

### **Chapter III.**

The devouring in a dismal forest of a luckless Lithuanian dog by my grand-uncle Nicholas B. in company of two other military and famished scarecrows, symbolised, to my childish imagination, the whole horror of the retreat from Moscow and the immorality of a conqueror's ambition. An extreme distaste for that objectionable episode has tinged the views I hold as to the character and achievements of Napoleon the Great. I need not say that these are unfavourable. It was morally reprehensible for that great captain to induce a simple-minded Polish gentleman to eat dog by raising in his breast a false hope of national independence. It has been the fate of that credulous nation to starve for upwards of a hundred years on a diet of false hopes and--well--dog. It is, when one thinks of it, a singularly poisonous regimen. Some pride in the national constitution which has survived a long course of such dishes is really excusable. But enough of generalising. Returning to particulars, Mr. Nicholas B. confided to his sister-in-law (my grandmother) in his misanthropically laconic manner that this supper in the woods had been nearly "the death of him." This is not surprising. What surprises me is that the story was ever heard of; for grand-uncle Nicholas differed in this from the generality of military men of Napoleon's time (and perhaps of all time), that he did not like to talk of his campaigns, which began at Friedland and ended somewhere in the neighbourhood of Bar-le-Duc. His admiration of the great Emperor was unreserved in everything but expression. Like the religion of earnest men, it was too profound a sentiment to be displayed before a world of little faith. Apart from that he seemed as completely devoid of military anecdotes as though he had hardly ever seen a soldier in his life. Proud of his decorations earned before he was twenty-five, he refused to wear the ribbons at the buttonhole in the manner practised to this day in Europe and even was unwilling to display the insignia on festive occasions, as though he wished to conceal them in the fear of appearing boastful. "It is enough that I have them," he used to mutter. In the course of thirty years they were seen on his breast only twice--at an auspicious marriage in the family and at the funeral of an old friend. That the wedding which was thus honoured was not the wedding of my mother I learned only late in life, too late to bear a grudge against Mr. Nicholas B., who made amends at my birth by a long letter of congratulation containing the following prophecy: "He will see better times." Even in his embittered heart there lived a hope. But he was not a true prophet.

He was a man of strange contradictions. Living for many years in his brother's house, the home of many children, a house full of life, of animation, noisy with a constant coming and going of many guests, he kept his habits of solitude and silence. Considered as obstinately secretive in all his purposes, he was in reality

the victim of a most painful irresolution in all matters of civil life. Under his taciturn, phlegmatic behaviour was hidden a faculty of short-lived passionate anger. I suspect he had no talent for narrative; but it seemed to afford him sombre satisfaction to declare that he was the last man to ride over the bridge of the river Elster after the battle of Leipsic. Lest some construction favourable to his valour should be put on the fact he condescended to explain how it came to pass. It seems that shortly after the retreat began he was sent back to the town where some divisions of the French Army (and amongst them the Polish corps of Prince Joseph Poniatowski), jammed hopelessly in the streets, were being simply exterminated by the troops of the Allied Powers. When asked what it was like in there Mr. Nicholas B. muttered the only word "Shambles." Having delivered his message to the Prince he hastened away at once to render an account of his mission to the superior who had sent him. By that time the advance of the enemy had enveloped the town, and he was shot at from houses and chased all the way to the river bank by a disorderly mob of Austrian Dragoons and Prussian Hussars. The bridge had been mined early in the morning and his opinion was that the sight of the horsemen converging from many sides in the pursuit of his person alarmed the officer in command of the sappers and caused the premature firing of the charges. He had not gone more than 200 yards on the other side when he heard the sound of the fatal explosions. Mr. Nicholas B. concluded his bald narrative with the word "Imbecile" uttered with the utmost deliberation. It testified to his indignation at the loss of so many thousands of lives. But his phlegmatic physiognomy lighted up when he spoke of his only wound, with something resembling satisfaction. You will see that there was some reason for it when you learn that he was wounded in the heel. "Like his Majesty the Emperor Napoleon himself," he reminded his hearers with assumed indifference. There can be no doubt that the indifference was assumed, if one thinks what very distinguished sort of wound it was. In all the history of warfare there are, I believe, only three warriors publicly known to have been wounded in the heel--Achilles and Napoleon--demi-gods indeed--to whom the familial piety of an unworthy descendant adds the name of the simple mortal, Nicholas B.

The Hundred Days found Mr. Nicholas B. staying with a distant relative of ours, owner of a small estate in Galicia. How he got there across the breadth of an armed Europe and after what adventures I am afraid will never be known now. All his papers were destroyed shortly before his death; but if there was amongst them, as he affirmed, a concise record of his life, then I am pretty sure it did not take up more than a half-sheet of foolscap or so. This relative of ours happened to be an Austrian officer, who had left the service after the battle of Austerlitz. Unlike Mr. Nicholas B., who concealed his decorations, he liked to display his honourable discharge in which he was mentioned as *unschreckbar* (fearless) before the enemy. No conjunction could seem more unpromising, yet it stands in the family tradition that these two got on very well together in their rural solitude.

When asked whether he had not been sorely tempted during the Hundred Days to make his way again to France and join the service of his beloved Emperor, Mr. Nicholas B. used to mutter: "No money. No horse. Too far to walk."

The fall of Napoleon and the ruin of national hopes affected adversely the character of Mr. Nicholas B. He shrank from returning to his province. But for that there was also another reason. Mr. Nicholas B. and his brother--my maternal grandfather--had lost their father early, while they were quite children. Their mother, young still and left very well off, married again a man of great charm and of an amiable disposition but without a penny. He turned out an affectionate and careful stepfather; it was unfortunate though that while directing the boys' education and forming their character by wise counsel he did his best to get hold of the fortune by buying and selling land in his own name and investing capital in such a manner as to cover up the traces of the real ownership. It seems that such practices can be successful if one is charming enough to dazzle one's own wife permanently and brave enough to defy the vain terrors of public opinion. The critical time came when the elder of the boys on attaining his majority in the year 1811 asked for the accounts and some part at least of the inheritance to begin life upon. It was then that the stepfather declared with calm finality that there were no accounts to render and no property to inherit. The whole fortune was his very own. He was very good-natured about the young man's misapprehension of the true state of affairs, but of course felt obliged to maintain his position firmly. Old friends came and went busily, voluntary mediators appeared travelling on most horrible roads from the most distant corners of the three provinces; and the Marshal of the Nobility (ex-officio guardian of all well-born orphans) called a meeting of landowners to "ascertain in a friendly way how the misunderstanding between X and his stepsons had arisen and devise proper measures to remove the same." A deputation to that effect visited X, who treated them to excellent wines, but absolutely refused his ear to their remonstrances. As to the proposals for arbitration he simply laughed at them; yet the whole province must have been aware that fourteen years before, when he married the widow, all his visible fortune consisted (apart from his social qualities) in a smart four-horse turn-out with two servants, with whom he went about visiting from house to house; and as to any funds he might have possessed at that time their existence could only be inferred from the fact that he was very punctual in settling his modest losses at cards. But by the magic power of stubborn and constant assertion, there were found presently, here and there, people who mumbled that surely "there must be something in it." However, on his next name-day (which he used to celebrate by a great three-days' shooting-party), of all the invited crowd only two guests turned up, distant neighbours of no importance; one notoriously a fool, and the other a very pious and honest person but such a passionate lover of the gun that on his own confession he could not have refused an invitation to a shooting-party from

the devil himself. X met this manifestation of public opinion with the serenity of an unstained conscience. He refused to be crushed. Yet he must have been a man of deep feeling, because, when his wife took openly the part of her children, he lost his beautiful tranquillity, proclaimed himself heart-broken and drove her out of the house, neglecting in his grief to give her enough time to pack her trunks.

This was the beginning of a lawsuit, an abominable marvel of chicane, which by the use of every legal subterfuge was made to last for many years. It was also the occasion for a display of much kindness and sympathy. All the neighbouring houses flew open for the reception of the homeless. Neither legal aid nor material assistance in the prosecution of the suit was ever wanting. X, on his side, went about shedding tears publicly over his stepchildren's ingratitude and his wife's blind infatuation; but as at the same time he displayed great cleverness in the art of concealing material documents (he was even suspected of having burnt a lot of historically interesting family papers), this scandalous litigation had to be ended by a compromise lest worse should befall. It was settled finally by a surrender, out of the disputed estate, in full satisfaction of all claims, of two villages with the names of which I do not intend to trouble my readers. After this lame and impotent conclusion neither the wife nor the stepsons had anything to say to the man who had presented the world with such a successful example of self-help based on character, determination and industry; and my great-grandmother, her health completely broken down, died a couple of years later in Carlsbad. Legally secured by a decree in the possession of his plunder, X regained his wonted serenity and went on living in the neighbourhood in a comfortable style and in apparent peace of mind. His big shoots were fairly well attended again. He was never tired of assuring people that he bore no grudge for what was past; he protested loudly of his constant affection for his wife and stepchildren. It was true he said that they had tried their best to strip him as naked as a Turkish saint in the decline of his days; and because he had defended himself from spoliation, as anybody else in his place would have done, they had abandoned him now to the horrors of a solitary old age. Nevertheless, his love for them survived these cruel blows. And there might have been some truth in his protestations. Very soon he began to make overtures of friendship to his eldest stepson, my maternal grandfather; and when these were peremptorily rejected he went on renewing them again and again with characteristic obstinacy. For years he persisted in his efforts at reconciliation, promising my grandfather to execute a will in his favour if he only would be friends again to the extent of calling now and then (it was fairly close neighbourhood for these parts, forty miles or so), or even of putting in an appearance for the great shoot on the name-day. My grandfather was an ardent lover of every sport. His temperament was as free from hardness and animosity as can be imagined. Pupil of the liberal-minded Benedictines who directed the only public school of some standing then in the south, he had also read deeply the authors of the eighteenth century. In him Christian charity was

joined to a philosophical indulgence for the failings of human nature. But the memory of these miserably anxious early years, his young man's years robbed of all generous illusions by the cynicism of the sordid lawsuit, stood in the way of forgiveness. He never succumbed to the fascination of the great shoot; and X, his heart set to the last on reconciliation with the draft of the will ready for signature kept by his bedside, died intestate. The fortune thus acquired and augmented by a wise and careful management passed to some distant relatives whom he had never seen and who even did not bear his name.

Meantime the blessing of general peace descended upon Europe. Mr. Nicholas B., bidding good-bye to his hospitable relative, the "fearless" Austrian officer, departed from Galicia, and without going near his native place, where the odious lawsuit was still going on, proceeded straight to Warsaw and entered the army of the newly constituted Polish kingdom under the sceptre of Alexander I., Autocrat of all the Russias.

This kingdom, created by the Vienna Congress as an acknowledgment to a nation of its former independent existence, included only the central provinces of the old Polish patrimony. A brother of the Emperor, the Grand Duke Constantine (Pavlovitch), its Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, marriedmorganatically to a Polish lady to whom he was fiercely attached, extended this affection to what he called "My Poles" in a capricious and savage manner. Sallow in complexion, with a Tartar physiognomy and fierce little eyes, he walked with his fists clenched, his body bent forward, darting suspicious glances from under an enormous cocked hat. His intelligence was limited and his sanity itself was doubtful. The hereditary taint expressed itself, in his case, not by mystic leanings as in his two brothers, Alexander and Nicholas (in their various ways, for one was mystically liberal and the other mystically autocratic), but by the fury of an uncontrollable temper which generally broke out in disgusting abuse on the parade ground. He was a passionate militarist and an amazing drill-master. He treated his Polish Army as a spoiled child treats a favourite toy, except that he did not take it to bed with him at night. It was not small enough for that. But he played with it all day and every day, delighting in the variety of pretty uniforms and in the fun of incessant drilling. This childish passion, not for war but for mere militarism, achieved a desirable result. The Polish Army, in its equipment, in its armament and in its battlefield efficiency, as then understood, became, by the end of the year 1830, a first-rate tactical instrument. Polish peasantry (not serfs) served in the ranks by enlistment, and the officers belonged mainly to the smaller nobility. Mr. Nicholas B., with his Napoleonic record, had no difficulty in obtaining a lieutenancy, but the promotion in the Polish Army was slow, because, being a separate organisation, it took no part in the wars of the Russian Empire against Persia or Turkey. Its first campaign, against Russia itself, was to be its last. In 1831, on the outbreak of the Revolution, Mr. Nicholas B. was the senior captain of his

regiment. Some time before he had been made head of the remount establishment quartered outside the kingdom in our southern provinces, whence almost all the horses for the Polish cavalry were drawn. For the first time since he went away from home at the age of eighteen to begin his military life by the battle of Friedland, Mr. Nicholas B. breathed the air of the "Border," his native air. Unkind fate was lying in wait for him amongst the scenes of his youth. At the first news of the rising in Warsaw all the remount establishment, officers, vets., and the very troopers, were put promptly under arrest and hurried off in a body beyond the Dnieper to the nearest town in Russia proper. From there they were dispersed to the distant parts of the Empire. On this occasion poor Mr. Nicholas B. penetrated into Russia much farther than he ever did in the times of Napoleonic invasion, if much less willingly. Astrakhan was his destination. He remained there three years, allowed to live at large in the town but having to report himself every day at noon to the military commandant, who used to detain him frequently for a pipe and a chat. It is difficult to form a just idea of what a chat with Mr. Nicholas B. could have been like. There must have been much compressed rage under his taciturnity, for the commandant communicated to him the news from the theatre of war and this news was such as it could be, that is, very bad for the Poles. Mr. Nicholas B. received these communications with outward phlegm, but the Russian showed a warm sympathy for his prisoner. "As a soldier myself I understand your feelings. You, of course, would like to be in the thick of it. By heavens! I am fond of you. If it were not for the terms of the military oath I would let you go on my own responsibility. What difference could it make to us, one more or less of you?"

At other times he wondered with simplicity.

"Tell me, Nicholas Stepanovitch"--(my great-grandfather's name was Stephen and the commandant used the Russian form of polite address)--"tell me why is it that you Poles are always looking for trouble? What else could you expect from running up against Russia?"

He was capable, too, of philosophical reflections.

"Look at your Napoleon now. A great man. There is no denying it that he was a great man as long as he was content to thrash those Germans and Austrians and all those nations. But no! He must go to Russia looking for trouble, and what's the consequence? Such as you see me, I have rattled this sabre of mine on the pavements of Paris."

After his return to Poland Mr. Nicholas B. described him as a "worthy man but stupid," whenever he could be induced to speak of the conditions of his exile. Declining the option offered him to enter the Russian Army he was retired with

only half the pension of his rank. His nephew (my uncle and guardian) told me that the first lasting impression on his memory as a child of four was the glad excitement reigning in his parents' house on the day when Mr. Nicholas B. arrived home from his detention in Russia.

Every generation has its memories. The first memories of Mr. Nicholas B. might have been shaped by the events of the last partition of Poland, and he lived long enough to suffer from the last armed rising in 1863, an event which affected the future of all my generation and has coloured my earliest impressions. His brother, in whose house he had sheltered for some seventeen years his misanthropical timidity before the commonest problems of life, having died in the early fifties, Mr. Nicholas B. had to screw his courage up to the sticking-point and come to some decision as to the future. After a long and agonising hesitation he was persuaded at last to become the tenant of some fifteen hundred acres out of the estate of a friend in the neighbourhood. The terms of the lease were very advantageous, but the retired situation of the village and a plain comfortable house in good repair were, I fancy, the greatest inducements. He lived there quietly for about ten years, seeing very few people and taking no part in the public life of the province, such as it could be under an arbitrary bureaucratic tyranny. His character and his patriotism were above suspicion; but the organisers of the rising in their frequent journeys up and down the province scrupulously avoided coming near his house. It was generally felt that the repose of the old man's last years ought not to be disturbed. Even such intimates as my paternal grandfather, a comrade-in-arms during Napoleon's Moscow campaign and later on a fellow-officer in the Polish Army, refrained from visiting his crony as the date of the outbreak approached. My paternal grandfather's two sons and his only daughter were all deeply involved in the revolutionary work; he himself was of that type of Polish squire whose only ideal of patriotic action was to "get into the saddle and drive them out." But even he agreed that "dear Nicholas must not be worried." All this considerate caution on the part of friends, both conspirators and others, did not prevent Mr. Nicholas B. being made to feel the misfortunes of that ill-omened year.

Less than forty-eight hours after the beginning of the rebellion in that part of the country, a squadron of scouting Cossacks passed through the village and invaded the homestead. Most of them remained formed between the house and the stables, while several, dismounting, ransacked the various outbuildings. The officer in command, accompanied by two men, walked up to the front door. All the blinds on that side were down. The officer told the servant who received him that he wanted to see his master. He was answered that the master was away from home, which was perfectly true.

I follow here the tale as told afterwards by the servant to my grand-uncle's friends

and relatives, and as I have heard it repeated.

On receiving this answer the Cossack officer, who had been standing in the porch, stepped into the house.

"Where is the master gone, then?"

"Our master went to J--" (the government town some fifty miles off), "the day before yesterday."

"There are only two horses in the stables. Where are the others?"

"Our master always travels with his own horses" (meaning: not by post). "He will be away a week or more. He was pleased to mention to me that he had to attend to some business in the Civil Court."

While the servant was speaking the officer looked about the hall. There was a door facing him, a door to the right and a door to the left. The officer chose to enter the room on the left and ordered the blinds to be pulled up. It was Mr. Nicholas B.'s study with a couple of tall bookcases, some pictures on the walls, and so on. Besides the big centre table, with books and papers, there was a quite small writing-table with several drawers, standing between the door and the window in a good light; and at this table my grand-uncle usually sat either to read or write.

On pulling up the blind the servant was startled by the discovery that the whole male population of the village was massed in front, trampling down the flower-beds. There were also a few women amongst them. He was glad to observe the village priest (of the Orthodox Church) coming up the drive. The good man in his haste had tucked up his cassock as high as the top of his boots.

The officer had been looking at the backs of the books in the bookcases. Then he perched himself on the edge of the centre-table and remarked easily:

"Your master did not take you to town with him, then."

"I am the head servant and he leaves me in charge of the house. It's a strong, young chap that travels with our master. If--God forbid--there was some accident on the road he would be of much more use than I."

Glancing through the window he saw the priest arguing vehemently in the thick of the crowd, which seemed subdued by his interference. Three or four men, however, were talking with the Cossacks at the door.



"And you don't think your master has gone to join the rebels maybe--eh?" asked the officer.

"Our master would be too old for that surely. He's well over seventy and he's getting feeble too. It's some years now since he's been on horseback and he can't walk much either now."

The officer sat there swinging his leg, very quiet and indifferent. By that time the peasants who had been talking with the Cossack troopers at the door had been permitted to get into the hall. One or two more left the crowd and followed them in. They were seven in all and amongst them the blacksmith, an ex-soldier. The servant appealed deferentially to the officer.

"Won't your honour be pleased to tell the people to go back to their homes? What do they want to push themselves into the house like this for? It's not proper for them to behave like this while our master's away and I am responsible for everything here."

The officer only laughed a little, and after a while inquired:

"Have you any arms in the house?"

"Yes. We have. Some old things."

"Bring them all, here, on to this table."

The servant made another attempt to obtain protection.

"Won't your honour tell these chaps? . . ."

But the officer looked at him in silence in such a way that he gave it up at once and hurried off to call the pantry-boy to help him collect the arms. Meantime the officer walked slowly through all the rooms in the house, examining them attentively but touching nothing. The peasants in the hall fell back and took off their caps when he passed through. He said nothing whatever to them. When he came back to the study all the arms to be found in the house were lying on the table. There was a pair of big flint-lock holster pistols from Napoleonic times, two cavalry swords, one of the French the other of the Polish Army pattern, with a fowling-piece or two.

The officer, opening the window, flung out pistols, swords and guns, one after another, and his troopers ran to pick them up. The peasants in the hall,

encouraged by his manner, had stolen after him into the study. He gave not the slightest sign of being conscious of their existence and, his business being apparently concluded, strode out of the house without a word. Directly he left, the peasants in the study put on their caps and began to smile at each other.

The Cossacks rode away, passing through the yards of the home farm straight into the fields. The priest, still arguing with the peasants, moved gradually down the drive and his earnest eloquence was drawing the silent mob after him, away from the house. This justice must be rendered to the parish priests of the Greek Church that, strangers to the country as they were (being all drawn from the interior of Russia), the majority of them used such influence as they had over their flocks in the cause of peace and humanity. True to the spirit of their calling, they tried to soothe the passions of the excited peasantry and opposed rapine and violence whenever they could, with all their might. And this conduct they pursued against the express wishes of the authorities. Later on some of them were made to suffer for this disobedience by being removed abruptly to the far north or sent away to Siberian parishes.

The servant was anxious to get rid of the few peasants who had got into the house. What sort of conduct was that, he asked them, towards a man who was only a tenant, had been invariably good and considerate to the villagers for years; and only the other day had agreed to give up two meadows for the use of the village herd? He reminded them, too, of Mr. Nicholas B.'s devotion to the sick in the time of cholera. Every word of this was true and so far effective that the fellows began to scratch their heads and look irresolute. The speaker then pointed at the window, exclaiming: "Look! there's all your crowd going away quietly and you silly chaps had better go after them and pray God to forgive you your evil thoughts."

This appeal was an unlucky inspiration. In crowding clumsily to the window to see whether he was speaking the truth, the fellows overturned the little writing-table. As it fell over a chink of loose coin was heard. "There's money in that thing," cried the blacksmith. In a moment the top of the delicate piece of furniture was smashed and there lay exposed in a drawer eighty half-imperials. Gold coin was a rare sight in Russia even at that time; it put the peasants beside themselves. "There must be more of that in the house and we shall have it," yelled the ex-soldier blacksmith. "This is war time." The others were already shouting out of the window urging the crowd to come back and help. The priest, abandoned suddenly at the gate, flung his arms up and hurried away so as not to see what was going to happen.

In their search for money that bucolic mob smashed everything in the house, ripping with knives, splitting with hatchets, so that, as the servant said, there

were no two pieces of wood holding together left in the whole house. They broke some very fine mirrors, all the windows and every piece of glass and china. They threw the books and papers out on the lawn and set fire to the heap for the mere fun of the thing apparently. Absolutely the only one solitary thing which they left whole was a small ivory crucifix, which remained hanging on the wall in the wrecked bedroom above a wild heap of rags, broken mahogany and splintered boards which had been Mr. Nicholas B.'s bedstead. Detecting the servant in the act of stealing away with a japanned tin box, they tore it from him, and because he resisted they threw him out of the dining-room window. The house was on one floor but raised well above the ground, and the fall was so serious that the man remained lying stunned till the cook and a stable-boy ventured forth at dusk from their hiding-places and picked him up. By that time the mob had departed carrying off the tin box, which they supposed to be full of paper money. Some distance from the house in the middle of a field they broke it open. They found inside documents engrossed on parchment and the two crosses of the Legion of Honour and For Valour. At the sight of these objects, which, the blacksmith explained, were marks of honour given only by the Tsar, they became extremely frightened at what they had done. They threw the whole lot away into a ditch and dispersed hastily.

On learning of this particular loss Mr. Nicholas B. broke down completely. The mere sacking of his house did not seem to affect him much. While he was still in bed from the shock the two crosses were found and returned to him. It helped somewhat his slow convalescence, but the tin box and the parchments, though searched for in all the ditches around, never turned up again. He could not get over the loss of his Legion of Honour Patent, whose preamble, setting forth his services, he knew by heart to the very letter, and after this blow volunteered sometimes to recite, tears standing in his eyes the while. Its terms haunted him apparently during the last two years of his life to such an extent that he used to repeat them to himself. This is confirmed by the remark made more than once by his old servant to the more intimate friends. "What makes my heart heavy is to hear our master in his room at night walking up and down and praying aloud in the French language."

It must have been somewhat over a year afterwards that I saw Mr. Nicholas B., or, more correctly, that he saw me, for the last time. It was, as I have already said, at the time when my mother had a three months' leave from exile, which she was spending in the house of her brother, and friends and relations were coming from far and near to do her honour. It is inconceivable that Mr. Nicholas B. should not have been of the number. The little child a few months old he had taken up in his arms on the day of his home-coming after years of war and exile was confessing her faith in national salvation by suffering exile in her turn. I do not know whether he was present on the very day of our departure. I have already

admitted that for me he is more especially the man who in his youth had eaten roast dog in the depths of a gloomy forest of snow-loaded pines. My memory cannot place him in any remembered scene. A hooked nose, some sleek white hair, an unrelated evanescent impression of a meagre, slight, rigid figure militarily buttoned up to the throat, is all that now exists on earth of Mr. Nicholas B.; only this vague shadow pursued by the memory of his grand-nephew, the last surviving human being, I suppose, of all those he had seen in the course of his taciturn life.

But I remember well the day of our departure back to exile. The elongated, bizarre, shabby travelling-carriage with four post-horses, standing before the long front of the house with its eight columns, four on each side of the broad flight of stairs. On the steps, groups of servants, a few relations, one or two friends from the nearest neighbourhood, a perfect silence, on all the faces an air of sober concentration; my grandmother all in black gazing stoically, my uncle giving his arm to my mother down to the carriage in which I had been placed already; at the top of the flight my little cousin in a short skirt of a tartan pattern with a deal of red in it, and like a small princess attended by the women of her own household: the head gouvernante, our dear, corpulent Francesca (who had been for thirty years in the service of the B. family), the former nurse, now outdoor attendant, a handsome peasant face wearing a compassionate expression, and the good, ugly Mlle. Durand, the governess, with her black eyebrows meeting over a short thick nose and a complexion like pale brown paper. Of all the eyes turned towards the carriage, her good-natured eyes only were dropping tears, and it was her sobbing voice alone that broke the silence with an appeal to me: "N'oubliez pas ton français, mon cheri." In three months, simply by playing with us, she had taught me not only to speak French but to read it as well. She was indeed an excellent playmate. In the distance, half way down to the great gates, a light, open trap, harnessed with three horses in Russian fashion, stood drawn up on one side with the police-captain of the district sitting in it, the vizor of his flat cap with a red band pulled down over his eyes.

It seems strange that he should have been there to watch our going so carefully. Without wishing to treat with levity the just timidities of Imperialists all the world over, I may allow myself the reflection that a woman, practically condemned by the doctors, and a small boy not quite six years old could not be regarded as seriously dangerous even for the largest of conceivable empires saddled with the most sacred of responsibilities. And this good man, I believe, did not think so either.

I learned afterwards why he was present on that day. I don't remember any outward signs, but it seems that, about a month before, my mother became so unwell that there was a doubt whether she could be made fit to travel in the time.

In this uncertainty the Governor-General in Kiev was petitioned to grant her a fortnight's extension of stay in her brother's house. No answer whatever was returned to this prayer, but one day at dusk the police-captain of the district drove up to the house and told my uncle's valet, who ran out to meet him, that he wanted to speak with the master in private, at once. Very much impressed (he thought it was going to be an arrest) the servant, "more dead than alive with fright," as he related afterwards, smuggled him through the big drawing-room, which was dark (that room was not lighted every evening), on tiptoe, so as not to attract the attention of the ladies in the house, and led him by way of the orangery to my uncle's private apartments.

The policeman, without any preliminaries, thrust a paper into my uncle's hands.

"There. Pray read this. I have no business to show this paper to you. It is wrong of me. But I can't either eat or sleep with such a job hanging over me."

That police-captain, a native of Great Russia, had been for many years serving in the district.

My uncle unfolded and read the document. It was a service order issued from the Governor-General's secretariat, dealing with the matter of the petition and directing the police-captain to disregard all remonstrances and explanations in regard to that illness either from medical men or others, "and if she has not left her brother's house"--it went on to say--"on the morning of the day specified on her permit, you are to despatch her at once under escort, direct" (underlined) "to the prison-hospital in Kiev, where she will be treated as her case demands."

"For God's sake, Mr. B., see that your sister goes away punctually on that day. Don't give me this work to do with a woman--and with one of your family too. I simply cannot bear to think of it."

He was absolutely wringing his hands. My uncle looked at him in silence.

"Thank you for this warning. I assure you that even if she were dying she would be carried out to the carriage."

"Yes--indeed--and what difference would it make--travel to Kiev or back to her husband. For she would have to go--death or no death. And mind, Mr. B., I will be here on the day, not that I doubt your promise, but because I must. I have got to. Duty. All the same my trade is not fit for a dog since some of you Poles will persist in rebelling, and all of you have got to suffer for it."

This is the reason why he was there in an open three-horse trap pulled up

between the house and the great gates. I regret not being able to give up his name to the scorn of all believers in the rights of conquest, as a reprehensibly sensitive guardian of Imperial greatness. On the other hand, I am in a position to state the name of the Governor-General who signed the order with the marginal note "to be carried out to the letter" in his own handwriting. The gentleman's name was Bezak. A high dignitary, an energetic official, the idol for a time of the Russian Patriotic Press.

Each generation has its memories.