SIXTH PERIOD.

RUSSIA'S PROGRESS AS A POWER; ITS INFLUENCE IN EUROPE

(From 1689 to 1801)

CATHERINE I

We said earlier that Peter I had changed the order of succession to the throne, and that he had substituted for birthright the pure and simple choice of the sovereign. It was a big step forward in establishing despotism. It must also be said that this measure was taken in hatred of Alexis or in anticipation of his incapacity.

To whom did he destined this throne from which he wished to remove the unfortunate Czarevitch forever? Everyone in Russia thought it was Catherine, his wife; and this conjecture became a general opinion, when in 1724, a year before his death, he had her crowned with a display and a pomp which surpassed all that was said of the coronation of the former Grand Dukes. A manifesto in which Catherine's services were recalled, including her fine conduct in the Pruth affair, had been published and circulated to make known her rights to sit on the throne beside the sovereign; henceforth, no one doubted that she would remain there after his death; but soon, when her intrigue with Moens was discovered, it must have been thought that this desire of the Tsar had vanished with the affection which had given birth to it. Peter did not want to make his disgrace public; but, as we have seen, he did not take revenge. Since then, he had only spoken to his wife in public. He died a few months later, and the rumor was generally that Catherine and Menshikov had approached their last hour.

What would appear to be against Catherine and Menshikov was that by the time the Emperor expired, all steps had been taken to proclaim this princess. Peter, who did not think he was so close to his end, did not even have time to express his supreme will. It is said that he wanted to dictate them to Princess Anna, the eldest of his daughters, but that when she came, he could no longer speak. Others said that he was trying to write, but that he could only trace these words: return all... These two words, each one interpreted according to his own inclination: some in favor of Catherine, others for Princess Anna: this last supposition was the most natural, because this Princess, beautiful, virtuous, and of a superior spirit, was tenderly cherished by her father.

Also, once on the throne, Catherine seemed to want to persuade the nation that the genius of Peter I was not entirely in the tomb, and carried out several useful things, the most laudable of which was to make his will, to avoid the dangerous consequences of the law carried by her husband. However, she was not free in this act, and Menshikov, who apparently flattered himself that he would survive her, forced her to name her heir the son of the Czarevitch, under whom he hoped to reign for a long time. If this Prince died childless, the crown was to pass to Princess Anne Petrovna, wife of the Duke of Holstein, and her posterity. After Anne, was named Princess Elisabeth, and, finally, Natalia, daughter of the Czarevitch.
Catherine reigned only two years and died at the age of thirty-eight (1727), overwhelmed by the despotism of Menshikov and perhaps also undermined by remorse at seeing herself as his accomplice. This famous woman could neither read nor write; her daughter Elisabeth signed for her and signed her will.

General Gordon, who had served for a long time under Peter I, drew the portrait of this Princess in a curious way: "She was," he said, "a very pretty woman, who had good sense, but not at all this vividness of imagination which some people attributed to her. The great reason which endeared her so much to the Czar was her extreme good humor. No one ever saw her with a moment of grief or caprice. Obliging and polite with everyone, she never did not forget his first condition."

Menshikov had betrothed his daughter to Peter II, and still planned to give Natalia, sister of the young sovereign, to his son. To carry out this plan, he had to be the sole master; consequently, despising the authority of a council of regency, composed by the deceased Empress, he seized upon the mind of the Prince and exclusively dictated his wishes. So much audacity and pride had their due. The great whom he humiliates by the new splendor of his fortune; the Duke of Holstein, husband of Princess Anna; the Dolgorukovs, the Golitsyns, the Tolstoi, and the Portuguese du Vier, who directed the secret chancellery of the police; all his enemies, like his most assiduous flatterers, plotted his ruin, with the intention of putting Anna, eldest daughter of Catherine and married to the Duke of Holstein, on the throne. This project failed. Most of its authors were sent to Siberia; others suffered the knot.

But at last, the Dolgorukovs, happier, knew how to win the favor of the young Prince, and Menshikov succumbed. Stripped of all his possessions and all his honors, he was sent to Siberia, where his wife, it is said, became blind from dint of crying. Otherwise, he showed firmness and nobility of soul in his disgrace, which may astonish in a man so passionate about power and gold. He had stolen all his life; and Peter I, who had punished him a hundred times with a cane for his embezzlements, usually ended by saying: "Menshikov will always be Menshikov."

The Dolgorukovs succeeded to the favor and power of Menshikov, and, like him, conceived the design of causing Peter to marry a princess of their family. The death of the latter, carried away by smallpox, at the age of fourteen, betrayed their hopes.

From the hands of a child, the scepter of the Russian monarchs passed again into those of a woman. There were offshoots of the elder branch of the Romanovs, they were two daughters of Ivan. The youngest was chosen to the exclusion of the other, for the reason that the latter was in Moscow, and that one wanted to have a little time in front of one to prepare a shadow of a political pact with the throne and plant some barriers in front of her. The occasion seemed favorable, because Princess Anna, Dowager Duchess of Courland, had a kindness and indifference which promised respite; but she did not lack advisers, who opened her eyes to this plot against absolute power. Ostermann, whose intriguing activity had largely contributed to giving her the crown, did not allow his prerogatives to be touched.

Ostermann was the son of a Lutheran pastor, who by his talents became Chancellor of the Empire. Another foreigner then arose in favor of the sovereign and did much more harm to
Russia: it was Biren. This bloodthirsty man, who had all the measure of absolute power that Ivan IV and Peter I had granted him, was the grandson of a domestic from the stables of James III, Duke of Courland. He dyed the steps of the throne with the blood of the highest Russian nobility, to avenge himself for not having been able to be incorporated into the body of the nobility of Courland. One could not count the number of unfortunates who perished in the tortures or who underwent the most rigorous exiles, under his frightful administration. The sovereign, having become his slave, received his orders, and more than once she was seen in vain to throw herself at his feet to moderate his atrocity.

Anna Ivanovna aspired to the glory of military successes and claimed to support the influence exerted by Peter the Great, her uncle, on the fate of Poland, by forcing the diet to recognize Augustus III, elector of Saxony, to the detriment of Stanisław Leszczynski. She succeeded, thanks to the skill of Münnich. She was no less favored by fortune in her enterprises against the Tartars and the Turks; but these victories cost her best troops, and, finally, to have peace (1740), she saw herself reduced to the sacrifice of all her conquests to Thomas Kouli-Kan the provinces conquered at great expense by Peter I, and whose conservation was only onerous to the state.

Anna was scrupulous in matters of religion. A very singular example of her severity is cited, of which a Prince Golitsyn, who had become a Catholic in the course of his travels, was the victim. She forced him to marry a washerwoman and consummate his marriage on a bed of ice and in a palace of ice. This happened during the winter of 1740. Among Russian princes, ferocity is never exempt from bizarreness, and the punishments inflicted by them always have a burlesque tinge.

Anna died of gout, in delirium, and even, it is said, tormented by remorse: she thought she saw around her bed the bloody images of her victims; for those of Biren were hers. By a first will, she had called her niece, Duchess of Mecklenburg, married to the Duke of Brunswick-Luneburg, to the throne. During the course of the illness which ended her days, Biren and his creatures took advantage of the weakening of her faculties to make her sign a new will in favor of the son of this niece, named Ivan, whose youth involved the necessity of a regency. The senate, the clergy, all the great signed a request to beg Biren to accept it: this petition was presented to them by Ostermann, who had drawn it up himself, having become Biren's favorite. The latter, proud of his new power, placed an even more cruel yoke on everything around him. The weight soon became unbearable. The rivalry of Duke Ulrich of Brunswick-Luneburg, whose exclusive rights he usurped over his son, and the jealousy of Münnich, frustrated in the hope of sharing an authority that Biren owed him in part, were the causes of the fall of this man. Arrested unexpectedly and thrown into the fortress of Schlüsselburg, he left it only to find, in Siberia, the traces of the victims with whom he had peopled those deserts.

The Duchess of Brunswick succeeded her in the regency, and her husband took the general command of the troops (1741). Münnich was at the head of the councils and of the ministry; but Ostermann's landmark suggestions soon induced the regent to take away the direction of affairs from him. This act of ingratitude was still that of blind imprudence, since she was losing her strongest support.

However weak and stormy the administration of the various sovereigns who so quickly succeeded Peter I, the brilliance with which this prince had surrounded his reign spread over
them, and his name still resounded in distant countries. We saw, under the regency of the Duchess of Brunswick, the envoys of Thomas Kouli-Kan, happy usurper of the power of the Persian monarchs, coming to Moscow, asking for their master the hand of Princess Elisabeth: the fame of her beauty had struck the ear of this conqueror. A whole army followed his ambassadors, and the presents they brought were worthy of her power: fourteen elephants and jewelry of inestimable value were presented on behalf of Thomas Kouli-Kan to the princess. His proposal was rejected; but, apparently to soften this kind of insult, the presents were kept.

However, the disorders of the regent, fruits of her passion for the Count of Leynard; the misunderstanding which was not long in arising between her and her husband, that which already existed between the two ministers Golitsyn and Ostermann, prepared a new revolution. Princess Elisabeth, absorbed in devotion and love, would perhaps never would have thought of the throne, if the activity of a subordinate intriguer, the French surgeon Lestocq, aided by the policy of the French ambassador La Chétardie, had not have for a moment torn her from her shameful weaknesses, to make her cross the short space which separated her from them: however, they did not dare to tempt her until the moment when it was no longer possible for her to retreat. The imprudent haste of the main author of the plot revealed his plot. The Regent, informed of this conspiracy, had interrogated Elisabeth; and, dissuaded by her feigned tears, she had suspended all investigation; a rare thing, to see in a court a woman deceived by the tears of another woman!*

*Lestocq, informed of the discourse which Elisabeth had had with the Regent, went the following morning to see this princess: she was at her toilette. He found a card on the table, set up a crown and a wheel on it, and presented this card to Elizabeth: "Midpoint, madam," he said to her, "the one for you, the other for me." This abrupt observation fixed the Princess's irresolution.

The Regent was shut up with her husband in the castle of Schlüsselburg, and the young Ivan, her son, also passed, but with the smile of happy ignorance, from his cradle to a prison which was to be eternal. Münnich, Ostermann and Golitsyn, devoted to the Duchess of Brunswick, initially condemned to death, suffered only that of exile.

ELISABETH

Solemnly proclaimed, Elisabeth showed her gratitude to the authors of her fortune. All the grenadiers of the Preobrazhensky Regiment who had taken part in this revolution were ennobled.

By her penchant for pleasure, as by her rare beauty, Elisabeth reminded Catherine of her mother; but she was far from reproducing any of the great qualities which, in this one, redeemed the faults. In her insatiable need for voluptuousness, disdaining the constraint of the bonds of marriage, she counted quite a large number of favorites. The first was due to Alexis Razumovsky, who, from a simple grenadier in the Preobrazhensky Regiment, became grand huntsman of the crown; his brother was made Hetman of the Cossacks of the Ukraine.

A more despicable taste, that of wine and strong liqueurs, soon took away from this Princess all dignity and character. Then the treasures of the state were abandoned to the depredations of a
certain Ivan Shuvalov, a skilful flatterer who, at the price of gold, had Voltaire write of the reign of Peter I.

Bestuzhev, who did not have the rights of love over Elizabeth, was, however, of all her political guides, the one who exercised the greatest influence over her. Presented to Elisabeth by this same Lestocq whose happy boldness had wrought the last revolution, the first use he made of his credit was to lose his benefactor. Then, sold to Austria and England, Bestuzhev obtained the dismissal of the French ambassador to La Chétardie, whom he hated, and even attempted to have him assassinated.

Elisabeth then set about naming herself a successor; and by the choice she made of Peter, son of the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, and of Anna, daughter of Peter I\textsuperscript{st}, she delighted all hope in the family of Anna Ivanovna. This young Prince, who had arrived in St. Petersburg, had already sacrificed his religion, which was Lutheranism, to the flattering prospect of the throne, when the vow of the Stockholm Senate came to call him to the throne of Sweden, vacant by old age and the state of stupidity of Frederick I. He preferred to give Russia a preference which his destiny was to make fatal.

Peter soon married Sophie-August of Anhalt-Zerbst, since become more famous under the name of Catherine Alexeievnna, whom he took in embracing the Greek religion.

It was then generally believed that the King of Prussia had negotiated this marriage; but more particular motives determined Elisabeth to conclude it. She saw in the young Princess of Anhalt Zerbst the niece of a man whom she had passionately loved in her youth and who had been destined for her as a husband; perhaps she even thought she found in the charming features of Alexeievnna something of the cherished features of that Prince of Holstein-Eutin, brother of the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst. The latter, ambitious and a mother, skillfully took advantage of the empire of these tender memories over the soul of Elisabeth, to assure her daughter of the title of Grand Duchess. This union seemed at first formed under happy auspices. The young couple seemed in love with each other: the smallpox came to destroy this happiness, depriving Pierre of the advantages of a face by means of which he had known how to please. This terrible change made him unbearable in the eyes of his young wife; but already skillful in the art of feigning, she concealed from him the disgust he inspired in her: it was a sacrifice to ambition. At such a tender age, Alexeievnna was no longer a stranger to the passions whose excesses she had to bear so far.

From that moment she became the most interesting character on this stage. She was both the center and the goal of all the intrigues; and, in the character that she was able to display, we can already notice the primary cause of the great events that we will soon have to relate.

Elisabeth, on arriving at the throne, had found the war with Sweden in full swing. This war had been provoked by France, who wanted to give occupation to Russia, in order to prevent her from interfering in the great quarrel of the Austrian succession. And then Sweden had easily flattered herself that she would recover some of her losses, seeing the heritage of Peter the Great troubled by all the palace revolutions which had begun on the death of that monarch. However, thanks to the skill of General Lacy, the Russians, far from losing their reputation founded at Poltava, had only increased it from the end of the regency of the Duchess Anne of Brunswick.
Eliabeth soon gave peace to her adversaries, by forcing them to accept as king a bishop of Lübeck, who, indeed, was at the same time a duke of Holstein (1743). Thus, was realized the favorite project of Catherine I, who had strongly desired to give the throne of Sweden to this house; thus increased abroad the political consideration and importance of Russia; but at home, for lack of a vigorous hand, the administration was breaking down, and the old public maxims were dying, submerged by a new corruption.

If ever a glorious title was unworthily usurped, it was doubtless that of *most merciful princess* that Elisabeth took. On ascending the throne, she had sworn not to punish any of her subjects with death, and deceived Europe proclaimed her humanity; but there is no humanity in replacing death with torments, since, by abolishing this pain, Elisabeth allowed the torture of ordinary and extraordinary questions to continue. *Public works*, to which those condemned to death were subjected, were even more terrible punishments than capital punishment. Finally, in spite of this appearance or this inclination of clemency, the prisons, under her reign, were encumbered with unfortunates who perished while demanding a judgment, and the lords continued to execute on their peasants the punishment of the rod, more or less similar to that of the knot.

Elisabeth was gallant and devout; but her devotion was only a cruel bigotry, and her gallantry an impudent licentiousness. "*More than once,*" says Lévêque (who cannot be suspected of being too severe), "*she went to seek her lovers even among the lowest class of the populace. I have even heard it said,*" he adds, "*that she had the fancy to bring a Kalmuck into her bed, rather piqued than repelled by the particular ugliness common to this people.*"

In the midst of this overflowing life, Elisabeth was indignant when she was denounced for any violation of ecclesiastical discipline. Eating meat or butter during Lent was a crime for which there was no grace. The blasphemers had their tongues ripped out without remission, and a somewhat agile remark, held on the turpitudes of the palace, was likened to the most odious blasphemy.

**PETER III**

If the death had not preceded Elisabeth's secret designs, Peter III would probably not have succeeded her (1762). When he arrived in St. Petersburg, this Prince had found a host of enemies who had aroused his unexpected fortune. He had brought German morals and customs among the Russians; a vain enthusiasm for military glory had led him to take Frederick as his model, whom he imitated ridiculously in childish details. Dressing his great Oranienbaum in the Prussian style, Peter thought he was following in the footsteps of the great king. The weakness of his character easily delivered him to those who wished to remove him from the throne, losing him in the mind of the Empress: Chancellor Bestuzhev was the soul of this party.

The young courtiers, who had long been led by the supple genius of this minister, succeeded, by giving the Prince all the faults of which he was to be accused, to blacken him in the eyes of Elisabeth, whom his wanderings had no more than indulgence for his successor. Trained every day deeper into the trap that was being laid for him, Peter, thanks to his companions in pleasures, soon became acquainted with all the vices which the lack of primary education scarcely excuses.
among men who experience this misfortune. However, no matter how many enemies they made to him for reasons of special interest, the people still saw in Peter III the last of Peter I. The time had not come when the efforts of the new factions, united by Catherine's Machiavellianism, were to make this princess powerful enough to rush her unfortunate husband from the throne.

Since, disgusted with her husband, drinker and gambler, she had sought compensation in illegitimate liaisons, three lovers had succeeded each other in the arms of the young Grand Duchess, already a strong woman, and proportioning her consolations to her annoyances. The first had been Saltykov, chamberlain to the prince, and placed by himself near his wife to distract her. Although the penetrating gaze of the courtiers had discovered the mystery of this love, this affair played well with the princely stupidity. Irritated by the accusations whose malevolence followed her favorite, she constituted herself the advocate of his chamberlain and kept him in his double post, to the derision of the whole court.* Elisabeth was also all the more convinced that at bottom she cared little about morals, provided there was no scandal, and that shamelessness showed itself under the mask of bigotry. Besides, her taste for spirits had completely stupefied her; from one dawn to the next, she was in an almost continual bacchanalian ecstasy, and one can judge of the state of her moral faculties by the degradation which her organs had experienced, since she could no longer bear we dressed him. In the morning, when she got up, her wives would weave clothes over her, which a few blows of the scissors would cause to fall off in the evening.

* _It was the common opinion in Russia, that Paul Petrovich, who was born at this time (1754), was the fruit of this adulterous trade._

Saltykov, having abused such a complacent fortune, saw himself instantly overthrown. His disgrace was the work of Chancellor Bestuzhev, who wanted to go from favorite to master, to lose the first, to seize the other, and to maintain himself in all the places he accumulated and which made him the man most powerful in the empire. It is said that the Grand Duchess regretted her first lover until the moment when the young Poniatowski, who was to be the second*, appeared in St. Petersburg. The happiness of this one was even more ephemeral, probably because she was even more stunned. Her conceit in all measures. Elizabeth ordered him to leave Russia, and he obeyed; but the passion of the Grand Duchess and the policy of Bestuzhev soon brought him back. Poniatowski reappeared at St. Petersburg in the capacity of Minister Plenipotentiary to the King of Poland. "From then on," says Castera in his Secret Memoirs, "losing all modesty and all prudence, Catherine no longer left her favorite, and imposed so little reserve on this trade, that all the Russians accused the young Pole of being the father of the child she was carrying in her womb. This second child was the Princess Anna, to whom the Grand Duchess gave birth shortly afterwards, and who died at birth."

* _Born a simple gentleman, and devoid of fortune, but given a beautiful figure and full of ambition, Poniatowski displayed for some time in Germany and France his vague hopes. He succeeded first in Paris, where the friendship of the Swedish ambassador had given him his first distinguished connections, and then in Russia._

Such were the preludes to a tragic end! The courtiers (and among them the greatest names are to be counted), witnesses to the debasement of their masters, despised them while flattering them
with lowliness; no generous voice came out of the ranks of this nobility to warn an unhappy Prince, who alone ignored his shame, and who was thus deceived into assassinating him later without fear of public indignation. The people also saw these disorders; but he did not dare, even with a dumb look, to accuse such great scandals, thinking that bad manners might fall within the privileges of power: "so much, the Russian people cried that this historian, is made for bondage!"

Peter III eventually opened his eyes, and an angry ire erupted at his wife's love affair with the Pole. He ran for revenge on the Empress, and had Bestuzhev deposed, as having favored the deportations of the Grand Duchess. The Grand Chancellor was immediately stripped of his posts and property and found guilty of insulting his Majesty, on the pretext of giving the order to Field Marshal Apraksin to evacuate Prussia, which the Russian army had just went to invade.

From then on, Catherine, threatened by her husband's revenge, was abandoned by all the courtiers. She asked the Empress for a hearing and was refused. To her dismay, she addressed the French ambassador to plead her case: this minister did not want to take on a mission which he regarded in advance as unsuccessful. Thus, missing everything at once, she was forced to follow her husband to Oranienbaum, who no longer disguised her hatred. Poniatowski entered this castle several times in various disguises; but one day he was finally discovered and arrested. Peter first wanted to hang him; but the authority of the Empress was called in, and the Prince, depositing his anger, contemplated this adventure only on the pleasant side, and laughed at it first: such was the deplorable mobility of his impressions.

The war against the King of Prussia was resumed with more activity (1759), and the generals who replaced Apraksin, deposed, defeated the Prussians, seized several places, and finally paled the star of Frederick at Kunersdorf, where thirty-two thousand men lost their lives. The Russians, or rather the Austro-Russians (since the Austrian and Russian armies had combined their forces), took seven thousand prisoners, seized twenty-six flags, one hundred and sixty pieces of cannon, and all the baggage of the Prussian army.

The following year (1760), the Russians, under the command of Totleben, entered the capital of the King of Prussia, and at last, as Elisabeth expired, the news of the capture of Colberg, the last boulevard of that Prince, and perhaps the last refuge of his fortune, arrived in Saint Petersburg.

When the Empress Elisabeth had expired, Panin is said to have advised Peter to go to the senate to have himself proclaimed and by this step to revive the ancient usages of the nation, which, according to him, offered a further guarantee to the authority of the sovereign. He told him "that it would be much more glorious to hold the crown from the free choice of the representatives of the nation, than from the strength and venality of the soldiers, as his predecessors had done." But this advice was dictated to Panin only by perfidy and his devotion to Catherine's interests. Peter had been on the verge of following Panin's advice; but, by an effect of the irresolution, which was natural to him, having consulted other courtiers, he was diverted from this project. The old prince Troubetzkoy declared to him that the party proposed by Panin was not only dangerous, but also opposed to the customs of the empire; he said that one should neither worry about a vain formality, nor place oneself under the tutelage of an ambitious senate; and that finally, if the throne were to waver, it would not be the senate which would have the strength to strengthen it, and that it was necessary, in all things, to avoid dissatisfying the soldiers.
In the interior, the beginnings of the administration of Peter III gave the happiest hopes. In fact, he forgave all those who had offended him during the reign of Elisabeth and recalled from exile all the victims whom the vengeance of this Princess had made.

He suppressed that horrible secret chancellery, that state inquisition, the very name of which made the citizens tremble; he restored freedom to the nobility, ever more humiliated, more enslaved since the reign of Ivan Vasilyevich; he freed the serfs who vegetated on the immense domains of the clergy, by uniting its lands to the crown; he reformed the numerous abuses which had been introduced into the judicial order and into the jurisprudence hitherto followed by the tribunals; finally he occupied himself with commerce, the sciences and the arts. We see that he worked to change the ideas of the people on his account: unfortunately, all these cares, which should have won him the favor of the nation, were contradicted by his obstinacy to introduce into his court and into his camps the German military morals. He had already sacrificed to this mad chimera all the calculations of a sound policy; he had restored his towns to the King of Prussia and had even granted him indemnities for his defeats; in a word, Frederick, beaten, had obtained from his enthusiastic disciple such advantages that he would not have dared to ask for them if he had been victorious.

Catherine, aided by her partisans, had skillfully taken advantage of all these faults to establish, by contrary conduct, her popularity. Shortly before the death of the Empress, yielding to the necessity of obtaining a reconciliation which was to rehabilitate her, she renounced Poniatowski, and appeared unexpectedly one evening at the theater, seated next to the sovereign, astonishing by her presence a court which had struck her with the most insulting oblivion. After the death of the Empress, she had shown herself assiduously in the churches, she had affected the national morals, and had been recommended by the clergy, who had never ceased to see in Peter III only a Protestant.

Poniatowski had not been slow to have a successor in the affections of the Grand Duchess: a third intrigue occupied Catherine before the death of the Empress Elisabeth, and no one yet suspected it at court. Grigory Orlov, this new lover, occupied only an obscure rank in the guards; but, if he had not the advantage of an illustrious birth, he held from nature the gifts which could replace them: a male beauty and an intrepid heart. Foreseeing for a long time the fate that her husband reserved for him, because of his disorders, Catherine, who only aspired to seize the reins of government, had communicated to him her secret designs, and had made him the most determined of conspirators, for there is little distance, for a subject, between defiling the bed of his sovereign and laying his hand on his crown.

Peter III had been meditating, in fact, to confine his wife, since he knew that, for the third time, she bore in her womb the fruit of her guilty loves. He had visited Prince Ivan in the fortress of Schlüsselburg, and it was generally thought that it was with the intention of calling him to the throne after him; but it appears that this unfortunate man, stricken with madness by the effect of his long captivity, could not respond to his views. It was then, it is said, that Peter cast his eyes on his uncle, Prince George of Holstein, whom he called to his court and showered with honors. This choice was hardly suited to flatter the wishes of the nation, since it was a foreigner who was introducing another.
In any case, Peter, on the verge of campaigning against Denmark, did not want to leave St. Petersburg until he had thrown Catherine into a state prison, and declared his son Paul illegitimate. Peter Petrovich had become, as we have said, enemies in all classes of the nation by his German preferences. While he was thus lost in public opinion, Catherine, serenity forefront, plotted, with infernal activity, her regicidal plots. She had succeeded in having Orlov appointed captain of the artillery quartermaster, and by this means disposed of the body of the corps at her whim. What would prove that she was preparing her resources for a long time is that Orlov had been promoted to this position before the death of Empress Elisabeth, that is, when this new liaison was still a secret, even for Catherine's friends.

Hetman Razumovsky and Count Peter entered the conspiracy. The ambassadors of the courts of Vienna, Versailles, and Copenhagen favored her. Lastly, these various ministers had spent a lot of money to support the upcoming revolution: "Now," says one writer, "if there is any Russian who can resist flattery, there is no one know how to resist money."

The conspirators deliberated for quite some time on how to carry out the plot. It was, above all, a question of how to get rid of the Emperor. Razumovsky and Orlov wanted him taken to Peterhof Palace, as a result of one of the orgies by which he must certainly have come to celebrate St. Peter's. Count Panin himself had gone to reconnoiter the apartment to carry out this kidnapping more easily. Lieutenant Passeck, one of Orlov's friends and the most ferocious of all the hand-men who had been assembled, asked to stab the Tsar in the middle of his whole court, and twice in a row, it is said, he laid in wait himself in the gardens of the palace to better execute this ambush, in spite of the defense which Panin had made of him.

The festivities had begun in Peterhof, when one of the conspirators, Passeck, was arrested, for some reason. Everyone else shuddered. However, a decisive part had to be taken.

An invincible fatality seemed to lead to his loss of the unfortunate Peter. Warned several times that a conspiracy was being made against him, he despised all warnings, even those which came to him from the King of Prussia; for it was known in Berlin what was going on in St. Petersburg. The Tsar replied to the monarch's agents, "Listen, if you are my friends, do not touch this rope."

The conspirators therefore resolved unanimously to act immediately so as not to leave to the Tsar the will and time to warn them. Grigory Orlov, one of his brothers, and his friend Bibikov went to the barracks to prepare their party's soldiers for the first signal, while another of Orlov's brothers, Alexis, ran to Peterhof to fetch the Empress.

On the eve of the triumph or torture, this young woman slept peacefully! The pavilion where she had stayed was at the end of the gardens, on the shores of the Gulf of Finland. This place was called the Monplaisir Pavilion. There, in order to be better able to escape, in case of failure, she had a canoe put on, which, in the meantime, was used for the night visits of her lovers. Grigory Orlov, giving his brother a key to the pavilion, made known to him the secret detours which might lead him there more promptly, and Madame Daschkoff handed him a note on which a few words had been hastily drawn.
It was two o'clock in the morning when Alexis Orlov arrived near the Tsarina's bed, who woke up and saw a soldier she did not know. "Your Majesty," said he, "has not a moment to lose; let her prepare to follow me." And at once he disappeared.

Catherine, astonished, called Ivanovna, one of her ladies; both dressed and disguised themselves so as not to be recognized by the sentries guarding the palace. As soon as they were ready, the soldier would take them and get them into a carriage waiting at the garden gate; Alexis grabbed the reins: they leave.

The exhaustion of the horses, in a hurry, forced Catherine to complete the walk; at last, overwhelmed with fatigue, but still in control of herself, she arrived at St. Petersburg at seven o'clock in the morning.

She immediately went to the Izmaylovsky Guards Quarter, where three companies were won over. At the sound of the Empress's arrival, the soldiers rushed in and surrounded her, shouting loudly. She told them in an altered voice that the most pressing danger had forced her to come and ask them for help; that the Tsar wanted to kill her and her son that very night; that she had been able to escape death only by flight, and that she had relied on their fidelity enough to get back into their hands.

The soldiers, trembling with indignation, answered her, all swearing to die for her. In the midst of this moving crowd, the chaplain of the Izmaylovsky Regiment was brought in, and this priest, with a crucifix in his hand, received the oath of troops. Thus, sanctified by religion, all that was needed for the revolt was to succeed in being a victory.

It was only too successful: the contagion was rapid among the troops. A single regiment of artillery resisted; and, in spite of the presence and the solicitations of Orlov, awaited the orders of the general who commanded it: it was a Frenchman named Villebois, who at least yielded only after many others. The lords who were in St. Petersburg learned, on their awakening, of the conspiracy and its success altogether. They hastened to come and pay homage to the sovereign. Catherine, dressed in the uniform of the guards, after traversing the ranks on horseback, went to the palace which the Empress Elisabeth had occupied; she dined there before an open window, constantly raising toasts to the people, who, touched by the excess of so much kindness, fell on their knees while proclaiming, in the intoxication of their happiness, the name of their virtuous sovereign.

But, while in less than two hours he thus lost the crown and the empire, what was the unfortunate Peter doing? He came gaily in a carriage, from Oranienbaum to Peterhof, followed by playful youth and charming women, still giddy with the pleasures of the day before, and noisily projecting those of the morrow. He was about to arrive, when a peasant handed him a note in which he gave him the disastrous news. Only one man, an obscure servant had remembered Peter, and had sent him this salutary advice had it not been too late: this faithful servant was again a Frenchman.

Dismayed at what he had just read, Peter did not seek resources in the zeal of friends still attached to his cause and did not accept any of the energetic advice given to him by them.
Weaker than the herd of feeble women who surrounded him, he persuaded himself that the audacious Catherine might consent to use her victory only halfway, and he let Count Vorontsov, his mistress's brother, who was eagerly offered to go and negotiate a reconciliation, but who, in reality, was only in a hurry to take shelter, by submitting to the Empress. In fact, he stayed with her.

Münnich proposed to the Czar to put himself at the head of three thousand Holstein soldiers, who were at Oranienbaum, and to march to St. Petersburg. This vigorous party frightened the courtiers, and one of them opened the more prudent advice to go to Kronstadt, where there would be a powerful fleet and a place defended by the sea. A general officer went ahead to announce the Czar; but when he arrived with his retinue, his envoy was already a prisoner, and when he himself, answering that Who goes there? of the sentinel, said: I, the Emperor! --"There is no more emperor! replied the soldier. And, indeed, to confirm this sinister reply, the fully armed garrison lined the shore, and the silence was broken only by the unanimous cry of Long live Catherine! and by the threat made by Admiral Talyisin, to shoot the yacht if it did not move away. At this injunction, Peter, terrified, recoiled; but his aide-de-camp, Goudowitch, stopped him, saying: "Sire, put your hand in mine and let us jump down; no one will dare to fire on us, and Kronstadt will be your Majesty's." Münnich supported this generous advice; but Peter, unable to understand him, ran to take refuge in the cabin of the yacht, in the midst of distraught women; they didn't even give themselves time to raise the anchor, they cut the cable and sailed away.

The Czar could still pass into Sweden, put himself at the head of the army which was in Pomerania, fight and sit down again, victorious, on his usurped throne. A prince endowed with courage would have found a hundred means of saving his crown and avenging his injury; but weak Peter only listened to the suggestions of fear. Still flattering himself that a reconciliation with Catherine would be possible, he returned to Oranienbaum. As for Catherine, during all these hesitations of her husband, she pursued the course of her impudent happiness. Crowned in the morning in the church of Kazan, in the evening she had mounted her horse for the second time; and, with bared sword in her hand, an oak wreath on her forehead, she placed herself at the head of the troops drunk with joy and brandy. Her triumph was no longer in doubt: those whom the uncertainty of events had hitherto detained rushed in crowds after him.

A manifesto, which was kept ready in advance, was profusely distributed. Catherine there justified her usurpation in the name of the interests of Russia, by imputing to her husband the project of introducing Protestantism into her States. It is said that in this manifesto she spoke of her husband's bad morals: it was Messalina insulting Claudius.

Peter, so quickly fallen, returned to his capital to exhaust the chalice of humiliations. As he crossed the ranks of his soldiers who had just dethroned him, he heard them shout: Long live Catherine! His friends were outrageously kidnapped and insulted at his side and himself, who could believe it? stripped of his orders, of his clothes, barefoot and in his shirt, remained for some time on the grand staircase of the palace, exposed to the derision of an unbridled soldiery!... He was finally imprisoned and entrusted to a safeguard.
Soon Count Panin came to present him with an act of abdication, which he signed. Never did a sovereign fallen from the throne sign a renunciation conceived in more dishonorable terms; never had the anger of the people reduced the person of a king to such extremities. In this abdication, Peter recognized his incapacity for government, confessed his faults, and promised never to seek to remount the throne. As soon as this infamous act was signed, the prince was taken to the castle of Ropsha, and the next day Catherine received the homage of the courtiers and women of the court who, the day before, had formed the suite of her unfortunate husband.

It was then that it was judged that usurpation could only be consolidated by a bloody sacrifice. Alexis, Grigory Orlov's brother, went with one of his own to Peter's prison; they offered the Prince to drink with them: having accepted the proposal, they poured into the prince's glass, instead of brandy, a violent poison with which they had been provided. However, Peter, unraveling the crime in the taste of the drink, refused to continue drinking and shouted for milk. At once the two villains called on Bovialensky, who commanded the post, for help, and the unfortunate monarch was strangled.

After the consummation of this murder, Grigory Orlov rushed to St. Petersburg and unexpectedly appeared before the Empress, in the midst of his court, pale, frightened, and trembling. Catherine received him calmly, scolded him softly on the childishness of his emotion, and at once shut herself up with him, Panin, Razumovsky and a few others. In this sinister council it was resolved that Peter's death should not be made public until the next day; then Catherine reappeared serenely in the middle of her court, and dined in public with remarkable gaiety; which made the flatterers say, "that no sovereign has ever shone better than the triple radiance of the graces of youth and goodness!" The next day the Empress announced the death of the former emperor, while she was at the table. Interrupting her meal at once, she burst into tears, dismissed everyone, retired to her apartment, and for several days gave all the marks of deep pain.

But soon, through a ukase, she announced to her people that the will of the Almighty had reminded her of Peter III. "This play," says Castera, "is a masterpiece of hypocrisy. No one was fooled by this bold lie. The marks of poison and strangulation were of awful evidence on the body of this unfortunate Prince, who was exposed in public to annihilate any pretext for revolt*.

It would have been a great opportunity, however, for a generous nation to rise en masse and stifle, in the blood of all these golden assassins, the beginning of such a fateful reign.

*It was publically announced that the death was from a colic of misery.