THE REIGN OF PETER THE GREAT, 1682-1725

Now an academician, now a hero,
Now a seafarer, now a carpenter,
He, with an all-encompassing soul,
Was on the throne an eternal worker.

PUSHKIN

If we consider the matter thoroughly, then, in justice, we must be
called not Russians, but Peterovtsev. . . . Russia should be called
Peterov, and we Peterovtsev. . . .

KANXIN

Peter the Great's reign began a new epoch in Russian history, known
variously as the Imperial Age because of the new designation of ruler
and land, the St. Petersburg Era because of the new capital, or the All-Rus-
sian Period because the state came to include more and more peoples
other than the Great Russians, that is, the old Muscovites. The epoch
lasted for approximately two centuries and ended abruptly in 1917. Al-
though the chronological boundaries of Imperial Russia are clearly marked
— by contrast, for instance, with those of appanage Russia — the begin-
ing of Peter the Great's reign itself can be variously dated. The reformer,
who died on February 8, 1725, attained supreme power in several stages,
and with reversals of fortune: in 1682 as a boy of ten he was proclaimed
at first tsar and later that same year co-tsar with his elder half-brother
Ivan; in 1689 he, or rather his family and party, regained effective control
of the government; in 1694 Peter's mother died and he started to rule in
fact as well as in name; finally in 1696 Ivan died, leaving Peter the only
and absolute sovereign of Muscovy. Therefore, before turning to the ce-
brated reformer and his activities, we must consider a number of years
during which Peter's authority remained at best nominal.

Russian History from 1682 to 1694

Tsar Alexis had been married twice, to Mary Miloslavskaya from 1648
to 1669, and to Nathalie Narshkina from 1671 until his death in 1676.
He had thirteen children by his first wife, but of the sons only two,
Theodore and Ivan, both of them sickly, survived their father. Peter, strong
and healthy, was born on June 9, 1672, about a year after the tsar's second
marriage. Theodore, as we know, succeeded Alexis and died without an
heir in 1682. In the absence of a law of succession, the two boyar families, the Miloslavskys and Naryshkins, competed for the throne. The Naryshkins gained an early victory: supported by the patriarch, a majority in the boyar duma, and a gathering of the gentry, Peter was proclaimed tsar in April 1682. Because of his youth, his mother became regent, while her relatives and friends secured leading positions in the state. However, as early as May, the Miloslavsky party, led by Aleksei’s able and strong-willed daughter Sophia, Peter’s half-sister, inspired a rebellion of the regiments of the streltsy, or musketeers, concentrated in Moscow. Leading members of the Naryshkin clique were murdered — Peter witnessed some of these murders — and the Miloslavskys seized power. At the request of the streltsy, the boyar duma declared Ivan senior tsar, allowed Peter to be junior tsar, and, a little later, made Sophia regent. It might be added that the streltsy, strongly influenced by the Old Belief, proceeded to put more pressure on the government and cause further trouble, but in vain: the new regent managed to punish the leaders and control the regiments.

From 1682 to 1689 Sophia and her associates governed Muscovy, with Ivan V incapable of ruling and Peter I, together with the entire Naryshkin party, kept away from state affairs. Prince Basil Golitsyn, the regent’s favorite, played a particularly important role. An enlightened and humane person who spoke several foreign languages and arranged his own home and life in the Western manner, Golitsyn cherished vast projects of improvement and reform including the abolition of serfdom and education on a large scale. He did liberalize the Muscovite penal code, even if he failed to implement his more ambitious schemes. Golitsyn’s greatest success came in 1686 when Russia and Poland signed a treaty of “eternal peace” that confirmed the Russian gains of the preceding decades, including the acquisition of Kiev. Yet the same treaty set the stage for the war against the Crimean Tartars, who were backed by Turkey. This war proved disastrous to Muscovite arms. In 1687 and again in 1689 Golitsyn led a Muscovite army into the steppe only to suffer heavy losses and defeat as the lack of water and the huge distances exhausted his troops, while the Tartars set the grass on fire. Golitsyn’s military fiasco, together with other accumulating tensions, led to Sophia’s downfall.

As Peter grew older, his position as a tsar without authority became increasingly invidious. Sophia, on her part, realized the insecurity of her office and desired to become ruler in her own right. In 1689 Theodore shackled, appointed by Sophia to command the streltsy, apparently tried to incite his troops to stage another coup, put the regent on the throne, and destroy her opponents. Although the streltsy failed to act, a denunciation resulted. Frightened by the report of a plot, Peter escaped in the dead of night from the village of Preobrazhenskoe, near Moscow, where he had
been living, to the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery. In the critical days that followed, the patriarch, many boyars and gentry, the military units trained in the Western manner and commanded by General Patrick Gordon, and even several regiments of the streltsy, rallied behind Peter. Many others wavered, but did not back Sophia. In the end the sister capitulated to the brother without a fight and was sent to live in a convent. Shaklovity and two of his aides were executed; several other officers and boyars, including Basil Golitsyn, suffered exile. Thus, in August 1689, Peter won acknowledgment as the effective ruler of Russia, although Ivan retained his position as co-tsar. Still, at seventeen, Peter showed no desire to take personal charge of affairs. Instead the government fell into the hands of his mother Natalie and her associates, notably her brother, the boyar Leo Naryshkin, Patriarch Joachim, and, after his death in 1690, Patriarch Hadrion. The years 1689–94 witnessed the last flowering of Muscovite religiosity, ritualism, pirochialism, and suspicion of everything foreign—it was even forbidden to train troops in the Western manner. But in 1694 Natalie died, and Peter I finally assumed the direction of the state at the age of twenty-two.

Peter the Great: His Character, Childhood, and Youth

The impression that Peter I commonly made on his contemporaries was one of enormous strength and energy. Almost seven feet tall and powerfully built, the tsar possessed astonishing physical strength and vigor. Moreover, he appeared to be in a constant state of restless activity, taking on himself tasks normally done by several men. Few Russians could keep up with their monarch in his many occupations. Indeed, as he walked with rapid giant strides, they had to run even to continue conversation. In addition to his extraordinary physical attributes, Peter I exhibited some remarkable qualities of mind and character. The tsar had an inestimable intellectual curiosity coupled with an amazing ability to learn. He proceeded to participate personally in all kinds of state affairs, technical and special as well as general, becoming deeply involved in diplomacy, administration, justice, finance, commerce, industry, education, and practically everything else besides. In his reforms the tsar invariably valued expert advice, but he was also generally independent in thought and did not hesitate to adapt projects to circumstances. Peter I also developed into an accomplished military and naval commander. He studied the professions of soldier and sailor from the bottom up, serving first in the ranks and learning the use of each weapon before promoting himself to his first post as an officer. The monarch attained the rank of full general after the victory of Poltava and of full admiral after the successful conclusion of the Great Northern War. In addition, the sovereign found time to learn some twenty different trades and prided himself on his ability to make almost anything, from a ship to a pair of shoes. With his own hands he twisted the teeth of his courtiers and cut off their beards. Characteristically, he wanted to be everywhere and see everything for himself, traveling indefatigably around his vast state as no Muscovite monarch had ever done. In a still more unprecedented manner he went twice to the West to learn, in 1697–98 and in 1717. Peter I's mind can best be described as active and practical, able quickly to grasp problems and devise solutions, if not to construct theories.

As to character, the tsar impressed those around him by his energy, unbending will, determination, and dedication. He recovered quickly from even the worst defeats and considered every obstacle as an invitation to further exertion and achievement. Less attractive, but at times equally imposing, traits included a violent temper, crudeness, and frequent cruelty. The sovereign could be an executioner, as well as a dentist, and his drunken, amorous, and blasphemous pastimes exceeded the measure of the rough times in which he lived. Yet Peter the Great must not be confused with Ivan the Terrible, whom he, incidentally, admired. The reformer never lost himself in the paranoid world of megalomania and delusions of persecution, and he even refused to identify himself with the state. To mention one significant detail, when reforming the army, Peter I crossed out "the interests of His Tsarist Majesty" as the object of military devotion and substituted "the interests of the state." Consistently he made every effort to serve his country, to bring to it change and enlightenment. As the sovereign wrote in the last months of his life, in connection with dispatching Vitus Bering's first expedition: "Having ensured the security of the state against the enemy, it is requisite to endeavor to win glory for it by means of the arts and sciences." Or, to support Peter the Great's emphasis on education with another quotation — and one especially appropriate in a textbook — "For learning is good and fundamental, and as it were the root, the seed, and first principle of all that is good and useful in church and state."

Although a precocious child, Peter received no systematic education, barely being taught to read and write. Instead, from a very early age he began to pick things up on his own and pursue a variety of interests. He devoted himself in particular to war games with a mixed assortment of playmates. These games, surprisingly enough, developed over a period of years into a serious military undertaking and resulted in the formation of the first two regiments of the guards, the Probruchenskii — for Peter lived in the village of Probruchenskvo — and the Semenovskii, named after a nearby village. Similarly, the young tsar showed an early interest in the navy. At first he built small vessels, but as early as 1694 he established a
dockyard in Archangel and constructed a large ship there all by himself. For information and instruction Peter went to the foreign quarter in Moscow. There he learned from a variety of specialists what he wanted to know most about military and naval matters, geometry and the erection of fortifications. There too, in a busy, informal, and unrestrained atmosphere, the tsar apparently felt much more at ease than in the conservative, tradition-bound palace environment, which he never accepted as his own. The smoking, drinking, love-making, rough good humor, and conglomeration of tongues, first discovered in the foreign quarter in Moscow, became an enduring part of Peter the Great's life. The determined attempt of Peter's mother to make him mend his ways by marrying him to Eudoxia Lopukhina in 1689 failed completely to accomplish the desired purpose.

Peter's Assistants

After Peter took over the conduct of state affairs and began to reform Muscovy, he found few collaborators. His own family, the court circles, and the boyar duma overwhelmingly opposed change. Because he discovered little support at the top of the state structure, and also because he never attached much importance to origin or rank, the sovereign proceeded to obtain assistants wherever possible. Before long an extremely mixed but on the whole able group emerged. To quote Kliuchevsky's colorful summary:

Peter gathered the necessary men everywhere, without worrying about rank and origin, and they came to him from different directions and all possible conditions: one arrived as a cabin-boy on a Portuguese ship, as was the case of the chief of police of the new capital, de Vâre; another had shepherded swine in Lithuania, as it was rumored about the first Procurator-General of the Senate, Laguzhinsky; a third had worked as a clerk in a small store, as in the instance of Vice-Chancellor Shafirov; a fourth had been a Russian house serf, as in the case of the Vice-Governor of Archangel, the inventor of stamped paper, Kurbatov; a fifth, i.e., Ostermann, was a son of a Westphalian pastor. And all these men, together with Prince Menshikov, who, the story went, had once sold pies in the streets of Moscow, met in Peter's society with the remnants of the Russian boyar nobility.

Among foreigners, the tsar had the valuable aid of some of his old friends, such as Patrick Gordon and the Swiss, Francis Lefort, who played a prominent role until his early death in 1699. Later such able newcomers from Germany as the diplomat, Andrew Ostermann, and the military expert, Burkhard Münnich, joined the sovereign's entourage. Some of his numerous foreign assistants, for example, the Scot James Bruce who helped with the artillery, mining, the navy and other matters, had been born in Russia and belonged to the second generation of foreign settlers in Muscovy.

Russian assistants to Peter ranged over the entire social gamut. Alexander Menshikov, Paul Laguezhinsky, Peter Shafirov, and Alexi Kurbatov, among others, came from the lower classes. A large group belonged to the service gentry, of whom only two examples are the chief admiral of the reign, Theodore Apraksin, and Chancellor Gabriel Golovkin. Even old aristocratic families contributed a number of important figures, such as Field Marshal Count Boris Sheremetev and Senator Prince Jacob Dolgoruky. The Church too, although generally opposed to reform, supplied some able clerics who furthered the work of Peter the Great. The place of honor among them belongs to Archbishop Theophanes, or Feofan, Prokopyovich, who, like many other promoters of change in Russia, came from Ukraine. Of all the "redlings of Peter's nest"—to use Pashkin's expression—Menshikov acquired the greatest prominence and power. This son of a corporal or groom, who reportedly was once a pie vendor, came closest to being the sovereign's alter ego and participating in the entire range of his activity. Beginning as the boy tsar's orderly in the Preobrazhenski regiment, Menshikov rose to be Generalissimo, Prince in Russia, and Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, to mention only his most outstanding titles. Vain and thoroughly corrupt, as well as able and energetic, he constituted a permanent target for investigations and court proceedings and repeatedly suffered summary punishment from Peter the Great's cudgel, but somehow managed to maintain his position.

The First Years of Peter's Rule

War against Turkey was the first major action of Peter I after he took the government of Russia into his own hands in 1694, following the death of his mother. In fighting Turkey, the protector of the Crimean Tartars and the power controlling the Black Sea and its southern Russian shore, the new monarch followed in the steps of his predecessors. However, before long it became apparent that he managed his affairs differently. The war began in 1695, and the first Russian campaign against Azov failed: supplied by sea, the fortress remained impregnable to the Muscovite army. Then, in one winter, the tsar built a fleet in Voronezh on the Don river. He worked indefatigably himself, as well as ordering and urging others, and utilized to the best advantage the knowledge of all available foreign specialists along with his own previously acquired knowledge. By displaying his tremendous energy everywhere, Peter the Great brought thirty sea-going vessels and about a thousand transport barges to Azov in May
1696. Some of the Russian fleet, it might be noted, had been built as far away as Moscow and assembled in Voronezh. This time besieged by sea as well as by land, the Turks surrendered Azov in July.

With a view toward a further struggle against Turkey and a continuing augmentation and modernization of the Russian armed forces, the tsar next sent fifty young men to study, above all shipbuilding and navigation, in Holland, Italy, and England. Peter dispatched groups of Russians to study abroad several months at a time. After the students returned, the sovereign often examined them personally. In addition to experts, the tsar needed allies to prosecute war against Turkey. The desire to form a mighty coalition against the Ottoman Empire, and an intense interest in the West, prompted Peter to organize a large embassy to visit a number of European countries and — a most unusual act for a Muscovite ruler — to travel with the embassy.

Headed by Lefort, the party of about 250 men set out in March 1697. The sovereign journeyed incognito under the name of Peter Mikhailov. His identity, however, remained no secret to the rulers and officials of the countries he visited or to the crowds which frequently gathered around him. The tsar engaged in a number of important talks on diplomatic and other state matters. But, above all, he tried to learn as much as possible from the West. He seemed most concerned with navigation, but he also tried to absorb other technical skills and crafts, together with the ways and manners and, in fact, the entire life of Europe as he saw it. As the so-called Grand Embassy progressed across the continent and as Peter Mikhailov also took trips of his own, most notably to the British Isles, he obtained some first-hand knowledge of the Baltic provinces of Sweden, Prussia, and certain other German states, and of Holland, England, and the Hapsburg Empire. From Vienna the tsar intended to go to Italy, but instead he rushed back to Moscow at news of a rebellion of the streltsy. Altogether Peter the Great spent eighteen months abroad in 1697-98. At that time over 750 foreigners, especially Dutchmen, were recruited to serve in Russia. Again in 1702 and at other times, the tsar invited Europeans of every nationality — except Jews, whom he considered parasitic — to come to his realm, promising to subsidize passage, provide advantageous employment, and assure religious tolerance and separate law courts.

The streltsy had already caused trouble to Peter and suffered punishment on the eve of the tsar's journey to the West — in fact delaying the journey. Although the new conspiracy that was aimed at deposing Peter and putting Sophia in power had been effectively dealt with before the sovereign's return, the tsar acted with exceptional violence and severity. After investigation and torture more than a thousand streltsy were executed, and their mangled bodies were exposed to the public as a salutary lesson. Sophia was forced to become a nun, and the same fate befell Peter's wife, Eudoxia, who had sympathized with the rebels.

If the gruesome death of the streltsy symbolized the destruction of the old order, many signs indicated the coming of the new. After he returned from the West, the tsar began to demand that beards be cut and foreign dress be worn by courtiers, officials, and the military. With the beginning of the new century, the sovereign changed the Russian calendar; henceforth years were to be counted from the birth of Christ, not the creation of the world, and they were to commence on the first of January, not the first of September. More important, Peter the Great rapidly proceeded to reorganize his army according to the Western pattern.

The Great Northern War

The Grand Embassy failed to further Peter the Great's designs against Turkey. But, although European powers proved unresponsive to the proposal of a major war with the Ottomans, other political opportunities emerged. Before long Peter joined the military alliance against Sweden organized by Augustus II, ruler of Saxony and Poland. Augustus II, in turn, had been influenced by Johann Reinhold Patkul, an émigré Livonian nobleman who bore a personal grudge against the Swedish crown. The interests of the allies, Denmark, Russia, and Poland-Saxony — although, to be exact, Saxony began the war without Poland — clashed with those of Sweden, which after its extremely successful participation in the Thirty Years' War had acquired a dominant position on the Baltic and in the Baltic area. The time to strike appeared ripe, for Charles XII, a mere youth of fifteen, had ascended the Swedish throne in 1697. While Peter I concentrated on concluding the long-drawn-out peace negotiations with Turkey, Augustus II declared war on Sweden in January 1700, and several months later Denmark followed his example. On July 14 the Russo-Turkish treaty was finally signed in Constantinople: the Russians obtained Azov and Taganrog as well as the right to maintain a resident minister in Turkey. On August 19, ten days after Peter the Great learned of the conclusion of the treaty with the Porte and the day after he officially announced it, he declared war on Sweden. Thus Russia entered what came to be known as the Great Northern War.

Immediately the Russians found themselves in a much more difficult situation than they had expected. Charles XII turned out to be something of a military genius. With utmost daring he crossed the straits and carried the fight to the heart of Denmark, quickly forcing the Danes to surrender. Unknown to Peter, the peace treaty of Travendal marking the Danish defeat and abandonment of the struggle was concluded on the very day on which Russia entered the war. Having disposed of Denmark, the Swedish king promptly attacked the new enemy. Transporting his troops across the
Baltic to Livonia, on November 30, 1700, he suddenly assaulted the main Russian army that was besieging the fortress of Narva. In spite of the very heavy numerical odds against them the Swedes routed the Russian forces, killing or capturing some ten thousand troops and forcing the remaining thirty thousand to abandon their artillery and retreat in haste. The prisoners included ten generals and dozens of officers. In the words of a recent historian summarizing the Russian performance at Narva: "The old-fashioned cavalry and irregulars took to flight without fighting. The new infantry levies proved 'nothing more than undisciplined militia,' the foreign officers incompetent and unreliable. Only the two guards and one other foot regiment showed up well."

It was believed by some at the time and has been argued by others since that after Narva Charles XII should have concentrated on knocking Russia out of the war and that by acting in a prompt and determined manner he could have accomplished this purpose. Instead, the Swedish king for years underestimated and neglected his Muscovite opponent. After lifting the Saxon siege of Riga in the summer of 1701, he transferred the main hostilities to Poland, considering Augustus II his most dangerous enemy. Again Swedish arms achieved notable successes, but for about six years they could not force a decision. In the meantime, Peter made utmost use of the respite he received. Acting with his characteristic energy, the tsar had a new army and artillery ready within a year after the debacle of Narva. Conscription, administration, finance, and everything else had to be strained to the limit and adapted to the demands of war, but the sovereign did not swerve from his set purpose. The melting of church bells to make cannon has remained an abiding symbol of that enormous war effort.

Peter I used his reconstructed military forces in two ways: he sent help to Augustus II, and he began a systematic advance in Livonia and Estonia, which Charles XII had left with little protection. Already in 1701 and 1702 Sheremetev at the head of a large army devastated these provinces, twice defeating weak Swedish forces, and the Russians began to establish themselves firmly on the Gulf of Finland. The year 1703 marked the founding of St. Petersburg near the mouth of the Neva. The following year Peter the Great built the island fortress of Kronstadt to protect his future capital, while the Russian troops captured the ancient city of Dorpat, or Tartu, in Estonia and the stronghold of Narva itself. The tsar rapidly constructed a navy on the Baltic, his southern fleet being useless in the northern war, and the new ships participated effectively in amphibious and naval operations.

But time finally ran out for Augustus II. Brought to buy in his own Saxony, he had to sign the Treaty of Altranstädt with Charles XII in late September, 1706: by its terms Augustus II abdicated the Polish crown in favor of pro-Swedish Stanisław Leszczyński and, of course, withdrew from the war. Peter the Great was thus left alone to face one of the most feared armies and one of the most successful generals of Europe. Patkul, incidentally, was handed over to the Swedes by Augustus II and executed. The Swedish king began his decisive campaign against Russia in January 1708, crossing the Volta with a force of almost fifty thousand men and advancing in the direction of Moscow.

Peter's position was further endangered by the need to suppress rebellions provoked both by the exactions of the Russian government and by opposition to the tsar's reforms. In the summer of 1705 a monk and one of the strelets started a successful uprising in Astrakhan aimed against the upper classes and the foreign influence. It was even rumored in Astrakhan that all Russian girls would be forced to wed Germans, a threat which led to the hasty conclusion of many marriages. The town was recaptured by Sheremetev only in March 1706, after bitter fighting. In 1707 Conrad Bulavin, a leader of the Don cossacks, led a major rebellion in the Don area. Provoked by the government's determination to hunt down fugitives and also influenced by the Old Belief, Bulavin's movement followed the pattern of the great social uprisings of the past. At its height, the rebellion spread over a large area of southern Russia, including dozens of towns, and the rebel army numbered perhaps as many as one hundred thousand men. As usual in such uprisings, however, this huge force lacked organization and discipline. Government troops managed to defeat the rebels decisively a year or so before the war with Sweden reached its climax in the summer of 1709. Still another rebellion, that of the Tatar Bashkirs who opposed the Russian disruption of their way of life as well as the heavy exactions of the state, erupted in the middle Volga area in 1705 and was not finally put down until 1711.

Some historians believe that Charles XII would have won the war had he pressed his offensive in 1708 against Moscow. Instead he swerved south and entered Ukraine. The Swedish king wanted to rest and strengthen his army in a rich land untouched by the fighting before resuming the offensive, and he counted heavily on Hetman Ivan Mazepa, who had secretly turned against his sovereign. His calculations failed: Maréchaux could bring only some two thousand cossacks to the Swedish side — with a few thousand more joining later — while a general lack of sympathy for the Swedes together with Menshikov's energetic and rapid countermeasures assured the loyalty of Ukraine to Peter the Great. Also, Charles XII's move south made it easier for a Russian force led by the tsar to intercept and smash Swedish reinforce-ments of fifteen thousand men on October 9, 1708, at Lesnaia. What is more, at Lesnaia the Russians captured the huge supply train which was being brought to Charles. Largely isolated from the people, far from home bases, short of supplies, and unable to
advance their cause militarily or diplomatically, the Swedish army spent a
dismal, cold winter in 1708-09 in Ukraine. Yet Charles XII would not
retreat. The hour of decision struck in the middle of the following sum-
mer when the main Russian army finally came to the rescue of the small
fortress of Poltava besieged by the Swedes, and the enemies met in the
open field.

The Swedish army was destroyed on July 8, 1709, in the battle of
Poltava. The Swedes, numbering only from 22,000 to 28,000 as against
over 40,000 Russians, and vastly inferior in artillery, put up a tremendous
fight before their lines broke. Most of them, including the generals, eventu-
ally surrendered either on the field or several days later near the Dnieper
whereupon they could not cross. Charles XII and Mancu did escape to Turkish
territory. Whereas in retrospect the outcome of Poltava occasions no sur-
prise, it bears remembering that a few years earlier the Swedes had won
at Narva against much greater odds and that Charles XII had acquired
a reputation as an invincible commander. But, in contrast to the debacle at
Narva, Russian generalship, discipline, fighting spirit, and efficiency all
splendidly passed the test of Poltava. Peter the Great, who had himself led
his men in the thick of battle and been lucky to survive the day, appreciated
to the full the importance of the outcome. And indeed he had excellent rea-
sons to celebrate the victory and to thank his captive Swedes "teachers" for
their most useful "lessons."

Yet not long after Poltava the fortunes of Peter I and his state reached
perhaps their lowest point. Instigated by France, as well as by Charles XII,
Turkey, which had so far abstained from participation in the hostilities,
declared war on Russia in 1710. Peter acted rashly, underestimating the
enemy and relying heavily on the problematical support of the vassal
Ottoman principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia and of Christian sub-
jects of the sultan elsewhere, notably in Serbia and Montenegro. In July
1711, the tsar found himself at the head of an inadequate army in need
of ammunition and supplies and surrounded by vastly superior Turkish
forces near the Pruth river. Argument persists to this day as to why the
Turks did not make more of their overwhelming advantage. Suggested
answers have ranged from the weariness and losses of the Turkish troops to
skilled Russian diplomacy and even bribery. In any case, Peter the
Great signed a peace treaty, according to which he abandoned his southern
fleet, returned Azov and other gains of 1700 to the Turks, promised not
to intervene in Poland, and guaranteed to Charles XII safe passage to
Sweden. But, at the price of renouncing acquisitions to the south, he was
enabled to extricate himself from a catastrophic situation and retain a domi-
nant hand in the Great Northern War.

That war, decided in effect in 1709, dragged on for many more years.
After Poltava, the tsar transferred his main effort to the Baltic, seizing
Viborg — or Viipuri — Riga, and Reval in 1710. St. Petersburg could be
considered secure at last. The debacle of Charles XII in Ukraine led to a
revival of the coalition against him. Saxony, Poland, Denmark, Prussia, and
Hanover joined Russia against Sweden. In new circumstances, Peter the Great
developed his military operations along two chief lines: Russian troops helped
the allies in their campaigns on the southern shore of the Baltic, while other
forces continued the advance in the eastern Baltic area. Thus in 1713-14 the
tsar occupied most of Finland. The new Russian navy became ever more active,
scored a victory under Peter's direct command over the Swedish fleet off
Hangö in 1714.

It may be worth noting that the sudden rise of Russia came as something
of a shock to other European countries, straining relations, for example,
between Great Britain and Russia. It also led to considerable fear and wor-
ed speculations about the intentions and future steps of the northern
giant; this was reflected later in such forgeries as the purported testament of
Peter the Great which expressed his, and Russia's, aim to conquer the
world. In 1717 the tsar traveled to Paris, and, although he failed to obtain
any diplomatic results beyond the French promise not to help Sweden,
one more he saw and learned much. In December 1718, Charles XII
was killed in a minor military engagement in Norway. His sister Ulrika
Eleonora and later her husband Frederick I succeeded to the Swedish
throne. Unable to reverse the course of the war and, indeed, increasingly
threatened, for Peter the Great proceeded to send expeditions into Sweden
proper in 1719-21, the Swedes finally admitted defeat and made peace. In
1720-21, by the Treaties of Stockholm, Frederick I reached settlements
with Saxony, Poland, Denmark, Prussia, and Hanover, abandoning some
islands and territory south of the Baltic, mostly in favor of Prussia. And
on August 30, 1721, Sweden concluded the Treaty of Nystadt with Rus-
sia.

By the provisions of the Treaty of Nystadt Russia acquired Livonia,
Estonia, Ingria, part of Karelia, and certain islands, although it returned
the bulk of Finland and paid two million rix-dollars. In effect it
obtained the so-called Baltic provinces which were to become, after the
Treaty of Versailles, the independent states of Estonia and Latvia and later
the corresponding Soviet republics, only to recover their independence when the
Soviet Union collapsed, and also obtained southeastern Finnish borders
located strategically next to St. Petersburg and the Gulf of Finland. The capture
and retention of the fortress of Viborg in particular gave Russia virtual control
of the Gulf. At a solemn celebration of the peace settlement the Senate pre-
valent upon Peter I to accept the titles of "Great," "Father of the Fatherland,"
and "Emperor." In this manner Russia formally became an empire, and one
can say that the imperial period of Russian history was officially inaugurated,
even though some European powers took their time in recognizing the new title
of the Russian ruler: only Prussia and the Netherlands did so immediately. Sweden in 1723, Austria and Great Britain in 1742, France and Spain as late as 1745.

In modern European history the Great Northern War was one of the important wars and Poltava one of the decisive battles. The Russian victory over Sweden and the resulting Treaty of Nystadt meant that Russia became firmly established on the Baltic, acquiring its essential "window into Europe," and that in fact it replaced Sweden as the dominant power in the north of the continent. Moreover, Russia not only humiliated Sweden but also won a preponderant position vis-à-vis its ancient rival Poland, became directly involved in German affairs — a relationship which included marital alliances arranged by the tsar for his and his half-brother Ivan V's daughters — and generally stepped forth as a major European power. The Great Northern War, and the War of the Spanish Succession fought at the same time, can be regarded as successful efforts to change the results of the Thirty Years' War and to curb the two chief victors of that conflict, Sweden and France. The settlement in the north, it might be added, turned out to be more durable than that in the west. Indeed, because of the relative sizes, resources, and numbers of inhabitants of Russia and Sweden, Peter the Great's defeat of Charles XII proved to be irreversible.

Foreign Relations: Some Other Matters

Although the Great Northern War lasted for most of Peter's reign and although it had first claim on Russian efforts and resources, the tsar never forgot Turkey or the rest of Asia either. We have noted the two wars that he fought against the Ottomans, the first successful and the second unsuccessful in the midst of the hostilities with Sweden. After Nystadt, the emperor turned south once more, or rather southeast. In 1722–23 he fought Persia successfully, in spite of great difficulties of climate and communication, to obtain a foothold on the western and southern shores of the Caspian sea. This foothold was relinquished by Russia in 1732, shortly after Peter's death.

Earlier the tsar had shown a considerable interest in Central Asia, its geography, peoples — particularly the Kazakhs — and routes, and especially in the possibility of large-scale trade with India. Whereas most of the Russian contacts with Central Asia were peaceful, a tragic exception occurred in 1717 when a considerable force commanded by Prince Alexander Bekovich-Cherkassky was tricked and massacred by the supposedly friendly khan of Khiva. Peter the Great ordered young men to learn Turkish, Tartar, and Persian, assigning them for this purpose to appropriate diplomatic missions. He even established classes in Japanese, utilizing the services of

a castaway from that hermit island empire. The tsar sent a mission to Mongolia and maintained diplomatic and commercial relations with China, which resulted in the negotiation of the Treaty of Kiashtka shortly after his death, and in the permanent establishment of an important mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in Peking. He initiated the scholarly study of Siberia; and, indeed, the emperor's interest extended even to the island of Madagascar!

The Reforming of Russia: Introductory Remarks

In regard to internal affairs during the reign of Peter the Great, we find that scholars have taken two extreme and opposite approaches. On the one hand, the tsar's reforming of Russia has been presented as a series, or rather a jumble, of disconnected ad hoc measures necessitated by the exigencies of the moment, especially by the pressure of the Great Northern War. Contrariwise, the same activity has been depicted as the execution of a comprehensive, radically new, and well-integrated program. In a number of ways, the first view seems closer to the facts. As Kluchevsky pointed out, only a single year in Peter the Great's whole reign, 1724, passed entirely without war, while no more than another thirteen peaceful months could be added for the entire period. Connected to the enormous strain of war was the inadequacy of the Muscovite financial system, which was overburdened and in a state of virtual collapse even before Peter the Great made vastly increased demands upon it. The problem for the state became simply to survive, and survival exacted a heavy price. Under Peter the Great the population of Russia might have declined. Milinov, who made a brilliant analysis of Petrine fiscal structure and economy, and other scholars of his persuasion have shown how military considerations repeatedly led to financial measures, and in turn to edicts aiming to stimulate Russian commerce and industry, to changes in the administrative system without whose improvement these and other edicts proved ineffective, to attempts to foster education in whose absence a modern administration could not function, and on and on. It has been further argued, on the whole convincingly, that in any case Peter the Great was not a theoretician or planner, but an intensely energetic and practical man of affairs.

Yet a balanced judgment has to allow something to the opposite point of view as well. Although Peter the Great was preoccupied during most of his reign with the Great Northern War and although he had to sacrifice much else to its successful prosecution, his reforming of Russia was by no means limited to hectic measures to bolster the war effort. In fact, he wanted to Westernize and modernize all of the Russian government, society, life, and culture, and even if his efforts fell far short of this stupendous goal, failed to dovetail, and left huge gaps, the basic pattern emerges, nevertheless,
with sufficient clarity. Countries of the West served as the emperor’s model. We shall see, however, when we turn to specific legislation, that Peter did not merely copy from the West, but tried to adapt Western institutions to Russian needs and possibilities. The very number and variety of European states and societies offered the Russian ruler a rich initial choice. It should be added that with time Peter the Great became more interested in general issues and broader patterns. Also, while the reformer was no theoretician, he had the makings of a visionary. With characteristic grandeur and optimism he saw ahead the image of a modern, powerful, prosperous, and educated country, and it was to the realization of that image that he dedicated his life. Both the needs of the moment and longer-range aims must therefore be considered in evaluating Peter the Great’s reforms. Other fundamental questions to be asked about them include their relationship to the Russian past, their borrowing from the West—and, concurrently, their modification of Western models—their impact on Russia, and their durability.

The Army and the Navy

Military reforms stemmed most directly from the war. In that field Peter the Great’s measures must be regarded as radical, successful, and lasting, as well as imitative of the West; and he has rightly been considered the founder of the modern Russian army. The emperor’s predecessors had large armies, but these were poorly organized, technically deficient, and generally of low quality. They assembled for campaigns and disbanded when the campaign ended. Only gradually did “regular” regiments, with Western officers and technicians, begin to appear. Even the streltsy, founded by Ivan the Terrible and expanded to contain twenty-two regiments of about a thousand men each, represented a doubtful asset. Stationed mainly in Moscow, they engaged in various trades and crafts and constituted at best a semi-professional force. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the streltsy became a factor in Muscovite politics, staged uprisings, and were severely punished and then disbanded by Peter the Great. The reformer instituted general conscription and reorganized and modernized the army. The general of course, had been subject to personal military service ever since the formation of the Muscovite state. Under Peter the Great this obligation came to be much more effectively and, above all, continuously enforced. Except for the unfit and those given civil assignments, the members of the gentry were to remain with their regiments for life. Other classes, with the exception of the clergy and members of the merchant guilds, who were needed elsewhere, fell under the draft. Large numbers were conscripted, especially in the early years of the Great Northern War. In 1715 the Senate established the norm of one draftee

from every seventy-five serf households. Probably the same norm operated in the case of the state peasants, while additional recruits were obtained from the townspeople. All were to be separated from their families and occupations and to serve for life, a term which was reduced to twenty-five years only in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

Having obtained a large body of men, Peter I went on to transform them into a modern army. He personally introduced a new and up-to-date military manual, became proficient with every weapon, and learned to command units from the smallest to the largest. He insisted that each draftee, aristocrat and serf alike, similarly work his way from the bottom up, advancing exactly as fast and as far as his merit would warrant. Important changes in the military establishment included the creation of the elite regiments of the guards, and of numerous other regular regiments, the adoption of the flintlock and the bayonet, and an enormous improvement in artillery. By the time of Poltava, Russia was producing most of its own flintlocks. The Russian army was the first to use the bayonet in attack—a weapon originally designed for defense against the charging enemy. As to artillery, Peter the Great developed both the heavy siege artillery, which proved very effective in 1704 in the Russian capture of Narva, and, by about 1707, light artillery, which participated in battles alongside the infantry and the cavalry. The Russian victory over Sweden demonstrated the brilliant success of the tsar’s military reforms. At the time of Peter the Great’s death the Russian army numbered 210,000 regular troops and 100,000 cossacks who retained their own organization.

The select regiments of guards, however, were not only the elite of Peter’s army; they had, so to speak, grown up with the emperor, and contained many of his most devoted and enthusiastic supporters. Especially in the second half of his reign, Peter the Great frequently used officers and non-commissioned officers of the guards for special assignments, bypassing the usual administrative channels. Often endowed with summary powers, which might include the right to bring a transgressing governor or other high official back in chains, they were sent to speed up the collection of taxes or the gathering of recruits, to improve the functioning of the judiciary or to investigate alleged administrative corruption and abuses. Operating outside the regular bureaucratic structure, these emissaries could be considered as extensions of the ruler’s own person. Later emperors, such as Alexander I and Nicholas I, continued Peter the Great’s novel practice on a large scale, relying on special, and usually military, agents to obtain immediate results in various matters and in general to supervise the workings of the government apparatus.

To an even greater extent than the army, the modern Russian navy was the creation of Peter the Great. One can fairly say it was one of his passions. He began from scratch—with one vessel of an obsolete type,
Administrative Reforms: Central Government, Local Government, the Church

Although mainly occupied with military matters, Peter reformed the central and local government in Russia as well as Church administration and finance, and he also effected important changes in Russian society, economy, and culture. Peter I ascended the throne as Muscovite tsar and autocrat — although, to be sure, until Ivan V's death in 1696 the country had two tsars and autocrats — and he proved to be one of the most powerful and impressive absolute rulers of his age, or any age. Yet comparisons with Ivan the Terrible or other Muscovite predecessors can be misleading. Whatever the views of earlier tsars concerning the nature and extent of their authority — and that is a complicated matter — Peter the Great believed in enlightened despotism as preached and to an extent practiced in Europe during the so-called Age of Reason. He borrowed his definition of autocracy and of the relationship between the ruler and his subjects from Sweden, not from the Muscovite tradition. The very title of emperor carried different connotations and associations than that of tsar.

In contrast to Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great had the highest regard for law, and he considered himself the first servant of the state. Yet, again in accord with his general outlook, he had no use for the boyar duma, or the zemski sobor, and trusted the Church in a much more high-handed manner than his predecessors had. Thus the reformer largely escaped the vague, but nevertheless real, traditional hindrances to absolute power in Muscovy. It was the discarding of the old and the creation of the new governing institutions that made the change in the nature of the Russian state explicit and obvious.

In 1711, before leaving on his campaign against Turkey, Peter the Great published two orders which created the Governing Senate. The Senate was founded as the highest state institution to supervise all judicial, financial, and administrative affairs. Originally established only for the time of the monarch's absence, it became a permanent body after his return. The number of senators was first set at nine and in 1712 increased to ten. A special high official, the Ober-Procurator, served as the link between the sovereign and the Senate and acted, in the emperor's own words, as "the sovereign's eye." Without his signature no Senate decision could go into effect; any disagreements between the Ober-Procurator and the Senate were to be settled by the monarch. Certain other officials and a chancellery were also attached to the Senate. While it underwent many subsequent changes, the Senate became one of the most important institutions of imperial Russia, especially in administration and law.

In 1717 and the years immediately following, Peter the Great established collegia, or colleges, in place of the old, numerous, overlapping, and unwieldy prikazy. The new agencies, comparable to the later ministries, were originally nine in number: the colleges of foreign affairs, war, navy, state expenses, state income, justice, financial inspection and control, commerce, and manufacturing. Later three colleges were added to deal with mining, estates, and town organization. Each college consisted of a president, a vice-president, four councilors, four assessors, a procurator, a secretary, and a chancellery. At first a qualified foreigner was included in every college, but as a rule not as president. At that time collegiate administration had found considerable favor and application in Europe. Peter the Great was especially influenced by the example of Sweden and also, possibly, by Leibniz's advice. It was argued that government by boards assured a greater variety and interplay of opinion, since decisions depended on the majority vote, not on the will of an individual, and that it contributed to a strictly legal and proper handling of state affairs. More bluntly, the emperor remarked that he did not have enough trustworthy assistants to put in full charge of the different branches of the executive and had, therefore, to rely on groups of men, who would keep check on one another. The colleges lasted for almost a century before they were replaced by ministries in the reign of Alexander I. Some prikazy, however, lingered on, and the old system went out of existence only gradually.

Local government also underwent reform. In 1699 towns were reorganized to facilitate taxation and obtain more revenue for the state. This system, run for the government by merchants, took little into account except finances and stemmed from Muscovite practices rather than Western influences. In 1720–21, on the other hand, Peter the Great introduced a thorough municipal reform along advanced European lines. Based on the elective principle and intended to stimulate the initiative and activity of the townspeople, the ambitious scheme failed to be translated into practice because of local inertia and ignorance.

Provincial reform provided probably the outstanding example of a
major reforming effort of Peter's come to naught. Again, changes began in a somewhat haphazard manner, largely under the pressure of war and a desperate search for money. After the reform of 1708 the country was divided into huge gubernias, or governments, eight, ten, and finally eleven in number. But with the legislation of 1719 a fully-developed and extremely far-reaching scheme appeared. Fifty provinces, each headed by a voevoda, became the main administrative units. They were subdivided into uetyady administered by commissars. The commissars, as well as a council of from two to four members attached to the voevoda, were to be elected by the local gentry from their midst. All officials received salaries and the old Muscovite practice of kormlenia — "feudings" — went out of existence. Peter the Great went beyond his Swedish model in charging provincial bodies with responsibility for local health, education, and economic development. And it deserves special notice that the reform of 1719 introduced into Russia a separation of administrative and judicial power. But all this proved to be premature and unrealistic. Local initiative could not be aroused, nor suitable officials found. The separation of administration and justice disappeared by about 1727, while some other ambitious aspects of the reform never came into more than paper existence. In the case of local government, Peter the Great's sweeping thought could find little or no application in Russian life.

The reign witnessed a strengthening of government control in certain borderlands. After the suppression of Bulavin's great revolt, the emperor tightened his grip on the Don area, and that territory came to be more closely linked to the rest of Russia. The consacks, however, did retain a distinct administration, military organization, and way of life until the very end of the Russian empire and even into the Soviet period — as readers of the novels of Sholokhov realize. Similarly, after Mazepa's defection to Charles XII in Ukraine, the government proceeded to tie that land, too, more closely to the rest of the empire. For example, an interesting order in 1714 emphasized the desirability of mixing the Ukrainians and the Russians and of bringing Russian officials into Ukraine, buttressing its argument with references to successful English policies vis-à-vis Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

The change in the organization of the Church paralleled Peter the Great's reform of the government. When the reactionary patriarch Hadrian died in 1700, the tsar kept his seat vacant, and the Church was administered for over two decades by a mere locum tenens, the very able moderate supporter of reform Metropolitan Stephen Izvorsky. Finally in 1721, the so-called Spiritual Regnament, apparently written mainly by Archbishop Theophanes Prokopovich, established a new organization of the Church. The Holy Synod, consisting of ten, later twelve, clerics, replaced the patriarch. A lay official, the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod, was appointed to see that that body carried on its work in a perfectly legal and correct manner. Although the new arrangement fell under the conciliar principle widespread in the Orthodox Church and although it received approval from the Eastern patriarchs, the reform belonged — as much as did Peter the Great's other reforms — to Western, not Muscovite or Byzantine, tradition. In particular, it tried to reproduce the relationship between Church and state in the Lutheran countries of northern Europe. Although it did not make Russia Byzantine as some writers assert, nor even caesaro-papist — for the emperor did not acquire any authority in questions of faith — it did enable the government to exercise effective control over Church organization, possessions, and policies. If Muscovy had two supreme leaders, the tsar and the patriarch, only the tsar remained in the St. Petersburg era. The Holy Synod and the domination of the Church by the government lasted until 1917.

Peter the Great's other measures in the religious domain were similarly conditioned by his general outlook. He considered monks to be shirkers and wastrels and undertook steps to limit ecclesiastical possessions and eventually to control ecclesiastical wealth. On the other hand, he tried to strengthen and broaden Church schools and improve the lot of the impoverished secular clergy. As one might expect, the reformer exhibited more tolerance toward those of other denominations than had his Muscovite predecessors, on the whole preferring Protestants to Catholics. In 1721 the Holy Synod permitted intermarriage between the Orthodox and Western Christians. The emperor apparently felt no religious animosity toward the Old Believers and favored tolerance toward them. They, however, proved to be bitter opponents of his program of reform. Therefore, the relaxation in the treatment of the Old Believers early in the reign gave way to new restrictions and penalties, such as special taxation.

An evaluation of the total impact of Peter the Great's administrative reforms presents certain difficulties. These reforms copied and adapted Western models, trying to import into Russia the best institutions and practices to be found anywhere in Europe. Efforts to delineate clearly the authority of every agency, to separate powers and functions, to standardize procedures, and to spell out each detail could well be considered revolutionary from the old Muscovite point of view. On the surface at least the new system seemed to bear a greater resemblance to Sweden or the German states than to the realm of the good Tzar Alexis. The very names of the new institutions and the offices and technical terms associated with them testified to a flood of Western influences and a break with the Muscovite past. Yet reality differed significantly from this appearance. Even where reforms survived — and sometimes, as in the case of the local government, they did not — the change turned out to be not nearly as profound as the emperor had intended. Statutes, prescriptions, and precise
rules looked good on paper; in actuality in the main cities and especially in the enormous expanses of provincial Russia, everything depended as of old on the initiative, ability, and behavior of officials. The koromlenitsa could be abolished, but not the all-pervasive bribery and corruption. Personal and largely arbitrary rule remained, in sum, the foundation of Russian administration; all the more so because despite the reformer’s frantic efforts the new system, which was much too complicated to be discussed here with anything approaching completeness, lacked integration, co-ordination, and cohesion. In fact a few scholars, such as Platonov, have argued that the administrative order established by Peter the Great proved to be more disjointed and disorganized than that of Muscovite Russia.

Financial and Social Measures

The difficulty of transforming Russian reality into something new and Western becomes even more evident when we consider Peter the Great’s social legislation and his overall influence on Russian society. Before turning to this topic, however, we must mention briefly the emperor’s financial policies, for they played an important and continuous part in his plans and actions.

Peter the Great found himself constantly in dire need of money, and at times the need was utterly desperate. The only recourse was to squeeze still more out of the Russian masses, who were already overburdened and strained almost to the breaking point. According to one calculation, the revenue the government managed to extract in 1702 was twice, and in 1724 five and a half times, the revenue obtained in 1680. In the process it taxed almost everything, including beehives, mills, fisheries, beards, and bath houses; and it also extended the state monopoly to new items. For example, stamped paper, necessary for legal transactions, became an additional source of revenue for the state, and so did oak coffins. In fact, finding or concocting new ways to augment government funds developed into a peculiar kind of occupation in the course of the reign. Another and perhaps more significant change was in the main form of direct taxation; in 1718 Peter the Great introduced the head, or poll, tax in place of the household tax and the tax on cultivated land.

One purpose of the head tax was to catch shirkers who combined household obligations or failed to till their land. It was levied on the entire lower class of population and it represented a heavy assessment — considerably heavier than the taxes that it replaced. Set at seventy or eighty kopecks per serf and at one ruble twenty kopecks for each state peasant and non-exempt townsman, the new tax had to be paid in money. From 1718 to 1722 a census, a so-called revision, of the population subject to the head tax took place. On private estates, serfs and those slaves who tilled the soil were registered first. Next came orders to add to the lists household slaves and all dependent people not on the land, and finally even vagrants of every sort. Each person registered during the revision had to pay the same set head tax; on estates, the landlords were held responsible for the prompt flow of money to the treasury. A number of scholars have stressed that Peter the Great’s tax legislation thus led to the final elimination of the ancient difference between serf and slave, and the merging of the landlords’ peasants into one bonded mass. Legally the mass consisted of serfs, not slaves. In actuality, as already indicated, the arbitrary power of the landlord and the weakness of the peasant made Russian serfdom differ little from slavery. After the revision the serfs were allowed to leave the estate only with their master’s written permission, a measure which marked the beginning of a passport system. The head tax, it might be added, proved to be one of the emperor’s lasting innovations.

On the whole Peter the Great had to accept and did accept Russian society as it was, with serfdom and the economic and social dominance of the gentry. The emperor, however, made a tremendous effort to bend that society to serve his purposes: the successful prosecution of war, Westernization, and reform. Above all, the government needed money and men. The head tax presents an excellent example of an important social measure passed for financial reasons. But whereas the head tax affected the lower classes, other social groups also found themselves subject to the inescapable demands of the tireless emperor. For example, the merchants, the few professional people, and other middle class elements, who were all exempt from the head tax, had to work harder than ever before to discharge their obligations to the state in the economic domain and other fields of activity.

However, the emperor insisted on service especially in the case of the gentry. State service, of course, constituted an ancient obligation of that class. But, as we have already seen in dealing with the army, under Peter the Great it became a more regular and continuous as well as much heavier obligation. Every member of the gentry was required to serve from about the age of sixteen to the end of his days, and the sovereign himself often gave an examination to boys as young as fourteen or even ten and assigned them to schools and careers. After an inspection, held usually in Moscow, the gentry youths were divided roughly two-thirds to one-third between the military and the civilian branches of service. Peter the Great insisted that in the civilian offices as in the regiments or aboard ships all novices must start at the bottom and advance only according to their merit. In 1722 he promulgated the Table of Ranks, which listed in hierarchic order the fourteen ranks, from the fourteenth to the first, to be attained in the parallel services — military, civil, and court. The Table, with its impressive ranks borrowed from abroad, served as the foundation
of the imperial Russian bureaucracy and lasted, with modifications, until 1917. The emperor opened advancement in service to all. Entrance into service brought personal nobility, while those of non-gentry origins attained the eighth rank in the civil service or the twelfth in the military became hereditary members of the gentry. He also began to grant titles of nobility, including "prince," for extraordinary achievements, and later emperors continued this practice.

Peter the Great's handling of the gentry represented something of a tour de force, and it proved successful to the extent that the emperor did obtain a great deal of service from that class. But the reformer's successors could not maintain his drastic policies. In fact, we shall see how in the course of the eighteenth century the gentry gradually escaped from its service obligations. At the same time entry into that class became more difficult, so that Peter the Great's effort to open the road to all talents was somewhat diminished. It might be added that some of the emperor's social legislation failed virtually from the start. Thus, for example, in 1714, in opposition to the established Russian practice of dividing land among sons, the reformer issued a law of inheritance according to which the entire estate had to go to one son only — by choice, and to the elder son if no choice had been made — the others thus being forced to exist, as in the case of the British nobility, solely by service. But this law turned out to be extremely difficult to enforce even during Peter the Great's reign, and it was repealed as early as 1731.

The Development of the National Economy

The development of the national economy constituted another aim of the reformer and another field for his tireless activity. Again, the emperor thought first of war and its immediate demands. But, in addition, from about 1710 he strove to develop industries not related to military needs, to increase Russian exports, and in general to endow the country with a more varied and active economy. Peter the Great made every effort to stimulate private enterprise, but he also acted on a large scale directly through the state. Ideologically the emperor adhered to mercantilism, popular in Europe at the time, with its emphasis on the role of the government, a favorable balance of trade, and the protection of home industries as reflected in the Russian tariff of 1724. One account gives the figure of 200 manufacturing establishments founded in Peter the Great's reign — 86 by the state and 114 by private individuals and companies — to add to the 21 in existence in Russia by 1695; another account mentions 250 such establishments in operation at the time of the emperor's death. The greatest development occurred in metallurgy, mining, and textiles. In effect, the emperor created the Russian textile industry, while he de-

developed mining and metallurgy impressively from very modest beginnings, establishing them, notably, in the Urals. He promoted many other industries as well, including the production of china and glass.

To facilitate trade Peter the Great built canals and began the construction of a merchant marine. For instance, a canal was built between 1703 and 1709 to connect the Neva with the Volga. Indeed, the Volga-Don canal itself, finally completed by the Soviet government after the Second World War, had been one of the reformer's projects. In the course of Peter the Great's reign Russian foreign trade increased fourfold, although it continued to be handled in the main by foreign rather than Russian merchants. On the whole, although some of the emperor's economic undertakings failed and many exacted a heavy price, Peter the Great exercised a major and creative influence on the development of the Russian economy. Later periods built on his accomplishments — there was no turning back.

Education and Culture

There could be no turning back in culture either. In a sense Peter the Great's educational and cultural reforms proved to be the most lasting of all, for they pushed Russia firmly and irrevocably in the direction of the West. While these measures will be discussed in more detail in the chapter dealing with Russian culture in the eighteenth century, it should be pointed out here that they fitted well into the general pattern of the emperor's activity. Utilitarian in his approach, the sovereign stressed the necessity of at least a minimum education for service; and he also encouraged schools that would produce specialists, such as the School of Mathematics and Navigation established in 1701. His broader plans included compulsory education for the gentry — which could not be translated into practice at the time — and the creation of the Academy of Sciences to develop, guide, and crown learning in Russia. This academy did come into existence a few months after the reformer's death. Through-out his life Peter the Great showed a burning interest in science and technology as well as some interest in other areas of knowledge.

In bringing the civilization of the West to his native land, the emperor tried to introduce Western dress, manners, and usages, often by force and against strong opposition. The shaving of beards is a celebrated and abiding symbol of the reign. While the government demanded it "for the glory and comeliness of the state and the military profession" — to quote from Summar's excellent little book on Peter the Great — the traditionalists objected on the ground that shaving impaired the image of God in men and made the Russians look like such objectionable beings as Lutherans, Poles, Kalmyks, Tatars, cats, dogs, and monkeys. Similarly it was argued that the already-mentioned calendar reform stole time from God and that the
new simplified civil script should not be allowed to replace Church Slavonic. The assemblies or big society parties that women attended, who hitherto had been secluded, also aroused a storm. Yet by the end of Peter's reign members of the civil service, army, and navy, of the upper classes, and to some extent even of the middle classes, particularly in the two leading cities, were shaven and wore foreign dress. Other Western innovations also generally succeeded in winning more adherents with time. It might be added in passing that the criticism frequently levied at Peter the Great that he split Russian society in two appears to miss the point.

The reformer had no choice, for he could not bring Western culture to all of his subjects at the same time. The gap between the Westernized segment of the population and the masses had to be bridged by his successors, if at all.

The Problem of Succession

The conflict between old Muscovy and new imperial Russia was played out in the sovereign's own family. Both Peter the Great's mother and his first wife Eudoxia, whom he forced to become a nun in 1698, belonged to the unreformed. In 1690 Eudoxia gave Peter a son, Alexis. The boy lived with his mother until her seclusion and later with aunts, in the old Moscovite palace. The emperor had little time for his son and never established rapport with him. Instead Alexis became the hope of the opponents of the new order and their rallying point. In 1711 Peter the Great married Alexis to a German princess. In 1712 the emperor himself married for the second time, taking as his wife a Lithuanian woman of low origin named Catherine, whom he had found in Menshikov's household, with whom he had been living happily for a few years, and by whom he had had children. It might be added that, because of her understanding and energy, Catherine proved on the whole to be a good companion to the emperor, whom she accompanied even in his campaigns. In 1715 Alexis's wife died after giving birth to a son, Peter.

At that point Peter the Great demanded that Alexis either endorse Peter's reforms and become a worthy successor to his father or renounce his rights to the throne. With characteristically passive resistance, Alexis agreed to give up his rights. Soon after that, in 1716, when Peter the Great, then in Denmark, called for his son, Alexis used the opportunity to escape to Austria and ask the protection of Emperor Charles VI, who had married a sister of Alexis's late wife. The following year, however, Peter the Great's emissary persuaded Alexis to return to Russia. He arrived in Moscow in 1718 and received pardon from his father on condition that he renounce his rights to the throne and name those who had urged him to escape. The last point led to an investigation, which, although it failed to discover an actual plot against the emperor, brought to light a great deal of opposition to and hatred of the new order, as well as some scandals. The pardon of Alexis was withdrawn as a result of the investigation and a trial set. Over a hundred high dignitaries of the state acted as the special court that condemned Alexis to death. But before the execution could be carried out Alexis expired in the fortress of Peter and Paul in the summer of 1718, probably from shock and also torture used during the questioning. Nine of his associates were executed, nine sentenced to hard labor, while many others received milder punishments.

Peter the Great's several sons born to Catherine died at an early age. Possible heirs, therefore, included the emperor's grandson Peter, the emperor's daughters and those of his half-brother Tsar Ivan V, and the emperor's wife Catherine. In 1722 Peter the Great passed a law of succession which disregarded the principle of hereditary seniority and proclaimed instead that the sovereign could appoint his successor. Once more position was to be determined by merit! But the emperor never used his new law. His powerful organism worn out by disease, strain, and an irregular life, he died on February 8, 1725, without designating a successor to his glorious victory, multinational, modernizing, and exhausted empire.

Evaluations of Peter the Great

Peter the Great hit Muscovy with a tremendous impact. To many of his contemporaries he appeared as either a virtually superhuman hero or the Antichrist. It was the person of the emperor that drove Russia forward in war and reform and inspired the greatest effort and utmost devotion. It was also against Peter the Great that the stryshi, the Bashkirs, the inhabitants of Astrakhan, and the motley followers of Bulavin staged their rebellions, while uncounted others, Old Believers and Orthodox, fled to the borderlands and into the forests to escape his reach. Rumor spread and legends grew that the reformer was not a son of Tsar Alexis, but a foreigner who substituted himself for the true tsar during the latter's journey abroad, that he was an imposter, a usurper, indeed the Antichrist. Peter himself contributed much to this polarization of opinion. He too saw things in black and white, hating old Muscovy and believing himself to be the creator of a new Russia. Intolerance, violence, and compulsion became the distinguishing traits of the new regime, and St. Petersburg — built in the extreme northwestern corner of the country, in almost inaccessible swamps at a cost in lives far exceeding that of Poltava — became its fitting symbol. The emperor's very size, strength, energy, and temperament intensified his popular image.

So the matter stood for about one hundred and fifty years, or roughly
until the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Peter the Great was revered and eulogized by the liberals, who envisaged him as a champion of light against darkness, and also by the imperial government and its ideologists, for, after all, that government was the first emperor's creature. Those who hated the reformer and his work included, in addition to the Old Believers and some other members of the inarticulate masses, such quixotic romantic intellectuals as the Slavophiles, who fancied to have discovered in pre-Petrine Russia the true principles and way of life of their people and who regarded the emperor as a supreme perverter and destroyer. It took a sensitive writer like Pushkin to draw a balance, emphasizing the necessity and the greatness of Peter's reforms and state, while at the same time lamenting their human cost. And Pushkin too was, in fact, overwhelmed by the image of Peter the Great.

Finally, with the work of S. Soloviev, himself a great admirer of the reformer, and other nineteenth-century historians the picture began gradually to change. Scholarly investigations of the last hundred years, together with large-scale publication of materials on the reformer's reign, undertaken by a number of men from Golikov to Bogoslovsky, have established beyond question many close connections between Peter the Great and the Muscovite past. Entire major aspects of the reformer's reign, for example, foreign policy and social relations and legislation, testified to a remarkable continuity with the preceding period. Even the reformer's desire to curb and control ecclesiastical landholding had excellent Muscovite precedents.

The central issue itself, the process of Westernization, had begun long before the reformer and had gathered momentum rapidly in the seventeenth century. In the words of a modern scholar, Peter the Great simply marked Russia's transition from an unconscious to a conscious following of her historical path.

Although in the perspective of Russian history Peter the Great appears human rather than superhuman, the reformer is still of enormous importance. Quite possibly Russia was destined to be Westernized, but Peter the Great cannot be denied the role of the chief executor of this fate. At the very least the emperor's reign brought a tremendous speeding up of the irreversible process of Westernization, and it established state policy and control, where formerly individual choice and chance prevailed.

Since Peter the Great was practical, and a utilitarian, it may be better to conclude this discussion on a more mundane note than historical destiny. Long ago Pogodin, a historian, a Right-wing intellectual, and one of the many admirers of the emperor, wrote:

Yes, Peter the Great did much for Russia. One looks and one does not believe it, one keeps adding and one cannot reach the sum. We cannot open our eyes, cannot make a move, cannot turn in any direction without encountering him everywhere, at home, in the streets, in church, in school, in court, in the regiment, at a promenade — it is always he, always he, every day, every minute, at every step!

We wake up. What day is it today? January 1, 1841 — Peter the Great ordered us to count years from the birth of Christ; Peter the Great ordered us to count the months from January.

It is time to dress — our clothing is made according to the fashion established by Peter the First, our uniform according to his model. The cloth is woven in a factory which he created; the wool is shorn from the sheep which he started to raise.

A book strikes our eyes — Peter the Great introduced this script and himself cut out the letters. You begin to read it — this language became a written language, a literary language, at the time of Peter the First, superseding the earlier church language.

Newspapers are brought in — Peter the Great introduced them.

You must buy different things — they all, from the silk neckerchief to the sole of your shoe, will remind you of Peter the Great; some were ordered by him, others were brought into use or improved by him, carried on his ships, into his harbors, on his canals, on his roads.

At dinner, all the courses, from salted herring, through potatoes which he ordered grown, to wine made from grapes which he began to cultivate, will speak to you of Peter the Great.

After dinner you drive out for a visit — this is an assemble of Peter the Great. You meet the ladies there — they were admitted into masculine company by order of Peter the Great.

Let us go to the university — the first secular school was founded by Peter the Great.

You receive a rank — according to Peter the Great's Table of Ranks. The rank gives me gentry status — Peter the Great so arranged it. I must file a complaint — Peter the Great prescribed its form. It will be received — in front of Peter the Great's mirror of justice. It will be acted upon — on the basis of the General Reglament.

You decide to travel abroad — following the example of Peter the Great; you will be received well — Peter the Great placed Russia among the European states and began to instill respect for her; and so on, and so on, and so on.