

CHAPTER V

Before entering upon an analysis of the pamphlet headed, "*Truth is but truth, as it is timed,*" with which we shall conclude the *Introduction* to the Diplomatic Revelations, some preliminary remarks on the general history of Russian politics appear opportune.

The overwhelming influence of Russia has taken Europe at different epochs by surprise, startled the peoples of the West, and been submitted to as a fatality, or resisted only by convulsions. But alongside the fascination exercised by Russia, there runs an ever-reviving scepticism, dogging her like a shadow, growing with her growth, mingling shrill notes of irony with the cries of agonising peoples, and mocking her very grandeur as a histrionic attitude taken up to dazzle and to cheat. Other empires have met with similar doubts in their infancy; Russia has become a colossus without outliving them. She affords the only instance in history of an immense empire, the very existence of whose power, even after world-wide achievements, has never ceased to be treated like a matter of faith rather than like a matter of fact. From the outset of the eighteenth century to our days, no author, whether he intended to exalt or to check Russia, thought it possible to dispense with first proving her existence.

But whether we be spiritualists or materialists with respect to Russia--whether we consider her power as a palpable fact, or as the mere vision of the guilt-stricken consciences of the European peoples--the question remains the same: "How did this power, or this phantom of a power, contrive to assume such dimensions as to rouse on the one side the passionate assertion, and on the other the angry denial of its threatening the world with a rehearsal of Universal Monarchy?" At the beginning of the eighteenth century Russia was regarded as a mushroom creation extemporised by the genius of Peter the Great. Schloezer thought it a discovery to have found out that she possessed a past; and in modern times, writers, like Fallmerayer, unconsciously following in the track beaten by Russian historians, have deliberately asserted that the northern spectre which frightens the Europe of the nineteenth century already overshadowed the Europe of the ninth century. With them the policy of Russia begins with the first Ruriks, and has, with some interruptions indeed, been systematically continued to the present hour.

Ancient maps of Russia are unfolded before us, displaying even larger European dimensions than she can boast of now: her perpetual movement of aggrandizement from the ninth to the eleventh century is anxiously pointed out; we are shown Oleg launching 88,000 men against Byzantium, fixing his shield as a trophy on the gate of that capital, and dictating an ignominious treaty to the Lower Empire; Igor making it tributary; Sviataslaff glorying, "the Greeks supply me with gold, costly stuffs, rice, fruits and wine; Hungary furnishes cattle and horses; from Russia I draw honey, wax, furs, and men"; Vladimir conquering the Crimea and Livonia, extorting a daughter from the Greek Emperor, as Napoleon did from the German Emperor, blending the military sway of a northern conqueror with the theocratic despotism of the Porphyro-geniti, and becoming at once the master of his subjects on earth, and their protector in heaven.

Yet, in spite of the plausible parallelism suggested by these reminiscences, the policy of the first Ruriks differs fundamentally from that of modern Russia. It was nothing more nor less than the policy of the German barbarians inundating Europe--the history of the modern nations beginning only after the deluge has passed away. The Gothic period of Russia in particular forms but a chapter of the Norman conquests. As the empire of Charlemagne precedes the foundation of modern France, Germany, and Italy, so the empire of the Ruriks precedes the foundation of Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic Settlements, Turkey, and Muscovy itself. The rapid movement of aggrandizement was not the result of deep-laid schemes, but the natural offspring of the primitive organization of Norman conquest--vassalship without fiefs, or fiefs consisting only in tributes--the necessity of fresh conquests being kept alive by the uninterrupted influx of new Varangian adventurers, panting for glory and plunder. The chiefs, becoming anxious for repose, were compelled by the Faithful Band to move on, and in Russian, as in French Normandy, there arrived the moment when the chiefs despatched on new predatory excursions their uncontrollable and insatiable companions-in-arms with the single view to get rid of them. Warfare and organization of conquest on the part of the first Ruriks differ in no point from those

of the Normans in the rest of Europe. If Slavonian tribes were subjected not only by the sword, but also by mutual convention, this singularity is due to the exceptional position of those tribes, placed between a northern and eastern invasion, and embracing the former as a protection from the latter. The same magic charm which attracted other northern barbarians to the Rome of the West attracted the Varangians to the Rome of the East. The very migration of the Russian capital--Rurik fixing it at Novgorod, Oleg removing it to Kiev, and Sviataslaff attempting to establish it in Bulgaria--proves beyond doubt that the invader was only feeling his way, and considered Russia as a mere halting-place from which to wander on in search of an empire in the South. If modern Russia covets the possession of Constantinople to establish her dominion over the world, the Ruriks were, on the contrary, forced by the resistance of Byzantium, under Zimiskes, definitively to establish their dominion in Russia.

It may be objected that victors and vanquished amalgamated more quickly in Russia than in any other conquest of the northern barbarians, that the chiefs soon commingled themselves with the Slavonians--as shown by their marriages and their names. But then, it should be recollected that the Faithful Band, which formed at once their guard and their privy council, remained exclusively composed of Varangians; that Vladimir, who marks the summit, and Yaroslav, who marks the commencing decline of Gothic Russia, were seated on her throne by the arms of the Varangians. If any Slavonian influence is to be acknowledged in this epoch, it is that of Novgorod, a Slavonian State, the traditions, policy, and tendencies of which were so antagonistic to those of modern Russia that the one could found her existence only on the ruins of the other. Under Yaroslav the supremacy of the Varangians is broken, but simultaneously with it disappears the conquering tendency of the first period, and the decline of Gothic Russia begins. The history of that decline, more still than that of the conquest and formation, proves the exclusively Gothic character of the Empire of the Ruriks.

The incongruous, unwieldy, and precocious Empire heaped together by the Ruriks, like the other empires of similar growth, is broken up into appanages, divided and subdivided among the descendants of the conquerors, dilacerated by feudal wars, rent to pieces by the intervention of foreign peoples. The paramount authority of the Grand Prince vanishes before the rival claims of seventy princes of the blood. The attempt of Andrew of Susdal at recomposing some large limbs of the empire by the removal of the capital from Kiev to Vladimir proves successful only in propagating the decomposition from the South to the centre. Andrew's third successor resigns even the last shadow of supremacy, the title of Grand Prince, and the merely nominal homage still offered him. The appanages to the South and to the West become by turns Lithuanian, Polish, Hungarian, Livonian, Swedish. Kiev itself, the ancient capital, follows destinies of its own, after having dwindled down from a seat of the Grand Princedom to the territory of a city. Thus, the Russia of the Normans completely disappears from the stage, and the few weak reminiscences in which it still outlived itself, dissolve before the terrible apparition of Genghis Khan. The bloody mire of Mongolian slavery, not the rude glory of the Norman epoch, forms the cradle of Muscovy, and modern Russia is but a metamorphosis of Muscovy.

The Tartar yoke lasted from 1237 to 1462--more than two centuries; a yoke not only crushing, but dishonouring and withering the very soul of the people that fell its prey. The Mongol Tartars established a rule of systematic terror, devastation and wholesale massacre forming its institutions. Their numbers being scanty in proportion to their enormous conquests, they wanted to magnify them by a halo of consternation, and to thin, by wholesale slaughter, the populations which might rise in their rear. In their creations of desert they were, besides, led by the same economical principle which has depopulated the Highlands of Scotland and the Campagna di Roma--the conversion of men into sheep, and of fertile lands and populous abodes into pasturage.

The Tartar yoke had already lasted a hundred years before Muscovy emerged from its obscurity. To entertain discord among the Russian princes, and secure their servile submission, the Mongols had restored the dignity of the Grand Princedom. The strife among the Russian princes for this dignity was, as a modern author has it, "an abject strife--the strife of slaves, whose chief weapon was calumny, and who were always ready to denounce each other to their cruel rulers; wrangling for a degraded throne, whence they could not move but

with plundering, parricidal hands--hands filled with gold and stained with gore; which they dared not ascend without grovelling, nor retain but on their knees, prostrate and trembling beneath the scimitar of a Tartar, always ready to roll under his feet those servile crowns, and the heads by which they were worn." It was in this infamous strife that the Moscow branch won at last the race. In 1328 the crown of the Grand Princedom, wrested from the branch of Tver by dint of denunciation and assassination, was picked up at the feet of Usbeck Khan by Yury, the elder brother of Ivan Kalita. Ivan I. Kalita, and Ivan III., surnamed the Great, personate Muscovy rising by means of the Tartar yoke, and Muscovy getting an independent power by the disappearance of the Tartar rule. The whole policy of Muscovy, from its first entrance into the historical arena, is resumed in the history of these two individuals.

The policy of Ivan Kalita was simply this: to play the abject tool of the Khan, thus to borrow his power, and then to turn it round upon his princely rivals and his own subjects. To attain this end, he had to insinuate himself with the Tartars by dint of cynical adulation, by frequent journeys to the Golden Horde, by humble prayers for the hand of Mongol princesses, by a display of unbounded zeal for the Khan's interest, by the unscrupulous execution of his orders, by atrocious calumnies against his own kinsfolk, by blending in himself the characters of the Tartar's hangman, sycophant, and slave-in-chief. He perplexed the Khan by continuous revelations of secret plots. Whenever the branch of Tver betrayed a velleité of national independence, he hurried to the Horde to denounce it. Wherever he met with resistance, he introduced the Tartar to trample it down. But it was not sufficient to act a character; to make it acceptable, gold was required. Perpetual bribery of the Khan and his grandees was the only sure foundation upon which to raise his fabric of deception and usurpation. But how was the slave to get the money wherewith to bribe the master? He persuaded the Khan to instal him his tax-gatherer throughout all the Russian appanages. Once invested with this function, he extorted money under false pretences. The wealth accumulated by the dread held out of the Tartar name, he used to corrupt the Tartars themselves. By a bribe he induced the primate to transfer his episcopal seat from Vladimir to Moscow, thus making the latter the capital of the empire, because the religious capital, and coupling the power of the Church with that of his throne. By a bribe he allured the Boyards of the rival princes into treason against their chiefs, and attracted them to himself as their centre. By the joint influence of the Mahometan Tartar, the Greek Church, and the Boyards, he unites the princes holding appanages into a crusade against the most dangerous of them--the prince of Tver; and then having driven his recent allies by bold attempts at usurpation into resistance against himself, into a war for the public good, he draws not the sword but hurries to the Khan. By bribes and delusion again, he seduces him into assassinating his kindred rivals under the most cruel torments. It was the traditional policy of the Tartar to check the Russian princes the one by the other, to feed their dissensions, to cause their forces to equiponderate, and to allow none to consolidate himself. Ivan Kalita converts the Khan into the tool by which he rids himself of his most dangerous competitors, and weighs down every obstacle to his own usurping march. He does not conquer the appanages, but surreptitiously turns the rights of the Tartar conquest to his exclusive profit. He secures the succession of his son through the same means by which he had raised the Grand Princedom of Muscovy, that strange compound of princedom and serfdom. During his whole reign he swerves not once from the line of policy he had traced to himself; clinging to it with a tenacious firmness, and executing it with methodical boldness. Thus he becomes the founder of the Muscovite power, and characteristically his people call him Kalita--that is, the purse, because it was the purse and not the sword with which he cut his way. The very period of his reign witnesses the sudden growth of the Lithuanian power which dismembers the Russian appanages from the West, while the Tartar squeezes them into one mass from the East. Ivan, while he dared not repulse the one disgrace, seemed anxious to exaggerate the other. He was not to be seduced from following up his ends by the allurements of glory, the pangs of conscience, or the lassitude of humiliation. His whole system may be expressed in a few words: the machiavelism of the usurping slave. His own weakness--his slavery--he turned into the mainspring of his strength.

The policy traced by Ivan I. Kalita is that of his successors; they had only to enlarge the circle of its application. They followed it up laboriously, gradually, inflexibly. From Ivan I. Kalita, we may, therefore, pass at once to Ivan III., surnamed the Great.

At the commencement of his reign (1462-1505) Ivan III. was still a tributary to the Tartars; his authority was still contested by the princes holding appanages; Novgorod, the head of the Russian republics, reigned over the north of Russia; Poland-Lithuania was striving for the conquest of Muscovy; lastly, the Livonian knights were not yet disarmed. At the end of his reign we behold Ivan III. seated on an independent throne, at his side the daughter of the last emperor of Byzantium, at his feet Kasan, and the remnant of the Golden Horde flocking to his court; Novgorod and the other Russian republics enslaved--Lithuania diminished, and its king a tool in Ivan's hands--the Livonian knights vanquished. Astonished Europe, at the commencement of Ivan's reign, hardly aware of the existence of Muscovy, hemmed in between the Tartar and the Lithuanian, was dazzled by the sudden appearance of an immense empire on its eastern confines, and Sultan Bajazet himself, before whom Europe trembled, heard for the first time the haughty language of the Muscovite. How, then, did Ivan accomplish these high deeds? Was he a hero? The Russian historians themselves show him up a confessed coward.

Let us shortly survey his principal contests, in the sequence in which he undertook and concluded them--his contests with the Tartars, with Novgorod, with the princes holding appanages, and lastly with Lithuania-Poland.

Ivan rescued Muscovy from the Tartar yoke, not by one bold stroke, but by the patient labour of about twenty years. He did not break the yoke, but disengaged himself by stealth. Its overthrow, accordingly, has more the look of the work of nature than the deed of man. When the Tartar monster expired at last, Ivan appeared at its deathbed like a physician, who prognosticated and speculated on death rather than like a warrior who imparted it. The character of every people enlarges with its enfranchisement from a foreign yoke; that of Muscovy in the hands of Ivan seems to diminish. Compare only Spain in its struggles against the Arabs with Muscovy in its struggles against the Tartars.

At the period of Ivan's accession to the throne, the Golden Horde had long since been weakened, internally by fierce feuds, externally by the separation from them of the Nogay Tartars, the eruption of Timour Tamerlane, the rise of the Cossacks, and the hostility of the Crimean Tartars. Muscovy, on the contrary, by steadily pursuing the policy traced by Ivan Kalita, had grown to a mighty mass, crushed, but at the same time compactly united by the Tartar chain. The Khans, as if struck by a charm, had continued to remain instruments of Muscovite aggrandizement and concentration. By calculation they had added to the power of the Greek Church, which, in the hand of the Muscovite grand princes, proved the deadliest weapon against them.

In rising against the Horde, the Muscovite had not to invent but only to imitate the Tartars themselves. But Ivan did not rise. He humbly acknowledged himself a slave of the Golden Horde. By bribing a Tartar woman he seduced the Khan into commanding the withdrawal from Muscovy of the Mongol residents. By similar and imperceptible and surreptitious steps he duped the Khan into successive concessions, all ruinous to his sway. He thus did not conquer, but filch strength. He does not drive, but manoeuvre his enemy out of his strongholds. Still continuing to prostrate himself before the Khan's envoys, and to proclaim himself his tributary, he eludes the payment of the tribute under false pretences, employing all the stratagems of a fugitive slave who dare not front his owner, but only steal out of his reach. At last the Mongol awakes from his torpor, and the hour of battle sounds. Ivan, trembling at the mere semblance of an armed encounter, attempts to hide himself behind his own fear, and to disarm the fury of his enemy by withdrawing the object upon which to wreak his vengeance. He is only saved by the intervention of the Crimean Tartars, his allies. Against a second invasion of the Horde, he ostentatiously gathers together such disproportionate forces that the mere rumour of their number parries the attack. At the third invasion, from the midst of 200,000 men, he absconds a disgraced deserter. Reluctantly dragged back, he attempts to haggle for conditions of slavery, and at last, pouring into his army his own servile fear, he involves it in a general and disorderly flight. Muscovy was then anxiously awaiting its irretrievable doom, when it suddenly hears that by an attack on their capital made by the Crimean Khan, the Golden Horde has been forced to withdraw, and has, on its retreat, been destroyed by the Cossacks and Nogay Tartars. Thus defeat was turned into success, and Ivan had overthrown the Golden Horde, not by

fighting it himself, but by challenging it through a feigned desire of combat into offensive movements, which exhausted its remnants of vitality and exposed it to the fatal blows of the tribes of its own race whom he had managed to turn into his allies. He caught one Tartar with another Tartar. As the immense danger he had himself summoned proved unable to betray him into one single trait of manhood, so his miraculous triumph did not infatuate him even for one moment. With cautious circumspection he dared not incorporate Kasan with Muscovy, but made it over to sovereigns belonging to the family of Menghi-Ghirei, his Crimean ally, to hold it, as it were, in trust for Muscovy. With the spoils of the vanquished Tartar, he enchained the victorious Tartar. But if too prudent to assume, with the eye-witnesses of his disgrace, the airs of a conqueror, this impostor did fully understand how the downfall of the Tartar empire must dazzle at a distance--with what halo of glory it would encircle him, and how it would facilitate a magnificent entry among the European Powers. Accordingly he assumed abroad the theatrical attitude of the conqueror, and, indeed, succeeded in hiding under a mask of proud susceptibility and irritable haughtiness the obtrusiveness of the Mongol serf, who still remembered kissing the stirrup of the Khan's meanest envoy. He aped in more subdued tone the voice of his old masters, which terrified his soul. Some standing phrases of modern Russian diplomacy, such as the magnanimity, the wounded dignity of the master, are borrowed from the diplomatic instructions of Ivan III.

After the surrender of Kasan, he set out on a long-planned expedition against Novgorod, the head of the Russian republics. If the overthrow of the Tartar yoke was, in his eyes, the first condition of Muscovite greatness, the overthrow of Russian freedom was the second. As the republic of Viatka had declared itself neutral between Muscovy and the Horde, and the republic of Tskof, with its twelve cities, had shown symptoms of disaffection, Ivan flattered the latter and affected to forget the former, meanwhile concentrating all his forces against Novgorod the Great, with the doom of which he knew the fate of the rest of the Russian republics to be sealed. By the prospect of sharing in this rich booty, he drew after him the princes holding appanages, while he inveigled the boyards by working upon their blind hatred of Novgorodian democracy. Thus he contrived to march three armies upon Novgorod and to overwhelm it by disproportionate force. But then, in order not to keep his word to the princes, not to forfeit his immutable "Vos non vobis," at the same time apprehensive, lest Novgorod should not yet have become digestible from the want of preparatory treatment, he thought fit to exhibit a sudden moderation; to content himself with a ransom and the acknowledgment of his suzerainty; but into the act of submission of the republic he smuggled some ambiguous words which made him its supreme judge and legislator. Then he fomented the dissensions between the patricians and plebeians raging as well in Novgorod as at Florence. Of some complaints of the plebeians he took occasion to introduce himself again into the city, to have its nobles, whom he knew to be hostile to himself, sent to Moscow loaded with chains, and to break the ancient law of the republic that "none of its citizens should ever be tried or punished out of the limits of its own territory." From that moment he became supreme arbiter. "Never," say the annalists, "never since Rurik had such an event happened; never had the grand princes of Kiev and Vladimir seen the Novgorodians come and submit to them as their judges. Ivan alone could reduce Novgorod to that degree of humiliation." Seven years were employed by Ivan to corrupt the republic by the exercise of his judicial authority. Then, when he found its strength worn out, he thought the moment ripe for declaring himself. To doff his own mask of moderation, he wanted, on the part of Novgorod, a breach of the peace. As he had simulated calm endurance, so he simulated now a sudden burst of passion. Having bribed an envoy of the republic to address him during a public audience with the name of sovereign, he claimed, at once, all the rights of a despot--the self-annihilation of the republic.