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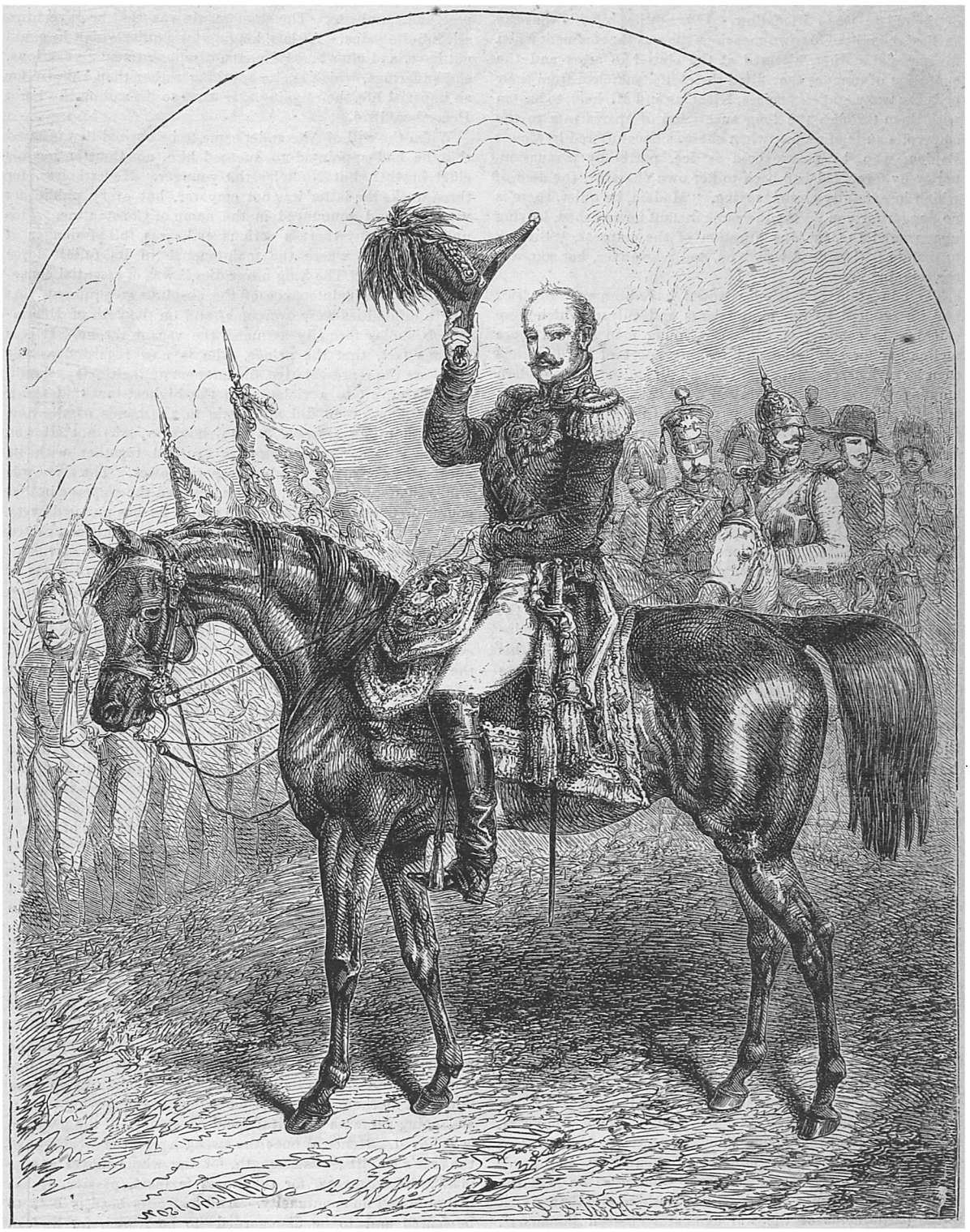
NICHOLAS, EMPEROR OF RUSSIA.

In Petersburg there is a likeness, from which, do what you may, you can never escape. It is that of the Czar, Nicholas,



NICHOLAS, EMPEROR OF RUSSIA.

Emperor of all the Russias, whose iron rule extends over seventy millions of souls, and one-seventh of the earth. Nicholas Pawlowitsch is the ninth of ten children borne to Paul by his second wife, Maria Feodorowna, a princess of Würtemberg The day of the imperial infant's birth was the 7th of July, 1796. The child had reached the age of four months, when on the death of his grandmother, Catharine II., his father ascended the throne. The eyes of Russia were fixed on

Alexander and Constantine, his elder brothers, and no reason whatever had Maria Feodorowna to suppose that the young Nicholas would ever wear the imperial crown. His youth presented no remarkable feature; yet, probably, may his earliest recollections have some fibres of connexion with that terrible night when assassination passed through the chambers of the old palace of Michailow. It is not improbable that the earliest thought of his own conscious life was that moment when his imperial mother, alarmed at the clatter of arms and the confusion of tongues that filled the castle, snatched from their beds the two youngest princes, Nicholas and Michael, to hasten with them through the long succession of apartments to the emperor's suite of rooms, when she was encountered by Count Pahlen, who, by nature cold as ice, partly by persuasion, partly by force, led her back to her own chamber, the door of which he carefully closed, saying, "Madam, be quiet, there is no danger for you." At the same instant he vanished, leaving unanswered the anxious question of the empress, "But my husband?" The deed was done, and Alexander, her son, was the reigning czar.

The education of Nicholas would have been very superior had he profited by the high talents and culture which were called on to conduct it. But the young man showed more inclination for soldiering and making sport of the courtiers than for serious, certainly for deep and difficult study. Modern languages, however, he acquired with ease, and manifested a taste for music, especially that of a martial kind. Cold and close by nature, Nicholas regarded his instructors with unconcern, and treated them with distance. Even toward his mother he appears to have shown no tenderness when once he was fairly out of the nursery. Of his youthful friendships not a word is said; already the prince overshadowed the youth. Gifted only with a common-place soul, he could not even in his favourite military recreations and pursuits rise to anything great or noble, but was satisfied with becoming a connoisseur in belts, and locks, and flints, and cartridge-boxes, and ramrods, and parade evolutions. His severe nature never unbent in the company of the officers, and towards officers and men he maintained a rigid discipline. Yet was he often unjust in his punishments, consulting rather his passions and his prejudices than the simple facts of the case; and when once he had done a wrong, he was never known to make amends, or in any way to rectify his error, though after he became emperor he has not seldom repaired an injustice into which he had fallen; still those acts of justice seem to have been the result rather of prudence and policy than of a high and generous regard for what is right.

The prince naturally failed to excite on his own behalf any warm sympathies in the public mind. Those who know him best ascribe to him only moderate abilities, shrug their shoulders when they speak of his want of information, and consider him as essentially a mere imitator of his predecessor Alexander, only that he wants the affability of the latter, and inwardly regards with dislike the huzzas of his almost idolatrous populace. However, it must be added that the coldness and hardness of his nature had one advantage, namely, that they guarded him against the fascinations and immoralities of a corrupt city and court.

The year 1814, together with the peace of Europe, brought back the former splendour of the palace life of Petersburg. It also showed the necessity for extraordinary attention to the inner condition of the empire, which during the war had fallen into lamentable neglect. The emperor, now advanced in years, had no heir. His eyes fell on Nicholas, and it became important that the grand prince's education should be improved. Foreign travel was determined on. Characteristic was the avowed object of that tour, which was nothing else than a visit to the battle-fields of the war against Napoleon Bonaparte. In addition to a survey of the chief of them in both Germany and France, he visited different courts, amongst others that of England. Returning home he made a hasty tour of the chief cities of Russia. Reviews and field-days marked his passage. In his judgment no place after a field of battle surpassed a parade in interest. The soul of Nicholas is the soul of a soldier. Shortly after his return, and on the 13th of July, 1817, he, now scarcely one-and-twenty, espoused in Petersburg, Marie Charlotte, princess of Prussia, who was about two years younger than himself. Years passed on in the midst of social disturbances and movements, which, though for the most part beyond his own dominions, Alexander did his utmost to compose and terminate. The chief result was, that he gave himself infinite pains. At last, longing for a quiet which he could not have, and after bereavements, disappointments, vexations, and sufferings, which excite anything rather than a desire for an imperial life, the reigning czar came to his end on the 1st of December, 1825.

When the will of Alexander came to be opened it was found that he had appointed to succeed him, not Constantine his elder brother, but Nicholas the younger. Nevertheless, for three weeks the latter was not emperor, but every public act was done and announced in the name of Constantine. This uncertainty, anywhere a serious evil, was full of danger at St. Petersburg, where the maintenance in its fullest force of the maxim, "The king never dies," was of essential consequence to the maintenance of the absolute government. At length difficulties were overcome, and on the 24th of December, Nicholas formally assumed the vacant throne. It is a curious fact, that the prince, who is now regarded as *par excellence* the representative and support of legitimacy, should owe his crown to a violation of the highest law of descent. The administration did not settle in the hands of the new czar without a conspiracy, which, however, was not allowed time to spread, and which was crushed together with its authors by the heavy hand of despotic power. The event was worse than a bad augury, for it confirmed the emperor in that course of unqualified absolutism which he has pursued every year with augmented rigours. To a man of his contracted faculties and inconsiderable reading, the progress of liberal ideas and institutions in the western and southern parts of Europe, serves only as an ever-increasing additional reason for tightening the reins of government at home, and for exercising all possible restraint abroad. And thus has it come to pass that the aggressive and despotical character of the emperor's foreign policy has for its source and support two of the strongest grounds: first, the traditions of his family; and, secondly, the necessities of his age; both of course understood in his own sense. Conquest and repression, thus recommended as the aim of a reign, easily fall into accord. In the mind of Nicholas they are practically one, and thus united, they act on his stern soul with ceaseless influence and overpowering effect. The momentum, which hence ensues, has another source of power. The Emperor of Russia is the head of the church. As head of the church he is regarded by his ignorant boors as next to God himself. Objects very near each other are often confounded. And so it is that Nicholas is accounted a god on earth, a *presens Divus*, even more so than any Roman emperor of old. His word in consequence is not only law, but the most sacred law; his will is not only absolute but righteous, and his wishes are all-prevailing, and his acts unimpeachable.

We have already seen that the czar is a soldier, a soldier of small dimensions, but "every inch" a soldier. This soldiership, which before his time had struck its roots deep in the country, by Nicholas has been nationalised. Russia is a huge camp, and the court is its head-quarters. Social life is a piece of drilled mechanism, passively obedient to the moving power, and going on with exactitude and constancy till the pressure is removed. Hence at once the strength and the weakness of the czar's empire;—its strength, for the whole moves as one mass; the weakness, for that mass is inert, passive, it has little life and no spontaneity. And hence its head is both to be feared and to be disregarded—to be feared, for he can ravage a neighbour's territories and put down liberty near his own borders, but he has no power for distant action; by diplomatic arts he may make himself felt in every European court, but he is unable to support his intrigues by armaments and expeditions, sundered from his soil, and sent to remote countries. Aware of this inability, the czar has constantly

endeavoured to extend the boundaries of Russia. The endeavour has been too successful.

The conquest and the advance have been rendered the easier by the pretexts under which they have been and still are carried forward. In the midst of a period of great social change, when free and active thought, in all countries of Europe, except Russia, has gone far to unbind the intellect and loosen the bands of society, Nicholas has appeared as the champion of prescription, of law, of order, of religion; and consequently as the opponent of revolution and anarchy, of infidelity and atheism. Such a position bestows incalculable power. But in what rough and unskilled hands is that awful power placed? Who can endure to think of a cause in substance so sacred being perilled in the custody of such a man and such a prince? What is right in the cause, he is sure to make wrong; and what is bad he is sure to render worse. Take, as a verification of this, the impiety which marks his present aggression in Turkey. What does he—he, the champion of Christendom? Simply, he plunders a neighbour on the pretext of an express commission from Him who is "just and righteous in all his ways;" and when he has, in his marauding career, butchered thousands of his fellow-men, the children of God, he offers up acknowledgments and thanksgivings to the Common Parent. Worse even than this has been his conduct toward Turkey; for how has he got a footing in the house which he is now wasting and robbing? By duplicity the most consummate, and by contrivances the most disreputable. For the Turk, as a Turk, we have no sympathy; but all the sympathy in the world have we for the cause of justice, freedom, civilisation, and Christianity, which is put in imminent danger by the misdeeds of the great northern aggressor.

THE VILLAGE OF DENIS, ON THE RIVER GABON.

The Gabon, which forms a receptacle for a number of water courses that have their source in the interior of the continent of Africa, is situated between 10′ and 30′ north latitude.

It may be considered to be bounded on the right shore by the points Clara and Obendo, upon the left by Pongara and Bohuin, and upon the side farthest from the sea by the islands of Konikey and Perroquets, beyond which extends the river Gabon, which, though of a considerable width near its mouth, narrows rapidly until its breadth is less than a mile. Before the establishment of French settlements upon the coast, Gabon was an important seat of the slave-trade. The wars which the different races inhabiting its banks and the neighbouring regions carried on among themselves, and their distant excursions, continually furnished the slave-ships with a considerable number of captives. The principal agents in the odious trade were the M'Pongos, whose most important village, situated upon the left bank, is called Denis, in honour of the chief who governs it. The M'Pongos are still almost the only agents of the barter which is carried on in the neighbourhood of the Gabon, and, in order to preserve this monopoly, they take care to maintain a mutual distrust between the Europeans and the tribes of the interior. On the one hand, they represent the Boulous, Pahouins, Bakalais, M'Bichos, &c., to us as nations of cannibals, who are constantly prowling about their villages to make captures, in order that they may have a feast on human flesh; and they feign the greatest terror at the mere name of their near neighbours the Boulous. On the other hand, they impress these tribes with the idea that we are rapacious and cruel pirates, when they visit them to procure from them commodities which they afterwards bring to us, such as ivory, wax, and dye-woods. But, in spite of this, the minds of the people of the interior are becoming enlightened as to the truth, and it is probable that, by means of some expeditions despatched to a considerable distance up the principal branch of the river, this trade, which is daily increasing, will soon become direct. Then, perhaps, the Europeans will at length succeed in opening a safe and regular route to the centre of the mysterious African continent, where so many generous missionaries of religion and of science have suffered bondage and death.

The M'Pongos inhabit the banks of the Gabon as far as the islands which surround the basin; their principal villages on the right bank are those of Kringer, Couaben, Louis, and Glass (called by the names of their respective chiefs), each village changing its name, and sometimes its site, with every new governor. Between Louis and Glass rises a wooden block-house, surrounded by palisades, and containing a garrison of Ioloffs, destined to protect the French settlement, built, as is also the Catholic mission, on a table-land overlooking the river. On a second table-land have been constructed magazines and some dwelling-houses; and it is to be hoped that the time is not far distant when a town will spring up around the settlement. An American missionary resides at the village of Glass.

The left bank is lower, and more swampy and unhealthy; on this side are the villages of Denis and Little Denis, in the former of which is to be found the original stock of the M'Pongo race; hence, doubtless, the supremacy of King Denis over the other chiefs of the same nation.

The village of Denis, situated on a peninsula, bounded on the south by the Gabon, is divided into several districts, separated by creeks, the approaches to which are swampy, so that people are obliged to make use of *pirogues* (rude boats used by the savages) to pass from one district to another. The principal street of the central district faces the river; it is long, broad, and built with tolerable regularity; the houses, which are constructed of a lattice-work of bamboo, differ little except in size. They are usually divided into two compartments; in one, the sleeping chamber for the whole family, are spread mats which serve as beds; the other contains the furniture, utensils, and provisions, and is used as assembly-room, kitchen, and store-room. Bananas, papaws, shrubs, and flowers, particularly lilies of a brilliant red, ornament and overshadow the entrance of the house, behind which stretches a curtain of bushy and luxuriant vegetation. In this street is situated the residence of King Denis, which is loftier and more spacious than the others; it is distinguished by some rude architectural ornaments, conspicuous among which are four sculptured columns, in the M'Pongo style, supporting a ledge of the roof, and thus forming a kind of peristyle.

The numerous relations of the king, who seem to constitute an aristocracy, are generally assembled behind the colonnade; and there the chief interests of the village are discussed by those who enjoy the honourable, though costly, privilege of being admitted to the royal presence, for they debate on the affairs of state over the gaming-table. The monarch employs himself almost exclusively in thus gaining the cash and other property of his subjects. No one is, in fact, so clever, or it may be so rash, as to succeed often in defeating the sovereign. The game consists in passing four hard dry berries through each of twelve holes made in a piece of wood, and of which either player has six. It is necessary to play in such a manner, that in taking the berries contained in one of the holes and placing one of them in each of the following, you come to a division in which your enemy has only two berries; that which you place there makes three, and you take; if the hole in which you have previously placed a berry also contained but two, that which has just been placed there making three, you take again; when the divisions of your adversary are thus emptied, the game is ended. The noise which the berries make, quickly handled, resembles that of dice in backgammon.

The people of the village entertain the greatest respect for King Denis; no one dares to pass before his residence when