XIV. died (September, 1715). The material prosperity of his early years had vanished, and in their place his failing eyes fell upon a famished peasantry and a government breaking down under its burden of debt. The disastrous end was the answer of fate to his foolish ambition. "I have made too many wars," the dying king admitted; "do not imitate me in that respect," he said, turning to his little heir. But to his contemporaries he remained to the day of his passing the *grand monarque;* and that title is a good summary of him as he appears in history, for it conveys the impression of a splendor which is not without the suspicion of hollowness.

The dominance of French civilization.

The brilliancy which Louis's long reign lent France cast a spell upon the rest of the world. Louis's court became the model court of Europe, and the so-called good society, the world over, adopted, for more than a century, the French tongue, French manners, French fashions, and French art. That such mere imitation could bring other nations no solid cultural advantages goes without saying, but it is necessary to recognize that French civilization under Louis must have possessed an irresistible charm to have excited such universal admiration.

The bloom of French literature.

Under Louis French literature unfolded a wealth of blossoms. It is the period of French classicism, a period, that is, of self-restraint and voluntary subjection to rules. Literature, always a perfect mirror of society, naturally assumed the majestic tone which ruled at Versailles, and prided itself on outward glitter and formal finish. But beneath this more or less artificial note sound, in the case at least of the leaders, the sincerity and conviction which are the constant characteristics of true art. France, modern France, France of the coming centuries, may point proudly to her tragic poets, Corneille (d. 1684) and Racine (d. 1699), and may always turn for refreshment and entertainment to the comedies of her inimitable Molière (d. 1673).

CHAPTER XIII

THE RISE OF RUSSIA AND THE DECLINE OF SWEDEN

REFERENCES: WAKEMAN, Ascendancy of France, pp. 165–72, 180–83, 289–308; HASSALL, The Balance of Power, Chapters V., XI., XIII.; RAMBAUD, History of Russia, Vol. II., Chapters I.–IV.; MORFILL, Russia; WALISZEWSKI, Peter the Great; NISBET BAIN, Charles XII.

SOURCE READINGS: ROBINSON, Readings, Chapter XXXII., Sections 1, 2, 3.

The Russians Slav and Christian.

THE Russians, the leading branch of the Slav family, took possession, in the period of the great migrations, of the wide plains of eastern Europe where they still reside. In the tenth century they became converted to Christianity by Greek missionaries, with the result that they have ever since been passionately attached to the Greek Orthodox Church, which held in the east the same commanding position occupied by the Roman Church in the west. They had not advanced far upon the road of civilization when a great calamity overtook them, for in the thirteenth century they were conquered by Asiatic Mongols or Tartars, whose yoke they did not entirely cast off until the beginning of the Modern Period. Under Ivan III. (1462–1505) and Ivan IV. (1547–84) the power of the monarch was greatly increased until he became almost absolute, and assumed, in witness of his position, the proud title of Cæsar or Czar. On the death of Ivan IV., called the Terrible, Russia was plunged into a sea of domestic troubles, out of which she was rescued in 1613 by the election to the sovereignty of

a native nobleman, Michael Romanoff. Michael was the first Czar of the dynasty which still rules Russia to-day.

Poles and Swedes, the natural enemies of Russia.

The first business of the House of Romanoff was to drive back the western neighbors, the Poles, who had taken advantage of the late civil troubles to appropriate Russian territory. The Czars had engaged in this task with some success when they found themselves confronted with another and far more formidable power, Sweden. Sweden being at that time the great Baltic state, a struggle was inevitable as soon as Russia resolved to get a foothold on what Sweden regarded as her sea. And that brings us to Peter.

Czar Peter.

Czar Peter is the glory of the House of Romanoff. Together with an older brother, Ivan, he succeeded to the throne in the year 1682. However, as the brothers were still too young to rule, a regency was established under an older sister, Sophia. Peter, a masterful lad, accepted the situation until 1689, when, being seventeen years old, he took the government into his own hands and sent Sophia to a nunnery. As Czar Ivan was a weak and brainless creature, his existence for the few more years that he lived was no check upon Peter's autocratic control.

The situation of Russia.

In order to understand Peter's activity it is necessary to grasp the chief factors of the Russian situation at the time of his accession. In the second half of the seventeenth century the Russians were in life and manners an Asiatic people, connected with European culture solely by the two bonds of their Aryan blood and their Christian faith. Politically their association with Europe was very slight. Their state was of vast extent, comprising the plain of the Volga and including a large part of northern Asia or Siberia, but was so cooped in on the west and south by a ring of great powers—Persia, Turkey, Poland, and Sweden—that it was practically an inland monarchy without a gate upon any sea which might throw open to it the highways of the world. Finally,

let us understand the Russian constitution. The Czar was on the way toward absolutism, but there still existed some checks upon his power— (1) the patriarch, the head of the Church, who exercised great influence in religious matters, and (2) the Streltsi, the Czar's body-guard, who, because they leaned upon the nobility and were a privileged force, felt inclined to regard themselves as superior to their master.

Peter's policy.

This situation Peter soon seized with a statesmanlike grasp, and moulded, through the efforts of a long rule, to his own purposes. He set himself, in the main, three aims, and met in all a degree of success which is fairly astonishing: he resolved to make the culture connection between Russia and Europe strong and intimate by opening the door to European civilization; he labored to open a way to the west by gaining a foothold on the Black and Baltic Seas; and lastly, he planned to rid himself of the restraint put upon his authority by the patriarch and the Streltsi.

Peter's character.

Peter is a difficult person for a modern man to understand. On one occasion he appears as a murderer, on another as a monster of sensuality, and on still another as one of nature's noblemen. We have the key to his character when we remember that he was a barbarian of genius—never anything more. Civilized standards applied to him are unjust and futile. Barbarity was an element of his blood, and all his strenuous, life-long aspirations for the nobler possessions of the mind never diminished his natural savagery. Therefore, his life is full of the strangest contrasts. With barbarian eagerness he appropriated everything that he encountered, good and evil alike, and surrendered himself, for the time being, to its sway with all his might. Certainly his distinguishing characteristic is an indomitable energy; his life burned at a white heat.

Peter's first conquest. Azov.

Peter's first chance to distinguish himself came in the year 1695. The Emperor Leopold was at that time waging

war against the Turks, who were beginning to show the first symptoms of collapse. Seeing his opportunity, Peter resolved to make use of their embarrassment to acquire a southern outlet for Russia, and in 1696 conquered the Port of Azov, on the Black Sea. The future now opened more confidently to him, and before taking another step he determined to visit the west and study the wonders of its civilization with his own eyes.

Peter's journey of instruction.

Peter spent the year 1697–98 in travel through Germany, Holland, and England. The journey, undertaken with a large suite of fellow-students like himself, was meant purely as a voyage of instruction. Throughout its course Peter was indefatigable in his efforts to get at the bottom of things, at the methods of western government, at the sources of western wealth, at the systems of western trade and manufacture. "My part is to learn," is the motto encircling the seal which he had struck for this voyage. In Holland he hired himself out for a time as a common ship-carpenter, ships having been a passion with him from his boyhood. In addition he attended surgical lectures, visited paper-mills, flour-mills, printing-presses, in short was untiring in his efforts to assimilate not a part but the whole of western civilization. In England King William received him with especial cordiality and assisted him in every way in the prosecution of his studies. The rough Peter was the joke of the day among the courtiers and dandies, but honest folk were spurred to interest by this enthusiastic worker, who balked at no drudgery to fit himself for the task of uplifting his backward people.

Peter disbands the Streltsi and organizes a standing army.

The opportunity for putting the results of his trip to the test of practice came sooner than Peter expected. At Vienna he heard that the Streltsi had revolted. He set out post-haste for home, established order, and then took a fearful vengeance. Over a thousand of the luckless guards were executed with terrible tortures. Rumor reports that Peter in his savage fury himself played the headsman. Sovereign and executioner—such accumulation of offices in one hand clearly exhibits the chasm that then yawned between Europe and Russia. But no one will deny that there was method in Peter's madness. The Streltsi, who were affiliated with the nobility, had been a constant centre of disaffection, and now was the time, as Peter clearly saw, to get rid of them. Such as were not executed were dismissed, and the troop was replaced by a regular army, organized on the European pattern and dependent on the Czar.

Peter's reforms.

Peter's reforms now crowded thick and fast. Every barrier was levelled to facilitate the invasion of western influences. He invited colonists, mechanics, and shipwrights to settle in Russia. He introduced western dress. He discouraged the wearing of beards, although they enjoyed the sanction of the Church, and, armed with a pair of scissors, occasionally with his own imperial hand practised the barber's art upon his subjects. But by such measures he clashed with the most cherished superstitions of his people, and the clergy, the natural centre of conservatism, became increasingly suspicious of his policy. As their discontent was a danger to the throne and a hindrance to reforms, the Czar resolved to make them more dependent on himself. When the patriarch died in 1700, Peter committed his functions to a synod which he himself appointed and controlled, and thus the Czar became the head of the Church as he already was the head of the state.

The inevitable clash with Sweden.

After his return from the west, Peter was more desirous than ever of gaining a hold on the Baltic. Azov, on the Black Sea, was worth little to him as long as the Turks held the Dardanelles. The west, it was clear, could be best gained by the northern route. But the enterprise was far from easy. The Baltic coast was largely held by Sweden,

and Sweden, the leading power of the north, was prepared to resist with energy any attempt to displace her.

The greatness of Sweden.

The rise of Sweden to the position of the leading Baltic power dates from the heroic time of Gustavus Adolphus (1611–32). Gustavus extended his rule over the northern and eastern shores of the Baltic, and through his successful interference in the Thirty Years' War, his daughter Christina, who succeeded him, acquired, as her share in the German booty, western Pomerania and the land at the mouth of the Weser and the Elbe (Treaty of Westphalia, 1648). For a short time now Sweden took rank with the great powers of Europe. Unfortunately for her, her greatness was the result not of her wealth and civilization, but of her military prowess; and, as experience proves, a military greatness rests on precarious foundations. A weak, unmilitary ruler, or a military adventurer who overstrains the bow, may undermine it. Generally speaking the successors of Gustavus were capable sovereigns, but they injured and antagonized so many interests that it was only a question of time when their neighbors would combine against them. Denmark to the west, Brandenburg-Prussia to the south, Poland and Russia to the east, had all paid for Sweden's greatness with severe losses, and nursed a corresponding grudge against her. The long-awaited opportunity for revenge seemed at length to have arrived, when in the year 1697, Charles XII., a boy of fifteen, came to the throne. His youth and inexperience appeared to mark him as an easy victim, and Denmark, Poland, and Russia formed a league against him to recover their lost territories (1700).

Charles XII.

The allies had, however, made their reckoning without the host. Charles XII. turned out, in spite of his youth, to be the most warlike member of a warlike race—a perfect fighting demon. But aside from his unflinching courage he lacked almost every virtue of a ruler. Of a proud and ob-