

Scottish Influences In Russian History

CHAPTER VII

THE BRUCE FAMILY IN RUSSIA. THE ESCAPE OF GENERAL GORDON.

We learn a good deal about the doings of the Bruce family in Russia from the memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, [*Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, Esq., a military officer in the services of Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain*, printed for the author's widow, London, 1782.] who served in the Prussian, Russian, and British armies successively. He narrates that two Bruces, James and John, cousins, both of the family of Airth, agreed during 'the troubles of Oliver Cromwell,' to push their fortunes abroad. They desired to go together, but got by mischance into two ships at Leith, one of which went to Russia and one to Prussia, and so never met again! James Bruce was the founder of the Russian branch, but it is from the grandson of the Prussian John that we learn most about their doings. Peter Henry Bruce (John's grandson, born in 1692) was in the Prussian army, and saw much soldiering in the Netherlands during the Blenheim campaign. It was not until 1710 that he entered the Russian service by the invitation (it is a wonderful instance of clannish feeling) of General James Bruce, who was son of Colonel William Bruce and grandson of the James Bruce who had been carried to Russia and was now one of the right-hand men of Peter the Great, and head of the Ordnance at Moscow. He joined his cousin at Warsaw on the 17th May, he being there in attendance on the Tsar, and at Taweroff, on the 29th, the Tsar was privately married to Catherine Aleksievna (the Livonian ex-peasant), and on this occasion General Bruce, who was present, was made Master-General of the Ordnance. He was already knight of four Orders, St. Andrew, the White Eagle, the Black Eagle and the Elephant. The campaign of the Pruth followed, Prince Kantemir's letter being read at the council of war which the Tsar called in General Bruce's tent. When peace was made Peter went off on one of those curious tours to Germany, taking General Bruce with him, while the latter's young relative was sent on an embassy to Constantinople, not returning from thence to Peterhof until 13th October. Petersburg was then in its infancy and houses scarce, and it is interesting to find that young Bruce had another protector there of his kin. 'I had the good fortune to be

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accommodated in Lieutenant-General (Roman Vilemovitch) Bruce's house, who was commandant of Petersburg, [His career was this: born 1668, he probably accompanied the Tsar Peter on his travels, 1697-98. He took part in the Siege of Schlüsselburg. In 1704 he was made commandant of St. Petersburg, and till his death, in 1720, was occupied in building the town. He was buried in the Fort of St. Peter and St. Paul (which he built) beside the Cathedral, opposite the altar. It was through his influence that the first Evangelical Church, St. Anne's, was built in St. Petersburg.] and brother to the Master-General of the Ordnance,' but the last, being still in Germany, ordered him to occupy his own house in Moscow, 'and stay in his house with his lady till he should arrive.' In this way we get the following description of Moscow in 1713: 'Coming in view of it, in a clear sunshine day, I never saw so glorious a sight as this city presented at a distance, with the vast numbers of gilded domes and steeples; but my expectations were greatly disappointed when I entered it, finding only ill-built wooden houses, and timber-streets interspersed with churches, and brick-houses with large courts and gardens, the habitations of the grandes and people of fortune; and coming to General Bruce's house, I met with a very kind reception from his lady, who treated me with the affection of a mother: they had then no child.'

He was witness of the 'great and dreadful fire' which broke out 'in a maiden monastery outside the town,' [Probably the Novo Devichi monastery. Founded in 1524, it was to it that the Tsaritsa Irina, sister of Boris Godounoff, retired, and in it Maria, widow of Magnus, King of Livonia, niece of Ivan the Terrible, was 'shut up' by Boris Godounoff (the editor of Horsey's *Travels* (Hakluyt Society) confuses it with the Troitza, where she was ultimately buried). Later, the Tsarevna Sophia, Regent, who was forced to become the Nun Susanna, as we have seen, by her brother Peter the Great, was interned here.] which 'consumed the greatest part of the city, especially the wooden houses,' and was astonished to see how soon it was rebuilt. Moscow was in a transition state; the people of rank - driven to it by the Reforming Tsar, had 'laid aside the old customs and manners of their fathers,' were now dressed 'in the French fashion,' and the ladies were 'very gay,' giving dances (on emerging from the Terem!), the Swedish prisoners taken at Poltava being their instructors and partners, their husbands being mostly employed to 'serve' their terrible master abroad in some way or other.

On 1st January, 1714, General Bruce arrived in Moscow to remove his family to Petersburg. A thousand of the best and most substantial families in Moscow had received orders for the same purpose. The Court removed,

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and, the Archangel trade with Moscow forbidden, the life of Moscow changed, 'so that this metropolis, once the pleasantest and most agreeable city in all Russia, became quite deserted, none remaining in it but the vulgar, which was a great mortification to all ranks of people being obliged to leave a place of such plenty for one where everything was both scarce and dear.' With General Bruce young Peter saw much of the Tsarevitch, Aleksei Petrovitch, whom he thought meanly of. The Tsar absolutely disregarded his subjects' discomfort in the new capital, [It was his own creation. 'He found only four fishermen's huts, to which he added a house for himself on an island for himself, on an island in the north side of the river, and called it Petersburg. This house was only a shelter from the weather and to rest in . . . but in memory of this great undertaking, it has been preserved ever since. Lieutenant-General Robert Bruce, commandant of the city, has the charge and use of this original hall, and has built a very good house adjoining to it for himself, which was one of the first that made a show in this place.']] being wholly intent upon its progress and that of Kronstadt. 'It was surprising to see so many great things undertaken and put in execution by one single person, without the assistance and help of anyone; his own great genius and indefatigable application to things, presiding over all, and seeing everything with his own eyes . . . so that never monarch was less imposed on than himself.' Petersburg had to be glazed with glass from England, but the Tsar erected large manufactories for making window and looking glass, under the direction of Englishmen, at Moscow. In 1716 young Bruce was commanded to discipline thirty tall and fine grenadiers, 'intended as a present to the King of Prussia,' and 'collected from different parts of the Czar's dominions.' Three years later, after the Naval war in Danish seas, Peter Bruce, who now had a company of artillery under General Bruce, desired again to join the Prussian army, and applied for his discharge, but 'could by no means obtain it, so I was obliged to continue in the Muscovite service, very much against my inclination.' In his enforced continuance in the country he saw (or heard) much of the trial and death of the unfortunate Tsarevitch, Peter's son: 'various were the reports that were spread concerning his death . . . very few believed he died a natural death, but it was dangerous to speak as they thought.' Peter Bruce had the military charge of the dead Tsarevitch's son, Peter Aleksievitch, afterwards Peter II. 'The Czar came frequently to see him perform his exercises, and was vastly pleased with his sprightliness and attention; and seeing some draughts and models of fortification laying on the table, he asked the young prince the use and advantage of each particular work, to which he gave his

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answers so readily . . . that his grandfather was so well pleased, that he embraced him most heartily, and made him a present of his picture richly set with diamonds, and gave him an ensign's commission in the first regiment of guards.' In 1721 Peter Bruce heard he had succeeded to a small estate in Scotland, and begged Count Bruce to get him leave to go thither, but the inexorable Tsar refused, until his own pleasure. The triumphal entry to Moscow was in the air. This triumphal entry was followed by 'six weeks' feasting,' and then on 22nd February, 1722, a proclamation was made 'by the sound of trumpet,' to acknowledge the successor to the throne, whom the autocrat should nominate. 'The order, however, must be obeyed, and was complied with by many with a reluctant heart . . . this was to me the most disagreeable service I ever performed in Russia, as I was so well acquainted with the excellent temper and genius of the young prince (Peter Aleksievitch), having had the honour to teach him the military exercises and fortification, and to whose prejudice this oath was certainly administered.'

The Caspian and Persian campaigns and many détours in Russia followed before the Scot obtained his 'liberty.' In 1724 things went a little better, and he was told that 'as soon as the Empress Catherine's coronation was over' he would receive his dispatches. Moscow hummed with foreigners and natives for this event, and at the ceremony he recounts that 'No. 13, Count Bruce, a privy counsellor and master of the horse,' carried the crown, his wife, 'the Countess of Bruce,' following as one of the train-bearers of the Empress herself. Peter Bruce was offered more preferment, and did not get his furlough from Count Bruce's representation to Prince Menschikoff until 27th May, 1724. Even then he 'received the pay and forage money due to me from the regiment, but could not get the two years' pay that was due to me as Engineer, and which amounted to 'twelve hundred rubles, but was told the money appropriated for the payment of the service was at Petersburg, and I must go there to receive it, which, if I had done, would have effectually put a stop to my journey. I empowered Major-General Le Fort to receive my pay, and sell my house and furniture in Petersburg, and to remit me the money to Scotland, but a stop was put to it till my return, and at the expiration of my furlough, everything I had left there was seized, so that I had no reason to boast of any advantage I reaped in Russia after thirteen years' service.' [He went into the British service, and in 1745 helped to fortify Berwick.

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He retired soon afterwards, and died in 1757.]

In those times it was much easier getting into Russia than out of it, as was evident in the case of Major-General Gordon, who 'wanted very much to quit the service, and solicited his discharge by every application in his power, but all in vain; and, being in Poland on a separate command,' after the battle of Poltava, 'he took that opportunity to send to Moscow for his wife and daughters, and on their arrival in Poland he carried them to Danzig, where he took shipping and sailed for Scotland.' [*Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce*, p. 114.]