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## ENGLISH VIEWS OF RUSSIA IN THE AGE OF PETER THE GREAT

MATTHEW S. ANDERSON

"YESTERDAY THE CZAR [sic] of Muscovy was brought from Greenwich in his majesties barge, and at present lyes incognito at a house joyning to the water-side in Norfolk Street."<sup>1</sup> Thus simply a contemporary chronicler recorded the arrival in London of Peter I in January, 1698. What did the people amongst whom he was setting foot for the first and only time know of the country from which he had come?

Not unexpectedly, they knew very little about Russia, and few of them felt more than a superficial interest in events there. Not unexpectedly, because relations, both political and economic, between the two countries had for three generations been becoming increasingly tenuous and intermittent. In the last years of the sixteenth century Dutch competition had begun to undermine the formerly predominant position of English trade in Russia, while the Time of Troubles and the civil wars in England had alike been hostile to the development of stable and regular diplomatic relations. During the Commonwealth period the execution of Charles I, the jealousy felt by Russian merchants of the commercial privileges of the English, and the desire of the Russian Government to increase its income from customs duties combined to reduce English influence in Russia to a very low ebb.<sup>2</sup> After the Restoration the privileges enjoyed by English merchants, lost in 1649, were not regained. The decline of England's trade with Russia in face of Dutch competition became more and more marked, and seemed irreversible. The diplomatic contacts between the two countries in the later seventeenth century were slight, and the vaguely known struggles of the Muscovites with the Poles, Crimean Tatars, Cossacks, and Turks appeared, as a rule, of only minor importance to the powers of Western Europe.

The most obvious index of the slightness of English interest in Russia in the later seventeenth century is the paucity of English books on any aspect of Russian life, and the very limited value of most of what did appear in print. Even Milton's *A Brief History of*

<sup>1</sup> N. Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714* (Oxford, 1857), IV, 330.

<sup>2</sup> I. Lubimenko, "Anglo-Russian Relations during the First English Revolution," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, XI (1928), 39-60.

*Moscovia* (London, 1682), the best known of such works, is a mere compilation from Purchas and Hakluyt of quite negligible value as a history.<sup>3</sup> Remote, inhospitable, and possessing no cultural prestige whatever, Russia was not a country which any normal Englishman ever contemplated visiting for pleasure. "If thou bee wise, as wise thou art, and wilt be ruled by me, live still at home and covet not those barbarous coasts to see," wrote the poet Turberville in 1568 after a few months' personal experience of the country.<sup>4</sup> The ensuing century had done nothing to modify this judgment. Thus there was no demand for guides and itineraries of the type provided for travelers in France and Italy, far less for genuine studies of Russian history, geography, language, or politics, even had there been authors capable of producing them. The most fundamental contribution to a better understanding of Russia made in England during the century, the *Grammatica Russica* of H. W. Ludolf (Oxford, 1696) was by a German pietist interested mainly in the possibilities of religious propaganda in Muscovy, and was published largely because of the chance interest of an Oxford professor in comparative linguistics.<sup>5</sup>

What knowledge of Russia did exist in England was not only fragmentary and inaccurate,<sup>6</sup> less satisfactory in every way than it had been a hundred years earlier, but also confined as a rule to the less attractive aspects of the country and its people.<sup>7</sup> Samuel Collins, who spent nine years in Russia as physician to the Tsar Aleksej Mikhailovič, and whose *Present State of Russia* (London, 1671) was perhaps the best account of the country published during the century, criticized unsparingly the faults and vices of the Russians, their ignorance, their drunkenness, their superstition, the brutality of their punishments, and complained that "I shall hardly make the description of this barbarous place worth the pains and trouble of reading."<sup>8</sup> Similar judgments can be found in the works of all seventeenth century commentators on Russia, and were echoed by

<sup>3</sup> R. R. Cawley, *Milton's Literary Craftsmanship: a Study of a Brief History of Moscovia* (Princeton, 1941), *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> R. Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (Glasgow, 1903-5), III, 135.

<sup>5</sup> This was Edward Barnard, Savilian Professor of Astronomy. See J. S. G. Simmons, "H. W. Ludolf and the Printing of his *Grammatica Russica* at Oxford in 1696," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, I (Oxford, 1950), 108-13.

<sup>6</sup> Largely because of the ignorance of the Russian language from which the authors of most descriptions of Russia suffered. V. O. Ključevskij, *Skazanija innostrancev o Moskovskom gosudarstve* (Moscow, 1918), p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> K. H. Ruffmann, *Das Russlandbild im England Shakespeares* (Göttingen, 1952), p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 19-24, 26-29, 41, 73-74.

the English merchants settled in the country.<sup>9</sup> The note of contempt which sounds through them was sharpened by the complete failure of nearly all contemporaries to realize the potential greatness of Russia's military resources and political power. She was despised, not only because she was barbarous, but also because she was, or appeared to be, weak.

The few months which Peter spent in England (January to May, 1698) did little to change this state of affairs. The Tsar seemed, at least in externals, to typify in many ways the backwardness of the country which he ruled. "After I had seen him often," wrote Bishop Burnet, "and had conversed much with him, I could not but adore the depth of the providence of God, that had raised up such a furious man to so absolute an authority over so great a part of the world."<sup>10</sup> His shyness and *gaucherie* in public, even his extreme absorption in naval and maritime affairs, seemed only reflections of the uncultured and semi-European society in which he had been brought up.<sup>11</sup> His capture of Azov on the other hand had already aroused the hope that he might play some part in reducing Catholic (and above all French) influence in Eastern Europe. A contemporary versifier for example, comparing his victories with those of William III over Louis XIV, "the Christian Turk," proclaimed that

Thy name makes Rome reflect on Heroes Slain  
And dread the Northern Nations once again.<sup>12</sup>

On the whole, however, the Tsar's visit made little real difference to the vague outlines of the conventional English picture of Russia. His presence in London did stimulate a short-lived and superficial curiosity about the country from which he had come, and hence the publication, in 1698 and 1699, of a number of books designed to meet this temporary demand. None of these attempted to challenge the accepted view of Russia as remote, backward, and, except as a source of supply for a few raw materials, fundamentally unimportant. One of them, *The Ancient and Present State of Muscovy* by Jodocus Crull, was the most detailed description of the country yet to appear in English. Even it, however, merely repeated the criticisms of Collins and others and, though praising the energy and

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the letters of Thomas Hale, a merchant in Archangel and Moscow, to his brother Bernard, of August 31, 1702, May 9, 1703, April 8, 1706, in British Museum Additional MSS. 33573. (All dates are New Style.)

<sup>10</sup> Bishop Burnet, *History of His Own Time* (Oxford, 1833), IV, 408.

<sup>11</sup> Luttrell, *op. cit.*, IV, 330, 332, 368; Burnet, *op. cit.*, IV, 407. *Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn*, W. Bray, ed. (London, 1906), III, 138, note 2.

<sup>12</sup> *A Congratulatory Poem to the Czar of Muscovy on His Arrival in England* (London, 1698).

open-mindedness of the Tsar,<sup>13</sup> dismissed the Russians as "A Nation guided for the most part merely by instinct."<sup>14</sup> Little realization was shown by any contemporary of the importance or even the existence of the process of westernization which had now been proceeding for a generation in Russia.

With the outbreak in 1700 of the Great Northern War the English attitude began to undergo relatively rapid and sometimes violent changes. The possible repercussions of the war upon events in Western Europe soon forced the Government to take more account than had hitherto been done of the great power now emerging on the eastern fringes of the continent, and Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations of a continuous and more or less modern kind may be said to date from the appointment of Charles Whitworth as envoy to Moscow in October, 1704. This official interest in the course of the war was heightened by the Russian victory at Poltava, by the accession of George I in 1714 and the consequent increase in the attention paid in England to German questions, and by the "Northern Crisis" of 1716-17. England remained keen and watchful up to the very moment of the signature of the Treaty of Nystad in 1721.

Parallel with, and lagging slightly behind, the governmental and diplomatic interest, can be discerned the slower growth in England of a more general and popular interest in Russia. Complete separation of the two is hardly possible or even desirable, for they were closely interconnected, and it is often not easy to tell whether a particular pamphlet or newspaper comment was inspired by the Government or by some group or party, or whether it expresses the real views of the educated public or even the mere idiosyncrasies of some individual.

On both levels, attention was focused, at least in the early years of the war, mainly on those aspects which directly affected the position in Western Europe. The Government wished to end the war by mediation, and proposals to this effect were accepted by both Russia and Poland, though uncompromisingly refused by Charles XII. This policy was inspired, not by any concern for Russia, Sweden, Poland, or the Baltic provinces for their own sake, but rather by the approach of a new Anglo-French war and the hope of using the forces which would be set free by a peace in the North in the struggle in Western Europe which was seen to be imminent. It was partly with this object in view that the Govern-

<sup>13</sup> Jodocus Crull, *The Ancient and Present State of Muscovy* (London, 1698), II, 204-5, 208.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, I, Epistle Dedicatory.

ment guaranteed the Treaty of Travendahl, which removed Denmark from the ranks of Sweden's enemies in August, 1700, and it was not for several years that hope of intervention by Charles XII on the anti-French side in the war of the Spanish Succession was finally abandoned.

Popular, even more than official, interest in the first years of the war tended also to be focused on the western aspects of the struggle. Thus while Charles XII's descent on Zeeland, the Treaty of Travendahl, and the Holstein-Gottorp question all provoked a substantial amount of newspaper and pamphlet comment, so spectacular an event as the great defeat of the Russian Army at Narva seems to have aroused surprisingly little general interest in England.<sup>15</sup> Defoe's description of Poland

The World's proboscis, near the Globe's extremes,  
For barb'rous Men reasoned and barb'rous Names<sup>16</sup>

continued to be applicable, *a fortiori*, to the average Englishman's concept of Russia. The information available to him about events in Eastern Europe was in any case very vague and imprecise and was constantly distorted and overlaid by rumors, which made all news from that area more or less suspect. "It has been often observed already," pointed out David Jones in his *Compleat History of Europe for the Year 1708*, "that 'tis the hardest matter in the World to distinguish Truth from Falsehood in those parts."<sup>17</sup> Thus in 1703 the difficulties which John Robinson, the English envoy to Sweden, was encountering in obtaining an audience with Charles XII produced strong rumors of the King's death, while even the battle of Poltava was followed, in August 1709, by reports of a great Swedish victory.<sup>18</sup>

The annihilation of the Swedish army in the Ukraine changed this position in a number of ways. On the official level, it endowed Peter and his allies with the power to partition or even destroy the Swedish Empire, and thus posed the question of a Russian-dominated Baltic, while by the influence in Poland and many of the German states which it gave him it brought forward the still wider problem of the place of Russia in the whole European state system. It had, of

<sup>15</sup> Of the seventy-six contemporary accounts of the battle of Narva cited by C. R. Minzloff, *Pierre le Grand dans la littérature étrangère* (St. Petersburg, 1872), pp. 256-77, none is in English.

<sup>16</sup> It comes from his poem *The Dyet of Poland, a Satyr* (London, 1705).

<sup>17</sup> David Jones, *Compleat History of Europe for the Year 1708*, p. 318.

<sup>18</sup> Luttrell, *op. cit.*, V, 282; Defoe, *Review of the State of the British Nation* (September 5, 1709), Miscellanea.

course, been realized long before 1709 that the Tsar was making great efforts to develop the military and above all the naval strength of Russia. As early as 1703 a newsletter from Hamburg<sup>19</sup> had credited him with the assembly, for a descent on the Livonian coast, of not less than a thousand small crafts, besides twenty-two frigates and a number of other vessels. Obviously the acquisition of Riga and Reval and the building of St. Petersburg have added scope to his maritime ambitions, but it was only after 1709 that a note of real anxiety at the prospect of Russian predominance in the Baltic became clearly audible in the correspondence of British statesmen.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the growing concern aroused by the new position in the North, however, preoccupation with the war and peace negotiations with France, and with the ever-present Succession question prevented for a number of years any effective intervention. "It is impossible," wrote St. John, "unless we are happy enough to draw ourselves out of the Warr we are engag'd in, that we should be able to give them [the anti-Swedish powers] the law, or to have that weight which we formerly had and which in prudence we ought always to keep ourselves in a condition of employing."<sup>21</sup>

The Treaty of Utrecht, and still more the accession of George I, who was already at least in principle a member of the anti-Swedish coalition, and whose forces had been since 1712 in possession of Verden, a part of the Swedish Empire, changed the whole position. For a time it seemed that a *de facto* alliance based upon the desire of their rulers to enrich themselves at the expense of Sweden might be established between Britain and Russia, particularly as an Anglo-Russian commercial treaty was being held out by the Tsar as a bait to attract British support.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, popular interest in Peter and the land he ruled continued in the years after Poltava to lag behind official interest. Occasional conformity, relations with France and Holland, the Treaty of Utrecht, the Protestant Succession, the Jacobites—these rather than the growth of Russian power continued to be the issues which stimulated the imagination of

<sup>19</sup> Dated August 10, 1703, in Public Record Office, State Papers Foreign, S. P. 101/40, Newsletters, Hamburg, 1703-26.

<sup>20</sup> In St. John (Secretary of State for the Northern Department) to Raby (Ambassador to Prussia) January 1, 1711, State Papers Foreign, Foreign Entry Books, S. P. 104/52. As early as December 1706 however Peter had thought it necessary to order A. A. Matveev, his newly appointed representative in London, to assure the Government that he did not intend to construct a large Baltic fleet. L. A. Nikiforov, *Russkie-Angliiskie otnošenija pri Pëtre I* (Moscow, 1950), p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> To Whitworth, December 11, 1711, S. P. 104/121.

<sup>22</sup> Various projects for such a treaty can be found in State Papers Foreign, Treaty Papers, S.P. 103/61.

journalists and the passions of the public. The publication from 1708 onwards of the first adequate English maps of Russia<sup>23</sup> may be taken as a symptom of some growth of interest, stimulated by the war, in the geography of Eastern Europe, though such general descriptions of Russia as were published<sup>24</sup> continued to be so sketchy or out of date as to be almost or quite worthless. The violence and intransigence of Charles XII, and his increasing identification in the public mind with the idea of absolute monarchy<sup>25</sup> deprived him of most of the sympathy which his misfortunes might otherwise have gained him, but the ferocity with which the war was conducted by the Russians, and in particular the ravaging of the Baltic provinces, prevented any growth in the popularity of his great opponent. If Peter were defeated, wrote Defoe, "Europe will rejoice in the downfall of his Power as they would of a Royal Butcher rather than a Christian monarch."<sup>26</sup>

It is the "Northern Crisis" of 1716-17 rather than the Battle of Poltava which marks the beginnings of a really active British popular interest in Russia and Russian policy. It is thus a milestone in the history of Anglo-Russian relations. The origin and development of this crisis—the agreement for a joint Russo-Danish attack upon southern Sweden to be supported if necessary by a British fleet; the consequent assembly of a large Russian force in Zealand; the sudden decision of the Tsar in September, 1716 (undoubtedly justified from a military point of view) to abandon the enterprise; the consequent collapse of the whole anti-Swedish coalition and the quartering of much of the Russian force for the winter of 1716-17 in the Duchy of Mecklenburg to the alarm of the British and Danish governments; these facts are fairly well known and have been described in detail more than once. The point which must be stressed here is that from the events of 1716 was generated the first outburst of genuine anti-Russian feeling ever seen in Britain. Even the discovery a few months later that the Swedish representatives in London and the Hague, Counts Gyllenborg and Goertz, if not Charles XII himself, had been intriguing to bring about a Jacobite restoration, which for a time made Sweden appear as great a threat

<sup>23</sup> H. Moll, *Map of Muscovy, Poland, Little Tartary and ye Black Sea* (London, 1708); C. Price, *A Correct Map of Muscovy* (London, 1711); Senex and Maxwell, *A Map of Muscovy* (London, 1712).

<sup>24</sup> H. Curson, *A New Description of the World* (London, 1706) (often reprinted), and A. D. Chancel, *A New Journey over Europe* (London, 1714).

<sup>25</sup> J. J. Murray, "British Public Opinion and the Rupture of Anglo-Swedish Relations in 1717," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLIV (1948), 127-28.

<sup>26</sup> *Review* (April 13, 1713), Cf. the issues of January 26 and 28, 1713, and his *History of the Wars of His Present Majesty Charles XII, King of Sweden* (London, 1715), pp. 147, 175.



to British interests as Russia,<sup>27</sup> did little to modify the distrust now felt of Peter I.

This distrust was aroused, above all, by the vast schemes of territorial conquest ascribed to the Tsar. The most anti-Russian of the numerous pamphlets which the crisis called forth, *The Northern Crisis, or Reflections on the Policies of the Czar*, voiced a widespread fear when it accused Peter of trying to lay "all the Burthen and Hazard of the war" upon his allies, and thus weaken them as well as Sweden "whilst he was preparing to swallow the one after the other." His own troops, it argued, were used only for easy conquests, or forcibly maintained at the expense of neutral states. The constant disorder in Poland was "in a great Measure owing to Muscovite intrigues" and the failure of the proposed attack on Scania was caused largely by Peter's desire to enfeeble Denmark. His lust for aggrandizement abroad, sharpened by the arbitrary power he wielded in Russia was unsatiable, for "Whatever Ends an insatiate Desire of Opulency, and a boundless Thirst for Dominion can ever put him upon, to satisfie their craving and voracious Appetites, those must, most undoubtedly, be his."<sup>28</sup> The same picture of Russian policy as dominated by ambition and treachery was drawn by other pamphleteers. The possibility that the Tsar might attempt to paralyze the activities of the British Government by giving help to the Jacobites particularly exercised many of them. It was suggested, for example, that one of Peter's Scottish doctors, Robert Areskine (Erskine), a cousin of John Erskine, Earl of Mar, the leader of the 1715 revolt, might have persuaded him to abandon the attack upon Sweden in order to allow Charles XII to invade England and re-establish the Stuarts.<sup>29</sup> Certainly there seems to be no doubt that Erskine was in touch with most of the leading Jacobite exiles.<sup>30</sup>

A more specific complaint was that Russia now controlled nearly all the sources from which Britain drew her supplies of essential naval stores. This, it could be plausibly argued, was economically

<sup>27</sup> For details see J. J. Murray, "Sweden and the Jacobites," the *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, VIII (1944-5), 259-76. Popular hostility to Sweden was undoubtedly encouraged by the Government to mobilize public support for George I's territorial ambitions in North Germany.

<sup>28</sup> *The Northern Crisis, or Reflections on the Policies of the Czar* (London, 1716), pp. 15-18.

<sup>29</sup> "A Letter from a Gentleman at Hamburg to His Friend at Amsterdam" in A. Boyer, *The Political State of Great Britain* (1717), XIII, 506-15. Cf. J. F. Chance, *George I and the Northern War*, pp. 165-66.

<sup>30</sup> "Letters and Documents Relating to Robert Erskine, Physician to Peter the Great, Czar of Russia, 1677-1720," R. Paul, ed., *Miscellany of the Scottish Historical Society*, II (Edinburgh, 1904), 418-22.

and strategically dangerous, and the maintenance of at least a reduced Swedish Empire to prevent a complete Russian monopoly of such stores was an essential British interest. If the Baltic provinces were returned to Sweden or even became the property of some third power their ports, Riga, Reval, Narva, and St. Petersburg would compete with Archangel for the trade. No one power would then monopolize the supply of this "Indispensable Needful." Already George Mackenzie, British Minister to Russia in 1714-15, had argued, in a great report of August 31, 1715<sup>31</sup> on the conquered Baltic provinces, that "a due distribution of Livonia is of the utmost importance to Us not only for Trade but other Motives to which we can't be indifferent," and that to allow Peter to keep both St. Petersburg and Archangel would be to "lay our Nation and Navy at his discretion." Existing difficulties in the supply of naval stores, urged Count Gyllenborg, in a pamphlet published in an English newspaper, were "but a Prelude to the Dance he [Peter] is like to lead us [the British] when Sweden's Ruin puts him in a Condition to accomplish his Projects."<sup>32</sup>

This line of argument was also reinforced by reports of the fortification of the newly acquired Baltic ports,<sup>33</sup> which clearly indicated the intention to retain them as bases for the newly built Russian fleet. These drove home the fact that Russia's pursuit of naval power had now become a good deal more than a mere amiable whim of the Tsar. Peter's achievements in the creation of a navy were clearly seen and indeed somewhat exaggerated. It was feared, not unjustifiably in view of later developments, that the Russian fleet might soon outnumber those of Sweden and Denmark combined, and enable the Tsar to end the war by a sudden blow at Sweden proper, perhaps even the seizure of Stockholm or Gothenburg. "Which done," wrote the author of *The Northern Crisis*, "let us look to ourselves, he will then most certainly become our Rival, and as dangerous to us as he is now neglected."<sup>34</sup>

Religious prejudices, still an important political force, were also appealed to by anti-Russian publicists. Political antagonism to Peter and his policies was heightened by the fact that the Swedes, whom he seemed on the point of overwhelming, had been regarded from the time of Gustavus Adolphus as one of the bulwarks of European, and particularly German, Protestantism. Behind at least some of

<sup>31</sup> In State Papers Foreign, Russia, S.P. 91/107.

<sup>32</sup> "An English Merchant's Remarks upon a Scandalous Jacobite Paper Publish'd the 19th of July Last in the *Post-Boy* etc." in Boyer, *op. cit.* (1716), XII, 305-20.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., the account of the fortification of Reval in the *Post-Boy* of January 14-16, 1717.

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

the pamphlets and newspaper articles of the years after 1716 it is possible to detect a note of real alarm over the possible religious repercussions if Sweden were completely defeated. Already Defoe had proclaimed, "I look upon the Swedes, next to the British and Dutch Nations, to be the Great and only Support and Refuge of the Protestant Interest in the World, and I always did so." Therefore the other Protestant powers should intervene jointly to put an end to the war for "If the Swedes are oppress'd, who is aggrandiz'd by it but the Poles on the one hand, a Popish Nation, and the Muscovites on the other, whose Power no good Man wishes to see greater than it is?"<sup>35</sup> The Russian occupation of Mecklenburg gave such arguments added point. If Russia conquered or dominated North Germany, wrote the author of *The Northern Crisis*, "I tremble to speak it, it is not impossible but in this age of Christianity, the Protestant Religion should in a great measure be abolish'd, and that Among the Christians (as well as once among the Heathens) the Greeks and the Romans may once more come to be the only Contenders for Universal Empire."<sup>36</sup> Other pamphlets argued that "Our first maxim is to support the Protestant Interest everywhere," that the Swedes were "a brave Protestant People" and that measures directed against them "must unavoidably endanger the whole Protestant Interest."<sup>37</sup>

The anti-Russian feeling which had so suddenly crystallized in 1716-17 retained its strength for a number of years. Much of it outlived the Great Northern War and even the Tsar himself. On the official level, the conclusion of the Hanoverian-Swedish treaty of November, 1719, by which Bremen and Verden were finally ceded to George I, consolidated the pro-Swedish attitude which had for some time been developing in London,<sup>38</sup> and seemed to mark Russia more clearly than ever as a ruthless and ambitious foe. Even after the signature of the Treaty of Nystad, which ended the war in August, 1721, Peter retained the power to threaten George I's peaceful possession of the territory he had acquired by supporting the claims of the Duke of Holstein to the Duchy of Schleswig. Moreover his increasingly close contacts with the Jacobite leaders, who were known to be pressing him for military action in their

<sup>35</sup> *Review*, March 18, 1713.

<sup>36</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> *The State-Anatomy of Great Britain* (6th ed., London, 1717), p. 53.; *Reasons for the Present Conduct of Sweden . . . Set Forth in a Letter from a Gentleman at Dantzic to his Friend at Amsterdam* (London, 1717), Preface. (The latter is Swedish-inspired.)

<sup>38</sup> For examples of this attitude see Townshend (Secretary of State for the Northern Department) to Finch (Envoy to Sweden), March 12, April 1 and 11, 1721, S.P. 104/155.

favor,<sup>39</sup> could hardly fail to arouse the hostility of both Government and public opinion. The growth of Russia's naval power still proceeded, in spite of unsuccessful attempts to hamper it by bribing the British shipbuilders and artificers in the Tsar's service to return home.<sup>40</sup> In 1719 it was being argued with passionate conviction that "no more the interest of our British Trade than that of our State can suffer the Czar to have a Fleet, if needs must he should retain a Seaport, on the Baltick."<sup>41</sup> Only the period of aristocratic reaction under Peter's successors, and the abandonment of many of his policies were able slowly to appease the suspicions so suddenly and violently aroused in 1716.

However, by the last years of the great Tsar's reign Russia had undoubtedly begun to occupy a far more prominent place in the mind of the educated Englishman than ever before. He remained, nevertheless, little better informed about many of the most important aspects of Russian life and society than he had been in the previous century. The information about Russia available to him continued to be far scantier and less accurate than that about any country in Western Europe. The weaknesses behind the impressive façade which Russia now presented to the outside world were still very inadequately understood. Peter's reforms, and his grandiose schemes of public works, now aroused an uncritical and somewhat excessive admiration in England. John Perry, himself for many years an engineer in Russian service, did much to draw attention to this aspect of the Tsar's activities in *The State of Russia under the Present Czar* (London, 1716), a work of historical importance, since upon it was based much of the idealized picture of Peter drawn by Fontenelle in his *Eloges* and Voltaire in his *Vie de Pierre le Grand*.<sup>42</sup> Perry paid generous tribute to the immense personal efforts which Peter was making to develop Russia. "He has I believe (for the Proportion of Time that I was in the Country) travell'd twenty times more than ever any Prince in the world did before him," he wrote. English as well as French writers echoed his judg-

<sup>39</sup> See the almost servile letter of James III to the Tsar January 18, 1723 in N. V. Aleksandrenko, *Russkie diplomatičeskie agenty v Londone v 18 veke* (Warsaw, 1897), II, 34-36. On Jacobite influence at St. Petersburg at the end of the Tsar's life, see Thomas Consett to Townshend, July 11 and 28, 1725, S.P. 91/9, and M. W. Bruce, "Jacobite Relations with Peter the Great," *Slavonic and East European Review*, XIV (1936), 343-62.

<sup>40</sup> Jefferyes (Minister to Russia) to Craggs (Secretary of State for the Southern Department) November 18, 1719, S. P. 91/9.

<sup>41</sup> "Truth is but Truth as it is Timed," Boyer, *op. cit.* (1719), XVIII, 161.

<sup>42</sup> A. Lortholary, *Le Mirage russe en France au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris, 1951), p. 285, note 4; p. 286, note 26.

ments and plagiarized his book, so that by the end of Peter's reign the image of the Tsar-Reformer was securely implanted in the mind of the English reading public. The darker side of the picture, the immense human cost of the changes and developments introduced into Russia by him, passed almost unrecognized, and the scope and violence of the opposition he encountered from large groups of his subjects were scarcely at all understood.

His subjection of the Russian church was seen and approved of, but the significance of the cleavage in Russian religious life between Orthodox and Old Believers escaped most English writers completely. It would almost be possible to read every book and pamphlet relating to Russia published in English during Peter's reign without realizing that such people as the *raskol'niki* existed, and certainly without understanding their numbers and importance. The only significant work of the period to which these criticisms do not completely apply is one not originally written in English, *The Present State of Russia in Two Volumes* (London, 1722-23) by F. C. Weber,<sup>43</sup> Hanoverian Resident in St. Petersburg from 1714 to 1719. This must rank as one of the most perceptive studies of Russia ever made, for it includes not only some recognition of the importance of religious divisions but also one of the very few contemporary allusions to two of the perennial problems of Russian government and society in the eighteenth century, the runaway serf and the corrupt *činovnik*.<sup>44</sup> *The Account of Russia as It Was in the Year 1710*, by Charles Whitworth, who had been British representative in Moscow from 1705 to 1712, also gave an analysis, in many ways penetrating, of developments in the earlier years of Peter's reign. It seems, in particular, to have been one of the first works to recognize the importance of internal colonization in the development of the Russian Empire,<sup>45</sup> but was not published till 1758.

Because of this ignorance of conditions and events within Russia it was possible for English observers to create for themselves in Peter's later years, and still more after his death, a picture of his character and achievements in some ways unduly flattering. This overestimate was based, in the last analysis, on the great military and political successes won by Russia under his rule. "The Czar," wrote the author of *The Northern Crisis*, "is by Nature of a great

<sup>43</sup> Originally published in German as *Das Veränderte Russland* (Frankfurt, 1721).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 70-73.

<sup>45</sup> Whitworth, *The Account of Russia as It Was in the Year 1710*, pp. 29-30.

and enterprising Spirit, and a Genius thoroughly Politick” and “his Plans carry in them a prodigious Deal of Prudence and Foresight, and his Ends are at Long Run brought about by a kind of Magick in Policy.”<sup>46</sup> In 1716 these were merely additional reasons for distrusting a man endowed with such uncomfortable abilities, but in the last years of Peter’s life, when the Treaty of Nystad had placed the stamp of finality upon his victories, these qualities came to be admired for their own sake. His policies seemed to be justified by the vulgar but inescapable criterion of practical success. Nothing could counterbalance the fact that he had been victorious and his rival defeated. Indeed the rise of Peter I in popular esteem was connected with, and largely dependent upon, a corresponding fall in the fashionable estimate of Charles XII. The defeat of Poltava went far to destroy the prestige which the King of Sweden had until then enjoyed in England, to deprive him of the status of a “Protestant Hero,” and to stamp him as merely a wrongheaded, ambitious and unsuccessful tyrant, who had met the fate he deserved. His career after Poltava seemed to show him as careless of the interests and welfare of his country and oblivious to all but personal ambition. After his death, and to some extent even before it, he became to most Englishmen the object of a dislike often curiously combined with both admiration and pity, and the example used by a score of writers from Johnson downward to point the moral that pride goeth before a fall.<sup>47</sup>

By contrast, the books of Perry and Weber, with their accounts of the vast material and social changes Peter was attempting to bring about in Russia, the encouragement given to foreign officers, teachers, and experts of all kinds, the limitation of the power of the Church, and the projected Academy of Sciences, all tended to produce an impression, in some ways deceptive, of progress, achievement, and increasing civilization.<sup>48</sup> This impression was often grossly exaggerated. Defoe, for example, spoke of the whole Russian people as “Searchers after Wisdom, studying Sciences, and eagerly bringing Home Books, Instruments and Artists from the most learned parts of the World for their Instruction.”<sup>49</sup> However, once formed, it was not seriously shaken by the reaction against

<sup>46</sup> *The Northern Crisis*, pp. 9, 25.

<sup>47</sup> See for example Swift’s comments on him in the Introduction to *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation* (Dublin, 1738), in *Works* (Temple Scott Edition), IX, 226.

<sup>48</sup> There is a good example of the conventional contrast between the harsh and warlike Charles and the pacific and constructive Peter in a play, *The Northern Heroes*, produced in London in 1748.

<sup>49</sup> *An Impartial History of the Life and Actions of Peter Alexowitz the Present Czar of Muscovy* (London, 1723), p. 3.

Peter's ideas and methods which followed his death, or, for that matter by the trial, torture, and death, in 1718, of his son Aleksej, the official explanation of which was accepted with little question in Britain.

In some sense a "self-made man," Peter appealed to an age in which practical intelligence, diligence, and energy were increasingly valued in a ruler, and it is not surprising that within a generation of his death his career was being used to exemplify the salutary effect of these virtues. The best of his eighteenth century biographers, for example, hoped that his achievements would "excite people in lower stations to the diligent practice of those duties which they owe to their countries, to their families, and to themselves."<sup>50</sup> An autocrat, working upon a backward and submissive people, he typified to an age receptive to such an idea the possibilities of what later became "enlightened despotism." The greatness of his achievement seemed magnified by the poorness of the human material which he had to manipulate. Few people in Western Europe were ready as yet to accept the Russians as their intellectual equals. In 1718 the poet Aaron Hill had proclaimed that:

Briton and Russian differ but in name,  
In nature's sense, all nations are the same.  
One world, divided, distant brothers share,  
And man is reason's subject—everywhere.<sup>51</sup>

But this was as yet a minority point of view. To most observers the backwardness and barbarity of Peter's subjects—"Creatures with the Names of Men, but with Qualities rather Brutal than Rational"—as one of his admirers called them<sup>52</sup>—made his successes appear all the more remarkable. "His Piety is visible in his noble Attempt to reform the Manners of his People, his Resolution great, in thwarting their Inclinations and obliging them to relinquish their long espoused Errors and superstitious Practices, which they were born and bred up in," wrote the Chaplain of the British factory at St. Petersburg.<sup>53</sup> From his career, it was pointed out a few years after his death, "We may see how much Reason every Nation has

<sup>50</sup> A. Gordon, *The History of Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia* (Aberdeen, 1755), I, Preface, xxiii-xxiv. According to Minzloff (*op. cit.*, p. 53), W. H. Dilworth's *The Father of His Country, or the History of the Life . . . of Peter the Great, Czar of Muscovy* (London, 1758) is the first life of the Tsar written "dans un but pedagogique."

<sup>51</sup> *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill* (London, 1753), III, 183.

<sup>52</sup> The phrase comes from the epitaph printed in Boyer, *op. cit.* (1725), XXXV, 167-69. See also the epitaph in *Historical Register* (1728), X, 90.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Consett, *The Present State and Regulations of the Church of Russia* (London, 1729), Preface p. xiv.

to thank Providence for setting a great good Man upon their Throne.”<sup>54</sup> Whatever doubts the contemporary Englishman may have had about the abilities and capacities of the Russian people, he had few or none about those of Peter I. What M. Lortholary has called “le mythe de Pierre le Grand” was already in process of formation.

<sup>54</sup> Boyer, *op. cit.* (1731), XLI, 502.