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twenty-eight others were killed. Stolypin's fifteen-year-old daughter had both legs broken and his three-year-old son also had injuries.

Apart from the socialist revolutionaries who hated him for the large number of death penalties that he imposed on terrorists, Stolypin had an open confrontation with the large landholders. The latter were fanatical enemies of Stolypin, who had taken their land to distribute it to poor farmers.

Everyone considered Stolypin's assassination inevitable. And they were right. On 1 September, 1911, as he was attending an opera performance in Kiev, a young man named Dmitri Bogrov approached him and shot him in the chest. The tsar was present with his two daughters, Olga and Tatiana. Before he fell down, Stolypin turned to the place where the sovereign sat and blessed him with the sign of the cross. Later it was revealed that the murderer was simultaneously a member of the revolutionary movement and an agent of the secret police, in other words, the invisible third enemy.³⁷ Thus the great dream for radical reforms in a climate of mutual cooperation had now definitively lost its great architect.

TSAREVICH ALEXIS

Amid this vortex of dramatic political disturbances, the birth of Alexis brought great consolation to the imperial couple, and at news of this the Russian people broke out into frenetic celebration. The brightness of the demonstrations in all of Russia was unique. From Nicholas' diary: "30th of July. Friday. An unforgettable great day for us, in which the mercy of God visited us so clearly. At 1.15 o'clock, Alix gave birth to a son, whom with prayer we called Aleksey. ... There are no words to be able to thank God sufficiently for the consolation that has been given us during this time of great difficulty!"³⁸ Alexis was born during the war of Russia with Japan.

One of the first telegrams of congratulations that the imperial couple received for the birth of the heir was from Saint John of Kronstadt himself. Nicholas and Alexandra's spiritual tie to Saint John remained ever very tight and strong. The saint had in fact taken part in the Sacraments of Marriage and of Coronation of the imperial couple, as well as in Olga's Baptism. Replying now to the congratulatory telegram of Saint John, Nicholas wrote the following: "The Empress and I thank you cordially, and we hope that you will assist at the baptism of our son. Nicholas."³⁹

The invitation to Saint John to participate at the baptism of Alexis was not simply an act of mere cordiality. This is obvious from the following article, published in the *New York Times*, on August 27, 1904:

CZAR REWARDS FATHER JOHN

Latter Said Birth of Heir Would Follow Royal Visit to Saroff.



Alexandra with Alexis.



Nicholas with Alexis.

ST. PETERSBURG, Aug. 26.—The Emperor has telegraphed his and the Empress's thanks to the monks of the St. Seraphim Monastery in reply to their congratulations on the birth of an heir to the throne. His Majesty has also presented a magnificent diamond and sapphire pectoral cross to Father John of Cronstadt, upon whose advice the Emperor and Empress went to Saroff to canonize St. Seraphim, Father John predicting that they would be sure to have a son and heir.⁴⁰

The ascription of Alexis' birth to the intercessions of St. Seraphim was also commented upon in another article in *The Washington Post*:

ST. SERAPHIM'S GIFT

The Three-year-old Heir to the Throne of the Czar.

... The existence of Alexis is the greatest of the innumerable miracles ascribed to the last saint canonized during the religious career of the late Mr. Pobiedonostseff. Kneeling side by side on the stone at Saroff, worn thin by the knees of St. Seraphim, Nicholas II and his consort had besought the spirit of the monk to grant them a son. Her majesty bathed in the spring at which Seraphim

had quenched his thirst. The bones of the saint were removed by a procession of gorgeously appareled clergy from a monastery near the miraculous spring to a new marble tomb wherein they are now permanently enshrined in the Uspensky Cathedral at Saroff. Vestments embroidered in gold and silver, worn by the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and the seventeen bishops escorting the relics, were the gift of the Czar for this particular occasion. The aggregate weight of the votive candles consumed in the two days of ceremony was over eleven tons. ... Within a year from the day on which the Czar and Czarina helped to carry the cedar wood box of relics through crowds of kneeling clergy from the monastery to the cathedral, Alexis was born. Seraphim, on this occasion as appears from a narrative in the St. Petersburg *Novoye Vremya*, manifested himself in the forest at Saroff. He was surrounded by innumerable bears.⁴¹

Nicholas named his son Alexis in honor of his beloved ancestor, Tsar Alexis. Little Alexis was the first male child born heir to the throne during the reign of his father from the seventeenth century onward. He was a comely blonde boy with deep blue eyes. At his baptism almost all the members of his huge family were present. Among them was his aged great grandfather, King Christian IX of Denmark, already eighty-seven years old. The Baptism was performed by Father John Yanishev, the rector of the palace. The children's English nanny, Mrs. Eagar, relates that when the priest anointed Alexis with the Holy Chrism, the infant "raised his hand and extended his fingers as though pronouncing a blessing!"⁴²

Even from infancy, Alexis appeared to be an especially happy child, full of liveliness and vigor. In the spring of 1905, before he had even completed his first year, Alexis was presented to the Royal Guard, the Preobrazhensky Regiment. When the soldiers greeted Alexis with a powerful, "Hurrah!" he broke out into happy laughter.

Nicholas and Alexandra had accepted that in the years of their governance it was difficult to enjoy a politically balanced Russia. They exerted all their labors and efforts to hand over to their son a better reality, a better Russia, a better tomorrow. Soon, however, they received the most powerful blow in their life. They discovered that for Alexis there might be no tomorrow.

From Nicholas' diary six weeks after the birth of Alexis, "8th of September. Wednesday. ... Alix and I were very concerned about the bleeding of little Alexei from his umbilical cord, which had lasted intermittently until the evening. I had to write to Korovin and the surgeon Fedorov; at about 7 o'clock they put on a bandage. ... 9th of September. Thursday. In the morning there was blood on the bandage again."⁴³

The months passed and Alexis began to attempt to stand on his feet. When he tripped and fell, little bruises appeared on him. After a little time, the bruises became dark blue swellings. It was obvious that his body did

not have the ability to stanch the flow of blood. His parents' worst fears had been confirmed: Alexis suffered from the "royal disease," hemophilia.

The hereditary affliction of hemophilia mainly affects males, and it is transmitted through the mother. Alexandra, a carrier of this affliction, had transmitted this dreadful disease to their only son in a time when the chances that the patient would succeed in passing through his childhood years alive were almost nonexistent. Alexandra had already encountered this fatal enemy in the past. One of her uncles, her brother, and two nephews had lost their lives because of this disease. Thus, she knew well that death would hover every moment over the head of her beloved child. The inability of science to treat Alexis opened the door to a tragic, painful chapter in the life of the royal family, but mainly for Alexandra. She believed that she was the cause of the drama that now began to unfold before them.

The most terrible episodes for Alexis' health happened when he was injured in the joints. Beyond the fact that they brought about long-lasting



Alexis bedridden, with his mother always by his side.



Alexis treated by Dr Botkin with mud bath therapy.
Alexandra always by his side.

disabilities, hemorrhages between the joints caused the patient unbelievable, unbearable pain. This occurred because the blood that entered into the narrow space of the joints, into the ankle, the knees, and the elbows pressed upon the nerves of that region. Often the trauma was so slight that it would pass unobserved. The following day, however, when Alexis woke up, he would say to his mother, “Mama, today I cannot walk” or “my elbow won’t bend.” As the internal bleeding continued, the pains became inhuman. Even though morphine was available, it could not be administered to hemophiliac patients because of its addictive properties with long-term use. In any case, the severity of the pains did not allow the patient to sleep. Thus, the only relief came when the patient, succumbing to the intensity of the pain, finally fainted. Traumas of this kind fixed Alexis to his bed for weeks. At last after every similar episode, subjection to long-term orthopedic therapy was necessary and afterwards baths in warm mud in order to avoid the possibility of permanent disability.

In these difficult and frightful hours, the only real weapon was prayer. Anna Vyubova remembers, “This autumn [of 1909] was made sad also by one of the all too frequent illnesses of the unfortunate little Tsarevitch. ... We who could do nothing else for him took refuge in prayer and supplication in the little church near the palace. Mlle. Tutcheva, maid of honor to the young Grand Duchesses, read the psalms, while the Empress, the older girls, Olga and Tatiana, two of the Tsar’s aides, and myself assisted in the singing.”⁴⁴

The problem of Alexis' health, however, did not end here for Nicholas and Alexandra. The family drama was twofold. Beside their inability to help their child in the hours of terrible pain, it was necessary by any possible means to assure that news of this terrible reality did not leak out from the palace. Under no circumstance must it become known that the future emperor of Russia suffered from an incurable disease that could at any moment deprive him of life. Despite all the family's efforts to keep Alexis' illness a secret, it was impossible for the people not to understand that something was not right with the tsarevich. As was natural, some of the frequent public appearances of the family occurred when Alexis was wounded. In those instances, the child appeared to be carried in the hands of a strong-armed Cossack of the Imperial Guard, making it obvious that the tsarevich suffered from some sickness. Thus, Nicholas' sister, Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna, was completely right when she said, "The birth of a son, which should have been the happiest event in the lives of Nicky and Alicky, became their heaviest cross."⁴⁵



Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna.

When Alexis was well, however, the whole life of the palace was transformed. Everything seemed bathed in a very sweet light. The young heir was undoubtedly the epicenter of the attention and love of the entire family. His sisters adored him. Within the family he was known by the pet name, “Little One,” and “Baby.” At first his parents’ particularly indulgent treatment because of his ailment turned him into a rather spoiled child. For example, when people used to kiss his hand, Alexis “didn’t miss the chance to boast about it and give himself airs in front of his sisters,”⁴⁶ which compelled his parents to stop this custom.

Alexei was an exceptionally lively child. In order to limit the opportunities for accidents, his parents assigned two sailors of the Imperial Navy to serve Alexis by turns as his personal assistants, seeing to it that they would protect him from dangerous activities. These sailors, Andrei Derevenko and Clementy Nagorny, were practically the child’s shadow. Furthermore, he was forbidden to ride a bicycle or a horse, and in general any kind of play in which he could come to harm. Nevertheless, that did not keep Alexis from being a happy and a lively child. There are many charming stories about his childish gaffes and games. General Alexander Spiridovitch has preserved a few of them.

“The Tsarevitch then seemed like a child in perfect health, and he played with all the gaiety and vivacity of children his age. He loved to play on the sand with Derevenko. That year [1908], his favourite game was *tchekarda* (leapfrog). He had fun climbing up on the big, burly Derevenko, and crawling over his back by straddling him. He imagined that in so doing, he accomplished the leap. When he had ‘jumped’ enough, he would get down on all fours and say, ‘All right, Derevenko, it’s your turn to jump.’ Derevenko, big and robust, would start off at a run and, barely touching the Tsarevitch with his hand, jumped effortlessly over the little body, which gave the child a lot of pleasure.

“In his little white sailor suit, with his invariable small velvet bag, which he wore as a bandolier and which contained his handkerchief, the Tsarevitch was a delightful child. Everybody wanted his photograph, but he never liked to let anybody take his picture, and every time he saw a camera pointed at him—which happened more than once a day—he would make a face. I nevertheless managed to surprise him with my box camera, without his noticing it, and snapped him when he was playing leapfrog and in his pose of ‘All right, Derevenko, it’s your turn to jump.’”⁴⁷

One day, while the tsar was inspecting the *Asia* crew, “the Tsarevitch insisted upon doing as the sentinels did: standing at attention, rifle in hand. At Derevenko’s request, they gave him a rifle, but it goes without saying that the Tsarevitch could not lift it and contented himself by holding it beside him, steadying it with his hand.”⁴⁸

Another charming incident took place as follows. Every morning, after his walk, the emperor would taste the usual fare of the escort, which was brought to him in his dressing-room. “Once he had conscientiously tasted



Pierre Gilliard giving a lesson to Olga.

all the 'proba,' the Tsar always thanked the man who had brought it. Later on, when the Tsarevitch was of an age to carry out the same duty, the Tsar, after having tasted it himself, would say to the under-officer of the Escort, 'And now, take the 'proba' to the Ataman' (the Tsarevitch was Ataman of all the Cossack troops). They would conduct the under-officer to the Tsarevitch, who would sit down with him at the table and apply himself to the duty of tasting, while chatting with the man, and asking him if he had any children, above all little girls. When the reply was in the affirmative, off he would go to his sisters' room, bringing back a doll intended for the officer's little daughter."⁴⁹

Lively and playful as he was, Alexis was nevertheless a very gentle and sensitive boy. Once, during a visit to the villa of an admiral in Sevastopol, he was playing in "an artificial pond, stocked with live fish. The Tsarevitch fished for shells and seaweed, but when someone offered him a fishing net, he refused it, saying, 'No, we mustn't. We must let them live.'"⁵⁰

As Alexis grew up, he became very affectionate, with simple manners and a humble disposition. One time a delegation of farmers visited him bringing gifts. His personal assistant required that they kneel before him. The boy blushed with shame and embarrassment. Later his tutor, Pierre Gilliard, who taught French to Nicholas' children, asked him whether he was pleased with what had happened. The child then replied that he was not at all pleased. Thus, when Gilliard saw to it that this did not happen again, Alexis felt great happiness that he had been delivered from this troubling ceremony.



Pierre Gilliard with Alexis.

Beyond simply being Alexis' French teacher, Pierre Gilliard established close ties with him. All the upbringing and education of the young Tsarevich occupied him significantly, and making use of the trust the royal couple placed in him, he attempted to influence them positively in this matter. Thus, recognizing that the sailor guardians' close monitoring of Alexis did not help the child, he wished to bring this to his parents' attention. His opinion was that with this arrangement the child would not be able to cultivate self-control and the necessary self-confidence that he would need when he grew up. This was even more important given Alexis' calling as heir to the throne. Gilliard in fact persuaded his parents to allow the child more independence. This proved very important, because Alexis then began to overcome many of the weaknesses in his character.

As he grew, Alexis became more and more serious and reflective. His repeated personal encounter with death made him especially

compassionate with the problems of other people. He tried in every way to relieve their hurts, and with impressive tenderness he consoled even the least servants of the palace when they passed through difficult times in their personal life.

Another worthy component of his character was a sense of gratitude, something that is very rare in children who learn early that they have whatever they may desire at their disposal. Baroness Buxhoeveden remembered with emotion the hours that she gave him English lessons, "It was pretty to see him when a lesson was over, getting up ceremoniously... and ... giving me his hand, with an exact imitation of the Emperor's manner, and thanking me with his own particularly sweet smile: 'It is really nice of you, you know.' He felt he was under an obligation to me, as I was not one of his regular teachers."⁵¹

Fabritsky wrote: "I knew the Heir from the time he was in the cradle, and played the leading role in the choice of his sailor-nanny, Derevenko whom I assigned, in accordance with Imperial orders ... I saw Alexis Nikolaevich reviewing the crew and playing with cabin boys on the yacht; I saw him receiving presentations, and I saw him in moments of childish mischief, etc. He always impressed everyone with his clear-sightedness, quick decision-making, loud voice, and resolute air, as well as his mildness, gentleness, kind-heartedness, and the attentiveness he showed to everyone and everything."⁵²

Thus, this little child gave the best hopes for his distinction as a particularly cultivated and rounded personality. These qualities constituted valuable attributes of the character of the future emperor of Russia.

SPALA AT THE WHIFF OF DEATH

Despite the great promises for a bright future given by the personality of this beautiful crown prince of Russia, his terrible disease never ceased to remind the family that death stood by to seize him at any moment. Alexis' most critical traumatic incident occurred at the beginning of September 1912. The family was then on the way to a hunting lodge in Spala, Poland, where they would stay for a few days. At some station on the route, Alexis was ready to go rowing in a nearby lake. Rowing was one of the few safe activities that he was allowed, in contrast with horseback riding and other such things. But while he leapt onto the boat, he fell and hit himself on the left thigh, so that by the time they reached Spala, a swelling had formed in the region.

The family doctor, Eugene Botkin, who was always with the family, kept Alexis in bed for a week until his pain and the swelling began to recede.

ANGELS OF MERCY

When Alexandra's strength began to fail her, they decided to have Olga and Tatiana replace her in her duties. Tatiana undertook the presidency of the Committee on Refugees, in which she was responsible for the resettlement and care of the thousands of Russian refugees who arrived from the war zones of the empire. Every week Tatiana presided over meetings and regulated all the activities of the committee. Olga was responsible for the collection of revenues that would cover the needs of the families of the soldiers. They devoted the morning hours that remained after their service in the operating room to these obligations. In the afternoon they continued their rounds of visits to the hospitals of Saint Petersburg.

Their hospital work was a source of important experience for the young princesses, which they would never have gained under other circumstances. This encounter with the reality outside the palace showed them an entire world that they had not known. They conversed with their nursing colleagues, persons whom they would not have been able to know otherwise. They learned about their personal problems, their thoughts, and in general all that related to their lives. Thus, they studied in the school of life and acquired equipment that would later be valuable.

In the field of nursing, Tatiana was shown to be as gifted as her mother. Although she was only seventeen years old, she assisted at the more complicated surgical procedures with the abilities of an experienced nurse. Her diary in this period is full of her experiences while working at the hospital. From her diary of 1915:³⁴ "7 January: In the morning had lesson in Zakon Bozhiy [Закон Божий: Law of God]. At 10 o'clock we two [with Olga] went to 'Znamenie,' from there to our infirmary.... Went to the Big House for a craniotomy. Handled the instruments. 19 February: ...we went to the Big House for two surgeries. Removed a bullet from one [patient's] head. 23 February: ...Anisimov of the 27th Siberian Rifle Regiment had surgery, amputated his right foot. I assisted and held the hooks. His left leg was already amputated to the knee."³⁵

The girls' work did not take place on an impersonal level. Even though throngs of wounded arrived daily at their hospital, the young duchesses met and connected personally with every one of them. They participated in their pain and agony and supported them with their pleasant company and consoling words.

The daughter of Doctor Botkin related the following: "Dr. Derevenko, a very demanding man towards the nurses, told me after the revolution that he rarely met such a calm, nimble and professional surgical nurse as Tatiana."³⁶ A professional nurse who worked with Tatiana in the operating room wrote likewise in her diary during this period: "The surgery was successful. After the first difficult cut, a river of incredibly smelly pus poured out. For the first time in my life I had the urge to vomit but Tatiana



Olga at a meeting of her committee.

Nikolaevna was fine, only when [patients] moaned pitifully, her little face twitched, and became crimson.”³⁷

Olga, however, was not able to bear the horror of this experience. Her sensitive soul suffered totally with those unfortunate youths. Thus after a few months of work in the operating rooms, exhausted by psychological pain, she had to withdraw from this work. She remained, however, responsible for the management of the hospital wings where she was assigned, and she continued to work on changing the bandages of the wounded and to perform all the necessary tasks in the recovery rooms of soldiers who were operated on.

Olga had an especially gifted mind. She had a flawless knowledge of the economic and political condition of Russia during the war and later during the revolution. Even from that period, she understood the increasing antipathy of the people towards her parents, and according to Dr Botkin’s son, she sensed beforehand what soon awaited them. It was precisely this perception that frequently caused her intense trouble and uneasiness.

Maria and Anastasia, fifteen and thirteen years old respectively in 1914, were too young to be trained as nurses. However, they also had their own hospital in which they performed their own services. In their daily visits the little princesses used to read from various literary works to their wounded, helped them compose letters, played board games with them, and in general did whatever they could to strengthen the morale of the troops. Their experiences and impressions from these activities are preserved in letters that they sent to their father, who was at the front most of the time during the war.

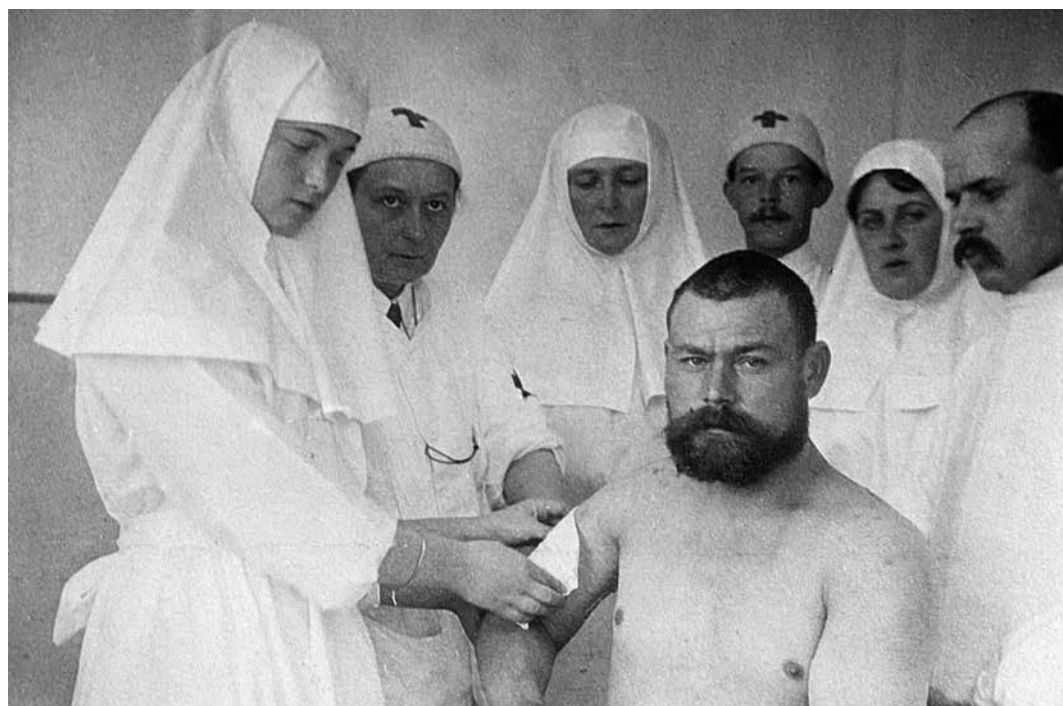
Little Anastasia wrote on 15/28 October 1914: "My golden and good Papa Darling! ...Today I sat with our soldier and helped him read, and it was so pleasant for me. He learned to read and write with us." Further on



Alexis with Olga and Tatiana.



Tatiana treating a wounded leg.



Olga treating a wounded arm.



Alexandra treating a head wound. On the left: Tatiana, Vyrubova and Olga.



Alexandra, Olga and Tatiana with Red Cross uniforms. Maria and Anastasia are also present.



With wounded officers. Above: Olga and Tatiana. Below: Maria and Anastasia.





Tatiana on the left. Alexandra on the right and below.



in the letter it was clear how familiar the girls were with the fact of death from such a young age: "Two more died yesterday, we even sat with them earlier."³⁸ And in spite of the fact that they lived in the midst of the general terror of daily deaths and hideous wounds, thirteen year old Anastasia did not lose her lively disposition: "Sleep well and see me in your dreams. I kiss you 1000 times. Your loving daughter, 13-year-old God's Servant Nastasia ANRPZSG.³⁹ May God keep you."⁴⁰

Even though they did not have nursing duties, the two younger girls' schedule was still very tiring and pressing. On 25 October/7 November 1914, Maria wrote to her father: "My dear Papa darling! I am terribly sorry that I did not have time to write to you. ... In the afternoon we went to 4 infirmaries in Pavlovsk with Mama and Aunt Mavra. ... Also today we went to the consecration of Svodny Regiment's infirmary. It is located in the building where the church used to be. A dining room was set up in that room, and moleben was held right there. ... After vsenoshnaya [всенощная: the All-Night Vigil] tonight we went to the infirmary."⁴¹

Even little Alexis often took part in the nursing activities of his sisters. On 30 November/13 December 1914, Tatiana wrote to her father: "Today we all five were at our infirmary and Aleksei was present at all dressings and during one of them [he] even held the tray where the pus dripped from the wound."⁴²

Recapitulating this period in the lives of the girls and of their mother, the daughter of Doctor Botkin writes, "Indeed, during the entire war, the already modest life of the imperial family now passed [even more] monotonously, [filled] day-to-day with work. So passed the weekdays, the holidays only differed in that instead of a morning visit to the infirmary, Their Majesties and Their Highnesses went to Obednya [Liturgy] at Feodorovsky Cathedral."⁴³

These young ladies made their debut in life through the gate of the hard reality of human drama. In contrast with other princesses of Europe, apart from the official celebration of their debuts into society when they turned sixteen years old, they had attended almost no dances up to then and certainly not afterward. Also, in contrast with their peers, they had no friends at all and no contact with the world. However, wartime revealed these pure beings as the most precious things that Russia had to offer in that period. Apart from their self-sacrificing love for the suffering, they took care to be the main human support to their parents in these critical and agonizing times of general turmoil. Their instructor, Gilliard, expressed with some dismay this characteristic observation, "If only the world had known what an example the Imperial family were setting with their tender and intimate association! But how few ever suspected it! For it was too indifferent to public opinion and avoided the public gaze."⁴⁴

The malicious environment of high society, continually pouring oil on the flames of revolutionary attitudes, dogged Alexandra's every step,

criticizing her every activity. Up until then they slandered the empress for the gulf that developed between her and high society, presenting it as the result of her supposed haughtiness. Now that Alexandra devoted her entire being to her people in practical ways and with unfathomable self-sacrifice, the slanders took on a new form. They asserted that it was completely unsuitable, completely improper and a great humiliation for the empress to wear a nurse's uniform and to work as a simple woman of the people in the hospitals! Thus, the words of the Lord came true, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept."⁴⁵ Alexandra was condemned regardless of her deeds and attitudes.

However, those that had the opportunity to know the Empress in this period of her work in the hospitals, saw the true light of her soul shine. They got to know her as she was in her close family surrounding, because the nurse's uniform gave her the ability to overcome her natural shyness and to manifest in practice her great maternal love towards her subjects.

In these times of crisis, the official recognition of her sacrifices by the Church gave Alexandra very great joy. The Holy Synod on 9 October, 1916 bestowed on the empress a gramota, an honorary award given in very rare cases when the offering on the part of some person is considered of tremendous significance. Alexandra's emotion was without description, because her recognition by the highest ecclesiastical authority was especially important in a time in which the basest rumors were circulating in church circles regarding her relationship to Rasputin.

'I WILL PERISH, BUT I WILL SAVE RUSSIA'

The burden of responsibility that Nicholas shouldered in the framework of this war was colossal. However, he displayed great stability and decisiveness in all his activities. He had given his entire being, soul and body, over to guiding Russia to victory. An invisible inward strength appeared to spring from within him, which was so apparent and impressive that anyone who encountered him during this time felt it intensely. Furthermore, these events brought him closer than ever to his people. The entire nation showed at every opportunity how much they valued his steady and dignified position in the world scene. All Russia to a man was at his side and the political passions seemed now to be lost in the past.

Nicholas did not follow the development of the war from his royal throne. He was constantly on the move, inspecting the Stavka [General Headquarters], the vast eastern front, the military hospitals, the factories, and in general every sector that contributed to the common national goal. Unfortunately, the first six months of the war did not have the expected result for Russia and her allies, England and France. The confidence that the war would be brief, and