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Catherine the Great

General Editor
KIREET JOSHI

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Catherine the Great

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Lokniketan

Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

Catherine the Great

General Editor: KIREET JOSHI

Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

Preface

The task of preparing teaching-learning material for value-oriented education is enormous.

There is, first, the idea that value-oriented education should be exploratory rather than prescriptive, and that the teaching-learning material should provide to the learners a growing experience of exploration.

Secondly, it is rightly contended that the proper inspiration to turn to value-orientation is provided by biographies, autobiographical accounts, personal anecdotes, epistles, short poems, stories of humour, stories of human interest, brief passages filled with pregnant meanings, reflective short essays written in well-chiselled language, plays, powerful accounts of historical events, statements of personal experiences of values in actual situations of life, and similar other statements of scientific, philosophical, artistic and literary expression.

Thirdly, we may take into account the contemporary fact that the entire world is moving rapidly towards the synthesis of the East and the West, and in that context, it seems obvious that our teaching-learning material should foster the gradual familiarisation of students with global themes of universal significance as also those that underline the importance of diversity in unity. This implies that the material should bring the students nearer to their cultural heritage, but also to the highest that is available in the cultural experiences of the world at large.

Fourthly, an attempt should be made to select from Indian and world history such examples that could illustrate the theme of the upward progress of humankind. The selected research material could be multi-sided, and it should be presented in such a way that teachers can make use of it in the manner and in the context that they need in specific situations that might obtain or that can be created in respect of the students.

The research team at the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) has attempted the creation of the relevant teaching-learning material, and they have decided to present the same in the form of monographs. The total number of these monographs will be around eighty to eighty-five.

It appears that there are three major powers that uplift life to higher and higher normative levels, and the value of these powers, if well illustrated, could be effectively conveyed to the learners for their upliftment. These powers are those of illumination, heroism and harmony.

It may be useful to explore the meanings of these terms – illumination, heroism and harmony – since the aim of these monographs is to provide material for a study of what is sought to be conveyed through these three terms. We offer here exploratory statements in regard to these three terms.

Illumination is that ignition of inner light in which meaning and value of substance and life-movement are seized, understood, comprehended, held, and possessed, stimulating and inspiring guided action and application and creativity culminating in joy, delight, even ecstasy. The width, depth and height of the light and vision determine the degrees of illumination, and when they reach the splendour and glory of synthesis and harmony, illumination ripens into wisdom. Wisdom, too, has varying degrees that can uncover powers of knowledge and action, which reveal unsuspected secrets and unimagined skills of art and craft of creativity and effectiveness.

Heroism is, essentially, inspired force and self-giving and sacrifice in the operations of will that is applied to the quest,

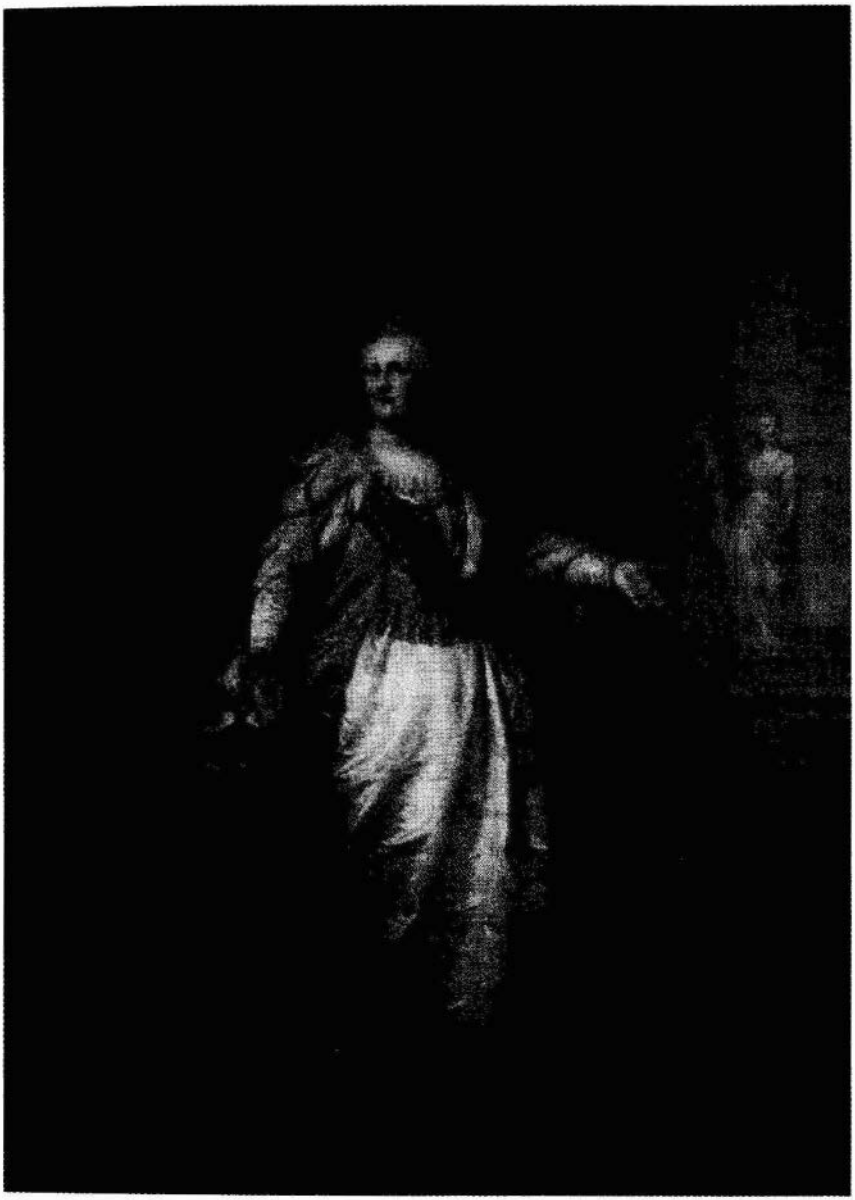
realisation and triumph of meaning and value against the resistance of limitations and obstacles by means of courage, battle and adventure. There are degrees and heights of heroism determined by the intensity, persistence and vastness of sacrifice. Heroism attains the highest states of greatness and refinement when it is guided by the highest wisdom and inspired by the sense of service to the ends of justice and harmony, as well as when tasks are executed with consummate skill.

Harmony is a progressive state and action of synthesis and equilibrium generated by the creative force of joy and beauty and delight that combines and unites knowledge and peace and stability with will and action and growth and development. Without harmony, there is no perfection, even though there could be maximisation of one or more elements of our nature. When illumination and heroism join and engender relations of mutuality and unity, each is perfected by the other and creativity is endless.

Catherine the Great was indeed heroic in her devotion to work till the very end of her life. She looked for illumination through the vast correspondance she kept, despite her punishing schedule, with many philosophers and luminaries of her time. She wanted to do the best for Russia, her adoptive country. And in this vast undertaking, she expressed a mesure of harmony through her remarquable achievements.

In the perspective of humanity's evolution, she stands as an example of what one woman's unshakable faith, confidence in her destiny and own inner lights, can achieve over obstacles, failures and enemies. For all in all, she governed alone, doing her utmost to the end when she collapsed of a heart attack.

As a force in action, remarkably intelligent, intuitive and pragmatic, she had an uncanny way to see, to attract and to use only the people, things and circumstances that could serve her purpose. And her purpose was, to the last, to make Russia great. She was a visionary and had the power to manifest her vision; she was a creative force and a builder and therein lies her greatness.



Catherine II the Great
(Painting by Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder -1793)

Catherine the Great

Introduction

In England the period of the New Monarchy from Edward IV to Elizabeth, in France the great Bourbon period from Henry IV to Louis XIV, in Spain the epoch which extends from Ferdinand to Philip II, in Russia the rule of Peter the Great and Catherine were the time in which these nations reached their maturity, formed fully and confirmed their spirit and attained to a robust organisation. And all these were periods of absolutism or of movement to absolutism and a certain foundation of uniformity or attempt to found it. This absolutism clothed already in its more primitive garb the reviving idea of the State and its right to impose its will on the life and thought and conscience of the people so as to make it one single, undivided, perfectly efficient and perfectly directed mind and body.

Sri Aurobindo — *The Ideal of Human Unity*

Catherine was born in 1729, as Princess Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst, the elder daughter of an obscure, noble German family. She died in 1796 as Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia.

At the age of 14, she was summoned to the Russian court by the Empress Elisabeth, to be groomed as the future bride of the Grand Duke Peter, son of Elisabeth and heir to the throne. Falling in love with her new country, and its people, she identified fully with it, revoking her austere Lutheran faith and whole-heartedly

embracing the orthodox religion. For years, conscious of being no ordinary woman, she had nursed, deep within, the ambition to be great and do great things. Russia became her opportunity.

At the age of 33, she came to the throne and reigned 34 years, driven by a prodigious, superhuman life-force, which made the second half of her life undoubtedly the most spectacular, the most well-known, and the most brilliant, not only in Russia but throughout eighteen-century Europe.

Gradually stripping away her prejudices, scruples[1] and sense of shame, beliefs and principles of the past, she realised a dream few women in history have achieved: to rule as the absolute monarch[2] of a great nation, that owed her crown neither to hereditary rights nor to the love of a reigning sovereign. As she herself said, she was a self-made woman, for the Grand Duke's wife might have easily suffered the fate of so many other princesses who were the victims of an unhappy marriage and court intrigues. She affirms it loudly in her memoirs: she struggled hard to maintain her position and survive; she did not go insane, she did not die of grief; she spent eighteen years allowing people to trample on her heart, swallowing insults, gritting her teeth, steeling her nerves and forging a heart of iron.

Power once hers, she strove first and foremost to keep it. When her authority was assured, she gave herself up to her passion for ruling with an eagerness and a fervour that compel admiration: ten, twelve, fourteen hours of work a day: meetings of the Senate, councils of ministers, personally controlling all the machinery of government. Catherine insisted on being her own minister of finance, of war, of home and foreign affairs. Her ministers were to carry out her orders and were only occasionally called upon to advise her. She would read each paper submitted for her signature (she speaks with contempt of Elizabeth who nearly always signed without reading). She carried out after her own diplomacy through personal correspondence with all reigning monarchs. She would make it

1 Scruple: (often pl,) doubt or hesitation as to what is morally right.
2 Absolute monarch: having unlimited authority; despotic.

her business to bring some order into the more than chaotic legislation of her empire and would convene a Commission, a kind of parliamentary assembly, with the purpose of finding out the country's real needs and providing a fresh basis for legislation. All her life she was to be seized by sudden bouts of "legislation mania", but she legislated alone.

Her equally great passion for building filled her capital, St. Petersburg, with magnificent stone edifices and the periphery of both St. Petersburg and Moscow with delightful palaces, country houses and parks. She also had a mania for collecting works of art, paintings, statues, carpets, gold and ebony work, coins, precious stones and so forth; her busy agents, recruited from among the best in Europe, literally stripped the private collections of France, England and Italy.

She was also to become an enlightened Maecena, the patron of poets, writers and philosophers, from whom she asked nothing in return but a bit of flattery. She built schools and hospitals, and busied herself with making textbooks for Russian children. Better still, she became a writer and authored satirical comedies and moral fables. She edited a literary review, the very first in Russia. She organized drama performances. In her palace, whose splendour outshone that of Versailles[1], she entertained lavishly, even beyond the dreams of Louis XIV[2].

Besides all this activity, she conducted long and ruinous, expensive wars against Turkey. Although present only in the person of her generals, she controlled the day-to-day operations and communicated by means of a voluminous correspondence with the heads of her armies. Her victories were also an excuse for stage-managed, lavish celebrations, the scale of which the most ambitious film directors of our times could hardly dare to imagine.

Thus she took a personal interest in everything, which did not

1 Versailles: a city in North central France, near Paris: site of an elaborate royal residence built for Louis XIV; seat of the French kings (1682-1789).
2 Louis XIV: known as le Roi Soleil (the Sun King). 1638-1715, king of France (1643-1715). Effective ruler from 1661, he established an absolute monarchy. His reign is regarded as a golden age of French literature and art.

prevent her from keeping up a lively correspondence with such illustrious friends as Voltaire, Diderot, Madame Geoffrin, and Baron Melchior von Grimm. To Grimm more than anyone else she poured out her thoughts and feelings, but she wrote to all letters ten or twenty pages long, for letter writing was another of her devouring passions.

In her private life, this husbandless woman did not pretend and was always lucid and honest about her nature's needs. Her great love remained Potemkin, intellectually her superior, an exceptional partner on many levels, and whom she sorely missed when he passed.

It was for everyone to see, especially diplomats, how her achievements in all directions were dictated by a genuine will to do the right thing. The opulence, she regarded as essential, had to be real. She managed to acquire it at the cost of incessanteffort. Her decrees show a remarkable good sense, especially coming from a woman who was not a trained political economist. She succeeded in reorganizing trade; she managed to rebuild and repopulate practically dead cities, to centralize administration and colonize desert provinces. In all of this, it is true she was assisted by Potemkin, who was an exceptionally able man.

Under her rule, Russia acquired new territories totalling a quarter of the area of European Russia; she created outlets to the Black Sea and the Baltic, doubled the strength of the army and the Russian fleet, and expanded trade. During her reign, Russia exported twice as much as in the time of Elizabeth and imported three times more. Thanks to her imperialist and expansionist policies, based on long-term planning, she succeeded in making Russia a much wealthier and more powerful country than it had been under her predecessors.

It is hardly possible, for us today, to fathom the display of the richness of Catherine's palaces — the splendour of which today only still dazzling traces remain —, the pictures and descriptions by admiring contemporaries portraying entertainments worthy of the Thousand and One Nights, in short, what the day to day pomp of this life may have been like for hundreds of privileged people

Catherine the Great in 1694, two years before her death
(Painting by Vladimir Borovikosky)

who lived and moved in this setting of almost unbearable luxury.

Yet, little imagination is needed to see the other side of the picture which calls for questions: where did all this money come from? Whose hands built, decorated and maintained all this? Catherine was not a miracle-doer. She did attempt a reform of serfdom[1], but did not succeed and the situation of the poor grew worse. For the truth is that never before had greater luxury, wealth and refinement been based on such an exploitation of a people's misery and humble submission. A people whose backwardness she as an autocrat and absolutist ruler of her time did not understand nor accept; as late in life she would not understand the French Revolution and, horrified by the fate dealt to the French crowned heads, would part altogether with Voltaire's ideas which she had earlier endorsed and promoted.

She, the woman, who through her fortunate wars (and the fortunate partition of Poland), through the fairylike brilliance of her court, her refined tastes and broad culture, was also to wrest her country from Turkish influence, thereby bringing up Russia as a modern state among the great powers of Europe. She, who nurtured Russian culture to its flowering, gave her name to a whole era of Russian history and has been, in the generally accepted meaning of the term, a great monarch.

1 Serf: (esp. in medieval Europe) an unfree person, esp. one bound to the land. If his lord sold the land, the serf was passed on to the new landlord.

The Arrival in Russia

On 10 January 1744, the Princess Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst set out with her parents as though on their annual visit to Berlin. Their departure from Zerbst was unobtrusive, for both her mother and father had taken care to give the impression in the town that nothing special was happening; they had not even explained to their daughter the reason for these hurried arrangements. But Sophia herself knew that she was embarking on no ordinary journey and, although not yet fifteen years old, she knew too, that this was a fateful step in her life.

The excitement in the Anhalt-Zerbst family had started on New Year's Day. Mail had come as they sat at dinner, and among the letters was one addressed to her mother, Princess Johanna. Sophia had seen that it was from Russia and had caught a glimpse of the words "with the Princess, her elder daughter." Moreover from her mother's behaviour and the prompt withdrawal of her parents to talk in private, she had guessed that it brought important news, and news that concerned her.

The letter was, in fact, from Brummer, the chamberlain of the court of the Grand Duke Peter, heir of the Russian throne. Brummer was a friend of her mother's, but he had written now on the instructions of the Empress Elisabeth herself to invite her to visit the imperial court with her daughter, travelling with all speed. The letter did not state the purpose of the visit.

A few hours later on the same day, excitement increased when another letter came, also addressed to her mother. This letter was from King Frederick of Prussia. He had learnt through his agents in St. Petersburg of the imperial summons, and had written at once to tell princess Johanna of the possibility of the marriage of her daughter to Grand Duke Peter and of the importance he attached to it. He, too, urged them to lose no time in setting out for Russia.

Elizabeth received mother and daughter at the entrance to the state bedchamber and embraced them. She observed each of them attentively and was touched to tears by the likeness of Princess Johanna to the brother who had been her betrothed. After half an hour, she dismissed them saying that they must be tired after their long journey. But the Grand Duke with his suite then escorted them to their apartments, where they all dined together.

On the next morning Sophia and her mother attended again in the audience chamber. The Empress appeared, dressed even more magnificently than on the night before, and followed by Count Razumovsky, her Cossak favourite, whom Sophia considered one of the handsomest men she had even seen. He bore on a gold plate the insignia of the Order of St. Catherine, which Elizabeth conferred on Sophia and then on Princess Johanna. It was a sign that they had made a favourable first impression.

Indeed, not only the Empress, but Peter, too, had been charmed by this demure young princess. He delighted in her company and explained ingenuously that what he liked most about her was the fact that she was German and a relative which meant that he could talk freely with her. He disliked the suite appointed to attend him and he hated Brummer. Moreover, he had only contempt for the Russians and their Orthodox christianity. He even told her that he really loved and wanted to marry one of the Empress's ladies-in-waiting who, because her mother

had been guilty of conspiring against the throne, had been exiled to Siberia; he was, however, prepared to obey his aunt, the Empress, and to marry Sophia. It was a devastating confession to make to a young girl who had just arrived in a strange

Sophie-Frederique-Augusta d'Anhalt-Zerbst (*the future Catherine II*)
(painting by Anna-Rosine Litchevsky - 1720)

country to marry him. It hurt Sophia deeply, but she did not allow her feelings to show. In fact, his conversation often embarrassed and distressed her, and she merely listened quietly, seeking to increase his confidence in her. She quickly realised that mentally he was no more than a child, and that he would be inadequate and immature as a husband, but never for a moment did she forget that he was heir to the throne.

From the first day of her arrival in Russia, Sophia gave all her energies to adopting it as her home and to making it her career. Despite her youth she was mature and clear headed, and her hunger for power and position was harnessed to a practical calculating mind. Her first principle of conduct was to win the confidence and goodwill of everyone, and already she had charmed the Empress and the Grand Duke, while her general bearing had earned the approbation of the court. She had, too, in her mother a foil whose stupidity and arrogance gave her frequent opportunities to shine as a dutiful daughter, innocent, sincere, and obedient, and she played the part well.

Sophia also saw that it was necessary not only for her to adopt this new country, but to demonstrate it in ways that all would understand. She therefore devoted herself to the study of the language and of Orthodox ritual. The Empress had already appointed teachers to instruct her in both subjects, but with special emphasis on orthodoxy for Elizabeth's first thought was for her rebaptism.

Sophia studied eagerly. Often she would jump out of bed in the middle of the night and, wearing only her nightgown, pace the floor of her bedroom learning her Russian lessons by heart. As a result she caught a chill, which developed into pleurisy. She fell sick when the Empress was away from Moscow on a pilgrimage to the Troitsa Monastery. (...)

Three days later the Empress returned to Moscow and, going at once to Sophia's bedside, found her unconscious. She promptly took charge and ordered blood-letting, and Sophia regained consciousness to find herself in the Empress's arms. For some days she remained gravely ill and was bled frequently.

The Empress watched over her solicitously, spending hours at her side and disregarding all risks that she might catch the infection herself, if it proved, in fact, to be smallpox. Moreover, she excluded Princess Johanna from the sick room so that the patient would not be troubled.

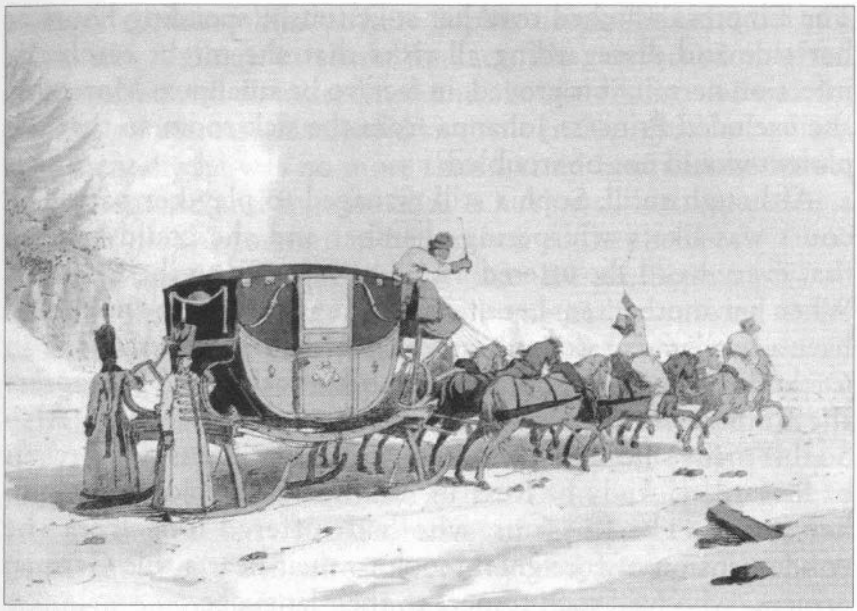
Although so ill, Sophia still managed to play her part. The court was like a whispering chamber and she could be sure that every word she uttered would be repeated to the Empress. When her mother sent her a message, suggesting that she should have a Lutheran pastor to comfort her, she firmly demanded an Orthodox priest, and nothing was better calculated to impress the Empress than this convincing sign of conversion. Also Sophia made sure that it was known that her illness was a result of her ardent study of Russian, and this, too, told strongly in her favour. The Russians, who had suffered long from the condescension of foreigners, took to their hearts this German princess who paid such respect to their language.

Sophia now fully recovered from her illness, studied in preparation for her admission to the orthodox church. She suffered no crisis of conscience over the change. In fact, her conversion took place "without any effort", as herself wrote later.

Her acceptance into the church was appointed to take place on 28 June and she worked hard to make herself word perfect. It was a lengthy ceremony, conducted in Russian and her knowledge of the language was still limited. On the occasion, however, she acquitted herself magnificently. In the presence of the Empress, the court, and the Holy Synode in the palace chapel, Sophia clad in the white robe of the neophyte, recited the creed in a clear voice, with an excellent accent and without once stumbling.

No one was more impressed and touched than the devout Empress who was in tears as she listened to Sophia pronounce her final acceptance of orthodox faith and heard her christened anew as Catherine Alexevna, the name chosen by the Empress in honour of her own mother, Catherine I of Russia.

On the following day she faced the ordeal of her betrothal



Scenes of Russia at the time of Catherine II: the main mode of transport for long distances at the time: the diligence
(Original drawing by an English traveller)

to the Grand Duke. This was not a private and intimate ceremony like her rebaptism, but public, taking place in the Uspensky Cathedral, where the Tsars of Russia had always been crowned. With all the magnificent ceremonial of the Orthodox Church, Catherine and Peter exchanged vows and rings, and Catherine was then proclaimed Grand Duchess. The little German princess from Zerbst, now an Orthodox Russian, was launched on her career.

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* *

How She Came to Power

Shortly after 4 pm on Xmas Day 1761, the doors from the bedchamber were flung open. The Prince Nikita Trubetskoi, one of the oldest senators, appeared in the doorway. He was in tears, as were all present, and then, controlling his emotion, he announced the death of the Empress, Elisabeth, and proclaimed the new sovereign, Emperor Peter III.

Catherine was at least nearing her goal. Eighteen years had passed since as a young girl she had first arrived in Russia, ambitious to make a glorious career for herself. Those years had passed for the most part in boredom and isolation, from which she had escaped into books and riding. She was now thirty-four years of age, but neither her difficulties at court, nor the hostility of her husband had broken down her determination, and, like most people driven by high ambition, she had drawn strength from sense of destiny, and the conviction that she was not doomed to pass her life in the shadows.

Now that he was Emperor, Peter believed that he could do as he wished, and his behavior became increasingly capricious, irresponsible, and at times imbecilic.

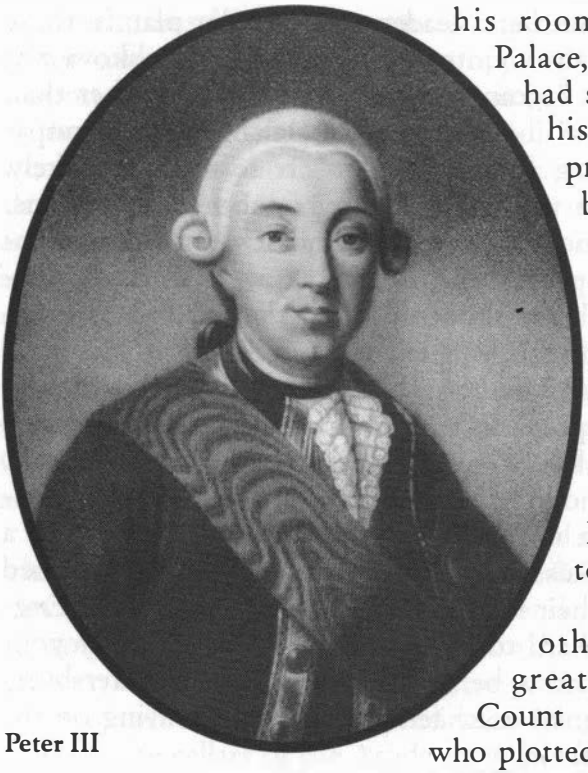
By some incidents during the first weeks of his reign, Peter could not have done more to affront the anger of his people, or to show to greater advantage the dignified conduct of his wife. Moreover, inspired by sadism or malice, he humiliated her frequently at court and

talked loudly of his intention of divorcing or shutting her away in a nunnery so that he could marry his mistress, Elizabeth Voronstsova.
It was not only his personal behavior, but even more his disregard and contempt for Russian prestige, interests, and traditions that antagonized the nation. He demonstrated this attitude particularly in his treatment of the army and the church, the two powerful forces on which the very security of his throne rested. But Peter, twisted in character, and feeble in health and intelligence, could never understand this nation over which a fate had set him to rule.

Panin, fearing that Peter III's rule would be disastrous for Russia, was now actively planning his overthrow. His proposal was to arrest Peter when he returned to St. Petersburg to witness the departure of the guards for the Danish campaign. It was a sound plan, for the army was consumed with sullen anger as this campaign approached, and it would need little to touch off an explosion among officers and men. At the same time Panin did not see in Catherine the saviour of Russia and he had no thought that she would ascend the throne; his idea had always been that her son the Grand Duke Paul should be Emperor, while she would merely act as regent until he came of age, and he still favoured imposing restraints on the autocratic power.

Catherine listened coldly and attentively to him. She did not intend to act as regent or to wield limited powers. But she said nothing of this to Panin, who was a patriotic Russian and a valuable ally. Indeed, she accepted his suggestion that the Grand Duke should not go with her to Peterhof, but remain in the Summer Palace, available in case of need.

It was on the Orlov brothers that Catherine chiefly depended. They had by mid-June won over all the guards officers, with a few minor exceptions, and they were actively sowing disaffection more widely in the army. In earlier discussions with them, Catherine may have approved their plan to seize the Emperor in



Peter III

his room in the Winter Palace, just as the guards had seized Ivan VI and his mother, and had proclaimed Elizabeth twenty-one years earlier. The departure of Peter for Oranienbaum had thwarted[1] this plan, and they had then adopted Panin's proposal to arrest Peter on his return to the capital.

There was one other conspirator of great importance, Count Kirill Razumovsky, who plotted silently, and without confiding in anyone except Catherine, and she kept his ideas secret, even from the Orlovs. Razumovsky, the Little Russian favourite of Elizabeth, was immensely rich in property and honours, but kindly, good-humoured, and generally liked, although there were those who dismissed him as a gay spoilt child of fortune. He was, however, extremely astute and devoted to his country and, although favoured by Peter, he had long been an admirer of Catherine whom he regarded as the only hope for Russia. As Colonel of the Izmailovsky and a man of considerable influence, he was a necessary ally in any conspiracy, and both Alexei Orlov and Dashkova made independent efforts to win him over, neither realizing that he had made his own plans.

1.To thwart: to oppose successfully or prevent; frustrate.

There was thus neither a leader nor a master plan in these preparations to rid the country of its Emperor. Dashkova was to write later of "a disjointed plan dreamt about rather than studied by a group of ill-assorted individuals with little sympathy or understanding for each other." It seems more likely, however, that there were two or three uncoordinated plans. Nevertheless it was not plotting, but a kind of spontaneous combustion among the people that, in fact, gave rise to the revolution which was to burst suddenly on Catherine and her supporters, and sweep them along with it.

Popular anger and discontent mounted sharply during June, as the troops prepared to leave for the Danish campaign. Rumours of every kind concerning the Emperor's apostasy[1], his assaults on Orthodoxy, his favouring of Germans over Russians, his treatment of his wife, whipped public feeling to a danger point. All Russians with few exceptions were united and outspoken in their loathing[2] of Peter. Keith, the old English minister, was heard to say to a Russian lady, "Really your Emperor must be mad to behave as he does." In St. Petersburg, Russians and foreigners alike felt that they were living on the verge of an upheaval.

Reaching Peterhof on 17 June, Catherine stayed quietly there with a few servants. She visited Oranienbaum once, on 19 June, to attend a theatrical performance, arranged by Peter, and she returned to Peterhof the same evening. This was the last time that she saw her husband.

In St. Petersburg the tense expectant mood of the people was near to breaking point. Then it happened that a corporal of the Preobrazhenski regiment was interrogated for asking one of his officers when the Emperor would be dethroned. An indirect result of this interrogation was the arrest of a certain Captain Passek on the charge of speaking scandalously of the Emperor. This proved to be the spark that detonated the explosion.

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1 Apostasy: abandonment of one's religious faith, party, a cause, etc.
2 Loath: reluctant or unwilling. Hostile.

Passek himself was of no special importance. But he was one of the officers who had sworn to oppose the Emperor and to support Catherine; he was also a friend and drinking companion of the Orlovs, and they were restless for action. Grigori Orlov went to see Dashkova whom he found with Panin. She was alarmed by Passek's arrest, taking it to mean that their conspiracy was uncovered, but Panin dismissed it as of no importance and calmed her fears. Soon afterwards he returned to the Summer Palace to be near the Grand Duke, while Grigori Orlov went back to barracks. It may well be that the decision to summon Catherine to the city had already been taken by the Orlovs and that Grigori had come to tell Panin and Dashkova. Certainly it would seem that Grigori Orlov knew what was about to happen.

However it was, Alexei Orlov prepared to ride to Peterhof, while his brother, Feodor, went to Kirill Razumovsky and told him openly what was planned. Razumovsky listened and made no comment. But, as soon as Feodor had gone, he sent for Taubert, the keeper of the printing press of the Academy of Sciences of which he was the president. He told Taubert to go down to the cellars of the Academy where he would find printers waiting with plates ready for printing overnight a manifesto on the overthrow of the Emperor and the accession of the Empress, and he was to supervise this work. Taubert asked to be excused from such a dangerous task, but Razumovsky brusquely said to him, "You already know too much. Now your head as well as mine is at stake. Do as I tell you."

Shortly after midnight on Friday, 28 June, Alexei Orlov with a brother officer, Vasili Bibikov, set out from the city and at 6 a.m. they reached Peterhof. As usual there were no sentries posted at the gates and Alexei went straight to Monplaisir where Catherine was asleep. Her trusted chambermaid admitted him and, going to her bedside, he said: "It's time to get up. All is ready for you to be proclaimed." She asked what had happened, and he told her of Passek's arrest. Realizing that the Orlovs had acted and that there could be no turning back, Catherine did

not hesitate. She quickly put on her black dress and walked across the garden to the road where Bibikov was waiting with a carriage. With her maid at her side, she set off on her momentous journey to St. Petersburg.

A few miles from the city, Grigori Orlov met them. Catherine transferred to his light carriage and continued the journey at a sharper pace. Nearing the village of Kalinkina, where the quarters of the Izmailovsky regiment began, Grigori mounted his horse and galloped ahead to alert his colleagues. Catherine remained in the carriage which now at a slow walk approached the regimental headquarters. For her these were minutes of terrible excitement and apprehension, for this was the first of the guards regiments on whom her fate depended.

Gregori Orlov, *by Rokotov, c. 1762*

Reaching the parade ground, Catherine could see a few men rushing from their barracks, and then she heard a drummer sounding the alarm. She dismounted from the carriage and stood alone, a poised and appealing figure in black. At once the troops rushed to her; some kissed her hands and her dress, others shouted, "Hurrah, for our little mother,

Catherine!" A crowd of officers and men quickly gathered around her, but then as though acting instinctively, they drew back, leaving clear an approach to her for the beloved padre of the regiment, Father Alexei, who was coming across the ground, bearing a crucifix in his hands. There and then the whole Izmailovsky regiment swore the oath of allegiance to their new Empress and autocrat, Catherine the Second. Soon afterwards their colonel, Razumovsky, arrived and respectfully knelt to kiss her hands.

This reception had presumably been planned in advance by the Orlovs, and Grigori had ridden ahead to ensure that nothing went wrong, and in particular that no one proclaimed Grand Duke Paul. But it had only needed one or two voices to be heard for the regiment to rise to a man to proclaim her, and now both officers and men were wild with enthusiasm, delighting especially in the fact that she had come first to them for protection and support.

Catherine returned to her carriage and, accompanied by Father Alexei and Razumovsky, and with an escort of the whole regiment, she set out for the Semenovsky barracks. The news was already beginning to spread and townspeople were joining the procession. The Semenovsky regiment, too, without one dissenting voice, welcomed her rapturously and swore allegiance. Among the Preobrazhenski, however, there were certain officers who knew nothing of the conspiracy, and who tried to hold their men to their oaths to Peter, but the troops swept them aside. The disorderly procession was moving noisily along the broad Nevsky Prospekt, when the first groups of Preobrazhenski guards rushed up breathlessly to explain their delay and to hail her as Empress.

The exulting crowd of guards, escorting Catherine, was now advancing into the city, and in increasing numbers the townspeople, hurrying from their houses, joined in welcoming her. The high enthusiasm of the crowd was infectious and they constantly shouted and cheered Catherine, who in her gracious acknowledgements of their ovations impressed them as

being truly their Empress.

About 9 a.m. the procession came to a halt before the church of Kazan. Catherine dismounted from her carriage and, with the Orlov brothers, Razumovsky, and a mass of guards officers, entered the church which was already crowded. The priests in a short service pronounced the blessing on her as the "autocrat Catherine the Second" and on "the heir to the throne, Tsarevich Paul Petrovich." As with the guards, there was apparently no attempt on the part of the church to proclaim the Grand Duke other than as heir to the throne.

The procession resumed its triumphal progress, but preceded now by priests. Catherine sat in an open carriage with Grigori Orlov riding on the right footboard and General Vilboa on the left, while Razumovsky, Prince Volkonsky, Count Bruce, and several generals rode close behind her, and the horse guards kept station on either flank. The disorderly crowd which had surged into the city had already become an imperial cortege.

Soon after Catherine had reached the Winter Palace, where the guards, joined by two infantry regiments, posted sentries, Panin hurried to her with the eight-year-old Grand Duke. He had snatched the boy from his bed immediately on learning of the coup. Catherine took her son, still in his nightdress, to the balcony of the palace to show him to the troops and the people crowded in the square below, and they roared their delight.

Within the palace, members of the Senate and of the Holy Synod, officials of the court, heads of the Colleges, generals and officers had begun assembling as soon as the news reached them. Some were still hurriedly making their way to the palace, and the sentries denied admission to no one wishing to swear allegiance to the Empress. All wanted to see her, to kiss her hand, to express gratitude and good wishes to their protectress. For some hours Catherine stood receiving people of every rank, and it seemed that the whole city was bustling into the palace to hail her and swear loyalty.

Here, too, Dashkova joined the Empress. She had been unable to squeeze through the people packed tightly in the

square, but, according to her account, some troops recognized her and she was passed triumphantly over their heads, and finally carried into the palace.

In the midst of this excitement and success, a certain calm commonsense reigned among those surrounding Catherine and throughout St. Petersburg. All seemed determined that what had been won should not be lost by any careless failure to take precautions. Mounted sentries guarded the gates to prevent any one leaving, for it was especially important to delay news of the revolution in reaching Peter. Strong patrols of guards moved through the city, but although most of the people were in the streets there was no disorder or rioting. Members of the foreign embassies walked about freely and all reported on the orderly conduct of the crowds.

It was now decided that Catherine should move from the Winter Palace and set up her court in the old palace where Elizabeth had lived and died. The move began without delay and, when she came out of the Winter Palace, Catherine found herself wildly proclaimed by the troops assembled in the forecourt. At first she did not recognize them. The quartermasters, acting on their own initiative, had brought from their stores the old army uniforms, introduced by Peter the Great, which were so dear to the hearts of the Russians. The soldiers had at once torn off their hated Prussian uniforms, forced on them by Peter III, and they stood now with great pride cheering their new Empress. It was a small incident, but indicative of the upsurge of national feeling which the revolution had released from bondage to Peter's Prussian ideals.

Within an hour of moving to the old palace, Catherine with the Senate and the leading men in the city was discussing the further action to be taken. The danger uppermost in their minds was that the troops, assembled in Livonia, ready to march on Denmark, and the navy at Kronstadt, might receive orders from Peter III to quell[1] the revolt in the capital. All had sworn loyalty

1 To quell: to suppress or beat down (rebellion, disorder, etc.); subdue.

to him and it was probably that the army and navy, like Peter himself, still knew nothing of the revolution. The most urgent step was therefore to secure the allegiance of these forces to their new sovereign before Peter could assert his authority.

Officers were at once chosen to ride out with the manifesto, proclaiming Catherine's accession, and with orders to all commanding officers to administer the new oath of allegiance to their men. There was no time to prepare the formal *ukaz*, usual on such occasions, and Catherine herself wrote out her imperial orders to the commander-in-chief of the army, Count Z.G. Chernyshev, to General Anshef Rumyantsev, and to Brown, the Governor-General of Riga who was responsible for the whole of Livonia. Her fears about these troops were reflected in her instructions to Brown to take all steps to ensure that the popular will, through which by God's help she had ascended the throne, was fulfilled, and to suppress all opposition, no matter how legal, and to accept only orders signed by her.

It was even more urgent to win the navy and the troops at Kronstadt to her side. The road from Oranienbaum to Kronstadt was short and easily travelled, and it was the most obvious step for Peter to take. Admiral Talyzin was appointed to go to Kronstadt, and he carried with him, not an *ukaz*, but a note in Catherine's hand which read: "Admiral Talyzin has been vested by us with full power in Kronstadt, and what he orders must be carried out. Catherine. June the 28th day of the year 1762." Other precautions were taken, all revealing this practical determination to secure the result of the revolution. It was even decided to arrest Peter III and to imprison him in Schlusselburg and a Major General Savin was sent post haste to the fortress to see that quarters were prepared for him.

About this time the chancellor, Count Mikhail Vorontsov, accompanied by Prince Trubetskoi and Count Shuvalov, arrived from Peterhof as emissaries of the Emperor. Vorontsov was to use his great authority to dissuade Catherine from acting treasonably towards her husband; Trubetskoi and Shuvalov had undertaken to ensure the loyalty of the guards and were

Catherine the Great *by Vigilius Eriksen, c. 1762*

empowered to kill Catherine, if necessary. By the time they reached the palace, however, all three men preferred to swear the oath of allegiance to her.

More than eight hours had now passed since Catherine, on the summons of Alexei Orlov, had set out from Peterhof, and during that time no news had come of any counter measures taken by the Emperor. But the people of St. Petersburg and all the troops celebrated with joyous relief as though the revolution

was over, its result immutable[1], and Peter III already non-existent. Nevertheless Catherine could not rest secure while Peter, dethroned but still Emperor, remained at large. So far she had acted on the guidance of her advisers without asserting her will. But now she decided to go herself to Peterhof at the head of her guards, and about 10 p.m. she penned a directive to the Senate. "Gentlemen of the Senate," it read, "I am now setting out with troops in order to secure, and win further support for the throne, leaving with complete faith to you, as my supreme government, the protection of the fatherland, the people, and my son. Catherine."

On the morning of 28 June, Peter had reviewed his troops as usual and then had set out with his suite for Peterhof to celebrate his nameday as the guest of the Empress. His suite was large and included, in addition to his mistress and his personal attendants, the Prussian ambassador, Goltz, the chancellor, Senator Count R. L. Vorontsov, the father of his mistress, and others.

In a carefree mood and suspecting nothing, Peter and his party halted at the gates of Monplaisir at 2 p.m. Only then did they learn that Catherine had gone to St. Petersburg. This discovery stunned them. All knew that it presaged[2] disaster.

Peter was at first too dumbfounded to take any action. But then he agreed to the proposals of the chancellor and Shuvalov, who set out at once for the city. About 3 p.m. Peter and the rest of his party made their way to the coast, vaguely intending to have a boat made ready so that, if their worst fears proved correct, they could escape. There they found a barge carrying fireworks with a lieutenant of the Preobrazhenski regiment in charge. When questioned the young lieutenant said that at 9 a.m. when he had set out from St. Petersburg he had noticed great excitement among the troops who were proclaiming the Empress, but he had not stayed as he had had orders to deliver

1 Immutable: unchanging through time.
2 To presage: to have a presentiment of.

the fireworks to Peterhof without fail. This was the first direct news that Peter had of what had happened, and, advised by Munnich and others, he at once posted Holstein guards on the St. Petersburg road, and sent Colonel Neelov to Kronstadt to bring a force of 3,000 men by sea to Peterhof.

After giving these orders Peter slumped[1] into inaction. He did not, however, want for advice. Munnich urged him to go straight to the capital and show himself to the people and the guards, reminding them of their oath of loyalty. But this was a course of action too bold, too courageous for such an abject coward as Peter to consider. The Prussian ambassador advised him to hasten to the troops assembled near Narva. Others advised him to escape to Holstein. Irascible, indecisive, and impatient of advice he allowed time and opportunity to slip by. But then he was persuaded to send General Devier and Prince Baryatinsky to Kronstadt with orders to hold the fortress loyal to him and to countermand[2] the earlier orders sent with Colonel Neelov.

Kronstadt was now the key to the success or failure of the revolution. Catherine had already sent Admiral Talyzin to take command in her name, and Peter's couriers were on the way there. Meanwhile in Kronstadt all was quiet, for no news or rumours had yet come from St. Petersburg. Neelov, who himself knew very little, arrived and gave Nummers, the commandant, some inkling of what had happened, and Nummers kept it to himself; when sealed orders reached him from Talyzin, soon after Devier's arrival, he concealed them too, so that Devier, believing that all was well, sent Baryatinsky to report to Peter that the fortress loyally awaited his arrival.

Nummers, however, like everyone else in Kronstadt, was ready to welcome the revolution, and when Talyzin came soon after Baryatinsky had left, Nummers promptly acted on his

1 To slump: to sink or fall heavily and suddenly.

2 To countermand: a) to revoke or cancel (a command, order, etc.). b) a command revoking another.

orders. The garrison and crews of all naval vessels at once swore the oath of allegiance to Catherine, and Talyzin with great energy made preparations to defend Kronstadt against any attempt by Peter to capture it.

It was 1 a.m. when a galley with Peter on board, escorted by a yacht, anchored outside the boom[1] closing the harbour. Peter himself in a boat let down from the galley approached the boom and ordered it to be raised. The midshipman in charge refused. Peter then called out that it was the Emperor giving the order. He was flabbergasted[2] when the midshipman replied that there was no longer an Emperor, only Empress Catherine the Second, and that, if the galley did not withdraw, he would open fire. Frightened out of his wits, Peter scuttled[3] back to his galley which at once pulled away towards Oranienbaum. This incident marked the end of his resistance, for he was a beaten man.

Meanwhile in St. Petersburg, Catherine readied for her expedition to Peterhof. The guards had greeted her decision to march with enthusiasm, and they were overjoyed when she took the rank of colonel of the guards, thus reviving the tradition established by Peter the Great, that the sovereign was their commanding officer. Before setting out, Catherine reviewed them, and she wore a guard's uniform, which she had borrowed from a young officer, and held a sabre in her hand. Mounted on a white horse in this uniform she was a striking figure, and the fervour of the guards reached a new pitch as they marched past her.

At 10 p.m. Catherine led her troops out of St. Petersburg. At her side rode Princess Dashkova, also wearing the uniform of a guards officer and revelling in the drama of the occasion. With them were two fieldmarshals, Trubetskoi and Buturlin, as well as Razumovsky, and Prince Volkonsky and others, while the mounted life guard formed the imperial escort.

Despite the general enthusiasm, however, the little army

1 Boom: a barrier across a waterway, usually consisting of a chain of floating logs, to confine free-floating logs, protect a harbour from attack, etc.
2 To flabbergast: to overcome with astonishment; astound.
3 To scuttle: to run or move about with short hasty steps.

Empress Catherine II
(Painting by Torelli, circa 1762 -1765)

made slow progress, and on the road to Peterhof, at the inn, troops and horses rested for five hours. But Catherine could not rest. Here she received a report from the Senate on their preparations to meet possible attacks from Kronstadt and Livonia, led by Peter, and she shared the anxiety of her senators. They still had no information on Peter's movements, and for all she knew she might soon be leading the guards into battle.

Shortly after 6 a.m., however, news came that put her anxieties to rest. She had just resumed the march to Peterhof, when she was joined by members of Peter's suite who had deserted him after his faint-hearted attempt to land at Kronstadt. From them, and particularly from the vice-chancellor, Prince Golitsyn, Catherine learnt about Peter's position and his defeated mood. In fact, Golitsyn brought a letter from him in which he acknowledged that he had treated her badly, promised to make amends, and proposed that they rule together in future. She did not bother to reply.

By this time, Alexei Orlov with an advance guard of hussars had already surrounded Peterhof and had disarmed the Holstein guards. Then, learning that Peter was still at Oranienbaum, he had galloped there with a handful of his men and had placed sentries at all gates. About 11 a.m. Catherine entered Peterhof and was saluted by her guards, drawn up to welcome her. There she received a second letter from Peter, who asked her forgiveness, resigned all his rights to the throne, and begged to be allowed to retire to Holstein with Elizabeth Vorontsova. But Catherine could not consider allowing him to live in freedom in Holstein where he would spend his time plotting against her; he must be arrested and kept under close guard at Schlusselburg. The question was how to arrest him without staining with blood the revolution so easy and even joyful up to this point. Finally she sent General Izmailov, who had been close to Peter, with a note demanding first that he write out and sign a statement of abdication[1]. Grigori Orlov accompanied Izmailov, who

1 Abdication: to renounce (a throne, power, responsibility, rights, etc.).

found Peter in a collapsed state, ready to agree to anything. He promptly signed the abdication and soon afterwards set out in a carriage with Elizabeth Vorontsova and his adjutant-general, Gudovich, for Peterhof. A strong guard at once surrounded the carriage and escorted it all the way.

On arrival Peter was taken to the quarters he had occupied as Grand Duke and there he was stripped of his decorations, his Russian uniform and his sword. He submitted without a word, a pathetic disheveled[1] figure, at one point near to fainting. Panin came to inform him of the temporary arrangements for his imprisonment and, some years later, he wrote: "I count it the greatest misfortune of my life that I was obliged to see Peter at this time." He gave no details of Peter's behaviour beyond stating that he begged not to be separated from his mistress and asked nothing else, not even for a meeting with the Empress.

Catherine wrote at once to the Senate, sending a copy of the abdication, and stating that she would herself present the original to them. She then chose a guard for Peter of four officers and "gentle chosen soldiers," placing Alexei Orlov in command, and since Schlusselburg was not yet ready, she sent Peter to Ropsha, a country estate given him by Elizabeth, which he had always liked.

With the abdication and arrest of Peter, Catherine's expedition to Peterhof and the revolution itself had ended in complete victory. She was eager to return to St. Petersburg to consolidate her position and to reign. But she was now weary, for she had not rested since early on 28 June when Alexei Orlov had awakened her at Monplaisir, and at a halt on the road back to the capital she snatched a few hours of sleep.

On the morning of June 30, Catherine made her entry into St. Petersburg, and it was a dramatic triumphal occasion such as she could never have dreamt possible. The people crowded along the broad streets of the capital, and at windows and on roofs of the buildings. Their enthusiasm was boundless and their constant

1 Dishevelled: (esp. of hair) hanging loosely.

shouts and cheers drowned the music of the military bands, but over this noise came the wild pealing of all the bells of all the churches in the city. As the procession approached the shouting mounted in a crescendo which even overtopped the bells.

Catherine herself, riding her white horse and still wearing her officer's uniform, led the Preobrazhenski, and the Semeonovsky and Izmailovsky guards, while artillery detachments, and three regiments of the line followed. The church hierarchy came to welcome and bless their new Empress. Wearing their rich raiment[1] and holding the ikons[2] and crucifixes, they set the final seal on this welcome, and indeed no sovereign could have been received with more fervent popular acclaim.

It was an extraordinary triumph for Catherine. A German without one drop of Russian blood in her veins, a Protestant convert to Orthodoxy, and a usurper[3], she had nevertheless been swept to the throne of the Romanovs on a wave of patriotic feeling by a people, staunchly[4] xenophobic[5], especially in their hatred of Germans, fanatic in their devotion to Orthodoxy, and strongly conservative in their traditions. It was, moreover, essentially Catherine's triumph. By a feat of personality she had projected herself into the minds of the Russian people as one of them, and with such force that they were ready and eager to entrust to her the guardianship of Orthodoxy and of everything they treasured in their national life.

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* *

1 Raiment: Archaic or poetic. attire; clothing; garments.
2 Ikon, icon: a representation of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint, esp. one painted in oil on a wooden panel, depicted in a traditional Byzantine style and venerated in the Eastern Church.
3 To usurp: to seize, , or appropriate (land, throne, etc.) without authority.
4 Staunch: firm.
5 Xenophobia: hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers or of their politics or culture.

A few anecdotes and events during Catherine's reign

I "New Russia" and the journey to Crimea

The journey to the Crimea, which Catherine made in 1787, was a triumphal progress of incredible magnificence, marking a splendid climax in her reign. It was intended to impress not only Turkey, but the whole civilized world with the wealth and power of the Empress of Russia, and as planned by Potemkin it more than succeeded. But, while the courts of Europe received prompt reports about this magnificent journey, news of the Russian people percolated[1] more slowly. At this time, in fact, a severe famine afflicted the country. Hungry beggars swarmed into Moscow and other towns in search of alms[2] and food, and the governors swept them away from all points where the Empress and her party might set eyes on them.

The imperial journey was announced at the beginning of 1786, when it was stated that the Empress would travel south to be crowned Queen of Tauris and protectress of the Tatars. An army would escort her, and the solemnities and splendours, costing many millions of rubles, would exceed anything that had ever been known. Potemkin had long cherished this project and had been working feverishly on it. As the time approached, however, his plans had to be scaled down and the coronation project was dropped, for the Crimea was in a state of unrest with skirmishing, developing at times into serious engagements,

1 To percolate: to permeate; penetrate gradually.
2 Alms: charitable donations of money or goods to the poor or needy.

between Tatars and Russians. Nevertheless, even in its modified form the imperial progress and the entertainments at each halt amazed Europe, where prodigal expenditure on such a scale was unknown.

Catherine set out from Tsarskoe Selo on 18 January 1787. She herself travelled with Madame Protassov ... in an enormous sledge[1] containing several compartments and drawn by thirty horses, while a convoy of 150 sledges accompanied her. Gliding over the crisp snow, their progress was swift and comfortable. At every halt hundreds fresh horses and teams of smiths, saddlers, and carpenters stood ready to see to the needs of the party and speed them on their way. By night fires at frequent intervals marked their route, but usually they stopped at the palace of the local governor, whom Potemkin had equipped in advance to accommodate the imperial party. In districts where there was no suitable palace or mansion, he had had one built and furnished magnificently for these few hours of use.

On 9 February, three weeks after her departure, Catherine arrived in Kiev, the ancient capital of Russia. Here Potemkin joined her. He had travelled ahead to ensure that all preparations were complete, and now in Kiev where the party had to wait several weeks until the ice broke on the Dnieper, making the river navigable for their onward journey by galley[2], he had arranged every possible comfort and entertainment for them.

The French, Austrian, and English ambassadors each had a private palace with a host of liveried[3] servants, private coaches and horses, and they lived in splendour. Comte de Ségur, the witty French courtier whom Catherine found so entertaining, was a special guest, and he was in good spirits because of the commercial treaty just concluded between his country and Russia. In Kiev, too, a crowd of pro-Russian Polish nobles, chief

1 Sledge: a vehicle mounted on runners, drawn by horses or dogs, for transporting people or goods, esp. over snow.

2 Galley: any of various kinds of ship propelled by oars or sails used in ancient or medieval times as a warship or as a trader.

3 Liveried: (esp. of servants or footmen) wearing livery.

among them Princess Sapieha and Lubomirsky, and the Potockis and the Branitskis, paid homage[1] to Catherine, who also gave a warm welcome to the two beautiful nieces of Potemkin, the Countesses Branicka and Skavronskaya. The gathering of so many nobles, both Russian and Polish, together with the dignitaries of church and army, all pressing to be received by the Empress and to take part in the fabulous entertainments, transformed the ancient city.

Only Potemkin was absent. Whether from eccentricity or weariness of the pomp and ceremony, for which he was so much responsible, or, as is more probable, because the strong religious mood and tradition of Kiev infected him, he withdrew to the Pecherskaya Lavra, the oldest monastery in Russia, which was renowned for its sanctity[2]. There he went into semi-retirement. He gave audience occasionally, but preferred to live in private praying, fasting and making his devotions during Passion week preceding Easter. He was, nevertheless, still in charge of all arrangements and a stream of messengers went out from the monastery, bearing his personal instructions for the further stages of the journey.

It was an exceptionally severe winter and the Dnieper was ice-bound until May. Catherine and her party at last embarked in galleys, a fleet of which had been specially built on Potemkin's orders. Seven enormous galleys, painted red and gold, headed the stately procession down river, and seventy-three others followed. More than 3,000 sailors, wearing special picturesque uniforms, manned this fleet. Each galley was fitted out with every luxury, even to the extent of having its own orchestra, and as the fleet moved southwards, the music floated over the water to the crowds who had gathered from near and far to line the river banks and watch this fantastic spectacle.

The Prince de Ligne, the gallant Austrian soldier, who, like

1 Homage: a public show of respect or honour towards someone or something (esp. in the phrases pay or do homage to). 2. (in feudal society) the act of respect and allegiance made by a vassal to his lord.

2 Sanctity: the condition of being sanctified; holiness.

Potemkine, *engraving by James Walker*

his friend, Ségur, so delighted Catherine, named the galleys "Cleopatra's fleet". It was a fitting title. The fireworks and illuminations, the floral decorations and triumphal arches and the galley fleet itself were all built around the Empress, who in her charm and gaiety and her love of life seemed to those present to challenge comparison with the fabulous Queen of the Nile. (...)

The fleet anchored at Kremenchug, where Catherine watched manoeuvres by 12,000 men, wearing the new uniforms introduced by Potemkin to give his troops greater comfort and efficiency. Thence they travelled on to the site of Ekaterinoslav, designated the capital of New Russia. The site was at an elevated part of the Dnieper bank not far distant from the rapids, and there Catherine, after prayers and blessings pronounced by the newly appointed archbishop, laid the foundation stone of the church which was to be the first building of the new city.

Finally Catherine with her large party reached Kherson, one of the goals of the journey. Here Potemkin was able to show her the town which he had founded and built in eight years. Already it was considerable in size with an impressive admiralty building, a busy harbour and a dockyard where a 66-gun warship and a 40-gun frigate were launched in her presence.

Catherine inspected the city thoroughly and was so strongly impressed that she wrote to Grimm that "the labours of Prince Potemkin have made this town and this region, where before the peace (with Turkey) there was not one hut, a flourishing country and city, which will grow richer with each year." There was one further detail, typical of Potemkin, which must have appealed to Catherine. This was a signpost which she saw by the eastern gate of the town, bearing the inscription: "This way leads to Byzantium." (...)

Another incident that unsettled many members of her suite at the outset of this Crimean visit was the sudden appearance of a large detachment of Tatars, mounted and colourful in their exotic dress. These Tatars, appearing so suddenly and surrounding the carriages as an escort and guard of honour, made [some] nervous. For centuries these Tatar horsemen had been the bitter

enemies of the Russians, and they had been subdued so recently, that there seemed some danger in allowing them to act as an escort. Catherine, however, was poised and tranquil as usual. Potemkin had arranged this guard of honour and he had complete faith that he would not expose her to real danger. In any case he had near at hand an army of 153,000 men.

With this escort, Catherine made an impressive entry into Bakhchisrai, the ancient city of the Khans, whose palace became her residence. Here, too, Potemkin had arranged spectacles which dazzled and astonished the whole party. The oriental scene with its colours, minarets and bazaars, the strange discordant call to prayer of the muezzins, the gorgeous robes of the Tatar princes and the sensual luxury of the Khan's palace with its fountains, cool tiled courtyards, and fragrance of orange groves, all combined to intoxicate Catherine and her guests. Only a short while ago she had been surrounded by snow and chilled by the icy cold of St. Petersburg's winter, and now in the Crimea the heat, the rich green foliage and the citrus fruits seemed unreal. In fact, the whole of her Crimean tour, as she herself wrote, "so strongly resembles the dreams of the Thousand and One Nights" that it stood in her memory as one of the greatest experiences of her life.

The climax of this visit was the excursion to the coast when Potemkin dramatically revealed to her from the heights near Inkerman the new town and harbour of Sevastopol. Forty men-of-war were drawn up in the harbour and, as Catherine caught her first sight of the harbour, the ships at once fired salvoes in her honour. Heightening the impact of this scene on all present was the knowledge that Constantinople itself was within two days sailing, and with the Black Sea stretching before her, it was as though she had already conquered Turkey.

After looking down for some time on the crowded harbour of Sevastopol, Catherine took from her pocket the miniature of Peter the Great which she always carried when travelling, and said to the Prince de Ligne who was with her: "What

would he say, what would he do, if he were here?" It was a rhetorical[1] question, but no doubt Peter would have acknowledged her achievement.

Potemkin was the hero of the day and indeed of the whole journey. Catherine frequently expressed gratitude for his work and, as she wrote to Grimm, "his exceeding great industry and intelligence." It was, however, Ségur who expressed the astonishment of the whole party at Sevastopol. "It seemed incredible to us," he wrote, "that at a distance of eight hundred leagues[2] from the capital and in a country so recently conquered, Prince Potemkin had found it possible in two years to raise such an establishment, to build a town, construct a fleet, to erect forts, and to assemble such a large number of inhabitants: this was truly prodigal activity."

The return journey was speedy. Catherine halted at Poltava and before her eyes an army of 50,000 men re-enacted the battle in which Peter the Great had routed Charles XII and finally broken Swedish power. "This grand and magnificent spectacle worthily crowned her journey, as romantic as it was historic," wrote Ségur.

At Kharkov, Potemkin took leave of Catherine to return to the south where he still had so much to do, and their parting moved them both. Potemkin had organized the whole journey as an expression of his great love for her as a woman and as his Empress. She indeed felt and returned his love; she was overwhelmed by his homage and her gratitude to him was boundless. She showered gifts on him, created him Prince of Tauris, and after their parting she wrote constantly to him.

Extracts from *Catherine the Great* by Ian Grey
Greenwood Press, Publishers, Westport, Connecticut, USA

1 Rhetorical: concerned with effect or style rather than content or meaning.

2 League: an obsolete unit of distance of varying length. It is commonly equal to 3 miles.

Catherine II
(Painting of Russian School, copy after Alexander Roslin)

II Reform of the Law

Although Catherine did not hesitate to follow self-interest in foreign relations, she took an idealistic view of her domestic problems. She turned from Machiavelli[1] to Montesquieu[2]. When she thought of Courland and Poland she pictured herself as a general on horseback; when she thought of Russia she pictured herself as the Little Mother, Matushka. She and Russia were united against the rest of the world.

The Empress wished to make her people happy without making herself unhappy. Russia had despotic, conflicting, chaotic laws. There was a printed code which had been handed down from Czar Alexei Michaelovich, the father of Peter the Great. But chiefly the people were ruled by *ukases*[3]. Not always, however, did the Russians obey promptly. It was commonly said of the peasants when some order had not been obeyed, "They are waiting for the third ukase." During the reign of Elisabeth Petrovna, the Senate had discussed the need of codifying the laws but postponements had ensued and nothing had been accomplished. On the threshold of her reign, Catherine was met by this need. It was a task made to her hand.

She took the ancient code of Czar Alexei in one hand and Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws in the other. There seemed to be no way of reconciling the two; so she decided that she had better cleave[4] to Montesquieu altogether. She worked three hours every day for more than three years and produced a

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1 Niccolò Macchiavelli (1469-1527), Florentine statesman and political philosopher; secretary to the war council of the Florentine republic (1498-1512). His most famous work is Il Principe (The Prince,1532).

2 Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755), French political philosopher. His chief work is L'Esprit des lois (1748), a comparative analysis of various forms of government, which had a profound influence on political thought in Europe and the U.S.

3 Ukaze: (in imperial Russia) an edict of the tsar.

4 To cleave: to cling or adhere.

thick volume. There was but little original thought in it as most of it had been adapted from her philosopher and guide. It was published under the title "Instruction of Her Imperial Majesty Catherine the Second for the Commission charged with preparing a project of a new code of laws." It was more briefly known in Russian as the *Nakaz*.

She worked secretly, showing her book to no one but Panin and Orlov. Count Panin was delighted. The Empress was at last engaged on a plan in which he could whole-heartedly share, that of putting political and social ideals on paper. The Count cried out, while his huge wig flopped to one side in his excitement, "These are principles which will cast down walls!"

In the summer of 1767 the work was at last finished. In December Catherine had sent out a *ukase* ordering the election of delegates for a legislative commission. During the spring, a time of great floods in Russia, the elections had taken place. There had been much groaning and protesting from districts afflicted by heavy rains, as the swollen streams made travel difficult and dangerous, but the new Empress ignored all excuses for delay and somehow or other the streams were forded[1]. In early summer, the delegates began to arrive in Moscow, in kibitkas, on horseback, on foot. They represented cities, districts, social classes, religions, races. There were Russian nobles wearing laces, diamonds, and velvets made up in the latest Paris fashion; there were merchants and military men; there were a few peasants in smocks; there were Tartars and Bashkirs. Well over a thousand delegates assembled.

Prior to the convention, the Empress sequestered[2] herself in the Kolomenakoe Palace not far from Moscow. Here she gathered around her various thinking persons, as she called them, and only asked them to criticize her manuscript. To meet their conflicting objections, she crossed out so much that half of the Instruction is left. Collecting the remnant of her labors, she

1 To ford: to cross (a river, brook, etc.) over a shallow area.
2 To sequester: to retire into seclusion.

sent it to the printer, and then had it read before the legislative convention. As many of the delegates could not read, it was necessary that the Instruction should be read aloud frequently and fully. At first the delegates rose in a body at the first sound of Her Majesty's words; but the document was read too often and too lengthily. Finally they just remained sitting or milled around according to their custom. Some English visitors who attended the convention called it a riot. Whether the meeting was really as tumultuous as the English Parliament can be on occasion is doubtful. But the Russian delegates wore so many gay, primitive colors, it probably seemed to Anglo-Saxon observers as if they expressed excitement and barbarism in every way.

The legislative commission dragged on a year and a half. The first sessions took place in the Kremlin but shifted to Petersburg when the Empress returned to her northern residence.

The Instruction abounds in democratic ideas. It goes so far as advocating the gradual abolition of serfdom by allowing the

Scenes of Russia at the time of Catherine II: A village Council of Elders
(Original drawing by an English traveller)

serfs to own property and to purchase their own freedom. But the Russian nobles were not in favor of the reform. Most of the plan was crossed out by her counselors before the Instruction ever went to print and the remainder was eliminated by speeches in the convention. The Empress abandoned all propaganda for the abolition of serfdom for the rest of her life and consoled her conscience by abusing the Russian nobles in her memoirs. "What had I not to suffer from the voice of an irrational and cruel public opinion when this question was considered in the legislative commission! The mob of nobles, whose number was much greater than I had ever supposed because I had judged them too much by the people who daily surrounded me, began to suspect that these discussions might bring about an improvement in the position of the peasants... I believe that there were not twenty human beings who reflected on the subject at that time with humanity, really like human beings!"

Scenes of Russia at the time of Catherine II: A simple home scene
(Original drawing by an English traveller)

III The Campaign for Vaccination

Catherine's campaign against smallpox in Russia won great fame for her in Europe. It must be admitted that her step took courage in those days. The prevalence of the disease was such that everybody believed that everybody had to have it. For instance, the court spoke of the Grand Duke's uncertain chance of life because he "had not yet had the smallpox." The royal family had no more protection than the poorest peasant. The fiancé of Empress Elisabeth had been carried off by smallpox on the eve of his marriage and Peter the Second had died in early youth of the same disease. From the time of Catherine's arrival in Russia she was constantly pursued by the fear of the pest and every time she fell ill she thought it had overtaken her.

She had heard of vaccination in England. Her admiration for English institutions had been encouraged by her friendship with Sir Charles Hanbury Williams and the influence of Voltaire. The practical English had imported vaccination from the Orient, and an Englishwoman, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, had set a brave example by allowing herself and her son to be inoculated[1]. On the other hand, there were many voices raised against it. The physicians of the Sorbonne discountenanced[2] vaccination and disregarded the experience of England with the practice. Frederick the Great was intensely afraid of it and wrote to Catherine to urge her strongly not to take the risk. She replied that she had always feared the smallpox and wished more than anything else to be freed of her enslavement to this fear. "I am so struck by a situation so unworthy that I regard it as a weakness not to escape from it."

She entered into correspondence with an English surgeon, Dr. Thomas Dimsdale, who was adventurous enough to accept her invitation to come to Russia. He had published a work on

1 Inoculate: to introduce (the causative agent of a disease) into the body of (a person or animal), in order to induce immunity.

2 Discountenance: to disapprove of.

inoculation and this had attracted the Empress's attention; she had always been a great importer and reader of foreign books. The famous Dr. Dimsdale arrested her attention, preoccupied as she was at all times with her anxiety about smallpox.

He arrived at the court of Petersburg in December, 1768. He was received as all foreign guests were received with social entertainments which the worthy doctor subsequently described in full in his tracts on inoculation in Russia. The Empress had been warned against the experiment and her fears were rife[1]. Although she had sent for Dimsdale to vaccinate her, she still continued to discuss the matter pro and con. At last she put an end to her fears by ordering the physician to vaccinate her secretly one day. The test succeeded capitally[2]. The ghost of this fear was laid, never to walk again.

The Grand Duke Paul was now vaccinated and Gregory Orlov. On the second day after the operation, Orlov had gone hunting. This was news to send to Europe, still trembling at the bare thought of vaccination. The Empress wrote the story to Voltaire, trusting him to spread it in the proper quarters. All at once she was ashamed that she had ever been so timorous as to fear vaccination. After all, every street urchin[3] in England had as much courage as that! She urged inoculation upon court circles in Petersburg and the aristocratic Russians suddenly became very bold. Dr. Dimsdale was kept busy with impatient applicants. "A few weeks ago," said Catherine, "nobody would hear of inoculation; but now nobody can wait to be vaccinated. It has become the fashion."

Extracts from *Catherine the Great* by Katharine Anthony
Garden City publishing Company, Garden City, New York

1 Rife: abundant.
2.Capitally: in an excellent manner, admirably.
3.Urchin: a mischivious child, esp. one young, small or raggedly dressed

Catherine the Great as statesman

We can hardly doubt the good intentions of Catherine in the early years of her reign.

In her copy of Fenelon's *Telemaque* were found these resolutions:

> Study mankind, learn to use men without surrendering to them unreservedly. Search for true merit, be it at the other end of the world, for usually it is modest and retiring.
>
> Do not allow yourself to become the prey of flatterers; make them understand that you care neither for praise nor for obsequiousness. Have confidence in those who have the courage to contradict you, ... and who place more value on your reputation than on your favor.
>
> Be polite, humane, accessible, compassionate, and liberal-minded. Do not let your grandeur prevent you from condescending with kindness toward the small, and putting yourself in their place. See that this kindness, however, does not weaken your authority nor diminish their respect.... Reject all artificiality. Do not allow the world to contaminate you to the point of making you lose the ancient principles of honor and virtue....
>
> I swear by Providence to stamp these words into my heart.

She informed herself assiduously on every relevant subject, and wrote detailed instructions on a thousand topics from army training and industrial operations to the toilette of her court and the production of operas and plays.

Said one of her earliest and least friendly biographers:

> Ambition extinguished not in Catherine's soul an ardent relish for pleasure... But she knew how to renounce pleasure, and to make the transition to employments the most serious, and application the most indefatigable to the affairs of government. She assisted at all the deliberations of the Council, read the dispatches of her ambassadors, and dictated, or indicated ... the answers to be returned. She entrusted her ministers with only the details of business, and still kept her eye on the execution.

The task of governing her vast area was made almost impossible by the number (ten thousand), diversity, contradictions, and. chaos of existing laws. Hoping to play Justinian to Russia, and to consolidate her power, Catherine, on December 14, 1766, summoned to Moscow administrative agents and legal experts from every part of the empire, to undertake a thorough revision and codification of Russian law. In preparation for their coming she personally prepared a *Nakaz*, or *Instructions*, describing the principles upon which the new code should be formed. These reflected her reading of Montesquieu, Beccaria, Blackstone, and Voltaire. She began by declaring that Russia must be thought of as a European state, and should have a constitution based upon "European principles." This did not, in her understanding, mean a "constitutional government" subordinating the sovereign to a legislature chosen by the people; the educational level of Russia would not permit even so limited an electoral franchise as existed in Britain. It meant a government in which the ruler, though ultimately the sole source of law, ruled in obedience to law. Catherine upheld the feudal

system — i.e., the system of mutual loyalty and services between peasant and vassal, vassal and liege lord, lord and sovereign—as indispensable to economic, political, and military order in the Russia of 1766 (a land of communities almost isolated from one another, and from the center of government, by difficulties of communication and transport); but she urged that the rights of masters over their serfs should be defined and limited by law, that serfs should be allowed to own property, and that the trial and punishment of serfs should be transferred from the feudal lord to a public magistrate responsible to a provincial court responsible to the sovereign. All trial should be open, torture should not be used, capital punishment should be abolished in law as well as in fact. Religious worship should be free; "amongst so many different creeds the most injurious error would be intolerance." The *Nakaz*, before being printed, was submitted by her to her advisers; they warned her that any sudden change from existing custom would plunge Russia into disorder; and she allowed them to modify her proposals, especially those for the gradual emancipation of the serfs.

Even as so bowdlerized the *Instructions*, published in Holland in 1767, stirred the European intelligentsia to enthusiastic praise. The Empress sent a copy direct to Voltaire, who made his usual obeisance. "Madame, last night I received one of the guarantees of your immortality—your code in a German translation. Today I have begun to translate it into French. It will appear in Chinese, in every tongue; it will be a gospel for all mankind." And he added in later letters: "Legislators have the first place in the temple of glory; conquerors come behind them. ... I regard the *Instructions* as the finest monument of the century." The French government forbade the sale of the Instructions in France.

The modified *Nakaz* was presented to the "Committee for Drafting a New Code," which met on August 10, 1767. It was composed of 564 members elected by various groups: 161 from the nobility, 208 from the towns, 79 from the free peasantry, 54 from the Cossacks, 34 from non-Russian tribes (Christian or

not), and 28 from the government. The clergy was not represented as a class, and the serfs were not represented at all. In some ways the Committee corresponded to the States-General that was to meet in Paris in 1789; and, as in that more famous assembly, the delegates brought to the government lists of grievances and proposals for reform from their constituents. These documents were transmitted to the Empress, and they offered her and her aides a valuable survey of the condition of the realm. The Committee was empowered not to pass laws, but to advise the sovereign on the state and needs of each class or district, and to offer suggestions for legislation. The delegates were guaranteed freedom of speech and inviolability of person. Some of them proposed the emancipation of all serfs some asked that the right to own serfs be more widely extended. In December, 1767, the Committee recessed; in February, 1768, it moved to St. Petersburg; altogether it held 203 sessions; on December 18, 1768, it was adjourned *sine die* because the outbreak of war with Turkey called many delegates to the front. The task of drafting proposed legislation was deputed to subcommittees, some of which continued to meet till 1775; but no code of laws was formulated. Catherine was not altogether displeased with this inconclusive result. "The committee," she said, "... has given me light and knowledge for all the Empire. I know now what is necessary, and with what I should occupy myself. It has elaborated all parts of the law, and has distributed the affairs under heads. I should have done more had it not been for the war with Turkey, but a unity hitherto unknown in the principles and methods of discussion has been introduced." Meanwhile she had shown the nobles on how broad a base her power rested. The Committee, before adjourning, proposed to confer upon her the appellation "Great"; she refused, but consented to be called "Mother of the Country."

Two of Catherine's recommendations became law: the abolition of torture and the establishment of religious toleration. This was widely extended: it allowed the Roman Catholic Church to compete with the Greek Orthodox; it protected the Jesuits

even after the dissolution of their order by Pope Clement XIV (1773); it permitted the Volga Tatars to rebuild their mosques. Catherine admitted the Jews into Russia, but she subjected them to special taxes, and (possibly for their safety) confined them to specific areas. She left the Raskolniki — religious dissenters — free to practice their rites unhindered; "we have indeed," she wrote to Voltaire, "fanatics who, as they are no longer persecuted by others, burn themselves; but if those of other countries did the same, no great harm would result."

The *philosophes* were especially pleased by Catherine's subordination of the Russian Church to the state. Some of them complained that she still attended religious services (so did Voltaire); the older of them recognized that her attendance was indispensable to retaining the allegiance of the people. By a decree of February 26, 1764, she turned into state property all the lands of the Church. The salaries of the Orthodox clergy were henceforth paid by the state — so ensuring their support of the government. Many monasteries and nunneries were closed; those that remained were forbidden to accept more than a prescribed number of novices, and the legal age for taking vows was raised. The surplus revenues from ecclesiastical institutions were applied to the foundation of schools, asylums, and hospitals.

Both the clergy and the nobility opposed the extension of popular education, fearing that the spread of knowledge among the masses would lead to heresy, unbelief, and factionalism, and would imperil social order. Here as elsewhere, Catherine began with liberal aspirations. She appealed to Grimm:

> Listen a moment, my philosophical friends: you would be charming, adorable, if you would have the charity to map out a plan for young people, from ABC to university. ... I, who have not studied and lived in Paris, have neither knowledge nor insight in the matter. ... I am very much concerned about an idea for a university and its management,

> a *gymnasium* [secondary school] and an elementary school... Until you accede to my request I shall hunt through the *Encyclopédie*. Oh, I shall be certain to draw out what I want!

Meanwhile she was moved by the pedagogical enthusiasm of Ivan Betsky, who had traveled in Sweden, Germany, Holland, Italy, and France, had frequented the salon of Mme. Geoffrin, had studied the *Encyclopédie*, and had met Rousseau. In 1763 she organized at Moscow a school for foundlings, which by 1796 had graduated forty thousand students; in 1764 a school for boys was opened in St. Petersburg, and in 1765 a school for girls; in 1764 the Smolny Monastery was transformed into the Smolny Institute for girls of the nobility — an echo of Mme. de Maintenon's St.-Cyr; Catherine was the first Russian ruler to do anything for the education of women. Baffled by the dearth of qualified teachers, she sent Russian students to study pedagogy in England, Germany, Austria, and Italy. A teachers' college was founded in1786.

She admired Joseph II's reforms of education in Austria, and asked him to lend her someone familiar with his procedure. He sent her Theodor Yankovich, who drew up for her a plan which she promulgated as a "Statute of Popular Schools" (August 5, 1786). An elementary school was established in the chief town of each county, and a high school in each of the principal cities of twenty-six provinces. These schools were open to all children of any class; corporal punishment was not allowed in them; teachers and textbooks were provided by the state. The project was largely frustrated by the reluctance of the parents to send their children to school rather than use them for labor at home. In the ten years between their foundation and Catherine's death the "popular schools" grew slowly from forty to 316; the teachers from 136 to 744; the pupils from 4,398 to 17,341. In 1796 Russia was still far be-hind the West in public instruction.

Higher education was scantily provided by the University of

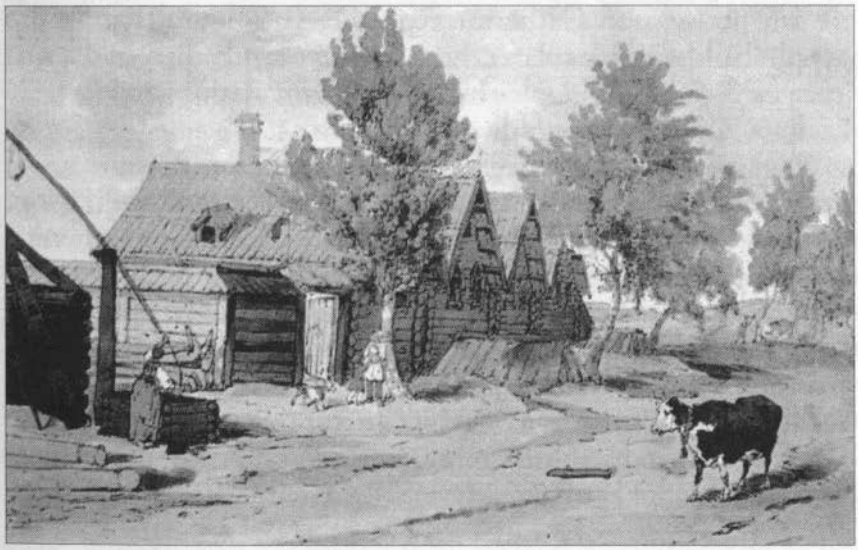
Moscow, and by special academies. A School of Commerce was founded in 1772, an Academy of Mines in 1773. The old Academy of Sciences was enlarged and was provided with ample funds. In 1783, on urging by Princess Dashkova, and under her presidency, a Russian Academy was organized for the improvement of the language, the encouragement of literature, and the study of history; it issued translations, published periodicals, and compiled a dictionary which appeared in six installments between 1789 and 1799. Appalled by the high death rate in Russia, and the primitive character of public sanitation and personal hygiene, Catherine brought in foreign physicians, established a College of Pharmacy at Moscow, and provided funds for the production of surgical instruments. She opened in Moscow three new hospitals, a foundling asylum, and an insane asylum, and in St. Petersburg three new hospitals, including a "Secret Hospital" for venereal diseases. In 1768 she introduced into Russia inoculation for smallpox, and quieted public fears by serving, aged forty, as the second Russian subject of the treatment — soon Catherine reported to Voltaire that "more people had been inoculated here in one month than in Vienna in a year." (In 1772 Naples had its first inoculation, and in 1774 Louis XV, *un*inoculated, died of smallpox.)

Her greatest achievement lay in carrying on the efforts of Peter the Great to bring Russia into Western civilization. Whereas Peter had thought of this chiefly in terms of technology, Catherine thought of it principally in terms of culture; by the force and courage of her personality she drew the literate classes of Russia out of the Middle Ages into the orbit of modern thought in literature, philosophy, science, and art. She was ahead of her Christian compeers (excepting the un-Christian Frederick II) in establishing religious toleration. A French historian compared her favorably with Le Grand Monarque:

> The generosity of Catherine, the splendor of her reign, the magnificence of her court, her institutions, her monuments, her wars, were precisely to

> Russia what the age of Louis XIV was to Europe; but, considered individually, Catherine was greater than this Prince. The French formed the glory of Louis; Catherine formed that of the Russians. She had not, like him, the advantage of reigning over a polished people; nor was she surrounded from infancy by great and accomplished characters.

In the estimate of an English historian Catherine was "the only woman ruler who has surpassed England's Elizabeth in ability, and equaled her in the enduring significance of her work." "She was," said a German historian, "every inch a 'political being,' unmatched by anyone of her sex in modern history, and yet at the same time a thorough woman and a great lady." We may apply to her the magnanimous principle laid down by Goethe: her faults were an infection from her time, but her virtues were her own.



Scenes of Russia at the time of Catherine II: common wooden houses
(Original drawing by an English traveller)

Notes

Russia under Catherine the Great

Frederick the Great wrote, about 1776: « Of all the neighbors of Prussia, Russia merits most attention, as being the most dangerous; it is powerful and near. Those who in future will govern Prussia will like me, be forced to cultivate friendship of these barbarians."

Always, in thinking of Russia, we most remember its size. Under Catherine the Great it included Esthonia, Livonia, Finland (in part), European Russia, the northern Caucase and Siberia. Its area expanded from 687000 to 913000 square kilometers in the eighteen century; its population grew from thirteen millions in 1711 to thirty million in 1790.

In 1722, 97.7 per cent of the Russian population was rural; in 1790, still 96.4 per cent; so slow was industrialization. In 1762 all but ten per cent of the people were peasant, and 52.4 per cent of these were serfs. Half of the land was owned by some 100,000 nobles, most of the rest by the state or the Russia Orthodox Church, some by semi-free peasants still owning services and obedience to local lords. A landlord's wealth was reckoned by the number of his serfs, so Count Peter Cheremetyev was 140,000 serfs rich. The 992,000 serfs of the Church were a main part of her wealth, and 2,800,000 serfs tilled the lands of the Crown in 1762.

The noble provided military leadership and economic organization; he was usually exempt from military service, but offered it in hopes of favors from the government. He had judiciary rights over his serfs, he could punish them, sell them, or banish them to Siberia; normally, however, he allowed his peasants to govern their internal affairs through their village assembly. He was obliged by law to provide seed for his serfs, and so maintain them through periods of dearth[1]. A serf

1 Dearth: an inadequate amount, esp. of food; scarcity.

might achieve freedom by owner's consent. Free peasants could buy and own serfs; some of these freemen, called *kulaki*, dominated village affairs, lent money at usurious rates and exceeded the lords in exploitation and severity. Master and man alike were a tough breed[1], strong in frame and arm and hand; they were engaged together in the conquest of the soil, and the discipline of the seasons lay heavy upon them both. Sometimes hardships were beyond bearing. Repeatedly we hear of serfs in great number deserting their farms and losing themselves in Poland or the Urals or the Caucasus; thousands of them died on the way, thousands were hunted and captured by soldiery. Every now and then peasants rose in armed revolt against masters and government, and gave desperate battle to the troops. Always they were defeated, and survivors crept back to their tasks.

Some serfs were trained to arts and crafts, and supplied nearly all the needs of their masters. At a feast given to Catherine II (the Comte de Ségur tells us) the poet and the composer of the opera, the architect who had built the auditorium, the painter who decorated it, the actors and actress in the drama, the dancers in the ballet, and the musicians in the orchestra were all serfs of Count Cheremeryev. In the long winter the peasants made the clothing and the tools they would need in the coming year. Town industry was slow in developing, partly because every home was a shop, and partly because difficulties of transportation usually limited the market to the producer's vicinity. The government encouraged industrial enterprises by offering monopolies to favorites, sometimes by providing capital, and it approved participation by nobles in industry and trade. An incipient capitalism appeared in mining, metallurgy, and munitions, and in factory production of textiles, lumber, sugar, and glass. Entrepreneurs were permitted to buy serfs to man their factories; such "possessional peasants," however, were bound not to the owner but to the enterprise; a governmental decree of 1736 required them, and their descendants, to remain in their respective factories until officially permitted to leave. In many cases they lived in barracks, often isolated from their families. Hours of labor ran from eleven to fifteen per day for men with an hour for lunch. After 1734 "free" — non-serf — labor increased in the factories, as giving more stimulus to the workers and more profits to the employer. Labor was too cheap to favor the invention or application of machinery; but in 1748 Pulzunov used a

1 Breed: a lineage or race.

steam engine in his ironworks in the Urals.

Between the nobles and the peasants a small and political powerless middle class slowly took form. In 1725 some three per cent of the population were merchants, tradesmen in the villages and the towns and at the fairs; importers of tea and silk from China, of sugar, coffee, spices, and drugs from overseas, and of the finer textiles, pottery, and paper from Western Europe. (...)

It was impossible that a people so used up and brutalized by the conflict with nature, so lacking in facilities of communication or in security of life, with so little opportunity for education and so little time for thought, should enjoy, except in the isolated villages, the privileges and perils of democracy. Some form of feudalism was inevitable in the economy, some mode of monarchy in central rule. It was to be expected that the monarchy would be subject to frequent overturns by noble factions controlling their own military support; that the monarchy should seek to make itself absolute; and that it should depend upon religion to help its soldiery, police, and judiciary to maintain social stability and internal peace.

Corruption clogged every avenue of administration. Even the wealthy nobles who surrounded the throne were amenable to "gifts". "If there be a Russian proof against flattery," said the almost contemporary Castéra, "there is not one who can resist the temptation of gold." Nobles controlled the palace guard that made and unmade "sovereigns"; they formed a caste of officers in the army; they manned[1] the Senate which, under Elizabeth, made the laws; they headed the collegia, or ministries, that ruled over foreign relations, the courts, industry, commerce, and finance; they appointed the clerks who carried the bureaucracy; they guided the ruler's choice of the governors who managed the "guberniyas" (provinces) into which the empire was divided, and after 1761 they chose the *vovodi* who governed the provinces. Over all branches of the government loomed[2] the mostly middle-class Fiscal, a federal bureau of intelligence, authorized to discover and punish peculation; but, despite its large use of informers, it found itself foiled[3], for if the monarch had dismissed every official guilty of venality the machinery of the state would have stopped. The tax collector had such sticky fingers that scarcely a

1 Manned: supplied or equipped with men.
2 To loom: to dominate.
3 To foil: to baffle or frustrate.

third of their gleaning reached the treasury.

Religion was specially strong in Russia, for poverty was bitter, and merchants of hope found many purchasers. Skepticism was confined to an upper class that could read French, and Freemasonry had many converts there. But the rural, and most of the urban, population lived in supernatural world of fearful piety, surrounded by devils, crossing themselves a dozen times a day, imploring the intercession of saints, worshiping relics, awed by miracles, trembling over portents, prostrating themselves before holy images, and moaning somber hymns from stentorian breasts. Church bells were immense and powerful; Boris Godunov had set up one of 288,000 pounds, but the Empress Anna Ivanovna outrang him by having one cast 432,000 pounds. The churches were filled; the rituals was more solemn here, and the prayers were more ecstatic, than in half-pagan papal Rome. The Russian priests — each of them a papa, or pope — wore awesome beards and flowing hair, and dark robes reaching to their feet (for legs are an impediment to dignity). They seldom mingled with the aristocracy or the court, but lived in modest simplicity, celibate in their monasteries or married in their rectories. Abbots and priors governed the monks, abbesses the nuns; the secular clergy submitted to bishops these to archbishops, these to provincial metropolitans, these to the patriarch in Moscow; and the Church as a whole acknowledged the secular sovereign as its head. Outside the Church were dozens of religious sects, rivaling one another in mysticism, piety, and hate.

Religion served to transmit a moral code that barely availed to create order amid the strong natural impulses of a primitive people. The nobles of the court adopted the morals, manners and language of the French aristocracy; their marriages were transactions in realty. The women of the court were better educated than the men, but in moment of passion they could erupt in hot words. Among the people the language was coarse, violence was frequent, and cruelty corresponded with the strength of the frame and thickness of the skin. Everyone gambled and drank according to his means, and stole according to his station, but everyone was charitable, and huts exceeded palaces in hospitality. Brutality and kindness were universal.

Extracts from *The Story of Civilization — Rousseau and Revolution* by Will and Ariel Durant. Simon & Schuster, New York

A few great personalities of the 18th century in the time of Catherine II

Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

He was the most prominent of the French Encyclopedists. He was educated by the Jesuits, and, refusing to enter one of the learned professions, was turned adrift by his father and came to Paris, where he lived from hand to mouth for a time. Gradually, however, he became recognized as one of the most powerful writers of the day. His first independent work was the *Essai sur le merite et la vertu* (1745). As one of the editors of the *Dictionnaire de médecine* (6 vols., Paris, 1746), he gained valuable experience in encyclopedic system. His *Pensées philosophiques* (The Hague, 1746), in which he attacked both atheism and the received Christianity, was burned by order of the Parliament of Paris.

He had made very little pecuniary profit out of the *Encyclopédie*, and Grimm appealed on his behalf to Catherine of Russia, who in 1765 bought his library, allowing him the use of the books as long as he lived, and assigning him a yearly salary which a little later she paid him for fifty years in advance.

In 1773 she summoned him to St. Petersburg with Grimm to converse with him in person. On his return he lived until his death in a house provided by her, in comparative retirement but in unceasing labor on the undertakings of his party, writing (according to Grimm) two-thirds of Raynal's famous *Histoire philosophique*, and contributing some of the most rhetorical pages to Helvetius's *De l'esprit* and Holbach's *Système de la nature*, *Système social*, and *Morale universelle*. In Sainte-Beuve's phrase, he was "the first great writer who belonged wholly and undividedly to modern democratic society," and his attacks on the political system of France were among the most potent causes of the Revolution.

Grimm Friedrich Melchior, Baron Von (1723-1807)

French author, the son of a German pastor, was born at Ratisbon on the 26th of December 1723. He studied at the University of Leipzig, where he came under the influence of Gottsched and of J. A. Ernesti, to whom he was largely indebted for his critical appreciation

of classical literature. ... His acquaintance with Rousseau, through a mutual sympathy in regard to musical matters, soon ripened into intimate friendship, and led to a close association with the encyclopaedists. He rapidly obtained a thorough knowledge of the French language, and acquired so perfectly the tone and sentiments of the society in which he moved that all marks of his foreign origin and training seemed effaced.

In 1753 Grimm, following the example of the abbé Raynal, began a literary correspondence with various German sovereigns. Raynal's letters, *Nouvelles Littéraires*, ceased early in 1755. With the aid of friends, especially of Diderot and Mme d'Epinay, during his temporary absences from France, Grimm himself carried on the correspondence, which consisted of two letters a month, until 1773, and eventually counted among his subscribers Catherine II of Russia, Stanislas Poniatowski, king of Poland, and many princes of the smaller German States.

His introduction to Catherine II of Russia took place at St Petersburg in 1773. In 1777 he again left Paris on a visit to St Petersburg, where he remained for nearly a year in daily intercourse with Catherine. He acted as Paris agent for the Empress in the purchase of works of art, and executed many confidential commissions for her. In 1792 he emigrated, and in the next year settled in Gotha, where his poverty was relieved by Catherine, who in 1796 appointed him minister of Russia at Hamburg. He died at Gotha on the 8 of December 1807.

The correspondence of Grimm was strictly confidential, and was not divulged during his lifetime. His notices of contemporaries are somewhat severe, and he exhibits the foibles and selfishness of the society in which he moved; but he was unbiased in his literary judgments, and time has only served to confirm his criticisms. In style and manner of expression he is thoroughly French. He is generally somewhat cold in his appreciation, but his literary taste is delicate and subtle; and it was the opinion of Sainte-Beuve that the quality of his thought in his best moments will compare not unfavorably even with that of Voltaire. His religious and philosophical opinions were entirely negative.

Voltaire (1694-1778) (pseudonyme of François-Marie Arouet)

French writer, satirist, the embodiment of the 18th century Enlightenment. Voltaire is remembered as a crusader against tyranny and bigotry. Compared to Rousseau's (1712-1778) rebelliousness and

idealism, Voltaire was skeptical about the solution of the great philosophical problems. Voltaire disliked his great contemporary thinker, but their ideas influenced deeply the French Revolution. In 1761 he wrote to Rousseau: "One feels like crawling on all fours after reading your work." "Liberty of thought is the life of the soul." (*Essay on Epic Poetry*, 1727)

François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire was born in Paris into a middle-class family. His father was a minor treasury official. Voltaire was educated by the Jesuits at the Collège Louis-le-Grand (1704-11). From 1711 to 1713 he studied law, and then worked as a secretary to the French ambassador in Holland before devoting himself entirely to writing. Voltaire's essays did not gain the approval of authorities, but he energetically attacked the government and the Catholic church, which caused him numerous imprisonments and exiles. In his early twenties he spent eleven months in the Bastille for writing satiric verses about the aristocracy.

Voltaire settled in 1755 in Switzerland, where he lived the rest of his life, apart from trips to France. He had his own château, Les Delices, outside Geneva, and later at nearby Ferney, in France. Anybody of note, from Boswell to Casanova, wanted to visit the place; Voltaire's conversations with visitors were recorded and published and he was flattered by kings and nobility.

Voltaire died in Paris on May 30, 1778, as the undisputed leader of the Age of Enlightenment. He had suffered throughout his life from poor health, but at the time of his death he was eighty-four. Voltaire left behind him over fourteen thousand known letters and over two thousand books and pamphlets.

As an essayist Voltaire defended freedom of thoughts and religious tolerance. In his *Dictionnaire Philosphique* (1764) he defined the ideal religion - it would teach very little dogma but much morality. The work was condemned in Paris, Geneva, and Amsterdam. For safety reasons Voltaire denied his authorship. In *Essay on the Manner and Spirit of Nations*, Voltaire presented the first modern comparative history of civilizations, including Asia. Later he returned to the Chinese philosophy is his *Dictionary*, praising the teachings of Confucius: "What more beautiful rule of conduct has ever been given man since the world began? Let us admit that there has been no legislator more useful to the human race."

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

He was born on June 28, 1712 in Geneva, Switzerland. His mother died shortly after his birth. When Rousseau was 10 his father fled from Geneva to avoid imprisonment for a minor offense, leaving young Jean-Jacques to be raised by an aunt and uncle. Rousseau left Geneva at 16, wandering from place to place, finally moving to Paris in 1742. He earned his living during this period, working as everything from footman to assistant to an ambassador.

Rousseau's profound insight can be found in almost every trace of modern philosophy today. Somewhat complicated and ambiguous, Rousseau's general philosophy tried to grasp an emotional and passionate side of man which he felt was left out of most previous philosophical thinking.

In his early writing, Rousseau contended that man is essentially good, a "noble savage" when in the "state of nature" (the state of all the other animals, and the condition man was in before the creation of civilization and society), and that good people are made unhappy and corrupted by their experiences in society. He viewed society as "artificial" and "corrupt" and that the furthering of society results in the continuing unhappiness of man.

Rousseau's most important work is *The Social Contract* that describes the relationship of man with society. Contrary to his earlier work, Rousseau claimed that the state of nature is brutish condition without law or morality, and that there are good men only a result of society's presence. Man joins together with his fellow men to form the collective human presence known as "society." *The Social Contract* is the "compact" agreed to among men that sets the conditions for membership in society.

Rousseau was one of the first modern writers to seriously attack the institution of private property, and therefore is considered a forebear of modern socialism and Communism. Rousseau also questioned the assumption that the will of the majority is always correct. He argued that the goal of government should be to secure freedom, equality, and justice for all within the state, regardless of the will of the majority.

One of the primary principles of Rousseau's political philosophy is that politics and morality should not be separated. When a state fails to act in a moral fashion, it ceases to function in the proper manner and ceases to exert genuine authority over the individual. The second important principle is freedom, which the state is created to preserve.

Rousseau's ideas about education have profoundly influenced modern educational theory. He minimizes the importance of book learning, and recommends that a child's emotions should be educated before his reason. He placed a special emphasis on learning by experience.

Potemkin, Prince Grigori Aleksandrovich (1739-1791)

Russian field marshal, statesman, and favorite of Catherine the Great. Potemkin was born in Smolensk Province on Sept. 13, 1739. He received considerable education in history, classics, and theology, and distinguished himself at the University of Moscow. But he found the army life more suitable than a seminary to his wild and imaginative temperament. He assisted in the coup d'état of June 1762 which brought Catherine II (the Great) to the throne in place of her husband Peter III.

Catherine who was much in need of reliable supporters, appreciated Potemkin's boundless energy and organizing ability. In 1774, their relation assume a more intimate character. Potemkin became the official favorite and was showered with honors and responsibilities. For the next seventeen years he was the most powerful man in Russia. A colorful extrovert, he reveled in ostentatious display and amassed vast personal wealth. Like Catherine, he succumbed to the lure of absolute power. Although he could be capricious and despotic, in many fields he manifested an enlightened spirit. He was tolerant towards religious dissidents and extended protection to national minorities, particularly the Orientals. As chief of the Russian army he introduced a more humane conception of discipline and exhorted officers to show fatherly concern for the welfare of their men. But the effectiveness of his military reforms was limited by the maintenance of serfdom, which he helped to consolidate.

Potemkin was more successful in strengthening Russia's hold on its newly acquired southern provinces, over which he ruled as virtual dictator. He promoted colonization, by foreign as well as Russian settlers, founded several new towns, and brought into being a Black Sea fleet. In 1783 he carried out the Russian annexation of Crimea. Four years later he arranged a much-publicized ceremonial tour by Catherine and her entourage through the southern provinces.

He died on October 5, 1791.

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Catherine the Great was born in 1729, as Princess Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst, the elder daughter of an obscure, noble German family. She died in 1796 as Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia. At the age of 33, she came to the throne and reigned thirty-four years, driven by a prodigious, superhuman life-force. Power once hers, she strove first and foremost to keep it. When her authority was assured, she gave herself up to her passion for ruling with an eagerness and a fervour that compel admiration. She would make it her business to bring some order into the more than chaotic legislation of her empire. It was for everyone to see, especially diplomats, how her achievements in all directions were dictated by a genuine will to do the right thing. The opulence, she regarded as essential, had to be real. She managed to acquire it at the cost of incessant effort. Her decrees show a remarkable good sense, especially coming from a woman who was not a trained political economist. She succeeded in reorganizing trade; she managed to rebuild and repopulate practically dead cities, to centralize administration and colonize desert provinces. In the perspective of humanity's evolution, she stands as an example of what one woman's unshakable faith, confidence in her destiny and own inner lights, can achieve over obstacles, failures and enemies. For all in all, she governed alone, doing her utmost to the end when she collapsed of a heart attack. As a force in action, remarkably intelligent, intuitive and pragmatic, she had an uncanny way to see, to attract and to use only the people, things and circumstances that could serve her purpose. And her purpose was, to the last, to make Russia great. She was a visionary and had the power to manifest her vision; she was a creative force and a builder and therein lies her greatness.

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