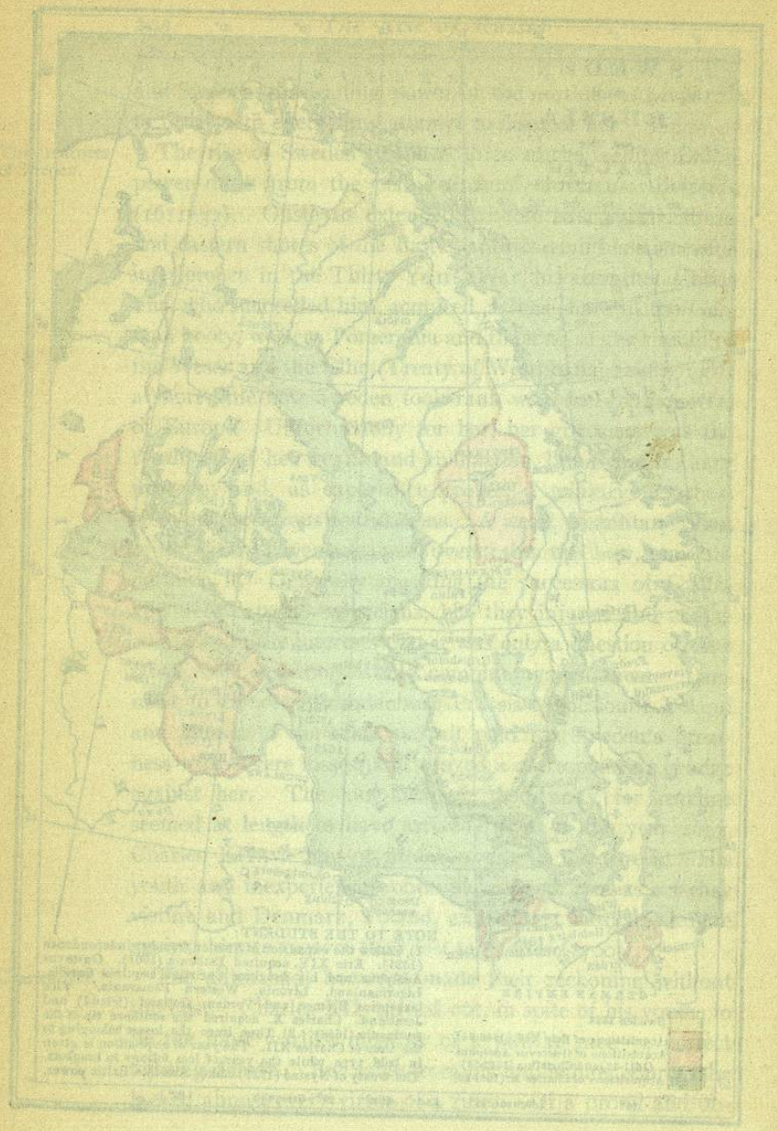

stinate nature he was never governed by a consideration of the welfare of his people, but always shaped his policy by his own romantic notions of honor. He was Don Quixote promoted to a throne, and though he could fight with admirable fury against windmills, he could not govern and he could not build. In the year 1700 his full character was not yet revealed, and people stopped open-mouthed with wonder, as he went up in splendor, like a rocket, in the north.

His marvellous campaign of 1700.

Before the coalition was ready to strike, young Charles gathered his forces and fell upon the enemy. As the armies of Denmark, Poland, and Russia were necessarily widely separated, he calculated that if he could meet them in turn, the likelihood of victory would be much increased. He laid his plans accordingly. In the spring of 1700 he suddenly crossed the straits from Sweden and besieged Copenhagen. The king of Denmark, unprepared for so bold a step, had to give way and sign with Charles the Peace of Travendal (August, 1700), in which he promised to remain neutral during the remainder of the war. The ink of his signature was hardly dry before Charles was off again like a flash. This time he sailed to the Gulf of Finland, where Peter with 50,000 men was besieging Narva. Charles at the head of only 8,000, advanced straightway to the attack, and his well-disciplined Swedes soon swept the confused masses of the ill-trained Russians off the field. On Peter's falling back into the interior, Charles was free to turn upon his last and most hated enemy, August the Strong, king of Poland, and before another year passed August, too, had been defeated.

He spoils all by his Polish policy.

Thus far the war had been managed admirably. Charles might have made his conditions and gone home. But passionately obstinate, he was set on humiliating August, whom he regarded as the instigator of the alliance, and whom he determined to drive out of Poland altogether. The at-

tempt necessitated getting Poland into his hands, and proved so difficult that it led to the undoing of his first successes and, finally, to the ruin of his life.

The anarchy in Poland.

Poland was at this time in a condition hardly better than anarchy. The nobles had all the power and were sovereign on their own lands. The only remaining witnesses of a previous unity were a Diet, which never transacted any business, and an elected king, who was allowed no power and had nothing to do. In the year 1697 the Poles had even elected to the kingship a foreigner, August the Strong, elector of Saxony. Now when in the year 1701 King August was defeated by Charles, the majority of the Poles were glad rather than sorry, for August had engaged in the war without the consent of the Diet; but when Charles began making conquests in Poland, and insisted on forcing a monarch of his own choosing on the Poles, a national party naturally gathered around August, who, although a foreigner, was nevertheless the rightful king.

Charles and August.

For many years following the brilliant campaign of 1700 Charles hunted August over the marshy and wooded plains of the Slav kingdom, but though always victorious, he could never quite succeed in utterly crushing his enemy. Even the capture of Warsaw and the elevation of his dependent, Stanislaus Lesczinski, to the Polish throne, did not change the situation. Finally, in 1706, Charles desperately plunged after August into Saxony, and forced him formally to abdicate the Polish crown.

Progress of Peter on the Baltic.

The vindictiveness of her sovereign was destined to cost Sweden dear. While Charles was squandering his strength upon a foolish enterprise, his neighbor, Peter, was making excellent use of his time. The lesson of Narva had not been lost upon him. He built up a disciplined army and gradually occupied a considerable part of the Baltic coast. To show his confidence in the future, he founded in 1703, on

the banks of the Neva, a new capital and named it St. Petersburg. Only in 1707, when he had wrung his peace from August, did the king of Sweden undertake to put a check on these Russian aggressions. To let Peter feel the whole weight of his sword, he marched against Moscow, but long before he reached that distant capital his ranks were thinned by the rigors of the Russian winter and decimated by disease. When Peter came up with Charles at Pultava (1709), the Swedes fought with their accustomed bravery, but their sufferings had worn them out. And now Narva was avenged. The Swedish army was literally destroyed, and Charles, accompanied by a few hundred horsemen, barely succeeded in making his escape to Turkey. The verdict of Pultava was destined to be final. Sweden stepped down from her proud position, and a new power, Russia, henceforth ruled in the north.

The verdict of Pultava.

As for Charles, the Sultan received the famous warrior hospitably and offered him Bender for a residence. There Charles remained five years—long enough to make Bender the name of one of the maddest chapters of his adventurous career. He immediately set his chief aim upon dragging Turkey into a war with Peter, but not till 1711 did the Sultan yield to the importunate pleader. A lucky campaign was about to deliver Peter into Charles's hands, when the Grand Vizier, who led the Turkish forces, accepted a bribe, and opening a lane let Peter's forces slip out of the trap into which they had blindly plunged. His unfortunate experience merely cost Peter Azov on the Black Sea. The disappointed Charles raved like a madman on seeing his foe escape, and when the Sultan, tired of the impertinence of the eternal meddler, requested him a little later to leave his territory, Charles obstinately refused to budge. It took a regular siege to bring him to understand that his entertainment in Turkey was over, and even then he fought like a

Charles in Turkey.

maniac upon the roof of his burning house until he fell senseless amid the *débris*. At length, after an absence of five years, he turned his face homeward (1714).

Sweden surrenders much of her Baltic territory.

Charles returned too late to stem the ebb of Swedish power, for the surrounding states had taken advantage of the king's long absence to help themselves to whatever territories they coveted. He met his foes with his accustomed valor, but his country was exhausted and his people alienated. In 1718, during his siege of Frederikshald in Norway, he was shot while riding out to reconnoitre the position of the enemy. His sister, Ulrica Eleanor, who succeeded him, was compelled by the aristocratic party to agree to a serious limitation of the royal prerogative. Then the tired Swedes hastened to sign a peace with their enemies. The German states of Hanover and Prussia acquired payments out of the Swedish provinces in Germany, Hanover getting Bremen and Verden, Prussia part of Pomerania; August the Strong was recognized as king of Poland; but Peter, who had contributed most to the defeat of Charles, got, too, by the Treaty of Nystadt (1721), the lion's share of the booty. He had handed over to him Carelia, Ingria, Esthonia, and Livonia—in fact, all the Swedish possessions of the eastern Baltic except Finland.

Peter and the Russian opposition.

Peter was now nearing the end of his reign. His rule had brought Russia a new splendor, but he was not spared pain and chagrin. For one thing his efforts in behalf of Russian civilization were resisted by the Russians themselves, and a secret party of hide-bound conservatives looked fervently forward to the time of the accession of Peter's son and heir, Alexis. Alexis, for his part, shunned no trouble to exhibit his sympathy with the cause of reaction. With a heavy heart Peter had to face the possibility of a successor who would undo his cherished life-work. For years he took pains to win Alexis over to his views, but when his efforts

proved without avail, he resolved, for the sake of the state, to deprive his son of the crown. The resolution we may praise, the method was terrible. It exhibited once more all of Peter's latent savagery. The Czarowitz died under the knout (1718), and the accounts which have come down to us make it probable that Peter had more than a passive share in his torture and execution.

Catherine II.

When Peter died (1725), it seemed for a time as if Russia would return to her former Asiatic condition. The government fell into the hands of a succession of dissolute, incompetent Czarinas, who let their favorites plunder the treasury and made Russia a byword in Europe, until the accession in 1762 of Catherine II. Catherine, by birth a petty princess of Germany, came to Russia as the wife of the heir-apparent, Peter. She was not only intelligent and energetic, but also wholly unscrupulous, and shortly after Peter, who was crotchety and half insane, had ascended the throne (1762), she led a revolution against him, in the course of which he was dethroned and murdered. Although she thus acquired the supreme power by means of a crime, once in possession of it she wielded it with consummate skill. Being of western birth, she naturally favored western civilization. Peter the Great himself had not been more anxious to give Russia a European varnish. More important still, she took up Peter's idea of expansion toward the west.

Catherine fixes her attention on Poland and Turkey.

Since the overthrow of Sweden, the chief resistance to the advance of Russia toward the Black and Baltic Seas had centred in Poland and Turkey. Their geographical position made them Russia's rivals and enemies, and Catherine saw her life-work in their abasement or subjection. Before she died she had succeeded in destroying Poland and in bringing Turkey to her feet.

Explanation of the anarchy of Poland.

The paralysis of Poland had been brought home to every observer in Europe, when Charles XII. of Sweden succeeded

in holding the country for a number of years with a mere handful of troops (1702–07). The weakness of the state was due to the selfish nobles and the miserable government which they had imposed on the country. To realize its ludicrous unfitness, one need only recall the famous provision called *liberum veto*, which conferred on every member of the Diet the right to forbid by his single veto the adoption of a legislative measure. By *liberum veto* one man could absolutely stop the machinery of government. Under these circumstances Poland was agitated by local quarrels in which ambitious neighbors presently took a hand. As it is a universal law that the weak are preyed upon by the strong, Poland has herself to thank in the first place for the ruin that overtook her in the eighteenth century. But that fact, of course, does not exempt from guilt the powers that threw themselves upon her like beasts of prey and rent her asunder.

The three partitions of Poland.

The three neighbors of Poland, Russia, Austria, and Prussia, had long held her in their power before they resolved to put an end to her existence by means of a partition. After extended negotiations the measure was finally arranged in the year 1772. The partition of that year—called the First Partition—did not destroy Poland; it simply peeled off slices for the lucky highwaymen. The land beyond the Dwina went to Russia, Galicia to Austria, and the province of West Prussia to Prussia. But partition once admitted in principle, the march of events could not be stopped, and a few years later the fate of Poland was sealed by a Second and a Third Partition (1793 and 1795). Poland ceased to exist as a state when her last army, gallantly led by Kosciusko, went down before the Russians, but as a people she exists to this day, and fervidly nurses in her heart the hope of resurrection.

The movement toward Constantinople.

The signal success achieved by Catherine in Poland excited her to increased efforts against the Turks. In two

wars (first war, 1768–74; second war, 1787–92) she succeeded in utterly defeating the great Mohammedan power, and in extending her territory along the Black Sea to the Dniester. It was a solid acquisition, but it did not satisfy the ambitious Czarina. She dreamed of getting Constantinople and left that dream as a heritage to her successors, who have cherished it in their hearts and have striven persistently since her death to set up their standards on the Bosporus.

Peter and Catherine, the founders of Russian greatness.

Catherine left Russia at her death (1796) the greatest power of the north, perhaps even of Europe. Her life, like that of Peter, is stained with gross immorality, but these two have the honor of having lifted Russia almost without aid, and often in spite of herself, to her present eminent position.

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