

THIRTEEN YEARS AT THE RUSSIAN COURT

IN CAPTIVITY AT TSARSKOÏE-SELO
March to August, 1917



THE CZAR CLEARING A PATH THROUGH THE SNOW IN THE PARK OF
TSARSKOÏE-SELO AT THE END OF MARCH, 1917.

{Frontispiece.

THIRTEEN YEARS AT THE RUSSIAN COURT

(A Personal Record, of the Last Years and
Death of the Czar Nicholas II. and his Family)

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WITH 59 ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

IN September, 1920, after staying three years in Siberia, I was able to return to Europe. My mind was still full of the poignant drama with which I had been closely associated, but I was also still deeply impressed by the wonderful serenity and flaming faith of those who had been its victims.

Cut off from communication with the rest of the world for many months, I was unfamiliar with recent publications on the subject of the Czar Nicholas II. and his family. I was not slow to discover that though some of these works revealed a painful anxiety for accuracy and their authors endeavoured to rely on serious records (although the information they gave was often erroneous or incomplete so far as the Imperial family was concerned), the majority of them were simply a tissue of absurdities and falsehoods—in other words, vulgar outpourings exploiting the most unworthy calumnies.¹

I was simply appalled to read some of them. But my indignation was far greater when I realised to my amazement that they had been accepted by the general public.

To rehabilitate the moral character of the Russian sovereigns was a duty—a duty called for by honesty and justice. I decided at once to attempt the task.

¹ To give some idea of what I mean, it is only necessary to record that in one of these books (which is based on the evidence of an *eyewitness* of the drama of Ekaterinburg, the authenticity of which is guaranteed) there is a description of my death! All the rest is on a par.

Everyone desiring information about the end of the reign of Nicholas II. should read the remarkable articles recently published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by M. Paleologue, the French Ambassador at Petrograd.

What I am endeavouring to describe is the drama of a lifetime, a drama I (at first) suspected under the brilliant exterior of a magnificent Court, and then realised personally during our captivity when circumstances brought me into intimate contact with the sovereigns. The Ekaterinburg drama was, in fact, nothing but the fulfilment of a remorseless destiny, the climax of one of the most moving tragedies humanity has known. In the following pages I shall try to show its nature and to trace its melancholy stages.

There were few who suspected this secret sorrow, yet it was of vital importance from a historical point of view. The illness of the Czarevitch cast its shadow over the whole of the concluding period of the Czar Nicholas II.'s reign and alone can explain it. Without appearing to be, it was one of the main causes of his fall, for it made possible the phenomenon of Rasputin and resulted in the fatal isolation of the sovereigns who lived in a world apart, wholly absorbed in a tragic anxiety which had to be concealed from all eyes.

In this book I have endeavoured to bring Nicholas II. and his family back to life. My aim is to be absolutely impartial and to preserve complete independence of mind in describing the events of which I have been an eyewitness. It may be that in my search for truth I have presented their political enemies with new weapons against them, but I greatly hope that this book will reveal them as they really were, for it was not the glamour of their Imperial dignity which drew me to them, but their nobility of mind and the wonderful moral grandeur they displayed through all their sufferings.

PIERRE GILLIARD.

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