

## CHAPTER VI

One feature characteristic of the Slavonic race must strike every observer. Almost everywhere it confined itself to an inland country, leaving the sea-borders to non-Slavonic tribes. Finno-Tartaric tribes held the shores of the Black Sea, Lithuanians and Fins those of the Baltic and White Sea. Wherever they touched the sea-board, as in the Adriatic and part of the Baltic, the Slavonians had soon to submit to foreign rule. The Russian people shared this common fate of the Slavonian race. Their home, at the time they first appear in history, was the country about the sources and upper course of the Volga and its tributaries, the Dnieper, Don, and Northern Dwina. Nowhere did their territory touch the sea except at the extremity of the Gulf of Finland. Nor had they before Peter the Great proved able to conquer any maritime outlet beside that of the White Sea, which, during three-fourths of the year, is itself enchained and immovable. The spot where Petersburg now stands had been for a thousand years past contested ground between Fins, Swedes, and Russians. All the remaining extent of coast from Polangen, near Memel, to Torrea, the whole coast of the Black Sea, from Akerman to Redut Kaleh, has been conquered later on. And, as if to witness the anti-maritime peculiarity of the Slavonic race, of all this line of coast, no portion of the Baltic coast has really adopted Russian nationality. Nor has the Circassian and Mingrelian east coast of the Black Sea. It is only the coast of the White Sea, as far as it was worth cultivating, some portion of the northern coast of the Black Sea, and part of the coast of the Sea of Azof, that have really been peopled with Russian inhabitants, who, however, despite the new circumstances in which they are placed, still refrain from taking to the sea, and obstinately stick to the land-lopers' traditions of their ancestors.

From the very outset, Peter the Great broke through all the traditions of the Slavonic race. "It is water that Russia wants." These words he addressed as a rebuke to Prince Cantemir are inscribed on the title-page of his life. The conquest of the Sea of Azof was aimed at in his first war with Turkey, the conquest of the Baltic in his war against Sweden, the conquest of the Black Sea in his second war against the Porte, and the conquest of the Caspian Sea in his fraudulent intervention in Persia. For a system of local encroachment, land was sufficient; for a system of universal aggression, water had become indispensable. It was but by the conversion of Muscovy from a country wholly of land into a sea-bordering empire, that the traditional limits of the Muscovite policy could be superseded and merged into that bold synthesis which, blending the encroaching method of the Mongol slave with the world-conquering tendencies of the Mongol master, forms the life-spring of modern Russian diplomacy.

It has been said that no great nation has ever existed, or been able to exist, in such an inland position as that of the original empire of Peter the Great; that none has ever submitted thus to see its coasts and the mouths of its rivers torn away from it; that Russia could no more leave the mouth of the Neva, the natural outlet for the produce of Northern Russia, in the hands of the Swedes, than the mouths of the Don, Dnieper, and Bug, and the Straits of Kertch, in the hands of nomadic and plundering Tartars; that the Baltic provinces, from their very geographical configuration, are naturally a corollary to whichever nation holds the country behind them; that, in one word, Peter, in this quarter, at least, but took hold of what was absolutely necessary for the natural development of his country. From this point of view, Peter the Great intended, by his war against Sweden, only rearing a Russian Liverpool, and endowing it with its indispensable strip of coast.

But then, one great fact is slighted over, the *tour de force* by which he transferred the capital of the Empire from the inland centre to the maritime extremity, the characteristic boldness with which he erected the new capital on the first strip of Baltic coast he conquered, almost within gunshot of the frontier, thus deliberately giving his dominions an *eccentric centre*. To transfer the throne of the Czars from Moscow to Petersburg was to place it in a position where it could not be safe, even from insult, until the whole coast from Libau to Tornea was subdued--a work not completed till 1809, by the conquest of Finland. "St. Petersburg is the window from which Russia can overlook Europe," said Algarotti. It was from the first a defiance to the Europeans, an incentive to further conquest to the Russians. The fortifications in our own days of Russian Poland are only a further step in the execution of the same idea. Modlin, Warsaw, Ivangorod, are more than citadels to keep a rebellious country in check. They are the same menace to the west which Petersburg, in its

immediate bearing, was a hundred years ago to the north. They are to transform Russia into Panslavonia, as the Baltic provinces were to transform Muscovy into Russia.

Petersburg, the *eccentric centre* of the empire, pointed at once to a periphery still to be drawn.

It is, then, not the mere conquest of the Baltic provinces which separates the policy of Peter the Great from that of his ancestors, but it is the transfer of the capital which reveals the true meaning of his Baltic conquests. Petersburg was not like Muscovy, the centre of a race, but the seat of a government; not the slow work of a people, but the instantaneous creation of a man; not the medium from which the peculiarities of an inland people radiate, but the maritime extremity where they are lost; not the traditionary nucleus of a national development, but the deliberately chosen abode of a cosmopolitan intrigue. By the transfer of the capital, Peter cut off the natural ligaments which bound up the encroaching system of the old Muscovite Czars with the natural abilities and aspirations of the great Russian race. By planting his capital on the margin of a sea, he put to open defiance the anti-maritime instincts of that race, and degraded it to a mere weight in his political mechanism. Since the 16th century Muscovy had made no important acquisitions but on the side of Siberia, and to the 16th century the dubious conquests made towards the west and the south were only brought about by direct agency on the east. By the transfer of the capital, Peter proclaimed that he, on the contrary, intended working on the east and the immediately neighbouring countries through the agency of the west. If the agency through the east was narrowly circumscribed by the stationary character and the limited relations of Asiatic peoples, the agency through the west became at once illimited and universal from the movable character and the all-sided relations of Western Europe. The transfer of the capital denoted this intended change of agency, which the conquest of the Baltic provinces afforded the means of achieving, by securing at once to Russia the supremacy among the neighbouring Northern States; by putting it into immediate and constant contact with all points of Europe; by laying the basis of a material bond with the maritime Powers, which by this conquest became dependent on Russia for their naval stores; a dependence not existing as long as Muscovy, the country that produced the great bulk of the naval stores, had got no outlets of its own; while Sweden, the Power that held these outlets, had not got the country lying behind them.

If the Muscovite Czars, who worked their encroachments by the agency principally of the Tartar Khans, were obliged to *tartarize* Muscovy, Peter the Great, who resolved upon working through the agency of the west, was obliged to *civilize* Russia. In grasping upon the Baltic provinces, he seized at once the tools necessary for this process. They afforded him not only the diplomatists and the generals, the brains with which to execute his system of political and military action on the west, they yielded him, at the same time, a crop of bureaucrats, schoolmasters, and drill-sergeants, who were to drill Russians into that varnish of civilization that adapts them to the technical appliances of the Western peoples, without imbuing them with their ideas.

Neither the Sea of Azof, nor the Black Sea, nor the Caspian Sea, could open to Peter this direct passage to Europe. Besides, during his lifetime still Taganrog, Azof, the Black Sea, with its new-formed Russian fleets, ports, and dockyards, were again abandoned or given up to the Turk. The Persian conquest, too, proved a premature enterprise. Of the four wars which fill the military life of Peter the Great, his first war, that against Turkey, the fruits of which were lost in a second Turkish war, continued in one respect the traditionary struggle with the Tartars. In another respect, it was but the prelude to the war against Sweden, of which the second Turkish war forms an episode and the Persian war an epilogue. Thus the war against Sweden, lasting during twenty-one years, almost absorbs the military life of Peter the Great. Whether we consider its purpose, its results, or its endurance, we may justly call it *the* war of Peter the Great. His whole creation hinges upon the conquest of the Baltic coast.

Now, suppose we were altogether ignorant of the details of his operations, military and diplomatic. The mere fact that the conversion of Muscovy into Russia was brought about by its transformation from a half-Asiatic inland country into the paramount maritime Power of the Baltic, would it not enforce upon us the conclusion that England, the greatest maritime Power of that epoch--a maritime Power lying, too, at the very gates of the Baltic, where, since the middle of the 17th century, she had maintained the attitude of supreme arbiter--that

England must have had her hand in this great change, that she must have proved the main prop or the main impediment of the plans of Peter the Great, that during the long protracted and deadly struggle between Sweden and Russia she must have turned the balance, that if we do not find her straining every nerve in order to save the Swede we may be sure of her having employed all the means at her disposal for furthering the Muscovite? And yet, in what is commonly called history, England does hardly appear on the plan of this grand drama, and is represented as a spectator rather than as an actor. Real history will show that the Khans of the Golden Horde were no more instrumental in realizing the plans of Ivan III. and his predecessors than the rulers of England were in realizing the plans of Peter I. and his successors.

The pamphlets which we have reprinted, written as they were by English contemporaries of Peter the Great, are far from concurring in the common delusions of later historians. They emphatically denounce England as the mightiest tool of Russia. The same position is taken up by the pamphlet of which we shall now give a short analysis, and with which we shall conclude the introduction to the diplomatic revelations. It is entitled, "*Truth is but Truth as it is timed; or, our Ministry's present measures against the Muscovite vindicated, etc., etc.*" Humbly dedicated to the House of C., London, 1719."

The former pamphlets we have reprinted, were written at, or shortly after, the time when, to use the words of a modern admirer of Russia, "Peter traversed the Baltic Sea as master at the head of the combined squadrons of all the northern Powers, England included, which gloried in sailing under his orders." In 1719, however, when *Truth is but Truth* was published, the face of affairs seemed altogether changed. Charles XII. was dead, and the English Government now pretended to side with Sweden, and to wage war against Russia. There are other circumstances connected with this anonymous pamphlet which claim particular notice. It purports to be an extract from a relation, which, on his return from Muscovy, in August, 1715, its author, by order of George I., drew up and handed over to Viscount Townshend, then Secretary of State.

"It happens," says he, "to be an advantage that at present I may own to have been the first so happy to foresee, or honest to forewarn our Court here, of the absolute necessity of our then breaking with the Czar, and shutting him out again of the Baltic." "My relation discovered his aim as to other States, and even to the German Empire, to which, although an inland Power, he had offered to annex Livonia as an Electorate, so that he could but be admitted as an elector. It drew attention to the Czar's then contemplated assumption of the title of Autocrat. Being head of the Greek Church he would be owned by the other potentates as head of the Greek Empire. I am not to say how reluctant we would be to acknowledge that title, since we have already made an ambassador treat him with the title of Imperial Majesty, which the Swede has never yet condescended to."

For some time attached to the British Embassy in Muscovy, our author, as he states, was later on "*dismissed the service, because the Czar desired it,*" having made sure that

"I had given our Court such light into his affairs as is contained in this paper; for which I beg leave to appeal to the King, and to vouch the Viscount Townshend, who heard his Majesty give that vindication." "And yet, notwithstanding all this, I have been for these five years past kept soliciting for a very long arrear still due, and whereof I contracted the greatest part in executing a commission for her late Majesty."

The anti-Muscovite attitude, suddenly assumed by the Stanhope Cabinet, our author looks to in rather a sceptic mood.

"I do not pretend to foreclose, by this paper, the Ministry of that applause due to them from the public, when they shall satisfy us as to what the motives were which made them, till but yesterday, straiten the Swede in everything, although then our ally as much as now; or strengthen, by all the ways they could, the Czar, although under no tie, but barely that of amity with Great Britain.... At the minute I write this I learn that the gentleman who brought the Muscovites, not yet three years ago, as a royal navy, not under our protection, on their first appearance in the Baltic, is again authorized by the persons now in power, to give the Czar a second

meeting in these seas. For what reason or to what good end?"

The gentleman hinted at is Admiral Norris, whose Baltic campaign against Peter I. seems, indeed, to be the original pattern upon which the recent naval campaigns of Admirals Napier and Dundas were cut out.

The restoration to Sweden of the Baltic provinces is required by the commercial as well as the political interest of Great Britain. Such is the pith of our author's argument:

"Trade is become the very life of our State; and what food is to life, naval stores are to a fleet. The whole trade we drive with all the other nations of the earth, at best, is but lucrative; this, of the north, is indispensably needful, and may not be improperly termed the *sacra embole* of Great Britain, as being its chiefest foreign vent, for the support of all our trade, and our safety at home. As woollen manufactures and minerals are the staple commodities of Great Britain, so are likewise naval stores those of Muscovy, as also of all those very provinces in the Baltic which the Czar has so lately wrested from the crown of Sweden. Since those provinces have been in the Czar's possession, Pernan is entirely waste. At Revel we have not one British merchant left, and all the trade which was formerly at Narwa is now brought to Petersburg.... The Swede could never possibly engross the trade of our subjects, because those seaports in his hands were but so many thoroughfares from whence these commodities were uttered, the places of their produce or manufacture lying behind those ports, in the dominions of the Czar. But, if left to the Czar, these Baltic ports are no more thoroughfares, but peculiar magazines from the inland countries of the Czar's own dominions. Having already Archangel in the White Sea, to leave him but any seaport in the Baltic were to put no less in his hands than the *two keys of the general magazines of all the naval stores of Europe*; it being known that Danes, Swedes, Poles, and Prussians have but single and distinct branches of those commodities in their several dominions. If the Czar should thus engross 'the supply of what we cannot do without,' where then is our fleet? Or, indeed, where is the security for all our trade to any part of the earth besides?"

If, then, the interest of British commerce requires to exclude the Czar from the Baltic, the interest of our State ought to be no less a spur to quicken us to that attempt. By the interest of our State I would be understood to mean neither the party measures of a Ministry, nor any foreign motives of a Court, but precisely what is, and ever must be, the immediate concern, either for the safety, ease, dignity, or emolument of the Crown, as well as the common weal of Great Britain. With respect to the Baltic, it has "from the earliest period of our naval power" always been considered a fundamental interest of our State: first, to prevent the rise there of any new maritime Power; and, secondly, to maintain the balance of power between Denmark and Sweden.

"One instance of the wisdom and foresight of our *then truly British statesmen* is the peace at Stalboa, in the year 1617. James the First was the mediator of that treaty, by which the Muscovite was obliged to give up all the provinces which he then was possessed of in the Baltic, and to be barely an inland Power on this side of Europe."

The same policy of preventing a new maritime Power from starting in the Baltic was acted upon by Sweden and Denmark.

"Who knows not that the Emperor's attempt to get a seaport in Pomerania weighed no less with the great Gustavus than any other motive for carrying his arms even into the bowels of the house of Austria? What befel, at the times of Charles Gustavus, the crown of Poland itself, who, besides it being in those days by far the mightiest of any of the northern Powers, had then a long stretch of coast on, and some ports in, the Baltic? The Danes, though then in alliance with Poland, would never allow them, even for their assistance against the Swedes, to have a fleet in the Baltic, but destroyed the Polish ships wherever they could meet them."

As to the maintenance of the balance of power between the established maritime States of the Baltic, the tradition of British policy is no less clear. "When the Swedish power gave us some uneasiness there by threatening to crush Denmark," the honour of our country was kept up by retrieving the then inequality of the

balance of power.

The Commonwealth of England sent in a squadron to the Baltic which brought on the treaty of Roskild (1658), afterwards confirmed at Copenhagen (1660). The fire of straw kindled by the Danes in the times of King William III. was as speedily quenched by George Rock in the treaty of Copenhagen.

Such was the hereditary British policy.

"It never entered into the mind of the politicians of those times in order to bring the scale again to rights, to find out the happy *expedient of raising a third naval Power* for framing a juster balance in the Baltic.... Who has taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourables of the earth? *Ego autem neminem nomino, quare irasci mihi nemo poterit, nisi qui ante de se noluerit confiteri.* Posterity will be under some difficulty to believe that this could be the *work of any of the persons now in power ... that we have opened; St. Petersburg to the Czar solely at our own expense, and without any risk to him....*"

The safest line of policy would be to return to the treaty of Itolbowa, and to suffer the Muscovite no longer "to nestle in the Baltic." Yet, it may be said, that in "the present state of affairs" it would be "difficult to retrieve the advantage we have lost by not curbing, when it was more easy, the growth of the Muscovite power." A middle course may be thought more convenient.

"If we should find it consistent with the welfare of our State that the Muscovite have an inlet into the Baltic, as having, of all the princes of Europe, a country that can be made most beneficial to its prince, by uttering its produce to foreign markets. In this case, it were but reasonable to expect, on the other hand, that in return for our complying so far with his interest, for the improvement of his country, his Czarish Majesty, on his part, should demand nothing that may tend to the disturbance of another; and, therefore, contenting himself with ships of trade, should demand none of war."

"We should thus preclude his hopes of being ever more than an inland Power," but "obviate every objection of using the Czar worse than any Sovereign Prince may expect. I shall not for this give an instance of a Republic of Genoa, or another in the Baltic itself, of the Duke of Courland; but will assign Poland and Prussia, who, though both now crowned heads, have ever contented themselves with the freedom of an open traffic, without insisting on a fleet. Or the treaty of Falczin, between the Turk and Muscovite, by which Peter was forced not only to restore Asoph, and to part with all his men-of-war in those parts, but also to content himself with the bare freedom of traffic in the Black Sea. Even an inlet in the Baltic for trade is much beyond what he could morally have promised himself not yet so long ago on the issue of his war with Sweden."

If the Czar refuse to agree to such "a healing temperament," we shall have "nothing to regret but the time we lost to exert all the means that Heaven has made us master of, to reduce him to a peace advantageous to Great Britain." War would become inevitable. In that case

"it ought no less to animate our Ministry to pursue their present measures, than fire with indignation the breast of every honest Briton that a Czar of Muscovy, who owes his naval skill to our instructions, and his grandeur to our forbearance, should so soon deny to Great Britain the terms which so few years ago he was fain to take up with from the Sublime Porte."

"'Tis every way our interest to have the Swede restored to those provinces which the Muscovite has wrested from that crown in the Baltic. *Great Britain can no longer hold the balance in that sea,*" since she *"has raised the Muscovite to be a maritime Power there....* Had we performed the articles of our alliance made by King William with the crown of Sweden, that gallant nation would ever have been a bar strong enough against the Czar coming into the Baltic.... Time must confirm us, that the Muscovite's *expulsion from the Baltic* is now the principal end of our Ministry."

Butler & Tanner. The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.

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