

MY TWO SUMMERS ON THE ESTATE OF FORMER RUSSIAN TSAR NIKOLAI

Tsar Nikolai II had a landed estate in the Gubernia (state) of Orel, in central Russia. It covered a great area of land; hundreds of acres of forests, thousands of acres of farm land. There was also a very large lake (Altuhovo). It was subdivided into a number of "hutors." Each hutor was managed by a college-trained agriculturist. Each one of them was a specialist in some branch of agriculture and did research work in his particular specialty.

The name of the estate was "Brasovo." The nearest railroad station to it was Bransk, and Brasovo was some 20 miles from Bransk.

The general manager of Brasovo was General Nikolai Lavrinovsky. His family had financial interest in the platinum mines in the Ural Mountains. Mr. Lavrinovsky was a graduate of the Paige Corps, a military school to which were admitted only sons of generals. The uniform in that school was very ornamental and expensive because of the gold insignia. Lavrinovsky was the highest in scholarship in his graduating class. Because of that standing, he was the Kammer-paige of the Tsar. The Kammer-paige was a personal attendant to the Tsar and was the highest honor a student could receive.

After graduation, Lavrinovsky was officer in his majesty's Leib-guard regiment, the blue Cuirassiers. To be an officer in either of the Cuirassier regiments, the man had to have a fairly large independent income. He had to purchase his reserve horse. These horses had to match in size and color and they were very costly. When the regiment was

lined up for inspection, they had to look alike. The Cuirassier regiments used to be the pride of the Tsar's army. After retiring from the military service, Lavrinovsky was judge in a number of courts in the City of Pskov.

The Lavrinovskys had three sons. The youngest one, Michael, or Misha, was in the Paige Corps. In the spring of 1898, he did not pass the exams in algebra and German language. In order to be promoted to the next class (grade), he had to take the exams over after the summer vacation. His parents decided to engage a tutor; one who could help him with the subjects and who also could be a companion.

Michael's mother asked a Latvian lady to suggest some boy. This Latvian lady was a member of my brother's congregation. She knew me because I played the organ in the church. She knew my scholastic record and that I spoke German fluently. She suggested me to Michael's mother. After an interview with Misha's mother, I was engaged to be the tutor.

Lavrinovsky's private estate, "Stremutka," was about 15 miles from the City of Pskov. It was located in a beautiful country, along the Mnoga River. Here they expected to spend the years of retirement.

A tannery at Stremutka tanned horse hides for making cavalriest's riding boots. The peasant boys had a chance to earn some money by selling willow bark for use in the tanning process. Horses that were too old for farm work were purchased by the tannery. Stremutka was a contented and prosperous community where the poor and the rich were getting along peacefully.

After a week in Stremutka, we were ready to go to Brasovo. At Bransk, a troika was waiting for us. Troika was a 3-horse team. The middle horse usually was a trotter and the side horses were slow gallopers who just kept up with the trotter. The middle horses in Brasovo

troika were gray and the side horses were black; that was a Brasovo distinction.

At the palace, General Lavrinovsky was waiting for us. After dinner, the general invited me to select my saddle horse. I selected a part-Arab, a bay that I thought was the most beautiful horse there. After I announced my choice, the general said to me, "Karl Petrovich, I feel that I should give you a warning that whoever has ridden that horse has fallen." I stuck to my choice. I did not fall the first summer, Michael made good in his exams, and I was invited to come back the next summer.

At Brasovo was a guest practically every Sunday. The first guest, after my arrival, was a cavalry Colonel. At the dinner table, he bragged about his riding wild prairie horses. He, too, wanted to see the famous Brasovo greenhouses.

The general was not going that day with us to the greenhouses. His middle son, Paul, was home from the cavalry military school. He told the stableman to saddle the general's horse for the visitor.

A short distance from the palace, in order to go to the greenhouses, it was necessary to make a right-angle turn. We all turned but the general's horse kept going straight in the direction of the office and was persistent about it so the colonel could not do anything about it. Finally, the stableman took the horse by the bridle and led it back to our group. After this, the colonel had nothing more to say about his riding of wild horses. I think that the general's son expected that the horse would do just that to embarrass the colonel.

The largest area of the greenhouses was devoted to pineapples. Ripe pineapples were canned and sent to Petrograd. The Tsar used to give them as presents to his dinner guests. A pineapple that was ripened

while growing had a better flavor and texture than the ones that could be bought in fruit stores. These canned pineapples were appreciated because of their quality and as presents from the Tsar.

One morning, a group was gathering to go partridge hunting. The Tsar turned to me and said, "Karl Petrovich, of course, you are going with us." To that my answer was, "I am a gymnasium boy and the law forbids gymnasium boys to carry firearms." Tsar's reply was, "I am the Tsar and can change laws." To that I said, "If the law is going to be changed, I am going with you." And I went.

Going over the meadow, I spotted the head of a snake above the grass and shot at it. A most unusual thing happened--only the head of the snake was shot off and not a scratch anywhere else. The Tsar looked at the snake and said to me that I could not make another shot like that in another 100 years. "Majesty, just show me another snake," I said. No other snake showed up. The unusual thing about it was that I shot with a #4 shot.

For the dinner after the second day of hunting, Michael's mother told the cook to have an all bird meat dinner. Sergey, the cook, suggested to have sparrow meat for the pirog (pie). Michael and I shot the sparrows in the chicken yard. Everybody got some birds and the Tsar had a number, so he was well pleased. At the dinner, everybody praised the pirog and wanted to know what meat was in it. That was kept secret for fear it might create prejudice. After dinner, when the secret was disclosed, Tsar remarked that it was wonderful that sparrow's meat was so tasty.

Tsar's younger brother, Sergey, had tuberculosis and he had to live in a mild climate. Such climate was in Abas Tuman in the Caucasian

Mountains. The natives there used to say that Abas Tuman was the biblical paradise where Adam and Eve started their honeymoon. In the valley flowers bloomed the year around and snow-capped mountains protected them against winds. Sergey lived just in the valley; doctors had forbidden him to go up the mountains. He was expected to come to Brasovo to hunt. Just a day or so before he started out for the trip, he picked a saddle horse, galloped up a mountain. Apparently his lungs had started to bleed and he fell to the ground. When a Molokan woman came to him, he was already dead.

My brother, John, was a Lutheran minister for the Caucasian military district. Naval Captain von Trachtenberg was a Lutheran and the man in charge of the Abas Tuman grounds was a Lutheran. My brother had to visit them once a year to give them communion. During my Easter vacation, I went with him to see Abas Tuman. Every clock in the palace was stopped at 9:30 -- supposedly the hour when Sergey died.

On a hot day, I splashed my face with a cool mineral water. It was concentrated enough so that the skin on my face peeled off and, with the new skin, I looked like a newborn baby, except for size. When I returned to school, friends asked me where I had been. "In paradise," used to be my answer. Then I had to give some explanations for they did not think that I could get into paradise.

One afternoon I was playing some Russian folk songs, all in the same key, including the national Russian hymn "God, Guard the Tsar." Nikolai came along and sat in a relaxed position on a rocking chair next to me. When I changed from the folk songs to the national hymn, the Tsar changed to a sitting-up "attention position" and put his right hand to the temple, like in saluting. I also played the "Volga Boatmen" song

as it would sound on a quiet day, in a storm with the melody faintly audible, then as on a quiet day. The Tsar remarked that he had never heard the song played in that way and that it required close listening to understand it. Naturally, he had not heard it played for it was my own composition just then for the occasion. The Tsar invited me to play it in Zimny dvoretz/ (winter palace) on his piano. With all the real pianists available for him, I never made use of the invitation; I just thanked him for it.

It was a custom that only in very official conversations a person was addressed by the family name -- usually, by first name, with father's name with the ending "vich." I was Karl Petrovich, for my father's name was Peter.

I had only been in Brasovo a few days when, one morning, I walked into the dining room and heard a rather rough voice saying, "Karl Petrovich, pozhaluista n/a zavtrask," ("K.P., please to breakfast"). I was dumbfounded for I could not see anybody in the room. On the next invitation, I spotted that it came from one of the parrots. The ordinary name for priest in Russian language was "pop," the pet names for parrots were also "pop" and "popochka." The word "durack"; fool, was also in the parrot vocabulary.

As was customary, one Sunday afternoon we sat on the veranda and drank tea. Suddenly, a riotous noise came from a short distance away. The general wanted to find out the cause of it and a horse was saddled for everyone who wanted to go with him. We rode in the direction of the noise and came to a group of peasants milling at the edge of the tree nursery. When the forest guard told the general why the yelling and fist shaking, namely, because he had threatened to shoot the first man

ant when I was research chemist with the Standard Oil Company (N.J.). He told me about various incidents in Tsarskoye Selo.

When the liberating army, too, was getting near Tsarskoye Selo, the revolutionaries decided to move the Tsar and his family further away, towards the Ural Mountains. And, when the liberating army was getting near there too, the revolutionists decided to execute the Tsar and his family before they could be freed.

The execution was to be by bullet shot in the heads, thus expecting instant death to shorten the duration of pain. They were afraid that a Russian as the executioner might turn about and shoot the supervisors. They chose a prisoner of a war, an expert rifle shot. Every prisoner was shot in the head. The rumor that a daughter survived could not very well be true and the Romanov dynasty became extinct and a new one, the communist dynasty, took its place.

While visiting in Brasovo, Nicolai lived very informally. There were no policemen or detectives around. Tsar was convinced that nobody would want to hurt him. Generally, Tsars were liked by the people of all classes. They used to be called by endearing names, like Tsar - Batyushka (Tsar-daddy) and the Tsaritsa as Tsaritsa matushka (mama). Tsaritsa Alexandra was not very popular. Some people, particularly the revolutionists, used to refer to her in a derogative way as "that German wench." That was partly because she was a German princess and because Russia was in war with Germany.

My brother, the Lutheran minister, was given permission to visit our mother's grave. On the way, he stopped at Dorpat (Russified to Yuryev). We three brothers had been students there at the University of Dorpat. While walking through the park, he saw a Non-muzhik-like looking tall, elderly man standing behind a barrel selling apples. The

name "Lavrinovsky" was painted on the barrel. Brother remembered that name, walked up to him, purchased some apples, and told the former manager of Brasovo that he was my brother. "Dah, dah, I remember Karl Petrovich. Is he alive?" The communists used to send the Latvian intellectuals to Siberian labor camps. There, under abominable living conditions and getting scanty food, they soon died. Lavrinovsky was glad to hear that I was safe in America and was well off.

Our birthplace, our father's farm, was dilapidated beyond recognition. The houses had been torn down and wood used up as fuel to heat the shacks that had replaced them. And the beautiful fruit trees also had been cut down and burned. That was supposed to have changed the place into Lenin's "paradise." If the rest of Russia proper is like what brother saw in Latvia, there is no more Brasovo, no more Stremutka, for they would not fit in in Communist ideas.

The Romanov dynasty had been eliminated and a new dynasty had taken its place. Fortunately, nothing is permanent in this world, and the Communist dynasty, too, is likely to disappear in due time. Let us hope for that to happen.

Recently, I have spoken with men from Soviet Russia. Not one wanted to return. Even in Gruzia, native land of Stalin, people are wondering why Stalin was permitted to live so long. Georgia, Groozia, is not happy to be in Soviet Russia as one of the republics. The other republics, previously non-Russian, all would like to regain their independence. The first attempt to get it failed because they all did not start the revolution at the same time. Later, if a large republic like Ukrania should stop to be a soviet republic, the rest of Russia would not be able to exist without the natural resources of Ukrania. Being a Ukranian