter when he had signalized himself by some victories. The Palatine Mniszczek came to find him in his camp with his daughter, Marina, wife of the first false Demetrius; she recognized him as her first husband and behaved accordingly. It is evident that she could not have been taken in by the imposture; it was therefore out of patriotic devotion and to harm the enemies of her country that this woman, of high birth, received the embraces of an obscure brigand; for that is how historians designate it.

Russia no longer had a sovereign (1611); the great, divided in opinion and not knowing to whom to take their oaths, resolved to govern themselves. During this time, a horrible famine came to desolate the country. Moscow was in the most dreadful situation; the misfortunes of the country seemed irreparable. Sweden, seeing the hour approaching for dividing up its spoils, had fallen into line, and Sigismund, Emperor of Germany, seemed disposed to favor this dismemberment; but during this time, the insolent tyranny of the Poles having reached its height, all those who were at Moscow were massacred by the Russians the day after Palm Sunday (1612).

Lyapunov, one of the principal authors of the revolution which had overthrown Shuisky, endeavored to remedy the evils of which he was largely the author, by organizing a confederation of Russian towns, in order to complete the drive out of the Poles. It was necessary to resort to the Cossacks to form an army; but their chief, Zarutsky, devoted partisan of Marina, authorizing the robberies of his people, soon ceased to get along with the other generals. In the meantime, Lyapunov was assassinated, and Pontus de la Gardie seized Novgorod for the King of Sweden, Charles IX. The capture of this town offered a peculiarity worthy of remark: it is that the military chiefs cowardly deserted their posts after having plundered the shops of the merchants, while a priest, the protopope or parish priest of Sainte-Sophie, with a handful of brave citizens, valiantly fought the Swedes.
In the sad state in which Russia found itself, its salvation came to it from one of its most obscure children. A butcher, named Kuzma Minin, rekindled the flame of patriotism in the souls of his fellow-citizens, and persuaded them to make every conceivable sacrifice for defense and the common safety. These examples are not uncommon in revolution.

The Russians, revived by the word of this man, went to seek Pozharsky, a brave warrior who had just shed his blood fighting for them. Having become a leader, Pozharsky saw the number of his soldiers rapidly increase and things change face. The Poles, who had assembled, were defeated in several encounters, and Moscow saw itself delivered from the foreigner.
RUSSIA.
Troops of the Line.

OFFICER ON CAMPAIGN. -- COMBINED GRENADEIR. -- INFANTRY SOLDIER.