

Book Reviews

Russia Under Two Tsars, 1682-1689: The Regency of Sophia Alekseevna. By C. Bickford O'Brien, University of California Publications in History, Volume 42. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952, pp. xiv, 178. Maps, bibliography, and index. \$2.50.)

Tsar Alexis, the second ruler of the Romanov dynasty and the father of Peter the Great, died in 1676. Before his death he had been married twice, to Maria Miloslavskii and to Natalia Naryshkina, both daughters of more or less prominent Russian boyars. These two marriages caused widespread political repercussions in Russia. Before Maria's death her brother, Prince Ivan Miloslavskii, had gained a dominant political influence at court and the names of various Miloslavskii relatives appeared in rosters of high public office. Tsaritsa Maria's death in 1669 caused consternation in the ranks of the Miloslavskiis and Alexis' marriage shortly thereafter to Natalia Naryshkina aroused much resentment, especially after Natalia's favorite, Artemon Matveev, displaced Ivan Miloslavskii as the principal figure at court. Gradually the influence of Matveev and the Naryshkins became pre-eminent—but not for long. Upon Alexis' death in 1676 Feodor, his eldest living son by his first wife, ascended the throne and the Miloslavskiis came back into power. Matveev and the members of his family were immediately exiled. But Feodor was a semi-invalid and it was apparent that he could not live long. The power-hungry Miloslavskiis pinned their hopes on the succession of Feodor's brother, mentally deficient Ivan, the second son of Alexis and Maria Miloslavskii. It was expected that a regency would be needed for the incompetent Ivan, and who would be a more likely regent than Uncle Ivan Miloslavskii. But the Naryshkins also had a candidate for the throne—Peter, the healthy young son of Alexis and Natalia Naryshkina, who had not yet reached his teens. Obviously he, too, would need a regent and who would be a more likely candidate than his mother's favorite, Artemon Matveev.

But the latter prospect was highly distasteful to the twenty-five-year-old third daughter of Alexis and Maria, Tsarevna Sophia Alekseevna, sister of ruling Tsar Feodor.

Vainly she sought to persuade Feodor to name Ivan as his successor; Feodor hesitated and died without naming anyone. Thereupon Patriarch Joachim, who favored the Naryshkins, called upon a rump *Zemskii Sobor* (National Assembly) to choose a successor to the throne. Although Miloslavskii partisans raised a few cries for Ivan, demands for the more popular Peter arose on all sides and the nine-year-old tsarevich was proclaimed ruler. Six Naryshkins were forthwith advanced to high places at court and Matveev was hastily summoned to Moscow from exile. But Sophia Miloslavskii, though dumbfounded, was not vanquished. At once she launched a campaign to undermine the Naryshkins. Rumors were circulated that Feodor had been poisoned. Liaisons were established with some of the commanders of the Streltsy, the principal military force in Moscow, and her agents ardently sought to incite revolt by forecasting terrible oppressions to come under Peter. A death list of forty-six, including Matveev, many Naryshkins, and their prominent supporters, was prepared of those to be killed by the Streltsy. The goal? To elevate Ivan to the throne by deposing Peter or by arranging a joint rule, with Sophia as regent. On May 15, 1682, word went out that Ivan was dead. The Streltsy at once moved into the Kremlin. "The next few hours saw the beginning of one of Moscow's ugliest blood baths. The pillage and carnage that gripped the city lasted for a week. At least seventy prominent leaders in the new government were literally butchered. . . ." Too late, it was discovered that Ivan still lived, but by that time Sophia had assumed an active political role, and the Naryshkins had been destroyed or vanquished by her Miloslavskii forces. Next, adopting a suggestion made earlier by Sophia, the Streltsy requested that Ivan and Peter rule jointly. The outcome? A new meeting of the rump *Zemskii Sobor* elevated the two boys jointly to the throne, with actual control of affairs in the hands of Regent Sophia. For seven years and four months, until she was driven from power by Tsar Peter, Sophia tightly held the reins of government.

Most of Professor O'Brien's volume is an intensive study of this period of Sophia's rule, years which have usually been slighted by most historians on the ground that they were a time of ineffective government and military failures. "Yet,"

the author contends, "casting aside the issue of legitimacy of rule, it is doubtful whether within the imperial family—during this important period—a more capable regent than Sophia could have been found." Professor O'Brien points to the vital changes which affected the cultural outlook, economy, and foreign relations of Russia during Sophia's regency and shows how they were largely the result of her enlightened and decisive leadership and that of her appointees. "In the realm of cultural and diplomatic achievement, the tsarevna proved herself a worthy daughter of Tsar Alexis and a distinguished representative of the Romanov dynasty. At home she introduced reforms that were practical in purpose, if moderate in scope. . . . In both Europe and Asia she and her advisers intelligently pursued Russian national interests. . . . It was a government of distinction and promise which held together against great odds. Its policies were both vigorous and enlightened."

Professor O'Brien has contributed to a fuller knowledge of Russia in the years 1682-1689. With the increased attention given to Russian history in American universities, it is essential that more and more studies of this type be made, for Russian history under the tsars consists not alone of the achievements of the outstanding and better known rulers. The book is clearly and interestingly written, and is provided with copious footnotes and an extensive bibliography of works in the Russian language. All in all, the author is to be congratulated on a work well done.

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Howells & Italy. By James Leslie Woodress, Jr. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1952, pp. xi, 223. Bibliography and index. \$3.50.)

One sometimes wishes that scholars were less specialized. A new book by an associate professor of English at Butler University is a case in point.

William Dean Howells was United States consul at Venice from 1861 to 1865. The experience was a determining one in his life. It transformed him from an Ohio newspaperman into a Cambridge author. It served him in lieu of the Harvard education his associates obtained.