

Scottish Influences in Russian History

CHAPTER IX.

SCOTTISH FAMILIES SETTLED IN RUSSIA. THE COURT PHYSICIANS. ROGERSON. OTHER SCOTS - SIR James WYLIE, COUNT BARCLAY DE TOLLY, LERMONTOFF. CONCLUSION.

Peter III., the nephew and heir of the Empress Elizabeth, had but a short reign, being, after reigning a few months, deposed by his wife, Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst, who, after his murder, ruled as Catherine II., or as Catherine the Great, from 1762 to 1796. Taking up the mantle of Peter the Great, she made the Russian people her own by becoming one of themselves. It was not so much that she did not encourage foreigners as well, for she did, but all her chief favourites were Russians, and it was to them that she gave the chief power, and to everything she carefully gave a Russian dress. Times, also, had changed. Russia was no longer the backward Byzantine empire it had been when Peter I. began to reign. He had battered down the wall that had separated it from Western Europe, and by the time Catherine came to occupy his throne, a class of Westernised Russians with Western ideas - mainly French, but in part German - had grown up. The use of the Scots naturally became much less, but there were still several names of note. The Bruces, now a Russified family, were powerful at Court. Count James Alexandrovitch Bruce, born 1742, fought against the Swedes, and was Governor of Moscow in 1781-86. He died at St. Petersburg in 1790-91, being buried in the Monastery of St. Alexander Nevski. [He had one daughter, who married into the family of Mysin-Pushkin, and took the name of Bruce, but had no children.]

Another Count Bruce (uncle?) was Senator, Lieutenant-General of the Semenovski Guards, General-in-Chief, and Governor of Novgorod and Tver. His wife was Prascovia Alexandrovna Roumiantsova, sister of the great General Roumiantsoff. [K. Waliszewski, *Story of a Throne*, p. 380.] She was born 7th October, 1729, and married in 1751. She was one of Catherine the Great's *confidantes*, [Princess Dashkoff - to use the Western form of her name - née Vorontzova, another of the Empress's earlier *confidantes*, lived for a year at Holyrood while her son was at Edinburgh University under Principal Robertson in 1778-79.] and on intimate terms until she supplanted the Empress with her favourite, Korsakoff. Exile from Court

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ensued, still the Empress wrote of her on her death, on 7th April, 1786: 'It is impossible not to regret her when one has known her so well.' [K. Waliszewski, *The Story of a Throne*, p. 380. He gives the date of her death as 1785, but the other is on the photograph of her tombstone, kindly sent to me by Mr. Clement J. Charnock, of Moscow.]

Almost a more important *confidant* of the Empress was the Dumfriesshire-born Dr. John Rogerson. He went, preceded by his neighbour, Dr. Matthew Halliday, out to Russia in 1766, and became the Imperial Physician. Every secret of the extraordinary Court was confided to his ear. He knew the details of the favourite Lanskoï's end, and of the Empress's strange death. In 1786 the Comte de Ségur noted the doctor's departure to England for six months, and added: 'As he dabbles in politics as much as in medicine, and it is through his hands that the bribes are supposed to pass, I cannot but be very pleased at his absence.' [K. Waliszewski, *The Story of a Throne*, p. 389.] Anyway, he was honoured by the complete confidence of his Imperial mistress, and retained that of her son, the Emperor Paul.

Clarke [*Travels*, pp. 113-4.] gives a delightful anecdote of him. 'Dr. Rogerson,' he says, 'as we were informed, regularly received' (from his patients' hands) 'his snuff-box, and as regularly carried it to a jeweller for sale. The jeweller sold it again to the first nobleman who wanted a fee for his physician; so that the doctor obtained his box again, and at last the matter became so well understood between the jeweller and the physician, that it was considered by both parties as a sort of banknote, and no words were necessary in transacting the sale of it.' These 'bank notes' allowed Dr. Rogerson to acquire the lands of Wamphray, in his native Dumfriesshire, and to maintain some state, and to build the house of Dumcrieff, where he died in 1823. The grateful Empress presented him with a collection of casts of all the medals struck by her Grand Ducal or Imperial predecessors (the 'False Dimitri' is, oddly enough, omitted, *pour cause?*), which, in a delightful eighteenth century case still exist. [The author's grandfather acquired them from Dr. Rogerson's son, and they are now in the author's possession.]

Though Dr. Rogerson, Dr. Guthrie and Sir James Wylie (of whom we shall hear later) were the chief physicians in the reigns of Catherine and Paul, and political powers, we are told that: 'Persons calling themselves *English*

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Physicians are found in almost every town' in Russia. 'Sometimes they have served in apothecaries' shops in *London* and *Edinburgh*; but generally they are Scots apothecaries who are men of Professional Skill and acknowledged Superiority. [Clarke's *Travels*, p. 114.] At St. Petersburg the Court Banker, Sutherland, was a Scot. Catherine made Robert Rutherford (fourth son of Sir John Rutherford of that ilk, who died unmarried), for many years a merchant in Leghorn, a Baron of the Russian Empire; and one of the Court Painters (who accompanied the Tsaritsa in her celebrated Progress to Crimea with Potemkin) bore the Scottish name of John Lindsay.

It was the maritime needs of the Russian Empire that brought the true worth of the Scots to the great mind of the Empress Catherine. She recruited many Scots from the British Navy, the chief of whom were Admirals Greig and Elphinstone. The Scots made a great name in the land of their adoption, and the Russian Navy owes everything to them. Samuel Carlovitch Greig, of Inverkeithing in Fife, went to Russia in 1763, with five other British officers, mostly Scots. He destroyed the Turkish fleet in 1770, [The doings of Greig and Elphinstone in this war will be found in *An Authentic Narrative of the Russian Expedition against the Turks by Sea and Land*; London, 1772. Other Scots mentioned are Mackenzie and Glasgow. Also the Englishman, Dugdale, who became an Admiral. An account of Greig is also in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.] with his fire-ships, showing, with Lieutenant Drysdale, extraordinary heroism, and was hailed, from his service and discipline, the Father of the Russian Navy. He was the chief instrument in the conquest of Crimea and the founding of Sebastopol, and was later Governor of Kronstadt, which he strengthened and refortified. He again fought the Turks in 1774, and against the Swedes, but in 1788 died on his own ship, the 'Rotislav' ('Wratislav'), on 26th October, in his fifty-third year.

It was Greig who had the ungrateful (and certainly unworthy) task of conveying as prisoner the mysterious and interesting Princess Tarakanoff [Princess Tarakanoff was an adventuress who claimed, or was thought to claim, to be daughter of the Empress Elizabeth and Razoumoffski. Catherine II. was much alarmed, had her entrapped at Leghorn and carried to Russia, where, it is believed, she died in the prison of the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, 4th December, 1775.] to her Russian captivity, after she had been disgracefully entrapped at Leghorn by Alexis Orloff on behalf of the Empress, with the assistance, one regrets to relate, of another Scot, John Dick, the British Consul there. We need say no more about the piteous story except to point out that Greig treated the captive kindly, and that the *enlèvement* was

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wholly characteristic of the time.

The Greig family settled in Russia. The Admiral was friendly to his compatriots. Robert Simpson, one of his Fleet Surgeons in 1774, became in 1792 Chief Surgeon of the great Naval hospital of Kronstadt. The Admiral's son, Sir Alexis Greig, entered the Russian Navy, and for remonstrating with the Emperor Paul for the latter's severity to some British seamen, was exiled in 1801 for a short time to Siberia, but he became an Admiral, and commanded in 1828 at the siege of Varna. His son, Vorontzoff Greig, later fought on the Russian side in the Crimean War, and was killed at Inkermann.

John Elphinstone, the other Scottish Admiral, whose kinsman had been in Ivan Groznie's army, died in 1785, but in England. He had begun by being *le désiré* of the Empress, but his opposition to her favourite of the time, Alexis Orloff soon weakened his popularity. In fact he as Admiral had been the real hero of the battle of Tchesmé, but the Empress was anxious to praise a Russian to give popularity to her alien-born rule, and gave all the laurels to Orloff. One branch of the Elphinstones remained in the Russian service. The Admiral's eldest son, Samuel William, became a Captain in the Navy, and married the daughter of his father's colleague, Admiral Kruse. His descendants are enrolled among the nobles of Livonia. John Carr gives an anecdote of an Elphinstone of the third generation in St. Petersburg at Kameni Ostrov. [*Travels Around the Baltic*, by John Carr (1804); London, 1805, pp. 355-7.]

'After the battle between the Russian and Swedish fleets off Cronstadt in May, 1790, Captain Elphinstone, then a very young lieutenant, was dispatched by his uncle, Admiral Creuse, to Catherine, who was at that time at the palace of Tsarko Selo, with the account of the successful manoeuvres of her fleet . . . Young Elphinstone arrived at the palace late at night in his fighting clothes, covered with dust and gunpowder, and severely fatigued with long and arduous duty. His dispatches were instantly carried to the Empress, who ordered her page-in-waiting to give the bearer refreshments and a bed, and requested that he might on no account be disturbed.' Catherine sent three times, but still he slept. 'At length Captain Elphinstone in all his *dishabille*' (*sic*, the author was a Scot and probably talked of

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'*dishabillies*') 'was conducted to her presence by her Secretary, when she commenced an enchanting conversation, in which she complimented the gallantry and many naval achievements of his family; . . . calling him "My son," "Now let proceed to business; I have received the dispatches, which have afforded me infinite satisfaction; I thank you for your bravery and zeal; I beg you will describe to me the position of the ships." Captain Elphinstone did so, and she took a note upon her pocket-book. Then 'as she gave her orders to the Commander-in-Chief, she presented him with a rouleau of ducats, a beautiful little French watch, and, although very young, promoted him to the rank of Captain.'

The services of these Scotsmen were invaluable to Russia, but yet irksome. Their nationality to a certain extent influenced the foreign policy of their adopted country, and forced it, whether it liked it or no, to forgo any bellicose intentions against Great Britain. It also forced the Empress Catherine to send off that Scottish 'naval adventurer,' Paul Jones, whom she had made in 1788 Rear-Admiral, and who had held a command at the battle of Liman in the Black Sea. [He quarrelled with Prince Potemkin during the expedition to Taurida. Potemkin was the patron of another Scottish adventurer, one Colonel Semple, who altered the Russian discipline and planned the military uniforms, by no means for good.] The other Scots, when Paul Jones was endeavouring to return to Russia, unanimously threatened resignation if his return was permitted; and they won.

Catherine, however, took into her service another man from Scotland, and raised him to high honour in connection with her Ordnance. This was Sir Charles Gascoigne (his father was Captain Woodroffe Gascoigne, an Englishman sent to 'settle' the Highlands of Scotland after 1746, and his mother was the Hon. Grizel Elphinstone, daughter of Lord Elphinstone). He had been manager of the Carron Iron Company, which had become embarrassed. Then, luckily for himself, he received, through the medium and influence of Admiral Greig, an offer from the Empress to cast shells, guns and shot for her army. Taking his workmen with him, he stole off from Scotland and went to Russia, where he formed a factory at Petrozovodsk, near Lake Onega, and also managed the mines of Olonetz. He flourished there (as did his successor Wilson, who was given the rank of General, and Charles Baird, who manufactured guns at Kronstadt and became a Knight

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of St. Vladimir, who both went out with him); was made a Councillor and a Knight of St. Vladimir; and died, leaving a large fortune, at St. Petersburg, 1st August, 1806. He had three daughters by his first wife, who were Anne, Countess of Haddington; Elizabeth, wife of George Augustus Pollen, Esquire, M.P., drowned at Memel in 1808; and another, who married Baron Polterazki, and died at Petrozovodsk, 11th December, 1795. His second wife, [See also K. Waliszewski's *Paul I.* She was married in 1797, and remarried, 1807, Thomson Grahame Bonar of London.] married in 1797, 'who, to the charms of youth and beauty, unites the most elegant accomplishments and manners,' was Anastasia-Jessye, daughter of Dr. Matthew Guthrie [He edited his wife's *Letters from the Crimea*. Cf. Carr's *A Northern Summer*.] (one of the Guthries of Hawkerton), a doctor from Edinburgh, Physician to the Noble Land Cadet Corps, and afterwards (attached to the Empress's suite) to the Emperor Paul, having gained the ear of the Russian Court.

The Empress Catherine died after a long and in some ways glorious reign, 6th (17th) November, 1796, and her son, the Emperor Paul, succeeded. Sir James Wylie, a Scottish surgeon, from 1790 in the Sletski regiment, who, when he had acquired name and fame, had three Scottish assistants, was made Imperial Physician, and on the Emperor's sudden end in 1801 had the delicate task of giving the medical certificate. In doing so, he stated that the deceased Emperor died of 'apoplexy,' which gave the Court great satisfaction, and he remained in the highest favour. He founded the Medico-Chirurgical Academy of St. Petersburg (it has his statue), and died full of honours in 1854, leaving his money to the Tsar, who endowed with it the hospital he had built.

The other Scot who has a statue in St. Petersburg belongs really to the reign of Alexander I., the last Emperor who comes within the scope of this book, Prince Barclay de Tolly. The story of the family is this. They came to Russia during the times of the Revolution of 1688, from Towy (Tolly) in Aberdeenshire. A descendant became Burgomaster of Riga, and his son, Gottlieb Barclay de Tolly, was ennobled - as a Russian officer, taking the name 'Bogdan' - and married a Mlle. Wermelen.

His sons were: (1) Bogdan Bogdanovitch (formerly Emil Johann), a General

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in the Russian service; (2) Michael Bogdanovitch, of whom afterwards; and (3) Andrei Bogdanovitch, a Colonel. Michael Bogdanovitch, whose statue adorns the Nevski Prospekt, opposite to the Cathedral of Kazan in St. Petersburg, was born in 1761. He entered the army and rose rapidly. He distinguished himself greatly in the war against Sweden by the passage of Kwarken, when the Russian troops under him crossed the Gulf of Bothnia on the ice. He became Governor of the conquered Finland. It was his policy as Minister of War that made the Russians always retire before the forces of Napoleon, and he helped to gain the battle of Leipzig. He was made a Count, 22nd May, 1813, and after the occupation of Paris was created by ukase, 30th October, 1815, Prince of the Empire of Russia. He died, 1818, having married Helen Ivanovna van der Smitten (who died, 1820). Their son, Ernest Michaelovitch (Ernest Magnus), Colonel and A.D.C. to the Emperor Nicholas I., married Leocadie (Leonilla), Baronne de Campenhausen, but had no children. The sons of his granduncle were, by ukase of 31st August, 1827, created Counts, and in 1859 [*Annuaire de la Noblesse de Russie*, par Roman I. Emerin, 1889, pp. 55-66.] General Aleksei Petrovitch Weimarn was allowed to take the title of Barclay de Tolly-Weimarn.

The Comte de Balmain, of the Scottish family of Ramsay of Balmain, was in the same reign the Russian Commissioner appointed to watch Napoleon, after his fall, at Saint Helena. He married, when there, the step-daughter of Sir Hudson Lowe, Miss Johnson. Lord Rosebery [*Napoleon, the Last Phase*, p. 142.] tells us that his family had been settled in Russia for a century and a quarter.

Another Russo-Scot who fought against Napoleon was Alexander Amatus Thesleff (of a Viborg family), born in 1788, a Lieutenant-Colonel in 1812. He was Assistant Governor-General of his native Finland from 1832 to 1847.

A Russian of Scottish descent, born in 1813, glorified his country in the reign of Alexander I. This was the great romantic poet Michael Yourievitch Lermontoff. His grandfather was Peter Lermontoff, whose ancestors, of the same blood as that which produced, ages before, the Scottish poet Thomas the Rymour, had gone to Poland at the end of the seventeenth century, like so many of their compatriots, and had strayed into Russia by way of Tula.

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To diverge from Byronic poetry; a curious experiment, which might have brought Scotland into closer relations with Russia, was made by the Emperor Alexander in regard to the last Sultan of the Crimea, This Khan, Aleksei Ivanovitch Katti Gheri Krim Gheri, a Moslem, was converted to Christianity by the Scottish missionaries at Cavass, in the Caucasus. The Emperor noted this, and sent him to Edinburgh to be educated, and then permitted him to preach his faith in Russia. The only result was that the Sultan, when at his Scottish University, married, in September, 1820, an Edinburgh lady, Miss Neilson of Millbank, and took her to Russia, but there, we are told, he made no converts!

The Tsar Alexander I. had an intimate friend, Saunders, [*Money Penny's Life of Disraeli*, i. p. 108.] of Scots descent, whom he made an Aulic councillor, and he did not forget what his parents had taught him of the value of Scottish physicians. He employed two Crichtons, uncle and nephew, of the old family of Frendraught, as his own physicians, who will be the last of the long roll of Scotsmen whom Russia has taken to itself, to be mentioned in this book. The first was Sir Alexander Crichton, [An account is given in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and a short one of his nephew as well in Anderson's *Scottish Nation*, vol. i. pp. 726, 727.] a son of Alexander Crichton of Newington, born at Edinburgh in 1763. He entered the Emperor's service in 1804 as Physician in Ordinary, and was soon made head of the whole civil medical department. He died, full of honours, in England, on 4th June, 1856. The second was his nephew, Sir Alexander William Crichton, born in 1791. He married, in 1820, the daughter of Dr. Sutthoff another of the Court Physicians.

Decorated and caressed by the Russian Court, and knighted by George IV. in 1817, he was made a member of the Medical Council and a Councillor of State. He was thirty years in the Russian service, during twenty-four of which he was Physician to the Emperor and his family, and so kept green, far into the nineteenth century, the success of his countrymen before the eyes of the Russian people.