

# RASPUTIN—DEVIL OR SAINT

by The Princess Radziwill

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**When Rasputin Returned to St. Petersburg After His Long "Exile" He Immediately Turned His Attention to Establishing New Acquaintances Who Could Help Him in His Enlarged Vision of Political and Diplomatic Importance**

**SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING INSTALLMENTS**

The career of Gregory Rasputin, the "Black Monk of Russia," can be compared to the life of a comet, both in its physical flight across the sky and in its effect upon a childlike people whose faith is based upon mysticism and superstition. Out of the oblivion of the small Siberian town Pokrovskoe, Rasputin appeared on the horizon of political Russia and wielded an influence over the State and Church such as has never been duplicated by a civilian and a layman.

There are many stories concerning the relationship existing between Rasputin and the Empress of Russia, but the author says that the latter regarded the "monk" merely as a person who could save the life of the ailing Tsarevitch. That the "Prophet," or "blessed Gregory," as his devotees called him, did wield a powerful influence over the Ministers and Court is emphasized in example after example. The same spell which he cast over the "monks" of his native town brought the sophisticated Russian nobility under his power. Despite his filthy, unkempt and revolting appearance, they, in company with the uneducated millions of peasants and town-people, became his devoted followers.

Rasputin's "creed" contained precepts objectionable to the orthodox Church and to the person not blinded by his mysticism, and after many unsuccessful attempts he was finally "exiled" to his old home. After two years he returned to the capital.

Rasputin was far too clever ever to say one word capable of offending the Empress, whose proud temperament would never have forgiven him any familiarity had he dared to venture upon it. Whenever he was in her presence he kept a most humble attitude, and certainly never discussed with her any matters of state and never dared entertain her with aught else than religious questions. He was far less guarded with regard to what he told the Emperor, with whom it is unfortunately true that he sometimes allowed himself remarks he would have done better to keep to himself. But the Tsar never looked upon him in any other light than in that of a jester whose sayings were absolutely devoid of any importance whatever, but who amused the Tsar at times by the daring manner in which he would touch upon things and criticize people whose names only he would ever have dared to mention in a disparaging tone before Nicholas II. But between that and the possession of any real power and influence there was an abyss which, unfortunately, in view of the turn that events were to take, no one noticed among all those who lamented over the almost constant presence of Rasputin at Tsarskoie Selo.

**Court Followers Use Rasputin**

All that I have said, however, refers only to the Emperor and Empress. In regard to some people, who surrounded them it was not quite the same. It is certain that from the first day that the "Prophet" was introduced at Tsarskoie Selo some intriguing persons applied themselves to make use of him for their own special benefit and advantage, and tried to create around him a legend that had hardly anything in common with the real truth. It is useless to mention the names of these people, whose influence it must be hoped is now at an end. But it is impossible not to speak of their activity in regard to the spreading of these rumors which attributed to Rasputin an importance he was never really in possession of. This caused no small damage to the prestige of the dynasty. Rasputin ought to have been considered for what he was—that is, a kind of jester, "un fou du roi," who, like Chicot in Dumas's famous novels, allowed himself to say all that he thought of his sovereign and whose words or actions no one could take seriously into account. Instead of this some ambitious men and women, mostly belonging to that special class of Technomikis or civil functionaries that has always been the curse of Russia and that, happily, is losing every day something of its former power, profited by the circumstance that the solitary existence led by the Imperial Court in its various residences did not allow any outside rumors to penetrate to the ears of the rulers of the country. They intentionally transformed Rasputin into a kind of *deus ex machina*, whose hand could be traced in every event of importance which occurred and who could at will remove and appoint Ministers, generals, ladies in waiting, court officials and at last induce the Tsar himself to deprive his uncle, the Grand Duke Nicholas, of the supreme command of the army and to assume it himself.

These different tales were repeated and carried about all over Russia with alacrity, and all the enemies of the reigning house rejoiced in hearing them. They were untrue nine times out of ten, and generally invented for a purpose. Rasputin did not influence the Tsar, who is far too intelligent to have ever allowed this uneducated peasant to guide or to advise him, but unfortunately he influenced other people, who really believed him to be all powerful. A kind of *camarilla* formed itself around Rasputin that clung to him and used him for its own purposes, and that went about saying that he was the only man in the whole of Russia capable of obtaining what one wanted, provided it pleased him to do so. One declared that he could persuade the Empress, always trembling for the health of her only son, to discuss with her imperial spouse any subject that he might suggest. In reality no such thing ever took place. Alexandra Feodorovna always kept Rasputin at arms' length, and for one thing had far too much faith in his absolute disinterestedness even to imagine offering him any reward or gratification. But it is a fact that he was often called by her to pray at



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the bedside of the little boy, who represented the best hope of Russia. This circumstance was cleverly exploited. No one was ever present at his interviews with the Tsar or with the Empress; it was therefore easy for him to say what he liked about them, certain that no one could ever contradict him, with the exception of the interested persons themselves, and these could never get to hear or to learn anything about the wild tales which it pleased him, together with his friends, to put into circulation regarding the position which he occupied at the court. Thanks to his persuasive powers and to the undoubted magnetic force he was possessed of, he contrived to imbue even earnest and serious people with the conviction that he was at times the echo of the voices of those placed far above him, and that they had called upon him to say to others what it embarrassed them to mention themselves.

In Russia, as a general rule, the people in power were all cringing before the Tsar, whom they never dared to contradict. There were at the time I am writing about some Ministers who believed, or affected to believe, in all the extraordinary tales which it pleased Rasputin to repeat, and who thought it useful to follow the indications which it pleased him to give to them. He was only too delighted to be considered the most powerful personage in the whole of the Russian Empire. He helped as much as he could to accredit all the legends going about among the public in regard to his own person, and he imagined that the best way to add to his reputation as a man who did not care for the opinions of the world was to treat this world with disdain and with contempt, and to transform into his humble slaves ladies belonging to the highest social ranks, just as he had transformed into his hand-maidens the peasant girls who had fallen under his spell.

**Rasputin Intrigues Against His Enemies**

That he magnetized most of the people with whom he prayed seems but too true. Perhaps they did not notice it, and perhaps this was done with the consent of those on whom he exercised his hypnotic strength—it is difficult to know exactly—but that his prayer meetings were the scene of spiritist and magnetic experiences all who have ever been present agree in saying. He made no secret about the fact and openly acknowledged the use which he made of the state of trance in which he liked to throw his disciples, especially those belonging to the weaker sex. He practiced to the full all the customs of the "Khlysts," but he added to them a cunning such as is but rarely found in a human being, and a rough knowledge of human nature which gave him the facility to exploit the passions of the many vile people who thought that he was their instrument while in reality it was they who were playing fiddle to his tune.

After his return to St. Petersburg he applied himself to the task of setting aside all his former patrons, such as Illiodore, against whom he contrived to irritate several important members of the Holy Synod with false reports about remarks which the now disgraced monk was supposed to have made. He contrived also to bring about the exile of the Archbishop of Saratoff, Hermogene, from whom he feared disagreeable revelations concerning his own

past life and certain episodes connected with the days when he had preached his so-called doctrine in the town and government of Saratoff. On the other hand, he toadied to other ecclesiastical dignitaries eager for promotion, and in that way obtained their support in the Synod. Very soon he turned his thoughts to more practical subjects than religious fervor or religious reforms, and sought the society of business and financial people. Among these he soon obtained the opportunities he longed for and established a kind of large shop or concern where everything in the world could be bought or sold, from a pound of butter to a minister's portfolio.

It is no exaggeration to say that there was a time when nothing of importance ever occurred in the political, social and administrative life of the Russian capital that was not attributed to Rasputin, and the result of this was that there crowded about him all kinds of dark personalities, who hoped, thanks to his support and influence, to obtain this or that favor. Everything interested him, everything attracted his attention; railway concessions, bank emissions, stock exchange speculations, purchase of properties, acquisition of shares in industrial concerns, arranging of loans for persons in need of them—nothing seemed too small or too important for his activity. He liked to think himself necessary to all these high-born people, whom he compelled to wait for hours in his ante-chambers, just as if he had been a sovereign. And for every favor he granted, for every word which he promised to say, he exacted payment in the shape of a pound of flesh, which consisted, according to circumstances, in a more or less important commission.

Ministers and functionaries feared him. They knew that he could do them an infinitude of harm by causing to be circulated against them rumors of a damaging character, the result of which would have undoubtedly been their disgrace or removal to another sphere of action very probably not at all desirable. He was credited for an infinitude of things he had never thought of performing, and he was supposed to have been privy to all kinds of governmental changes that either pleased or displeased those who criticized them. As time went on one accused him among other things of the dismissal of the procurator of the Holy Synod, Mr. Loukianoff, with whom he had for a long period been at daggers

drawn and who had openly expressed his disapproval of the "Prophet" and his disbelief in his miraculous powers. The elevation of the Archimandrite Warnawa, one of his warmest patrons in the past, to the episcopal see of Tobolsk was also said to have been Rasputin's work, and the public persisted so entirely in seeing his hand everywhere and in everything that it was even rumored that it was he who was answerable for the decision of the censor forbidding the representation of a drama by the celebrated author Leonide Andreie called, "Anathema," on the eve of the day when it was to be produced—a decision which caused an immense sensation in the society of the Russian capital.

It was natural that among the many people who crowded around Rasputin some secret police agents found their way. One of these who was later to become the hero of more than one scandal, a certain Mr. Manassevitch Manuiloff, behought himself of becoming the mentor of the "Prophet." He was in close relation with Count Witte, always eager for his own return to power and desirous of overturning every individual in possession of the posts which he had formerly occupied himself. The two men tried to imbue Rasputin with the idea that he had great political talents, and that it was a pity he had not yet turned these into account for the good and the welfare of Holy Russia. Rasputin did not believe in the sincerity of his newly acquired advisors, but he was shrewd enough to see that their help would be of wonderful value to him. He willingly entered into the plans which they unfolded to him between two glasses of brandy or two cups of champagne as the occasion presented itself. Count Witte was very well aware of all the secret influences which were paramount at Tsarskoie Selo, and he contrived to turn them in favor of Rasputin, suggesting at the same time to the latter the things which he sought to say when in presence of certain personages. It was easy to throw in a word now and then, either in the shape of a jest, or of a remark uttered inadvertently and unintentionally, but yet sure to bear fruit in the future. The great thing was to give to Rasputin the idea that he was a personage of importance. This was not a very difficult matter considering the very high opinion which he already had of his own capacities, coupled with his set resolution to make the most hay whilst the sun was shining and never to miss an opportunity of asserting his personality no matter in what occasion or with what purpose.

**The Balkan War Aids the "Monk"**

The Balkan war gave Rasputin a golden opportunity for exercising his various talents, and it is pretty certain that he made at the time strenuous efforts in favor of peace, repeating to whomever wished to hear him that he had had visions which predicted that the greatest calamities were awaiting Russia, if she mixed herself up in it. This feeling was shared by a numerous party, and the sovereign himself was the most resolute adversary of any military intervention in this unfortunate affair. It is likely that even without Rasputin Russia would not have drawn her sword either for Bulgaria or for Serbia, but nevertheless it pleased his friends to say that without him this would have most undoubtedly occurred. And it also pleased him to assert that on this occasion he had proved to be the savior of his native land. We shall see him repeat this legend with great relish during a conversation which I had with him personally just before the breaking out of the present war.

There was also another incident in which Rasputin most certainly was implicated. This was the dismissal of Mr. Kokowtsoff, then Prime Minister and President of the Council, followed by the appointment in his place of old and tottering Mr. Gremykin, to whom no one in the whole of Russia had ever given a thought as a possible candidate for this difficult post. Count Witte was the personal enemy of Mr. Kokowtsoff, whom he had never forgiven for his so-called treason in regard to himself, and he never missed any opportunity to attack him in the Council of State, of which they were both members, criticizing his financial administration and making fun of the splendid budgets which were regularly presented to the Duma. These Witte declared to be entirely artificial, reposing on a clever manipulation of figures. In some ways it was easy to find fault with Mr. Kokowtsoff, whose name had been mixed up far too much for the good of his personal reputation in all kind of financial transactions and Stock Exchange operations. But, then, the same thing had been said about Count Witte with perhaps even more reason than about Mr. Kokowtsoff, whose wife, at least, had never been suspected of any manipulations with her banking account. Indeed, no finance minister in Russia had escaped accusations of the kind from his detractors or his adversaries, and it had never interfered with their administrative careers nor prevented them from sleeping soundly.

So far, so well; but then this was more the work of events as they had unfolded themselves naturally than the merit of Rasputin; yet he was openly congratulated by his friends, or so-called ones, on the success which he had obtained in driving Mr. Kokowtsoff away. The ultra-orthodox party which hailed the advent to power of one of its members—Mr. Gremykin having always been considered as one of the pillars of the conservative faction—not only cheered the "Prophet" with enthusiasm but also started to proclaim anew his genius and clear understanding of the needs of the Russian people. Thus a ministerial crisis culminated in the apotheosis of a man whose only appreciation of the qualities and of the duties of a Minister consisted in the knowledge of that Minister's existence as a public functionary.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

## PENNSYLVANIA SOLDIER BOYS IN THE MAKING AND WHAT THEY HAVE TO FACE



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"WE'LL RALLY ROUND THE COOKS, BOYS, WE'LL RALLY ONCE AGAIN," IS WHAT THEY SING AT CAMP MEADE  
Members of Company E, 315th Infantry, who bear the nickname of "The Dead Battalion," are very much alive at mess hours and between times as well.

KAISER'S SNIPERS WEAR HEAVY HEAD ARMOR  
This Canadian official photograph from the western front shows a German mask captured by Canadians. It is made of two-inch steel.