

**THE GROWTH OF RUSSIAN
POWER CONTINGENT
ON THE DECAY OF THE
BRITISH CONSTITUTION**

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The Growth of Russian Power Contingent on the Decay of the British Constitution by Stewart Erskine Rolland

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*These articles are now reprinted in consequence of a visit to several of
the Committees.*

THE GROWTH OF RUSSIAN POWER

CONTINGENT ON THE

DECAY OF THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION.

CHAPTER I.

A HUNDRED and seventy years ago the condition of England was this. She had suffered and was suffering from internal disputes, but she was not, as a nation, engaged in any complications abroad; she was not in any way dependent on other countries for her supplies; and, so far from interfering with foreign states, even Queen Elizabeth and her successor—the sovereigns most interested in using the Reformation as a political engine against the house of Valois and the courts of Spain and Austria—had distinctly refused to violate the law of nations by giving any assistance to the Elector of Cologne or the Palatine of Bohemia; and Cromwell himself was, against his will, compelled to forego his designs of carrying the arms of England abroad, and making himself the military arbiter of Europe.

Great Britain was ruled by sovereigns who governed by the advice of their council. These councillors, having no factious purposes to serve, and no end to gain with foreign courts, could not have sanctioned such interference, unless when any breaches of the feudal law with reference to the English king's possessions in France made such a procedure necessary, in conformity with the laws which held together the entire realm.

Russia existed at that time but as the barbarous dukedom of Muscovy. It is true that Vlodimir's baptism, under the name of Basil, in 987, and his marriage with the Byzantine Princess Anne Porphyrogenita, had connected him with the Eastern empire, and that Ivan Basilovitz had, in the middle of the fifteenth century, in espousing the Princess Sophia, the legitimate heiress of the Palæologi, asserted his right to the Imperial sceptre, globe, and two-headed eagle; yet these were events of as little significance in the eyes of Europe as the right to rule

over the continent of America, which an Indian sachem might suppose himself to acquire by marriage, would now be in the eyes of a president of the United States. Nothing would have then seemed more impossible than for England and Russia ever to come into collision.

Within sixty years—within the memory of a man—the whole theory and practice of the constitution of England were changed; the Britain of 1740 bears no more resemblance to the Britain of 1680 than did the Rome of Honorius to the Rome of Scipio. The change in the physical condition of Russia was no less amazing.

England came forth from her seas at the same moment that Russia came forth from her snows; serfage had been established in Russia by a ukase in 1601, the very year that had established pauperism in England; and the Czar finally crushed the resistance of his Boyars at the same time that the two or three families who monopolised the governing functions in England succeeded in abrogating the functions of the Privy Council, and establishing themselves above the Sovereign and above the law.

The Czar invited Germans to his court, and married his niece to the Duke of Mecklenburgh nearly at the moment that a Prince of the House of Hanover was invited to England, and when England was thus further involved, directly and immediately, in those affairs of continental powers to which William of Orange's Dutch interests and animosities had led the way. At the same time the increasing importance of England's colonies and plantations induced an immense development of her maritime force, and the new modes of taxation, supply, and funded debt, brought about a change in her commercial system, at the exact period when the Czar's invitation to foreigners, establishment of despotism at home, and seizure of outlets abroad necessitated a constant continuous extension of the limits of his empire, as the only condition by which could be maintained the artificial changes he had brought about.

The Czar had no option. With the martial Poles and Swedes on his western, and the fiery and untameable Tartar hordes on his eastern frontier—with China with its three hundred millions of people governed by fixed and eternal laws, circumscribing his deserts on one side, and on the other, Turkey, the maintainer of the good faith of treaties—extension of dominion became for Peter the Great the condition of existence.

The formulas laid down in Peter the Great's will were but the expressions of this necessity, and the key is this—"to exist we must extend ourselves; we cannot extend ourselves by arms, we must do so by art." Hence the foundation of that wonderful conclave, the Russian Cabinet, recruited, in modern times, from

those solitary, unquiet, and intelligent spirits which heretofore were wont to range themselves under the banners of Loyola.

A similar necessity of extension had been entailed on England, but in a different form. She had passed into a new phase when the revocation of the Edict of Nantes sent into her, as to a place of refuge, the more intelligent of the manufacturers of France, engrafting them on the more ancient Flemish colonies. By degrees England, from being entirely an agricultural country, spinning little more yarn and little more wool than she herself required, passed into the condition of a people pledging themselves to manufacture supplies for the whole earth—growing rich at the outset, growing greedy as they proceeded, and, finally, involving themselves in the necessity of exploring the world to find new markets.

Commercial extension was equally a necessity for Russia. To create a navy (which as yet she has not succeeded in doing); to maintain four or five different armies in distant corners of her enormous territory; to repress the chronic disaffection of each new-acquired province; to surround her servants with the pagantry of wealth; in a word, to buy men, money must be had, and for this she had no means but the sale of her raw produce, nor had she any customer but England, to whom, up to the present hour, she has constantly looked for gold, and from whom she has refused to take anything but gold in exchange for her own commodities.

The will of Peter contained the following clauses:—

"7. *We must principally seek the alliance of England for commerce, because it is the power most in want of us for its navy, and which can be the most useful in the development of ours. We must exchange wood and other productions for her gold, and keep up continual relations among her traders and seamen and ours.*

"8. *We must incessantly extend ourselves towards the north, the Baltic Sea, and towards the south, the Mediterranean.*

"9. *We must advance as much as possible towards Constantinople and India. Whoever shall reign there will be the true master of the world. Therefore, we must fan continual wars, sometimes with Turkey, sometimes with Persia; create dockyards and emporiums on the Black Sea; take possession, little by little of that sea, as well as of the Baltic, which is a point doubly necessary for the success of the plan; we must hasten the downfall of Persia; advance into the Persian Gulf; re-establish as far as can be done the ancient commerce of the East through Syria, and enter into the two Indies, which are the store of the world. When once there, we can do without the gold of England."*

But it is an equal necessity that as Russia's commercial field

advances, that of England should be narrowed. Our present increasing dependence on the sale of our manufactures demands new markets; the condition of Russia's existence depends on the continuance of her monopolies; it is, therefore, as compulsory on her to exclude us from trading with any nation in the world who would exchange the raw produce in which she deals for our manufactures, as it is for us to seek for new customers in every quarter of the globe.

Two points are to be considered in connection with this—the independence of the United States, and the formation of our Indian empire. In the first instance England acquired a rival, and Russia a neighbour, who, as bearing certain points of resemblance to herself in extent of territory and desire of acquisition, and certain points of resemblance to England, in manners, language, and race, she could find peculiar facilities of using, and especially against England.

By her successive conquests in Hindostan, England placed herself in the line of an especial rival to Russia, both by the method in which she made her conquests, and by the long-coveted possession of the conquest itself, and also by a certain exposure to danger; it is, therefore, more directly in the East that Russia and England have reached the point of convergence.

But there is this difference between her and us: she has neither our material power nor our material wealth, and is, furthermore, menaced hourly and incessantly by a danger which, though our Indian empire is in some measure exposed to it, yet in her case imperils her very existence at home.

This is the insurrection of her subjected populations, or the advent of an Asiatic conqueror like Nadir Shah, who in 1738 recovered for Persia the whole of her ancient possessions, swept Russia from the shores of the Caspian and from off the sea of Azoff, and might, had he so willed, have put in motion towards Moscow all the warlike tribes from Cabul to the Kuban.

How sensible she herself is of this danger will best be shown by an extract from the work of General Valentini, a memoir on the military occupation of Constantinople, written for the Russian Cabinet in 1822, at the moment when she was endeavouring to excite the European governments to favour her plan of putting down the Greek rebellion which she had excited in Turkey:—

“If the Mussulmans, driven back to the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, and into the peninsula of Arabia, were to become again what they formerly were, shepherds and hunters; if they were to unite with the Persians, and come to an understanding with them on the dogmas which divide

them; if they were to educate their sultan in the tent, and not in the seraglio, then Europe (i. e., Russia) would have to guard against a new invasion on their part."

The change in the relative position of the two countries dates from the visit of Peter the Great to England, and the almost simultaneous deprivation of the British sovereign of his standing and responsible councillors.

The only seaport Peter possessed at his accession was Archangel, situated in the frozen regions of the White Sea. He saw that an outlet by the Baltic was an indispensable necessity for Russian advance, as well for securing a foreign commerce, as for connecting Russia with Europe, and acting through that connection with the countries of the East.

Consequently, the Czar, in 1697, arrived in London, having visited Riga, Königsberg, Dantzic, Hamburg, and Amsterdam; and having prepared the means for using the various powers of Europe against Sweden, Turkey, and Poland, he found in England a "minister to his mind."

The Earl of Danby had been impeached by the Commons for "traitorously encroaching to himself regal power, by treating in matters of peace and war with foreign ambassadors and princes, and giving instructions to his Majesty's ambassadors abroad, without communicating the same to the Secretaries of State, and the REST OF HIS MAJESTY'S COUNCIL."

The minister stood his ground when the king, his master was expelled. He was raised in the peerage, and we next find that "*while the Czar was in England he entered into a treaty with some considerable English merchants to give them a free monopoly of tobacco into his dominions, on the condition of paying five shillings per hogshead to the Marquis of Carmarthen.*"

Having thus secured an English minister, and having excited the fears of the English court by representing the Swedish monarch as engaged in conspiring with the British Jacobites for the restoration of the Stuarts; and having been victorious at Pultawa, Peter finally obtained the treaty of 1721, by which Russia gained the Swedish provinces of Esthonia, Ingria, and Livonia, including the towns of St. Petersburg, Revel, and Cronstadt.

On the capture and execution of the Czar's envoy, Baron Gortz, by Swedish officers, after the death of Charles XII., at Frederickshall, his papers were seized and published. The plan he had brought from Peter to propose to the Swedish king contained this, amongst other conditions, for a plan of partition of Poland and the North of Europe:—

"*As to what relates to England, the two parties take their*