

ONE OF THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY as well as one of the most successful impostors who ever made religion a cloak for ambition, sensuality, and vice was removed from earth in the assassination of the Russian monk, Gregory Rasputin. This is the striking assertion at the beginning of a most interesting study of the monk in *The Outlook* (New York), by Mr. George Kennan, the American traveler who some years ago investigated and wrote on the Siberian-exile system. Rasputin's very name, we are told, "means a rake, a dissolute, licentious man," and was assumed by its bearer when, in later life, "he put on a deceptive garb of sanctity"—perhaps intending "to suggest the idea that he was a reformed and converted sinner." He was of peasant stock and received the elementary education of the public schools, which enabled him to write his name and read the Bible. "As a youth he was given to drunkenness and dissipation, and lived the life of a common village hoodlum of the peasant class; but in spite of his excesses he developed into a man of powerful physique and not unpleasing appearance, and a man, moreover, who for some reason was particularly attractive to women." His intermediary years, when he took up the guise of religion, are here sketched:

RUSSIA'S RELIGIOUS IMPOSTOR

*The
Literary
Digest
for
February 3,
1917*

"About the beginning of the present century, when he was approaching middle life, Gregory happened to fall in with an itinerant Siberian preacher, and under the latter's influence he ostensibly reformed, repented, and became converted. Whether there was any sincerity in this profest change of heart or not we have no means of knowing; but for two years or more the repentant sinner studied the Bible, ecclesiastical history, and the writings of the Church fathers, and finally went on a long religious pilgrimage. When he returned to western Siberia he became an itinerant preacher himself, and set up as a *starets*, or 'holy one,' under the name of Rasputin. By this time he had become a man of shrewd native ability, had acquired self-confidence, and had discovered that by means of his personal magnetism, his knowledge of the Scriptures, and his reputed holiness, he could exert a strong influence over both men and women, but particularly women. The idea then apparently occurred to him that he could find a wider field for the exercise of his talents in the capital of the Empire than in western Siberia, and in 1905, armed with letters of introduction from the local ecclesiastical authorities to Bishop Theofan and the famous Father John, of Cronstadt, he started for St. Petersburg.

"The supposition that a middle-aged, profligate Siberian *muzhik* could make a career for himself in the higher circles of St. Petersburg society would have seemed at that time so improbable as to be almost ridiculous; but the daring, quick-witted, unscrupulous religious impostor was well on the road to success in less than three months. He seems to have been taken up first by the ladies of the higher court circles, who found his religious teachings novel and his personality attractive. The Countess Ignatief, wife of a former Governor-General of

The Literary Digest for February 3, 1917

Siberia, is said to have called attention to him first, but he was soon received as a welcome guest in all those salons of the capital where religious and philosophical questions were discusst. 'In a few months,' said the St. Petersburg *Ryetch*, 'the *starets* reached the apogee of his influence and success. Religious seekers in the salons regarded him as a sort of apostle, who had come as the bearer of new truth and teaching. His religious and philosophical theories, based on his alleged authority from on high and on the "cleansing" of the world from its sins through him, attracted a throng of disciples—especially female disciples—and opened a wide arena for the gratification of his lascivious propensities.'"

Accounts differ as to the circumstances of his meeting the Czar, but it seems to have occurred about ten years ago, and his influence soon became so great that "even nobles, generals, and high officers of State who desired promotion or increase of salary sought his intercession and support." But by 1909 his loose moral conduct had become a scandal and in 1910 Prime Minister Stolypin ordered him out of the city. He disappeared

for a time, but at the end of 1911 he was back again in St. Petersburg and "became the favorite, if not the adviser, of the Emperor and Empress." During the next two years, so Mr. Kennan quotes from the St. Petersburg *Ryetch*, "the life and success of the *starets* were perhaps without a parallel eyen in Russian history." Thus:

"To his influence were attributed the resignation of S. M. Lukianof, Procurator of the Holy Synod, the overthrow of Bishop Hermogen and the monk Ilidor, with whom he had quarreled; the promotion of Bishop Barnabas; the campaign against the Metropolitan Antonius; and the wholesale dismissal of professors from the ecclesiastical academies. His activities finally created so much indignation in the Duma that they were made the subject of two interpellations.

"In July, 1914, while Rasputin was making a visit to his native village of Pokrofsky, in the Siberian province of Tobolsk, he was stabbed in the street by a peasant woman named Guseva, who declared, when she was arrested, that she 'wished to remove from this world that false, infamous prophet, who has led so many people astray, and who has falsely instructed the Czar on countless questions.' Rasputin, who seemed to be mortally wounded, was taken to a hospital in Tyumen, where he was soon cared for by Prof. Serge Fedorof, the Czar's court physician, and Mademoiselle Virubova, a lady-in-waiting of the Empress, who had been sent there by Imperial command. Two or three days later a telegram from Tyumen announced that after a surgical operation Rasputin died, without recovering consciousness, at 6 P.M., on the 14th of July. But he was not dead. A subsequent report stated that he had regained consciousness and would probably recover. Three or four months later he was again in St. Petersburg, apparently as popular among the women and as powerful at the court as ever.

The Literary Digest for February 3, 1917

"After the outbreak of the European War Rasputin's influence over the Emperor and the Empress was popularly connected with many important events, notably the removal of the Grand Duke Nicholas from command of the armies. Rasputin it was said, favored a separate peace with Germany, and the Grand Duke, when he heard of it, declared that if the *staret* should fall into his hands he would hang him.

"Russian newspapers and speakers in the Duma have never been permitted to criticize, directly or indirectly, the Imperial family; but during the past two years the attentive reader of current Russian history must have noticed, in the press and in parliamentary debates, frequent references to the 'dark forces' that were attempting to control Russia's foreign and domestic policy.

"These 'dark forces' were Rasputin and other adventurers impostors, or fanatics, who were apparently influencing the character and sometimes inspiring the acts of a religiously inclined but superstitious monarch. The most potent of these sinister influences has finally been removed by assassination."



GREGORY RASPUTIN,

The recently assassinated Russian monk who wielded a "dark" influence in the Royal household.