SIXTH PERIOD

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

(From 1689 to 1801)

CATHERINE II

When, by the assassination of Peter III (1762), the revolution was consummated, the recognition of the sovereign broke out with regard to the accomplices. The two Orlov, Grigory and Alexis, were made counts. Panin had the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the others were also rewarded. It was not even the doctor who made the poison that had been swallowed up by the dethroned prince, who did not have his share of the graces of the august sovereign: for having poisoned his father, he was appointed first physician of the son, that is, of the young Grand Duke Paul.

Weakened for a long time and torn apart by the perpetual dissensions of a turbulent aristocracy, Poland had seen new germs of discord ferment within it by the obstinacy of a Catholic majority to outlaw dissident Poles; so were the Poles who shared the Lutheran religion, and even those who, more boldly, professed the heresy renewed by the Sozzini, that is, who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. Catherine took the dissidents under her protection in order to set fire to Poland: she was only too successful.

The end of Augustus III, which was presumed to be imminent, singularly favored a new revolution. All particular ambitions were agitated, and the court of St. Petersburg, where it was foreseen that the fate of this republic would be decided, became the home of all intrigue. Catherine had already resolved her plan. It began by obtaining, under special pretexts, that the courts of Austria and France would not emerge from a strict neutrality with regard to the affairs of Poland. A treaty of offensive and defensive alliance, which Frederick desired, was the prize she placed on the same promise from this prince. As the tracks were thus prepared, greed and the fears at stake operated the rest. The swords of the Russian officers, shining insolently in the sanctuary of dietary deliberations, suspended the free expression of the general will; and, in spite of the opposition of a few brave patriots, Poniatowski was elected king of the Poles (1764).

Once on the throne, he wanted to be king, and not betray the wishes of a generous nation. He formed a few useful establishments, and seemed to want to reorganize the deplorable administration, the sad fruit of long misdeeds; but Catherine proved to him that he was still only a favorite, that is, a slave on the throne, and paralyzed all his efforts. Her desire to see him again was attributed to her recent trip to Livonia. She had stronger motives. No matter how much confidence she had in her fortune, she felt she had to sacrifice many more victims to her personal safety; moreover, one crime gave rise to another, and the road on which it had embarked was the one on which it was most difficult to stop. The real purpose of his journey was the death of Ivan.

Then shut up in Schlüsselburg, this Prince was in his twenty-fourth year. He possessed a noble and touching figure, a tall stature, an inexpressible sweetness in sound of voice and manners, and
all that nature can add to great misfortune to excite interest and soften the most insensitive hearts. We have said that the weakness of his intelligence was close to idiocy, which could not appear surprising, since this unfortunate Prince had never known any abode other than his prison.

A brigand named Mirovich came out of the ranks of the Russian soldiers to serve Catherine's designs. He was promised everything he wanted. He was to attempt a feigned abduction of the Prince, and the officers guarding him, warned by an order signed by the Empress, were to kill him on the first attempt that occurred. The crime was thus executed: Ivan's two guards, Vlaffief and Ushakov, seeing that Mirovich was about to break down the doors of the Prince's prison, threw themselves sword in hand on him, who, naked and in his shirt, nevertheless defended himself with incredible vigor; but finally he succumbed under the blows of these wretches; then they opened the door, and, showing to Mirovich and his soldiers the bloody body of the prince, said to them: "Here is your emperor!" The assassins fled to Denmark, where they found a safe haven with the Russian ambassador. Mirovich, arrested, appeared before the judges with a calmness which testified to his foolish credulity, and was not deceived until the axe, by knocking off his head, gave him the measure of the recognition which the instruments of great crimes must expect from those who commanded them. The pain suffered by Mirovich did not avert the suspicions of the real author of this odious plot. Everyone was expecting everything to go wrong, and all eyes, like the interest of the nation, turning on the young Paul Petrovich, presaged an equally disastrous fate for him.

However, the powers, deceived by Catherine on the subject of Poland, had had time to penetrate her designs. She herself no longer concealed them and had Repnin, her ambassador, deliver to the Diet of Warsaw a declaration equivalent to an order in favor of the dissidents. The court of France, more indignant than alarmed at her ambition, thought of instigating a war with the Turks. The Duke of Choiseul had conceived the idea, the skill of the Count of Vergennes implemented it. The fixing of the respective limits of the States of Poland and of the Turkish provinces was the subject of a first explanation, which the complacency of Poniatowski for Catherine was able at first to elude (1767).

It was at the same time that, aspiring to all kinds of celebrity, Catherine composed instructions to serve as the basis for a new system of legislation. All the nations of the vast Russian empire were called upon to contribute, through the organ of their deputies, to the completion of this great work. Moscow was seen to unite within its walls the inhabitants of the banks of the Irtysch and those of the ice of the pole: the astonishment of these men was great to find themselves together. The instructions of the Empress, solemnly read in this great assembly, merited for her the magnificent titles of great, prudent, and mother of the country. However, trembling at having imprudently given to the representatives of these peoples a power which could become fatal to her power, she hastened to separate them. Gold medals were struck to immortalize the memory of their vain gathering; most of these medals immediately passed from the hands of the savage deputies who had received them, into those of the goldsmiths of Moscow.

The war provoked by the French ministers Choiseul and Vergennes had begun on the frontiers of Turkey. The Ottomans first had the advantage under the ramparts of Khoczin (Chotin); Prince Gallitzin experienced two successive defeats there. However, the Russian troops regained that superiority which belongs to art and discipline even more than to bravery, and Catherine,
impatient to reach the end of a war whose outcome was to give for all of Europe the measure of her forces and to fix her rank among the powers, wanted, by attacking in the seas of Greece the Ottomans, already vanquished by Rumyantsev and Repnin on the banks of the Borysthenes and the Danube, to crush them at a single blow and prepare thus a resounding triumph.

Intoxicated with ambition and no longer seeing anything impossible, Catherine flattered herself from then on that she would carry out the great project from which she had drawn the first idea in her conversations with the enterprising Münnich: that of driving the Turks out of Europe, and to restore to the fatherland of the Themistocles and the Philopoemen its ancient freedom; but fortune did not favor her generals; such a fine revolution must have been the work of more skillful and purer hands. Catherine's intervention was only fatal to the Greeks and only served to cover the Morea with tombs.

At the beginning of 1771, the formidable lines of Perekop were but a vain obstacle to the boldness of Prince Dolgorukov, whom the capture of this place rendered master of all the Crimea. But at the same time a terrible scourge came to punish the Russians for their successes: the plague, brought from Bender to Moscow, ravaged several provinces of the Empire: and the furious superstition of the inhabitants increased the intensity of the evil. Grigory Orlov offered to brave this double danger and subject this blind and unfortunate people to useful measures. He managed to stop the progress of the contagion: it was undoubtedly the most glorious moment of his life.

Catherine finally began the dismemberment of Poland (1775). We have said that she had long been in agreement with the King of Prussia; the court of Vienna yielded to the influence of the court of Berlin. As for France, she was represented, in her foreign relations, by the Duke d'Aiguillon, whose superior genius was not to be feared; the Ottomans not being to be feared, Catherine saw her ambition surrounded by impunity.

The Poles, invaded by the allied armies, made their indignation burst out, and demanded with loud cries the intervention of the powers guaranteeing the Treaty of Oliva, by which the integrity of their territory had been assured. However, not content with having invaded Poland by force of arms, these three powers still wanted a Diet to solemnly recognize them as legitimate masters of the provinces which they had ravished, in defiance of the sacred rights of nations. This Diet assembled; and, in spite of the resistance of the majority of its members, terror soon completed what corruption had begun, and in order not to see the capital plundered, the nobles, disconcerted, delivered up the State. But these advantages, of which Catherine was proud, were cruelly balanced: the plague continued its ravages in the south of her Empire; and, while she acquired eighteen hundred thousand unsecured subjects in Poland, the inhumanity of her governors caused her to lose six hundred thousand in Russia (1774). The whole horde of the Tunguses, even more indignant at the outrages done to their venerable chief than at the plunder which despoiled them, abandoned an inhospitable soil and masters without justice, to go and retake, at the foot of the mountains of Tibet, the pastures of their fathers. During this time, jealous of obtaining the votes of the famous men of the century, Catherine affected in her correspondence virtues and above all a political moderation which were always foreign to her. Voltaire and Diderot were more than once invited by her to go to her court. Voltaire, already
sufficiently informed by his trip to Berlin of the value of these august friendships, did not allow himself to be taken in and continued his cajoling from a distance.

At this time a new favorite appeared, more dangerous for Orlov than the timid Vasilchikov, who had just been dismissed: it was Potemkin. Of all those who have had the favor of Catherine, none has taken a greater part in the events of her reign or has more intimately associated her name with that of this sovereign. They almost shared among themselves the exercise of the supreme power, and perhaps posterity will apportion to them, in equal proportion, the praise or the blame which the acts of that power have since deserved.

Potemkin aspired, like Orlov, to the Empress's marriage; but this Princess was herself too despotic in character not to fear a master. At this time, that is to say in the course of the year 1778, she made a journey to Moscow; and, on her return, she gave a successor to Potemkin, called Zavadovsky, who was himself soon replaced by Zorich, of whom we shall speak again presently.

Catherine had found it too painful, since she had ascended the throne, to cover her pleasures with that veil with which human respect at least tries to entangle itself, when a natural modesty has not formed its fabric; but she had subjected her disorders to forms whose regularity consecrated them, in her court, as a prerogative attached to the crown. There was a way to install a favorite, and to dismiss him when he ceased to please. His life, his habits in the palace, everything was determined by this scandalous legislature of the boudoir. Never was the crowned vice flaunted with more proud impudence. Never were the ideas on which public honesty rests more openly trampled underfoot. Every young man endowed with a male beauty became the hope of his family, and one saw a hundred rivals every day, aspiring to the easy kindnesses of their sovereign, displaying in his path their athletic appearance and the bold forehead of the wrestler who strikes. the challenge and demand the fight.

When the titular favorite had ceased to please, he was to leave immediately and, satisfied with the liberalities which usually accompanied his dismissal, resign his duties to the new favorite without a murmur; the latter, the day after his presentation, appeared in public and gave his arm to the Empress.

Potemkin was the first who dared to infringe custom, by remaining at court despite the Empress's order, when Zavadovsky caught her eye. Potemkin believed, in losing the rights of lover, that he still had other titles to his sovereign's attachment. He was not mistaken, and his temerity preserved for him all that others lost by quitting their singular employment, that is to say, honors, dignities and credit.

Potemkin, who knew Catherine's inconstant ardor, took advantage of it to lose those of the favorites who seemed ambitious. Zavadovsky, more reckless or more imprudent than the others, wanted to enter the lists of intrigue with this formidable adversary: he succumbed. Potemkin had him replaced by a young Serbian, named Zorich, a simple officer of the hussars, and who, having come to Petersburg to ask for promotion, owed to the elegance of his bearing a fortune which the noblest exploits would not have earned him.
However, the Turks, ashamed of the conditions to which the victories of Rumyantsev had subjected them, took advantage of the usurpations of Catherine, in the Crimea, to break the Treaty of (Küçük) Kaynarca (1778). New disensions, new interests arose in Europe; and, in order not to engage in another war with the Porte time and forces the use of which she could apply to more important objects, Catherine signed the convention of Constantinople (1779), which consecrated the independence of the Crimea and annulled its claims to Wallachia and Moldavia. However, these were still only temporary and provisional measures.

For a long time, jealous of the English in the North Seas, she had felt that she could at least, with as many rights as they, arrogate exclusive navigation and finally free the trade of Russia from the obstacles born of the privileges granted at all times to the subjects of Great Britain. The French ministers Vergennes and Saint-Priest skillfully profited by these provisions of Catherine and knew how to acquire rights to her recognition by employing, in her favor, at the time of her treaty with the Turks, their credit with the Divan. The naval confederation, which soon after was formed under the name of armed neutrality (1780), was again a result of the skill of the Comte de Vergennes.

But the great project of the Eastern Empire was still the Czarina's favorite dream and Potemkin's hope. This one flattered himself to obtain this immense viceroyalty, and probably to start then a new dynasty of Greek emperors. He advised Catherine to bring Joseph II into the plan of invading the Crimea; for that was where he had to begin, and that was the reason for the trip to Mohilev, where Joseph appeared under the name of Count of Falkenstein (1781).

We have hitherto seen Catherine faithful to the ambitious principles of Peter I, whose genius she seemed to wish to resuscitate in order to merit an equal renown; now, apparently forgetting the policy of this monarch, she was going to seek the alliance of a power hated and despised by him. She sent ambassadors to Rome, she announced the design of protecting the Jesuits and supporting them against their enemies; she offered asylum of her empire to those men proscribed by the various sovereigns of Europe; she showed them her throne as a rallying point.

To the creation of the monuments which perpetuate the glory of Peter I, Catherine added the institution of those decorations which encourage one to deserve them: the order of Saint-Georges and that of Saint-Vladimir owe their creation to her.

But, always to follow her great projects, she founded towns on the road which was to lead her to Constantinople (1783). That of Kherson, whose name awakens poetic memories, owed in part its rapid birth, its forty thousand inhabitants, its yards and its vassals, to the active ambition of Potemkin. We see that Catherine finally carried out the invasion of the Crimea. Instead of running to arms, the Turks amused themselves by responding to the manifesto in which it insulted the most sacred rights, by invoking them to consecrate the spoliation which had preceded the slaughter of thirty thousand Tartars of all ages and sexes, commanded by Potemkin and executed by a general who bore his name.

The Turks, frightened by the number of troops already assembled on their frontiers, preferred to negotiate rather than fight; but they lost, by the last treaty signed at Constantinople (1784), all that new defeats might have cost them. The Crimea, the island of Taman and almost all of Kuban
remained with the Empress. She owed these advantages to Potemkin, to whom she gave the nickname of Tauric. The credibility and glory of this favorite seemed at this moment to attain their highest degree. The death of Panin, and especially that of Grigory Orlov, left him without rivals; the first died overwhelmed by his disgrace; and Orlov, if we believe the rumors which were spread, owed to the perfidy of Potemkin a still more deplorable end: the most dreadful insanity, attributed to poison, carried him to the tomb.

The peace which she had just concluded with the Turks left Catherine the possibility of pursuing the execution of the projects which Peter had made in Persia. For a century, this empire, always prey to revolutions, favored, by the respective pretensions of the usurpers who tore each other within, the views of enemies from outside. The Czarina protected one of these ambitious factions, but her plan could not be realized; and, in spite of the vessels with which she had peopled the Caspian Sea, she could not succeed in establishing solid relations with these countries.

Carried away by the rapid succession of political events, we for a moment lost sight of the intrigues and revolutions of the seraglio, for this word alone suits the court of Catherine. Disgusted with Zorich, by the ignorance of this young Serbian, the Empress gave him a successor after a year. It was Korsakov, since general under Paul I, in the war with France. Simple sergeant in the guards, the latter had received no education, nature had not endowed him with any spirit. He had affairs with the beautiful Countess of Bruce, friend and favorite of Catherine, and their imprudence furnished the Empress with the most mortifying proof of what she would have refused to believe. Lansky succeeded Korsakov. Of all these lovers he was the most beloved and must have been, since the development of his mind was the work of Catherine's care.* He died in the prime of his years. Catherine seemed inconsolable; it is said that on emerging from the long sadness into which this loss had plunged her, she secretly married Potemkin, brought back to her by the tender efforts he had made to snatch her from her despair. He alone was permitted to interrupt the solitude to which she devoted herself for three months in the palace of Tsarskoye Selo. Be that as it may, Potemkin did not prove jealous of spousal rights; and, from that moment, on the contrary, he openly included among his attributions those of steward of the pleasures of the Empress: henceforth also his despotism was complete.

*He also outweighed all the others in his outward advantages. Never had one seen more beautiful features, a more seductive expression, a nobler and more elegant figure; in a word, more perfections united in a man.

After having conquered the Crimea, to which she restored the ancient name of Tauride, Catherine wanted to visit this province. This voyage was one of the most singular examples of the efforts flattery can make to deceive and amuse kings. We have spoken of a great lord who, to pleasantly surprise Louis XIV, caused the trees of a vast forest to fall in one night, which had displeased the monarch; but this fact is only a small courtesan's gallantry, in comparison with what Potemkin had executed gigantically. The course of the Dnieper, hitherto by enormous rocks forming cataracts called the leaps of Borysthenes, was, by immense works, cleared of these obstacles, and offered the fifty galleys which carried the sovereign and her retinue an easy navigation. Both sides of the river presented the liveliest and most animated spectacle.
imaginable. Villages and, on more remote levels, well-built towns, happy populations everywhere mixing songs and dances with rustic work, numerous herds, an unequivocal pledge of ease and prosperity; everything conspired to give the highest idea of the happiness of these countries: Catherine was enchanted.

But the whole picture was only a vain shadow evoked for a moment in the middle of a desert by the gold of Potemkin. These distant cities were miserable stage decorations; these villages built for one day were destroyed the next day; these people, so gay, so happy, caught at great distances, walked under the stick, to go from stage to stage to reproduce in the eyes of the Czarina, under new costumes, their misery disguised as contentment and their tears as cries of joy. They were leaving and the sad silence of the desert took over all its rights on this ground, a moment amazed at their presence.

Arrived at Kherson, Catherine read on the side of the East Gate a Greek inscription which meant: "It is here that it is necessary to pass to go to Byzantium." There were in this city a large number of foreigners who all seemed to come to adorn this triumphal journey; there were Greeks, Tartars, French, Belgians, Spaniards, English, Poles, etc.*

*Among the French were Edouard Dillon and Alexandre Lameth.

After these superb celebrations, the sovereign returned to her capital to know the sad state of her finances and to hear the painful cries of her subjects oppressed by famine. The peace imposed on the Ottomans was hardly less necessary to Russia because of the poor state of her finances; Repnin was ordered to conclude it. Potemkin, humiliated by the glory which his successor had just received, hastened in vain to rush to Moldavia to prevent the signing of the treaty. Everything was over when he arrived in Iași. He left full of vexation to go to Ochakov, his conquest; but before arriving there, fate had concluded with itself; he expired in the countryside at the foot of a tree, being still only fifty years old.

We believe we should add a few details about this extraordinary man. Child of caprice, he had all the vices that such a fortune supposes, and never was a satrap of Asia more irritable and more haughty. He had the stupid contempt for foreigners that characterizes the lower classes of his nation. Several French emigrants, who had distinguished themselves sufficiently at the siege of Ochakov to deserve the marks of his esteem and his gratitude, experienced only the effects of his brutality.* Conversing with them one day on the French Revolution, Potemkin had the impudence to say, addressing Langeron: "Colonel, your compatriots are mad; I would only need my grooms to bring them to their senses." The emigrant, indignant, answered him proudly: "Prince, I do not believe that you can succeed there with all your army." At these words, Potemkin rose angrily and threatened Langeron to send him to Siberia. This prime minister often got so angry as to hit his general officers: one day he slapped a foreign major because, in the presence of his mistress, he praised the beauty of another woman.

* Counts Roger de Damas and Langeron; the Duke of Richelieu.

Potemkin's fortune was immense and came solely from gifts from his sovereign. On one occasion only, that is to say on her return to St. Petersburg, after the campaign against the Turks,
she presented him with a palace, estimated at six hundred thousand rubles, and a coat embroidered with diamonds which cost at least two hundred thousand. There was something gigantic about his personal luxury; his table usually cost a thousand rubles a day: it was also covered with the most delicate dishes and the rarest fruits. He needed cherries in the heart of winter; he bought them for up for a ruble a piece*. When he gave parties, he threw money at the people; but, in the midst of so much magnificence, this savage Lucullus never paid his debts. Finally, to complete to paint this great lord with bare legs, as he was popularly called in Russia**, he brought together all the titles, all the distinctions, all the good fortune and all the wealth that the first subject in the Muscovite empire could possess, unless to be a brother of the sovereign or his heir presumptive.

*Physical intemperance was, like moral exaggeration, one of the salient features of Potemkin's organization. He ate a whole goose, a sirloin or a ham for his breakfast; drank a prodigious quantity of wine and spirituous liquor, and then dined with the same voracity.

**Because he was usually, at home, in the greatest negligee, and his legs were bare at all times, even when he received illustrious foreigners or ministers, his colleagues.

To achieve such a brilliant fortune, Potemkin had needed neither great talents nor great qualities; he had only needed a beautiful face and an athletic constitution: the weaknesses of a woman did the rest. When this golden-fronted colossus was overthrown, those who had long adored him blushed with their respect: talent than intrigue, would have so long dominated the empress and the empire.

Despite his carelessness and negligence, the death of this man created a great void in the administration of affairs, which he had directed for so long. Several ministers were called by Catherine to carry this burden. Berbosodko, who had worked under Potemkin; the favorite Platon Zubov, who aspired to pass from the boudoir into the political cabinet, and Nicolas Soltykoff, shared the task. A few others, without being entitled, exercised much influence; we cite, among others, an intriguer named Markov, whom Platon Zubov had made his guide in this new career. It was in one of the frequent councils where these statesmen discussed the interests of the Empire that the final partition and the absolute ruin of Poland was decided.

Catherine could not forgive the Polish nation for the acts by which that nation had wished to preserve its existence and attempted to raise its dignity, since the invasion of 1775. These acts were the abrogation, by the national diet of 1788, of the constitution that the perfidy of some despoilers had violently imposed on the Poles, at this first period of their misfortunes; the alliance which they had recently contracted with Prussia, and the promulgation of a new constitution, which, still more recently (1791), had just taken place; finally, she committed an irremissible crime against the nation to applaud the republican principles which were triumphing in France.

Then, independently of the Empress's personal passions, there were other reasons in her which made the ruin of this unhappy country inevitable: it was necessary to satisfy the greed of this crowd of men who thronged the steps of the throne, and whom their immense depredations, while exhausting the treasury of Russia, had nevertheless not enriched, so much a scandalous
Prodigality had become fashionable under the reign of the magnificent Catherine. Before the destiny of Poland was fixed, they already divided it among themselves, by obtaining, by special laws, the lands, and castles which they found suitable. The Russian came, imperial ukase in hand, to chase from his home the peaceful Pole, who, not having emigrated, saw himself reduced to abandoning his inheritance, and dragging his wife, his children, and his misery far away. Spoliations of this kind were innumerable.

When this new invasion had been announced to the Diet, by a declaration of war, the whole nation burst into patriotic enthusiasm. However, the Poles could hardly put more than thirty thousand men under arms, while one hundred and twenty thousand Russians advanced to annihilate them. In twenty combats, the most intrepid valor triumphed over number, and supplied the resources. Peasants armed with scythes routed whole battalions of Russians, and never did a nation expiring on the field of battle prepare itself for a more glorious agony. It was then that the famous Kosciuszko acquired his fine reputation, and after having fought and struggled with a constancy forever worthy of admiration, he only surrendered his arms by falling in the midst of his own, bloody and pierced with blows. All that survived this last day of Maciejowice shut themselves up in the suburb of Praga and were pursued there by General Suvorov. We know that this ferocious general, having made himself master of this capital, put to the sword not only the soldiers, but all the inhabitants who were there, without distinction of sex or age. More than twenty thousand individuals were slaughtered, and the rearguard of Suvorov's army corps marched in blood all along the suburb to enter Warsaw. On hearing of this massacre, Catherine was in bed, the courier having arrived during the night; she got up, and running, half-naked, to her wives' apartment, she shouted to them with exaltation: "Get up! I am avenged, the Poles no longer exist!"

The courts of Petersburg and Berlin divided up the remains of Poland. Stanislaus Augustus, this Prince whose royalty, the work of the Czarina, seemed to have been nothing but a mockery, was relegated to Grodno, where he lived in obscurity on a pension which was granted him by the Empress, while Repnin, appointed governor-general of the invaded Polish provinces, established there the splendor of a sovereign.

The destruction of Poland completely changed the political system of the North, destroying the Treaties of Oliva and Moscow, on which this system rested. The barrier which these treaties had established between Russia, Prussia, and Austria, was thus thrown down; and these powers, previously separated from each other by vast provinces, became immediate neighbors.

After having recounted Catherine's all too successful attacks on Poland, it remains for us to say those which she meditated against France, whose nascent freedom and republican regime were in her eyes "an odious attempt against the thrones of Europe." We know that she welcomed and encouraged illustrious emigrants, and that she even provided aid for the success of this monarchical crusade of which, at her instigation, Gustav III was to be the leader; but then this prince had perished under the blows of Anckastrôm, and Catherine seemed much less disposed to interfere in this great quarrel, since the world knew the warlike value of French soldiers. However, as she saw in it a certain cause of conflagration for Europe, and consequently of weakening for her own power, she ended by yielding to the solicitations of the favorite Zubov, to the intrigues of the British cabinet and of Prince Esterhazy and joined to the English fleets a
squadron of twelve vessels and eight frigates; but by exacting from England a million sterling in subsidies: which meant that England did not long retain such a burdensome auxiliary.

At the same time, the haughty autocrat turned her arms against Persia. Her generals had already invaded the province of Dagestan, while, on another point, she continued the execution of her favorite project: war against the Ottomans and their expulsion from Europe. This hope became more founded, following her new treaties with England and Austria. These powers undertook to aid Russia in her plans against Turkey, on the condition that she would contribute to the coalition against France in a more effective manner than she had done with her fleet. Thus, the limits of Catherine's vast empire were about to be pushed back on one side, beyond the Caucasus, and on the other as far as the Bosphorus, when death, deceiving her hope, suddenly stopped her. On the morning of 6 November 1796, after having had coffee and chatted cheerfully with her women, she passed into a dressing room; a moment later a loud cry was heard; her women having entered, saw the Empress stretched out dead, her face turned against the floor, as if she had fallen down struck with terror by a formidable vision: it was only a fatal apoplectic attack.

We have just spoken of the reign of this sovereign with too many details not to think ourselves obliged to characterize her person. Everyone knows that Catherine was beautiful, but of that beauty whose charms hide something fatal; of that beauty which cursed angels borrow when they are supposed to mingle with mortals. A painter had, it is said, imagined representing her as a mythological nymph with a graceful smile, holding palm leaves and flowers in one hand, while in the other she hid the dagger and the torch of the Furies.

Voltaire, as we have said, had nicknamed her the Semiramis of the North, and she seemed to have accepted this poetic gallantry with pleasure. Now, this name suited her doubly, since the sovereign of Babylon had dipped her hands in the blood of her husband and usurped the sovereign power. This is how Voltaire himself shows us the wife of Ninus, on the faith of ancient traditions. One might therefore suppose that the author of La Henriade had concealed the bloodiest satire under the guise of an ingenious flattery.

Catherine had a high, closed and virile character. She made herself respected and feared by a nation that hated her; but to all of her sex in private life, she offered an example of inconceivable weaknesses. Her favorites, with whom she would never share the throne, and whom she disgraced at will, exercised over her, in private, a humiliating and tyrannical empire. Orlov and Potemkin often pushed their abuse to extreme excesses; the indomitable Catherine, finally, allowed herself to be beaten by her lovers, only opposing with her tears to their brutality.

She wanted to appear to love letters and the arts; but it was without knowing the emotions. The only paintings which decorated her boudoir were two pictures representing, one, the burning of the Ottoman fleet in the bay of Çeşme, and the other, the massacre of the Poles, in the suburb of Praga.

Catherine enlarged Russia at the expense of the positive force of this empire; she undertook many things, accomplished few, and lied to her age by speaking of liberty and philanthropy with philosophers who were not telling the truth; but history, in pointing out her reign, is forced to notice it, still less as a great epoch of political movement, than as a striking example of all kinds
of disorders and disorganizations. To say that this Empress joined the morals of Messalina with the dark combinations of Fredegunda would perhaps be exposing oneself to reproaches for wishing to go beyond the truth, if one did not think of the assassination of Peter III, the murder of Prince Ivan and to the massacre of the Poles!

The long chapter of Catherine's love affairs is still the most innocent part of her life. What loves, and what number of lovers! German writers, whose exactness allows nothing to be lost, have published a biographical collection of these illustrious or obscure functionaries, and have made an immense catalog of them; we do not believe, however, that any scholar of Tubingen or Bremen dares to boast that the shores of Monplaisir or the groves of Tsarskoye Selo have revealed all their secrets to him. Still, it is positive that, to obtain the benevolence of the Czarina Catherine and something better, only two conditions were needed: appearances and apropos.

**STATE OF MORALS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA, AT THE END OF THE XVIII\(^{th}\) CENTURY**

We have spoken of the efforts made by Peter the Great to polish the morals of his barbarous people and to Europeanize them, if we may so express ourselves; but one will easily judge of the nature of the results which could be obtained, in this respect, by a master who knew himself so little of this science of politeness and worldliness. To live that he wanted to teach others, a prince whose feasts were nothing but orgies, who punished with the cane his ministers and the greatest lords of his court; a prince, we say, whose gallant munificence, with regard to his amorous whims, never exceeded the sum of five rubles (about twenty-five francs), and of such popularity, that he ran to the port, as soon as a Dutch ship arrived, to get drunk with the sailors.

Peter the Great having noticed, in his wanderings in England and France, that women set what is called the tone, and softened the morals among the most civilized nations, wanted to have, in Russia, assemblies where women, against ancient usage, could figure. Now, his rough gallantry had imagined inflicting a glass of brandy to drink on any contravener of the rules of politeness, whatever his sex: "in such a way", says Voltaire, "that honorable society often returned drunk and a little less polite."

This glass of brandy with which Peter the Great punished ill-learned people recalls another whim of this bizarre despot. He had appointed governor of Moscow, and invested with all the outward attributes of power, a coarse boyar, of Tartar origin, who represented him during his frequent absences from the capital, and even on the solemnities where he liked to blend in the crowd. This governor had in his palace a large bear trained to perform the functions of butler and chamberlain; when anyone presented himself to speak to His Excellency, he had first to deal with the bear, who, advancing with all the grace of which his species is susceptible, presented the visitor with a large glass of brandy, which he had to drink entirely, otherwise the bear, touchy on this point of the ceremony, grabbed the unfortunate bourgeois and tore his clothes, when his susceptibilities only attacked those clothes. Such is one of the examples, among a thousand, of Peter the Great's savoir-vivre.
If the Russians were long strangers to that exquisite elegance in social habits, which can hardly be found except in a free nation, or at least endowed with a feeling of human dignity, we can safely say that they were quick to learn our vices and even to exaggerate them.

We do not see, indeed, that the history of any other nation of Europe presents, in these modern times, a more complete spectacle of private immorality than that offered by the Russian people under the reign of the famous Catherine. Every nation copies its greats, and slavery is always an imitator, because it is accustomed to deifying the faults of the power that oppresses her. Now, let us judge of the influence that the spectacle of this dissolute court, where Catherine II; realized the fables that are told of the Queen of Aachen, must have exercised on national ideas and morals; of this court which had become the Amaethon of another shameless Venus, where the post of favorite was the first place in the Empire, and where all, priests, generals and great lords saw themselves constrained to prostrate themselves before the idol which was to the lust of a woman her elevation and her power!

If at least such disorders, admitting returns of modesty, had only occasionally afflicted public honesty! but these turpitudes, with Catherine, were permanent; no one can say that, for thirty-five years, the office of favorite has ever been vacant for twenty-four hours in succession: a short absence or a temporary indisposition of the one who held it was enough to have him replaced; it was, moreover, the employment for which the Empress showed the most choice and discernment, and it is unexampled that she brought up an incapable subject for it.

When old age, which spares the beauty of queens no more than that of women of the people, by depriving the Czarina of the right to please and the chance of being loved, had made the place so envied as a favorite a task truly difficult, it was then that the court of the Semiramis of the North offered Europe unparalleled pictures in what cynicism has ever been most eccentric. The excesses of a Heliogabalus and the impure traditions of degenerate Rome do not strike the imagination with less astonishment. Towards the end of her life, Catherine was almost deformed in size and deathly pale. Her legs, still swollen, seemed all of a sudden with that pretty foot that we had once admired. In this state of physical dilapidation, adorned and covered with diamonds, wandering around her dull eyes, and, despite the perfumes with which she was somehow marinated, exhaling the odor of the tomb, the autocratic did not appeal less to the lovers, his desires still had their first energy; and this woman, who had so much to fear and so little to hope from the other world, attached herself, with a convulsive embrace, to the pleasures of the earth. Age even seemed to increase her fury: at sixty-five, she was suddenly seen renewing the Lupercalia which she had formerly celebrated with the Orlov brothers; Zubov became the title favorite, and Valérien, his brother, gifted with athletic vigor, was associated with him in his duties. It was with these two young men that old Catherine then passed her days, while her armies defeated the Turks, cut their throats with the Swedes, set fire to unhappy Poland, and while her people cried out, in Saint Petersburg as in Moscow, misery and famine!

It is understood that it does not enter into the plan of our work to record here the details of this private life. We leave to the memories of the time the ability to speak of evenings at the Hermitage and the mysteries of small society. Our summary has already been only too heavily loaded with all the investigations of great history; there are, moreover, stories which hurt morality, while wishing to serve it. If one is curious to learn what were the functions of a
Countess of Branitskaya, of a Madame Praskovya, commonly called the assayer or the tester; if we want to know the preliminaries of the definitive installation of a favorite of Catherine, we can have recourse to the documents which we have consulted ourselves, and which have in truth become rather rare, because the Russian court, and the Emperor Alexander more than any other, neglected nothing to annihilate them: he did well.

Such, then, were the moral at court; it remains for us to speak of those of the city.

The women, under Catherine, proud to see so much power in the hands of a person of their sex, brought back into their homes and into society the pre-eminence which they enjoyed at court. Princess Daschkoff, already outside her sex by her tastes, her manners, and her exploits, was still more so by her titles and her functions as director of the Russian Academy. She asked Catherine for a long time to appoint her colonel of the guards and the author of Secret Memoirs on the Russian Court claims "that she would have fulfilled this job better than most of those who exercised it." She adds that several renowned Russian generals were at that time governed by their wives, and trembled before them: "Several of them," she says, "occupied themselves with the details of the regiment, gave orders to the officers, employed them in special services, sometimes dismissed them and created them."

Madame Mellin, colonel of the Tobolsk Regiment, commanded with a truly martial tone. She received the reports in her dressing room and led the parade, while her volunteer husband took care of himself elsewhere. The Swedes having attempted a surprise, she was seen to come out of her tent in uniform, place herself at the head of a battalion, and march towards the enemy. Many women followed the army in the war against the Turks. "The seraglio of Potemkin," says the author of the Secret Memoirs, "was always composed of beautiful amazons, who enjoyed visiting the battlefields and examining the vigorous proportions of the Turks, dead, stripped bare and still looking menacing, as Tasso's Argent must have seemed to the tender Herminie."

One should not believe that this inversion of the roles assigned by nature to the man and the woman, was in Russia only the fruit of caprice; the author of the Secret Memoirs, who seems to have lived in this country for a long time, noticed even more masculinity in the habits and tastes of the women who lived in the countryside, and it is personal servitude that she does, with good reason, to derive this sad alteration from the primitive moral type: "Widows or daughters of age," he says, "taking the government of their property, are forced to enter into the details least suitable to their sex. Buy, sell, exchange slaves; assigning them their task, making them undress in front of them to inflict on them the punishment of rods, are things that would be as repugnant to the sensibility as to the modesty of a woman, in a country where men would not be degraded at the level of domestic animals; but, in Russia, these are functions which many women are daily obliged to acquit."

It remains for us to say what was the state of letters under Catherine, who, jealous of all the means of occupying the world with her and increasing her fame, would seem to have had to protect them. The truth is, however, that she did much less in their favor than Elisabeth, whose reign was illustrated by several remarkable productions. Catherine, it is true, bought, out of ostentation, some libraries, some collections of pictures; she pensioned flatterers, and flattered famous men who could serve as her trumpets; she sent gold snuffboxes and jewels to strangers;
but she left to die beside her, in profound misery, scholars and national artists of distinguished merit, and to whom posterity later paid homage.