

# How the Czar Was Doomed to Death

An Authentic Document Written by His Major-Domo  
Describes His Last Known Hours of Life

By CARL W. ACKERMAN

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*Mr. Ackerman, the special correspondent of THE NEW YORK TIMES in Siberia and Russia, went to Ekaterinburg at the close of 1918 to investigate the fate of the ex-Czar, Nicholas Romanoff, which still remained a mystery. He obtained and translated a unique document written by the former Emperor's major-domo, describing the Czar's last hours in Ekaterinburg. As the servant had not seen his master executed, however, the Bolshevik statement of his death remained unconfirmed. An Associated Press dispatch from Warsaw, Dec. 24, quoted Michael de Tschihatchef, a nephew of General Skoropadski, as authority for the statement that ex-Czar Nicholas and his whole family were still alive, and on Jan. 8 a London dispatch printed a like statement from Grand Duke Cyril. Though this part of the mystery of the Czar's fate remains unexplained at the present writing, (Jan. 15, 1919,) the old major-domo's narrative clears up other points, and is here presented as a historical document of permanent value.*

**E**KATERINBURG, (via Vladivostok,) Dec. 22, 1918.—I have obtained the first eyewitness account of the Czar's last days under the Bolsheviks and of his trial and brief farewell to his family, which shows that until his very last hour Nicholas Romanoff was intriguing with his military leaders for the restoration of the monarchy, and that it was the discovery of this plot by the Ural District Soviet which caused the order to be given for his execution; but whether he was actually shot is a mooted question in Ekaterinburg which will never be definitely solved until the Czar or his body is found. Meanwhile, he is considered dead, although probably all the members of his family are still alive.

For twenty-two years Parfen Alexievitch Dominin served the Czar as major-domo, accompanying him into exile, and remained with his imperial master until the early hours of the morning of July 17, when the Czar was led away by Bolshevik soldiers. In his manuscript report, in simple Russian, filled with the devotion of a lifelong servant, is presented, as far as I am able to learn, the only single, complete, and authentic account of the Czar's life

at Ekaterinburg, Dominin describes the Romanoffs' family life, tells of the illness of the Czarevitch, of the Empress's tragic pleas for mercy on her knees before the Soviet guard, and gives details of the evidence presented at the secret midnight trial, where the Czar appeared, undefended and alone, dressed in his soldier's garb.

## CHARGES IN THE INDICTMENT

Dominin states that the indictment presented against Nicholas charged him with being a party to the counter-revolutionary plot to overthrow the Bolsheviks and with secretly corresponding with Generals Denekine, Dutoff, and Dogert, who were endeavoring to liberate him and who had sent him word to be prepared to be freed.

When the Czar was taken away his family was removed, according to Dominin, which corroborates the testimony of Sister Maria, from Ekaterinburg's famous old monastery, founded by the Czar's ancestors. Maria, who brought milk and eggs for the Czarevitch, told me when I saw her in a little room of the monastery that word had been received from the interior of Russia by a reliable courier stating:

"Dear friends, all is well." She believes this refers only to the family.

Dominin's manuscript, in Russian, which is here given in verbatim translation, contains a supplement with the Czar's abdication manifesto written in October, 1905, during the Russo-Japanese war, which was printed but never promulgated.

Parfen Dominin, who is 60 years of age, now lives in seclusion. He was born in a village in the Costroma Government and began serving the Czar in 1896. His manuscript reads:

"Beginning with the first days of July airplanes began to appear nearly every day over Ekaterinburg, flying very low and dropping bombs, but little damage was done. Rumors spread about the city that the Czechoslovaks were making reconnoissances and would shortly occupy the city.

"One day the former Czar returned to the house from his walk in the garden. He was unusually excited, and after fervent prayers before an ikon of Holy Nicholas the Thaumaturgist he lay down on a little bed without undressing. This he never did before.

[During the Czar's imprisonment here the house was surrounded by a twenty-foot board fence. Part of the garden around the house was in this inclosure, where the imperial family was permitted to exercise, seeing nothing outside.]

"Please allow me to undress you and make the bed," I said to the Czar.

### FELT DEATH WAS NEAR

"Don't trouble, old man," the Czar said, "I feel in my heart I shall live only a short time. Perhaps today—already"—but the Czar did not end the sentence.

"God bless you, what are you saying?" I asked, and the Czar began to explain that during his evening walk he had received news that a special council of the Ural District Soviet of Workingmen, Cossacks, and Red Army Deputies was being held which was to decide the Czar's fate.

"It was said that the Czar was suspected of planning to escape to the Czech Army, which was advancing toward Ekaterinburg and had promised to tear him away from the Soviet

power. He then resignedly:

"I don't know anything."

"The Czar's daily life was very strict. He was not permitted to buy newspapers, and was not allowed to walk beyond the limited time.

"All the servants were thoroughly searched before leaving and upon returning. Once I was forced to take off all my clothing because the Commissary of the Guard thought I was transmitting letters from the Czar.

"Food was very scarce. Generally only herring, potatoes, and bread were given, at the rate of half a pound daily to each person.

"The former heir to the imperial throne, Alexis Nikolaievitch, was ill all the time. Once he was coughing and spitting blood.

"One evening Alexis came running into the room of the Czar, breathless and crying loudly, and, falling into the arms of his father, said, with tears in his eyes: 'Dear papa, they want to shoot you.'

"The Czar whispered: 'It's the will of God in everything. Be quiet, my sufferer, my son, be quiet. Where is mamma?'

"Mamma weeps," said the boy.

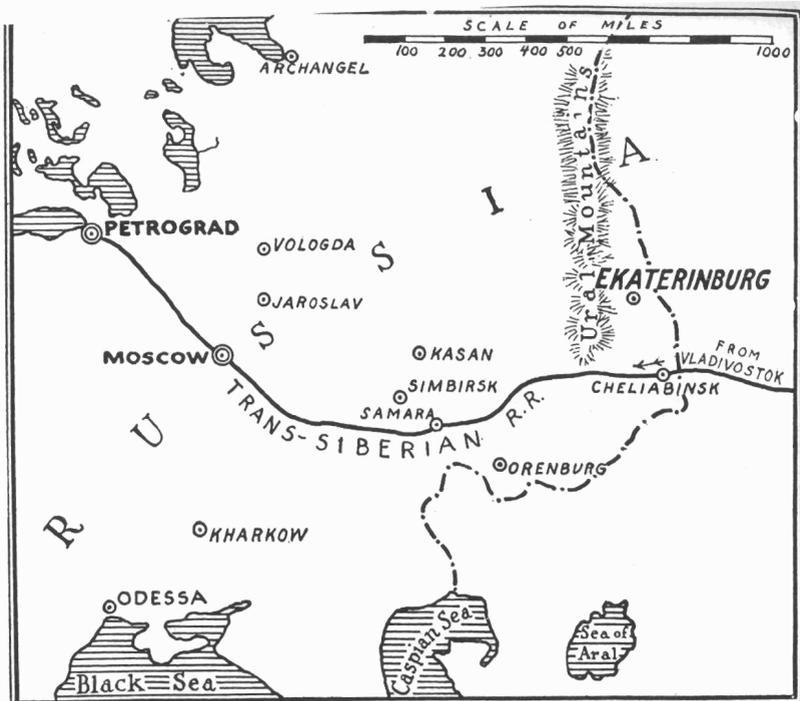
"Ask mamma to calm herself; one cannot help by weeping. It is God's will in everything," the Czar replied.

"With ardor Alexis pleaded: 'Papa, dear papa, you have suffered enough already. Why do they want to kill you? That is not just.'

"The Czar replied: 'Alexis, I ask you for only one thing. Go and comfort mamma.'

"Alexis left. The Czar knelt before the ikon of holy Nicholas, praying for a long time. During these days Nicholas became very devout. Often he would awaken during the night because of some nightmare. He would not sleep any more, but spent the rest of the night in prayers.

"From time to time the Czar was permitted to meet his wife, Alexandra, or, as he called her, Alice, but his son he could meet whenever he desired. Once Alexandra Feodorovna came weeping



LOCATION OF EKATERINBURG, WHERE THE EX-CZAR WAS CONDEMNED TO DEATH BY THE BOLSHIEVIK

into the Czar's room, saying: 'It is necessary in any case that you should put all your papers and documents in order.' After this Nicholas wrote all night.

"The Czar wrote many letters, among them those to all his daughters, to his brother Michael; to his uncle, Nicholas Nicholaievitch; General Dogert, Duke Gendrikoff, Count Olssuffieff, the Prince of Oldenburg, Count Shumarokoff Elston, and many others. He did not seal his letters, as all his correspondence was controlled by the Soviet censors. Often it happened that his letters were returned by the Commissary of the Guard, with the penciled remark: 'Are not to be forwarded.'

"For many days Nicholas Alexandrovitch would not eat. He would fall down and only pray. Even for a man who had not the gift of observation it was evident that the former Czar was greatly troubled and feeling heartsick.

#### TAKEN TO BE SENTENCED

"On July 15, late in the evening, there appeared suddenly in the Czar's room

the Commissary of the Guard, who announced:

"'Citizen Nicholas Alexandrovitch Romanoff, you will follow me to the Ural District Soviet of Workmen, Cossacks, and Red Army Deputies.'

"The Czar asked in a pleading tone:

"'Tell me frankly, are you leading me to be shot?'

"'You must not be afraid, nothing will happen until your death. You are wanted at a meeting,' the Commissary said smiling.

"Nicholas Alexandrovitch got up from his bed, put on his gray soldier blouse and his boots, fastened his belt, and went away with the Commissary. Outside the door were standing two soldiers, Letts, with rifles. All three surrounded him, and for some reason began to search him all over. Then one of the Letts went ahead. The Czar was forced to go behind him, next to the Commissary, and the second soldier followed.

"Nicholas did not return for a very long while, about two hours and a half

at least. He was quite pale, his chin trembling.

"'Old man, give me some water,' he said.

"I brought him water at once. He emptied a large cup.

"'What happened?' I asked.

"'They have informed me that I shall be shot within three hours.'

### BEFORE HIS JUDGES

"During the meeting of the Ural District Soviet a minute of the trial was read in the presence of the Czar. It was prepared by a secret organization named the Association for the Defense of Our Native Country and Freedom. It stated that a counter-revolutionary plot had been discovered, with the object of suppressing the workmen's and peasants' revolution by inciting the masses against the Soviet by accusing it of all the hard consequences resulting from imperialism all over the world—war and slaughter, famine, lack of work, the collapse of transportation, the advance of the Germans, &c.

"The indictment further stated that to attain this the counter-revolutionists were attempting to join all the non-Soviet political parties, Socialists as well as imperial parties. The evidence presented at the trial showed that the staff of this organization could not carry out its intentions fully because of a divergence of views regarding the tactics between the Left and Right Parties. The evidence presented showed that at the head of the plot stood the Czar's personal friend, General Dogert.

"The evidence presented against the Czar shows that in this organization were working also such representatives as the Duke of Krapotkine, Colonel of the General Staff Ekhart, Engineer Llinisky, and others. There are reasons for believing that Shavenpoff was also in direct connection with this organization and that he was supposed to be the head of the new Government as military dictator.

"All these leaders had established a very strong conspiracy. In the Moscow fighting group were 700 officers who afterward were transferred to Samara, where they were to await reinforcements

from the Allies with the purpose of establishing a Ural front to separate Great Russia from Siberia. Later, according to the supposed plot, when results of the famine should show, all those sympathizing with the overthrow of the Soviet would be mobilized to advance against Germany.

"The evidence presented shows proofs that certain Socialist parties were taking part in the plot, including the Right Social Revolutionists and Mensheviks, working in full harmony with the Constitutional Democrats. The Chief of Staff of this organization was in direct communication with Dutoff and Denikine.

"The testimony stated that during the last few days a new plot had been discovered having for its object the rescue of the former Czar from the Soviet with the help of Dutoff.

"Besides this it was proved at the trial that the Czar conducted secret correspondence with his personal friend, General Dogert, who urged the Czar to be ready to be freed.

### THE DEATH SENTENCE

"In view of this evidence, together with the troublesome situation caused by the decision of the Ural District Soviet to evacuate Ekaterinburg, the former Czar was ordered to submit to execution without delay because the Soviet believed it harmful and unjustifiable to continue to keep him under guard.

"'Citizen Nicholas Romanoff,' said the Soviet Chairman to the former Czar, 'I inform you, you are given three hours to make your last orders. Guard, I ask you not to leave out of your sight Nicholas Romanoff.'

"Soon after Nicholas returned from the meeting his wife and son called upon him weeping. Often Alexandra fainted and a doctor had to be called. When she recovered she knelt before the soldiers and begged for mercy. The soldiers answered that it was not within their power to render mercy.

"'Be quiet, for Christ's sake, Alice,' repeated the Czar several times in a very low tone, making the sign of the cross over his wife and son.

"After this Nicholas called me and kissed me, saying:

"'Old man, do not leave Alexandra and Alexis. You see, there is nobody with me now. There is nobody to appease them, and I shall soon be led away.'

"Later it proved that nobody except his wife and son, of all his beloved ones, was permitted to bid farewell to the former Czar. Nicholas and his wife and son remained together until five other soldiers of the Red Army appeared with the Chairman of the Soviet, accompanied by two members, both workingmen.

"'Put on your overcoat,' resolutely commanded the Chairman.

"Nicholas, who did not lose his self-possession, began to dress, kissed his wife and son, and me again, made the sign of the cross over them, and then, addressing the men, said in a loud voice:

"'Now I am at your disposal.'

"Alexandra and Alexis fell in a fit of hysterics. Both fell to the floor. I made an attempt to bring mother and son to, but the Chairman said:

"'Wait. There should be no delay. You may do that after we have gone.'

"'Permit me to accompany Nicholas Alexandrovitch,' I asked.

"'No accompanying,' was the stern answer.

"So Nicholas was taken away, nobody knows where, and was shot during the night of July 16, by about twenty Red Army soldiers.

"Before dawn the next day the Chairman of the Soviet again came to the room, accompanied by Red Army soldiers, a doctor, and the Commissary of the Guard. The doctor attended Alexandra and Alexis. Then the Chairman said to the doctor:

"'Is it possible to take them immediately?'

"Answered 'yes,' the Chairman said:

"'Citizen Alexandra Feodorovna Romanoff and Alexis Romanoff, get ready. You will be sent away from here. You are allowed to take only the most necessary things, not over thirty or forty pounds.'

"Mastering themselves, but stumbling from side to side, mother and son soon

"'Tomorrow get him out of here,' the Soviet Chairman commanded the guard, pointing at me.

"Alexandra and Alexis were immediately taken away by an automobile truck, it is not known where.

"The morning of the following day the Commissary again appeared, and ordered me to get out of the room, taking with me some property of the Czar, but all the letters and documents belonging to the Czar were taken by the Commissary. I left, but had great difficulty in procuring a railway ticket, because all the stations and trains were overfilled with soldiers of the Red Army, tossing about and evacuating the city and taking along all precious objects."

An epilogue and supplement to the manuscript, also written by Dominin, follow:

"The Cheliabinsk newspaper *Utro Sibiri* states that the Czar's execution was certified to by a special Government declaration at a place ten versts from Ekaterinburg. On July 30 a tumulus was found containing metal things belonging to each member of the family of the former Czar, and also bones of burned corpses, which may be those of the Romanoff family.

"As hostages, Grand Duchess Elena Petrova, Countess Henrikova, and a third, whose name I don't know, were taken away. The total hostages were about six. The Bolsheviki fled in the direction of Verknoturie.

#### CZAR'S ABDICATION OF 1905

"The Academician Bunakovhky, a member of the Russian Historical Society, found accidentally in the secret division of the Senate archives the proof sheet of a 'collection of laws ordered of the Government,' dated Oct. 17, 1905, in which was printed the following manifesto:

Disturbances and riots in the capital and many parts of the empire are filling my heart with painful grief. The welfare of the Russian Emperor is indissolubly joined with the welfare of the people, and the affliction of the people is his grief. From the disturbances which have now arisen may proceed deep disorder among the population, a threat to the unity and integrity of our State.

is being determined, we consider it the duty of our conscience to fuse our people into a close union and join all the powers of the population for the height of the State's prosperity.

Therefore we have decided to abdicate the throne of the Russian Empire and lay down the high power. Desiring not to be separated from our beloved son, we surrender the succession to our brother, the Grand Duke Michael, and bless him upon the ascendance to the Russian throne.

NICHOLAS ROMANOFF.

(Countersigned) Minister of the Court,  
BARON FREDERICKS.

Oct. 16, 1905. Novy Peterhof.

"Written with a red pencil on the text was 'Hold up printing. Manager of Typography Kedrinsky.'

"He tells me the following details regarding the delay in printing the manifesto. At 8 o'clock on the evening of Oct. 16 I received from a courier a packet from the Minister of the Court,

Baron Fredericks, asking me to publish the manifesto in the next number of the Collection of Laws. As the manifesto was not received in the usual way through the Minister of Justice, Kedrinsky in giving the manifesto to a typographer to prepare the printing, simultaneously informed Shthegtovioff by telephone.

"At first the Minister of Justice only asked for the holding up of the printing, but at 11 o'clock the functionary for special commissions from the Minister visited Kedrinsky and asked for the original of the manifesto and ordered the proof sheet transmitted to the secret archives of the Senate."

Thus the Czar spent the last days as a Bolshevik prisoner, disappearing within a few hours before the Czechoslovak troops freed the terror-stricken city of Ekaterinburg.

## The Russian Peasant and the Czar

By COMTE GASTON DE MERINDAL

*This sympathetic sketch by a noted French author was written a month before the Czar's death sentence and was made public at the end of July, 1918:*

**C**ZAR NICHOLAS II., who swore on his father's deathbed to remain true to the alliance with France, and who kept his oath, is now enduring martyrdom, with a dignity which one day history will recognize. What sort of existence is he enduring now? I have exact information as to how he was transferred to Ekaterinburg. Already the treatment the Emperor had received at Tobolsk had shown the baseness of feeling actuating those who had usurped his authority, and whose ferocious absolutism is even now causing the greater part of his people to think regretfully of the absolutism of Nicholas II., which at any rate was paternal. Often and often I have tried, out of journalistic curiosity, to talk of the Czar with mujiks and workmen. But they have always turned the conversation, and in their faces I could read remorse and shame.

One evening at the end of January, 1918, I was looking over the Kamenoo-

stroff at Petrograd, the vista being obscured in the darkness and the damp. One could see nothing except the heaps of snow bordering the street on which the rays of light from half-closed shutters fell in luminous patches. From time to time the report of a rifle shot, the crackling of a mitrailleuse in the distance, a call for help, or a sinister cry caused timorous figures to hurry past the fronts of the houses. Suddenly a voice, young and plaintive, began singing an air which made me start. The singer was an izvoshtshik, or driver, and he was calmly sitting sideways on his sledge, with his legs touching the snow, while his horse jogged along as he liked. Then I vaguely perceived several "Red Guards," who stopped for a moment and then silently went on their way. An old woman selling newspapers bowed low and hastily crossed herself, or, rather, left the gesture uncompleted, as though afraid \* \* \* By this time