HERBERT BURY

RUSSIAN LIFE TO-DAY

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Bury H.

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

My first inclination, when the entirely unexpected proposal of the Publishers came to me to write this book, was immediately to decline. There are so many well-known writers on Russia, whose books are an unfailing pleasure and source of information, that it seemed to me to be nothing less than presumption to add to their number. But when I was assured that there seems to be a great desire just now for a book which, as the Publishers expressed it, "should not attempt an elaborate sketch of the country, nor any detailed description of its system of government and administration, or any exhaustive study of the Russian Church, and yet should give the *impressions* of a sympathetic observer of some of the chief aspects of Russian Life which are likely to appeal to an English Churchman," I felt that I might venture to attempt it.

It has been given to me to get to understand thoroughly from close and intimate knowledge the commercial development of Siberia by our countrymen; and yet everywhere, both there and in Russia proper, I have to go to every place specially and primarily to give the ministrations of religion. It can be permitted to few, if any, to see those two sides of the life of a great and growing Empire at the same time. This has been my reason, therefore, for undertaking this small effort, and my object is to give, as the Publishers expressed it, "personal impressions." I hope my readers will accept this book, therefore, as an impressionist description of Russian life of to-day, of which it would have been quite impossible to keep personal experiences from forming an important part. And though I write as an English Churchman, yet I wish to speak, and I trust in no narrow spirit, to the whole religious public, that I may draw them more closely into intelligent sympathy with this great nation which has seemed to come so suddenly, unexpectedly, and intimately into our own national life and destiny – and I believe as a friend.

HERBERT BURY,
Bishop.

CHAPTER I
Russia's Great Spaces

I will begin my opening chapter by explaining how I come to have the joy and privilege of travelling far and wide, as I have done, in the great Russian Empire. I go there as Assistant Bishop to the Bishop of London, holding a commission from him as bishop in charge of Anglican work in North and Central Europe.

It may seem strange that Anglican work in that distant land should be directly connected with the Diocese of London, but the connection between them, and between all the countries of Northern and Central Europe, as far as our Church of England work is concerned, is of long standing. It dates from the reign of Charles I, and from an Order in Council which was passed in 1633, and placed the congregations of the Church of England in *all* foreign countries at that time under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London "as their Diocesan." It may be remembered that when the present Bishop of London went to Washington some years ago he took with him some interesting documents which he had found in the library at Fulham Palace, and which were connected with the time when Church work in the United States looked to London for superintendence and episcopal leadership. These he handed over to the custody of the Episcopal Church of America, knowing how interested that Church would be to possess them, and to keep them amongst other historical records.

The same rapid progress as that which has attended the American Church has been made in the Colonies and other parts of the world. New dioceses and provinces have been formed one after another, and in 1842 the Diocese of Gibraltar was formed, taking in the congregations of the English Church in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Roumania, and all places bordering upon the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. But the other countries of Europe, to the north and in the centre, remain still, as far as Church work goes, where that old Order in Council placed them, in the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London.

It is impossible, of course, that he should attempt to meet this responsibility himself and bear the burden of such a diocese as that of London, and so the rule has been, since 1825, to issue a commission to another bishop, who, while being an assistant, yet has to feel himself fully responsible, and in this way spare the Bishop of London as much as he possibly can.

It will therefore be understood, as I have said in my few words of introduction, that, filling such a position and having such work to superintend, and also, for many reasons to be more fully explained in succeeding pages, finding the Orthodox Church of Russia very friendly towards our own, I shall write throughout with those whom I have termed the "religious public" very clearly in my mind and sympathies. At the same time I am hoping to interest the general reader also, and therefore shall try my utmost to give a comprehensive view of Russian life as it will be found to-day by travellers on the one hand if they give themselves time and opportunity enough, and by those, on the other, who have to go and live and work in Russia.

First impressions are usually interesting to recall. Mine were immediate and extraordinarily vivid, and were all associated with thoughts – which have gradually become convictions – of Russia's vast potentialities and future greatness.

When first I had the honour and pleasure of an audience with the Emperor of Russia – I will speak of it at greater length in a later chapter – one of the first questions he asked me was: —

"And what has most impressed you, so far, on coming, as a new experience, into my country?"

I was not prepared for the question, but answered at once and without the least hesitation – for there seemed to come into my mind even as His Majesty spoke, the vivid impression I had received —

"Russia's great spaces!"

"Ah, yes!" he said, evidently thinking very deeply; "that is true. Russia's *great* spaces – what a striking impression they must make, for the first time!"

I went on to explain that one can see great spaces elsewhere. On the ocean when for days together no other vessel is seen; on some of the great plains in the other hemisphere; riding across the great Hungarian tableland; and even in Central France or in the Landes to the west I have felt this sense of space and distance; but Russia's great flat or gently undulating expanses have always seemed to me to suggest other spaces on beyond them still, and to give an impression of the vast and illimitable, such as I have never known elsewhere. It is under this impression of vast resources, no doubt, that so many military correspondents of our daily papers constantly speak of the Russian forces as "inexhaustible." It is the same with other things also. They suggest such marvellous possibilities.

This is the impression I would like to give at once in this my opening chapter – a sense of spaciousness – power to expand, to develop, to open out, to make progress, to advance and grow. It is not the impression the word "Russia" usually makes upon people who know little about her inner life, and have received their ideas from those who have experienced the repressive and restrictive side of her policy and administration. But I can only give, and am glad of the opportunity, the results of my own experiences and observations; and those are embodied in my reply to the Emperor.

When I crossed the Russian frontier for the first time it was with a very quaking and apprehensive spirit. All that lay beyond was full of the mysterious and unknown, so entirely different, one felt it must be, from all one's previous experiences of life! Anything might happen, for this was Russia! "Russia" has stood so long with us in this country for the repressive and reactionary, for the grim and forbidding and restricting, that it will be difficult for many to part with those ideas, and I can hardly hope to remove impressions now deeply rooted. I can only say, however, that my own prejudices and preconceptions in the same direction disappeared, one after another, with astonishing rapidity in my first year; and now my spirits rise every time I cross the frontier of that great country, and my heart warms to that great people as soon as I see their kindly and friendly faces, their interesting and picturesque houses, and catch my first sight of their beautiful churches, with the fine cupolas above them with their hanging chains, painted and gilded domes, and delicate finials glittering in the sun and outlined against a sky of blue. Russia to me presents at once a kindly, friendly atmosphere, and others feel it also; for I have, just before writing these words, laid down a copy of *The Times* in which Mr. Stephen Graham – no one knows the heart and soul of Russia quite as he does, I fancy – writing one of his illuminating articles on "Russia's Holy War," says "People in Russia are naturally kind. They have become even gentler since the war began." Those who enter Russia expecting the unfriendly will find, I feel sure, as we have done, exactly the opposite – nothing but kindness and courtesy. It will be the same in other experiences also if I mistake not.

One of the chief difficulties ordinary travellers or tourists expect to encounter, for instance, in Russia is that of language.

"Isn't it extraordinarily difficult to acquire, and to make yourself understood?" is an invariable question, and certainly in long journeys across country, as from Warsaw up to Riga, and from Libau on the Baltic to Moscow, and especially in my Mining Camp Mission in Siberia, I expected to have very great difficulties; but, as so often happens, they were difficulties in anticipation rather than in reality.

Even off the beaten track in Russia any one who can travel comfortably in other European countries can travel equally satisfactorily there. Most educated people speak French, and an ever-increasing number – for English governesses and nurses are in great request – speak English. Great numbers of the working class speak German, the national language, of course, of Russia's Baltic provinces, on railway trains as conductors and in restaurants as waiters, and at railway stations as porters. Indeed, if any one is in the dining-car of a train or in the buffet or dining-room of a railway station or other public place, and has the courage to stand up and say, "Does any one here speak French?" or "Does any one here speak German?" some one ready to help and be friendly will invariably come forward.

In my first Siberian Mission, however, I found myself in a real difficulty. I had to drive across the Kirghiz Steppes from the railway at Petropavlosk, about four days and nights east of Moscow, to the Spassky Copper Mine, and the management had sent down a very reliable Kirghiz servant of theirs to be my interpreter; but I found that his only qualification for the work of interpreting was that, in addition to his own Kirghiz tongue, he could speak Russian!

For the inside of a week, travelling day and night, we had to get on as best we could together, and arrange all the business of changing horses, getting food, and paying expenses, largely by signs. Once only, and then in the dead of night when changing horses, did we encounter a German-speaking farmer from Courland or Lettland on the Baltic, and a great joy it was to him to meet some one who knew those fair parts of the Russian Empire where agricultural work brings much more encouraging results for the toil bestowed upon it than Siberia, with its terrible winter season.

But though to acquire a knowledge of Russian for literary purposes, so as to write and compose correctly, must be most difficult, owing to the number of letters in the alphabet – forty-six as compared with our twenty-six – and the entirely different way from our own in which they are written, I do not think it is difficult to acquire a fair knowledge of the language in a comparatively short time so as to make one's self understood and get along. I find young Englishmen, going to work in Russia and beyond the Urals, very quickly come to understand what is being said, and to make known their own wishes and requirements; and in a couple of years, or sometimes less, they speak quite fluently.

It always seems to me that the Russians pronounce their words with more syllabic distinctness than either the French or Germans. And that natural kindness and friendliness of the whole people, of which I have already written, makes them wish to be understood and to help those with whom they are speaking to grasp their meaning. This, of course, makes all the difference!

When the question of the great difficulty of the language is raised another remark nearly always follows:

"But then the Russians are such great linguists that they easily understand!" And it is usually supposed that they "easily learn other languages because their own is so difficult," though they encounter no more difficulty, probably, than any one else when talking in their own tongue in infancy. They are "great linguists" for the same reason as the Dutch – and that is because, if they wish to be in educated society or in business on any large scale, their own language will only go a very short way.

In Russia as in Holland, as I have been told in both countries, an educated household will contain a German nurse and an English governess, while French will be the rule at table. It used to be a French governess, but now the English governess is in great request everywhere in Russia and Poland; and, in the great nobles' houses, there is the English tutor also – not always for the language, but to impart English ideas to the boys of the family. When I was last in Warsaw, an Oxford graduate came up at a reception and introduced himself, and told me he was with a Polish prince who had astonished him on the first morning after his arrival by saying: —

"I have engaged you as a tutor for my two boys, but it will not be necessary for you to teach them anything – that is already provided for. I want you to be their companion, walk out with them, play games with them, and help them to grow up after the manner of English gentlemen."

There is no real difficulty, therefore, with the language, nor is there with the money of the country as soon as one realizes the value of the rouble, eight of which make nearly a pound, and that it is divided into a hundred *kopecks*, pronounced *kopeeks*, two of which are equal to about a farthing.

And now to speak of the actual travelling. Everything in the way of communication in Russia is on a large scale and in keeping with the answer I gave to the Emperor, and which I have placed at the head of this chapter. As soon as one passes the frontier, for instance, the travellers change into carriages adapted for a broad-gauge railway, and are at once in more commodious quarters. There is no land, I suppose, where travelling over great distances is so comfortable as in Russia for all classes; and it is incredibly cheap, first-class tickets costing less than third in our own country, for those using the ordinary post train, which every year becomes more comfortable and nearer to the standard of

the wagon-lit. There are excellent lavatories, kept perfectly clean, where one can wash, shave, and almost have a sponge bath, for – though without the luxuries of the Trans-Siberian express – there is more room.

There is usually a restaurant-car on the long-distance trains – and practically all the trains in Russia are for long distances – and, if not, there is plenty of time to get food at the stations on the way. Conductors will take every care and trouble to get what is necessary, and first and second-class compartments are never overcrowded, as far as my experience goes. I believe, indeed, that not more than four people may be put into a compartment for the night, and, as the cushioned back of the seats can be lifted up, all the four travellers can be sure of being able to lie down. The first-class compartments on a post train are divided into two by folding-doors, and one is allowed to buy a *platzcarte* and so have the whole compartment to one's self. Every accommodation too is provided for lying down comfortably in the third-class, and the travellers there are always the happiest-looking on the train.

Another consideration shown to the public is that the scale of charges falls in proportion to the distance to be traversed. The stations are specially spacious, particularly along the routes beyond Moscow, where emigration continually goes on into the great pastoral lands of Siberia. In the summer months the traffic is very great, and it is one of the most touching and appealing experiences I can recall to pass through one of the great waiting-halls of such a station as Samara, at night, and pick one's way amongst the sleeping families of peasants waiting to get their connection with another line, and resting in the meantime. Their little possessions are all about them, and father and mother and sons and daughters lie gathered close up together, pillowing their heads upon each other, good-looking, prettily dressed, and fast asleep – as attractive a picture as any one could wish to see.

There is a great freedom of movement everywhere in Russia, and I do not remember having seen the word *verboten* (the German for "forbidden"), or its equivalent, in any part of a Russian or Siberian station. The rule of having three bells to announce approaching departure is a most excellent one, whether the pause is long or short, the first ringing very audibly about five minutes, the second one minute, and the third immediately before departure. If travelling long distances, the ten-minutes' stop at all large towns gives plenty of opportunity for exercise and fresh air, and the absolute certainty of hearing the bells gives a perfect sense of security that no one will be left behind. If the bell rings twice just as the train enters the station, every one knows that the stay will be short, and that it is not worth while getting out.

Some of the most resting and refreshing experiences I have ever had have been those of travelling day after day for some two or three thousand miles in Russia, getting one's correspondence straight, for writing is quite easy in those steady and slow-moving express trains, reading up reviews and periodicals or making plans for future journeys, looking out of the windows in the early morning or late evening, all varied by meals in the *coupé* or at a station, seeing all kinds of interesting people in strange costumes, and many attractive incidents at places where one alights for a walk and exercise.

More interesting than the railways, however, are the rivers. How large these are, and how important a part they have filled in the past, before the days of railways, and still play in the commerce and life of the people, will be seen at once by a glance at the map at the end of the book. None of them, however, though one gets a real affection for the Neva after sledging over it in the winter and sailing upon it in the summer, attracts and indeed fascinates, as the Volga never fails to do. It is magnificent in size, and is the largest in Europe, 2,305 miles in length, three times as long as the Rhine. Many of us know what the Rhine is to the Germans. Treitschke, as we have been reminded in one of the most widely read of modern books, when leaving Bonn, wrote to a friend, "To-morrow I shall see the Rhine for the last time. The memory of that noble river will keep my heart pure, and save me from sad and evil thoughts throughout all the days of my life."

I have always understood the strong appeal to the historic, and even the poetic, sense which the Rhine puts forth, but I never understood the sense of the ideal which a river might convey until I saw, approached, and crossed the Volga.

It was a May evening, three years ago, as we drew near and then passed along its right bank before crossing. It was of the loveliest colour of rich and living brown, like that of a healthy human skin, carrying life and burdens of every description upon its ample bosom, fostering all kinds of enterprise and activity on its shores, and flowing on with stately dignity, as if it would not be hurried from its calm consciousness of its own strength and significance for those nine provinces through which it passes on its way to the Caspian. I felt its spell at once, and, as I crossed the great bridge over which the Trans-Siberian line is carried – an exquisite piece of engineering a mile and a quarter in length – I knew that I should always feel a curious sense of personality in connection with that glorious river. I think Merriman, in one of his novels, speaks of associating a sense of consciousness with the Volga; and that is just what I have felt each time of crossing over its bounteous-looking, calm, and steady flow. It seems to live and know.

The third and last "difficulty" which I will speak of in this opening chapter, and which is no difficulty at all, is the passport. Every one in Russia must possess one; and, if travelling and intending to spend one or two nights in a place, it must be sent to the proper official and be duly stamped. It must be *visèd* by the Russian ambassador, or minister, at the place from which one starts before entering Russia; and, which is even more important, it must be *visèd* by the right official at some important town or place of government, and stamped with the necessary permission, before one is able to *leave* Russia.

It is natural to feel at the frontier, when entering the country, "I hope it is all right," as the passport is handed to the customs officer, and, with just a little approach to anxious uncertainty, after all one has heard and read; but it is almost impossible to avoid real anxiety that it will be found correct and in order as it is presented at the frontier when *leaving*, as the difficulties of being kept back there, so far away from the great cities, would be far greater than those of being refused *admission* from some technicality that could probably be put right by a telegram to and from England.

"But surely the passport must prevent you from feeling that sense of freedom that you have spoken of more than once – surely *that* must give a sense of repression and suspicion and being watched and having an eye kept on your doings," my reader will be thinking, and perhaps many other people have the same feeling. It is, however, exactly the opposite with me, for my passport in Russia and Siberia is a great stand-by, and gives me a great sense of being always able to establish my own identity.

There can be little doubt that the passport was established from the first in the interests of the community, for it is entirely in their own interests that people should possess them. No one who is honest in purpose can have any difficulty in procuring one or be brought to any trouble through it. The necessity of frequently producing them, in moving from place to place, is always in the interests of the traveller in a vast empire like Russia. It has given me a great feeling of confidence in launching out, as has been necessary now and then, into the unknown, to feel "They will be able to trace me all along by the entries made in official registers, as the passport has been stamped." If any one disappeared in Russia the police would be able to trace his movements to very near the place of disappearance.

It is a great help in getting letters also to have a passport, for we are just as anxious as the officials can be that our letters should not go to the wrong people; and in travelling in out-of-the-way places it is simply invaluable in getting the help, advice, and recognition that sometimes are so very necessary. Even the passport, therefore, helps to deepen the sense of security and freedom with which one launches out into Russian travel, anxious to gain all that it has to give in information and stimulating experience.

It will be remembered, however, that I speak always not as a resident, but as a traveller; and there is just this difference —*indeed, it is a vast difference*– between my own opportunities and those

of an ordinary traveller. Travelling as the bishop for the English Church work in Russia, in every place our clergy and residents have only been too happy to speak of their own experiences and impressions, some of them lifelong and all-important. When travelling in Siberia, and the guest from time to time of managers of the great mines, I go out with them day after day and get long conversations with them, their wives, and members of the staff. I hear all about early struggles, hopes and fears, difficulties and triumphs extending over many years. The conditions of life and characteristics of the people in vast tracts of country are described to me by those who know them well. No one but a bishop travelling through the country would have the same information so freely volunteered to him. And it is this which has led me to feel that I might, without undue presumption, write for ordinary readers about the life of a country in which I have not, as yet, spent a great many years.

It *is* a great country, as all we who know it feel, and "It doth not yet appear what it shall be." If some of us are right in thinking of the Russians as a great race with a vast country of tremendous resources; who can in any way picture the great and wonderful possibilities of their future? It will be my task to try and show how little opportunity they have had as yet of getting their share of modern civilization, how imperfectly, as yet, the ethical side of their religion has been imparted to them; and still, in spite of all this and of other defects of their social and religious life, how much they have accomplished in the way of real achievement.

I fail to see how any one can help feeling the greatest interest – hopeful and expectant – about their future, or feel anything else but the great thankfulness that I feel myself, that we and they as peoples have been brought so intimately together by circumstances which few could have foreseen only a very few years ago, but which have come about not only, as some would say, in the course of Providence, but in a very true sense, as I trust our and their national histories shall show in time to come, "According to the good hand of our God upon us."

CHAPTER II
General Social Life

The whole life of the Russian people reminds those who visit them continually and in every possible way that they are in a religious country; for everywhere there is the *ikon*, or sacred religious picture. There are other ways, especially the columns of the newspapers full of notices of private and public ministrations and pathetic requests for prayers for the departed, of bringing religion continually before the public mind, but the *ikon* is most in evidence. It is a picture in one sense, for it is a representation either of our Lord or of the Holy Virgin or of some well-known saint; but the garments are in relief, often composed of one of the precious metals and ornamented in some cases with jewels; and thus it is quite different from other sacred pictures. It is the first characteristic evidence of "Russia" to meet one's eyes on entering, and the last to be seen as one leaves, any public place.

"A great picture of the Virgin and Child hangs in the custom-house at Wirballen," writes Mr. Rothay Reynolds at the beginning of *My Russian Year*, "with a little lamp flickering before it."

"The foreigner, who was a few minutes before on the German side of the frontier and stands on Russian soil for the first time, looks at the shrine with curiosity. Porters are hurrying in with luggage, and travellers are chattering in half a dozen languages. An official at a desk in the middle of the great hall is examining passports. A man is protesting that he did not know that playing-cards were contraband; a woman is radiant, for the dirty lining she has sewn in a new Paris hat has deceived the inquisitors. Everybody is in a hurry to be through with the business, and free to lunch in the adjoining restaurant before going on to St. Petersburg. It is a strange home for the majestic Virgin of the Byzantine picture.

"Here, at the threshold of the empire, Russia placards – S. Paul's vivid Greek gives me the word – her faith before the eyes of all comers. In the bustle of a custom-house, charged with fretfulness and impatience and meanness, Russia sets forth her belief in a life beyond the grave and her conviction that the ideals presented by the picture are the noblest known to mankind."

Nowhere as in Russia is one reminded so constantly, in what we should consider most unlikely places, that we are in a Christian country. In the streets and at railway stations, in baths, hotels, post offices, shops, and warehouses, in the different rooms of factories and workshops, in private houses, rich and poor alike, in government houses, and even in places of evil resort which I will not specify, as well as in prisons, indeed in *every* public place there is the *ikon*– most frequently representing the Holy Mother and Child – and its lamp burning before it.

In later chapters I will write more at length upon religion and worship, but I must give the reader *at once*, if a stranger to Russia, something of the impression which the ubiquity of the *ikon* makes upon those who go there for the first time. It is *always* to be seen. And though I will try and describe what it directly represents in the shape of Church life later, yet from the very first I must write, as it were, with the *ikon* before me. I must see with my mind's eye the Holy Mother clasping the Divine Child to her bosom, with a few flowers and a twinkling little light before them, all the time I write, whether it is of things secular or sacred, grave or gay, national or international, or I shall give out but little of the spirit which I feel I have breathed deeply into my life in that wonderful country, and certainly shall not be able to help any reader who has not been there as yet to understand why it should be spoken of as "Holy Russia."

That which the *ikon* stands for, therefore, must be the spirit of every chapter I write, or I shall give my readers no true picture of Russian life.

Fortunately for those who want further particulars than such a book as this can give them – and it will fail in its purpose if it does not make many readers *wish* to have them – there has been a very excellent *Baedeker's Guide to Russia* published last year, which is a wonderfully complete work

considering the vast empire with which it has to deal. I will therefore attempt nothing at all in the way of statistics or descriptions such as a guide-book gives, or such as will be found in the excellent books to which I shall often refer. If I can take my readers with me in thought as I travel about Russia and Siberia, and can give them some of the information which has been given so freely to me, and can convey to them some portion of the impressions made upon me when far away from the beaten track, and above all can lead them to give their sympathies freely and generously to the people of the land and to our own countrymen so hospitably welcomed amongst them, and so generously treated, I shall be more than repaid for my work, and shall ask nothing better.

In Russia there are two forms of government, clearly and strenuously at work, and wide asunder in their character, the autocratic and the democratic. It is impossible to do much more than mention these two tremendous forces, which are so strongly forming the character, and determining the destinies for a long time to come, of a great people.

Since 1905 the Russian Empire has had constitutional government under the form of an Imperial Council or First Chamber, the Imperial Duma or Second Chamber, with the Emperor, advised by a small council of ministers, still an autocratic sovereign. The Emperor can overrule any legislation, and probably would if advised by a unanimous council; but it must be evident to most people if they think a little, that even now he would be very reluctant to do this except in some very grave crisis of the national life, and that in time to come he will never dream of such interference. Constitutional government in Russia has really begun, and when one considers the past it is clear that great progress has been made in the direction of constitutional freedom since it was granted in 1905. The reconstitution of the Polish nation, the stirring amongst the Finns, the rising hopes of the Jews, the national aspirations of Mongolia more and more fully expressed, the general “moving upon the face of the waters” of the Spirit which makes a free people, cannot but rivet the attention of those interested in social and national life upon Russia at this time, when the autocratic government of long standing is passing, so simply and so naturally, it would seem, into the constitutional.

Since the emancipation of the serfs there has been a steady growth of the democratic, almost communal, spirit in all the peasant villages of Russia, and though their powers have been somewhat curtailed since 1889 they are self-governing and very responsible communities. Some of the best and most interesting Russian stories, therefore, deal with incidents and experiences in village life; and it is the great fact that Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, whose book upon Russia is one of the most complete character, went and shut himself out from the rest of the world at the little village of Ivanofka, in the province of Novgorod, and there drank in the spirit of the language and of the national life, that makes his compendious work a real classic for those who want truly to understand Russian life and nationality.

There are two distinct social and constitutional forces at work, therefore, and not working slowly and deliberately, as so often in the past, but with great rapidity – the autocratic seeking to realize its responsibilities and to fulfil them, and the democratic feeling that its ideals are coming nearer to being realized every day.

There is consequently no country so absorbingly interesting to the constitutionalist at this time as Russia. Nothing can be more stimulating, to those who want to read the signs of the times, than to know that revolutionaries, such as M. Bourtzeff,[1] who had left their country in despair to plan and plot, have now returned, without troubling whether they would be pardoned or punished, full of expectant hope for their country’s constitutional future. Perhaps cautious people will hope that progress may be slow, but the great thing is to be able to say, “It moves.”

Every city and great town in Russia has something specially characteristic about it, and of course they are, as yet, very few in number. Catherine the Great, as is well known, thought cities and

[1] See end of this chapter, p. 45.

towns could be created, though she found out her mistake, and Russia still remains a land of villages rather than of towns, but the great towns which do exist have usually very distinctive features.

Petrograd, for instance, though, as Peter intended it should be, essentially modern, has its very special features in its domed churches and the magnificence of its wide river with the great palaces upon its banks and bordering upon its quays. The fortress of S. Peter and S. Paul, on the opposite side, "home of political prisoners and dead Tsars," when the sun is setting, is never to be forgotten, and enters at once upon the field of vision as one thinks of Peter's capital.

Then Moscow! How well I remember Bishop Creighton's enthusiasm whenever he spoke of Moscow. Though his face might be calm and its expression grave before, only let Moscow be mentioned and it would light up at once, as with sparkling eyes he would exclaim: —

"Moscow! – oh, you must see Moscow: nothing in the world is like it. You *must* see it."

But it is really the Kremlin which makes Moscow unique, with an intangible influence and sense of association connected with it that no one can describe, as one thinks of its historic past and of Napoleon! The Kremlin! I had read and heard descriptions of it from time to time, but was in no way prepared for that vast area of palaces, churches, treasuries, great houses, and barracks, enclosed by glorious walls and towers and entered by impressive gateways, over which one gazed with wondering eyes when seen first under the blue sky and brilliant winter sun.

It is no use attempting to describe it; but Moscow is the Kremlin, and to *feel* the Kremlin is to *know* Moscow.

Upon entering the Spassky Gate, or Gate of the Redeemer, every hat has to be removed in honour of the *ikon* of the Saviour which is placed above it. The picture was placed there, by the Tsar Alexis, in 1647, to be regarded as the "palladium of the Kremlin," and the order was given then that hats should be removed when passing through. The law is rigorously enforced still, and though it is sometimes a trial – I had frostbite in consequence when I last went through a year ago – yet the act is almost an instinctive one when entering or leaving the Kremlin.

Warsaw, again – for no one in this generation can dissociate it from Russia and call it Polish only – with its glorious position on the Vistula in the midst of its great plain, though not so ancient and inspiring as Cracow, in Galicia, is full of moving appeal to the national and historic sense for those who visit it for the first time, and especially, as in my own case, when entering the empire by that route. I have seen Warsaw in spring, summer, and winter, and always felt its charm; and I have not felt more deeply moved for a long time than by the Emperor's proclamation that he intended the Poles once more to be a nation and – there can be but little doubt about it – with Warsaw as its capital.

Riga also, the great shipping-port on the Baltic, which I have entered by sea and by land, and when coming in by sea have had the pleasure of seeing our beautiful English church on the shore with its graceful spire standing out conspicuously, yet blending in with other towers and pinnacles. How very characteristic of the Baltic and attractive the city is, with its blending of the Teuton and Slav populations! But how essentially Russian it is in all its leading features, while different from all other Russian cities! It is so wherever one goes both on this and on the other side of the Urals. There always seems to be something specially characteristic in these great centres of population; and they all seem as if, unlike other towns, they had each their own interesting story to tell for those who have ears to hear.

Town or city life in Russia is not very representative of the true life of the country and its people, though it undoubtedly exerts a widespread influence upon their general social life; for Russia's vast population is not gathered together in either towns or cities, but in hamlets and villages. Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace tells us that when he wrote his first book on Russia, in 1877, there were only eleven towns with a population of over 50,000 in European Russia, and that, in 1905, they had only increased to thirty-four. The increase of the future will no doubt be more rapid when the war is over.

The great cities will probably, as practically all the cities of Europe have done of late years, follow the lead of Paris under Baron Hausmann in the character of their imposing blocks of houses

and wide boulevards, and one capital will be much the same as any other in Europe in its general appearance and social life.

Russian cities, however, even the capital, though ever becoming more cosmopolitan, still possess their many distinctive and interesting features, costumes, and customs, and are most picturesque and interesting, of course, during the long winter. It gives one a shock almost to go for the first time to Warsaw or Petrograd – at Moscow there is always the Kremlin – in the middle of the summer. There is little to distinguish them then, apart from the ever-glorious beauty of the churches, from Buda-Pest or Vienna.

But in the winter! Then it is everywhere still characteristic Russia. The sledges, for instance, with their *troikas*! They are the same carriages or *droschkes* as in summer, but with runners instead of wheels. Horses are harnessed in the same way in both seasons, and even the coachmen seem to wear exactly the same dress all the year round, edged with fur like their caps, though the padding inside the coat *must* be less in summer, one would think. The sledges of nobles and other wealthy people, used in the winter only, are painted and decorated most attractively. To drive out on a winter night, under a sky brilliant with stars, the air extraordinarily keen, bracing, and stimulating, the bells tinkling from the high and graceful yoke which rises from the central horse of the three, wrapped in furs, and with no sounds but the bells and the crack of whips and the subdued crunching of the snow, is to taste one of the joys of life, and feel to the full, with happiness in the feeling, "This is Russia!"

The coachmen pad up their robes of blue to an enormous extent, so that they seem to bulge out over their seat. It is said to be a custom dating from Catherine's days and from her requirements that there should be at least twelve inches of good stuff between her coachman's skin and her nose! But the present reason for the custom, which prevails, as far as I know, in no other country, is that there is an objection to a thin coachman. When I was speaking of the absurdity of these grotesque padded-out figures to a lady whom I had taken into dinner one night in Moscow, she at once said: —

"Well, I must say I like my coachman to look comfortable and well fed, I should hate a thin one."

Dickens's fat boy in Pickwick must commend himself to Russia, for they love Dickens and read him in translation and the original all through the empire, as just what a driver ought to be. I should think coachmen in Russia, however, *ought* to be fat without any padding-up, for they are all merry and good-tempered, their blue eyes and pleasant faces under their furry caps giving the impression of perfect health. They sit on their boxes all day without any violent exercise, and probably have good and abundant food, and above all they sleep. However long you keep your coachman, even in the depth of winter, he does not mind, for he invariably seems to go to sleep while waiting, and to have an absolutely unlimited capacity for gentle and peaceful slumber. I am not at all sure whether my driver on the steppes has not usually been asleep even when we have been going at full speed, the centre horse trotting swiftly, the other two, according to custom, at the gallop.

The *dvornik* is another institution in town life. He is an indoor servant in great houses, usually about the front hall, to open the door for those who go out, ready for all sorts of odd things; or he may be a head out-of-doors servant; or he may give general help for three or four or more smaller establishments; but he has to be there, and cannot be dismissed, for he is *ex officio* a member of the police and has to make his report from time to time. It must give a little sense of espionage, but still, as with the passport, it is only the evil-minded or evil-living who need to be afraid of the *dvornik's* report, and it must be remembered also that the Russian Government has long had cause to dread the revolutionary spirit, and has had to fight for its very life against it.

This is the darker side of life in Russia; and as far as my experience goes it is the only dark side, for it must be evident that a designing *dvornik* may do untold harm, and specially – as I have known to be the case – in official and diplomatic establishments. The custom opens out possibilities of blackmail also, and one can only hope that it will pass away in what so many of us feel are to be for Russia the better days to come.

Russians are very hospitable, not only lavish in its exercise where ample means allow, but naturally and by custom thoroughly and truly ready, even in the homes of the very poor, to welcome the coming guest.

This is brought out in every book one reads of Russia, but by no one more touchingly than by Mr. Stephen Graham in his *Tramp's Sketches*, when he journeyed constantly amongst the very poor and found them always ready to "share their crusts." Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace says the same about the wealthier classes: "Of all the foreign countries in which I have travelled Russia certainly bears off the palm in the matter of hospitality."

An interesting feature of a Russian meal, luncheon, or dinner, is its preliminary, the *zakouska*. It probably dates from the time when guests came from long distances, as they do still in the country, and would be hungry upon their arrival, and yet would have to wait until all the guests had come. It would be, and indeed in some houses to which I have been is still, understood, that if you were asked for a certain time the dinner would follow in the course of an hour or two; and so the "snack" was provided, and laid out upon the sideboard. The great dinners or banquets in London are "7 for 7-30," to give time for guests to assemble.

The *zakouska*, however, remains the custom still at every meal, and consists of caviare sandwiches, *pâté de foie gras*, and various kinds of deliciously cured fish. Strangers to the country, not understanding this particular custom, for it is provided in the drawing-room, ante-room, or in the dining-room itself, sometimes enjoy it so much and partake so freely, that they feel unequal to the meal which follows, and then have the pain of seeing their host and hostess quite mortified and hurt by their not doing full justice to the good things provided. I remember being entertained at supper in Libau by the good consul and his family, at the St. Petersburg Hotel, when the *zakouska* provided was so abundant and attractive that we all decided that we could not go beyond it to anything more substantial.

Another special and characteristic feature of Russian life, and one which it seems impossible to transplant to another country, for many of my friends have tried it, is the *samovar* or large urn with a central flue for burning or smouldering charcoal. The *samovar* is always near at hand, and ready to be brought in at short notice to furnish what one can only call the national beverage of tea. The steaming urn is a very cheerful object in the room, and when tea is made and guests are served, the teapot is placed on the top of the central flue and everything is kept bubbling hot. On the steppes I used to boil my eggs in the space between the flue and the outside cover, though this was not held to be good for the tea. Tea is provided and enjoyed everywhere in Russia, drunk very hot, rather weak and almost always with sugar, though *not* with lemon except in great houses and hotels. "Slices of lemon," to my amazement I was told, as I travelled off the track of railways and sometimes on, "are an English custom!"

Tea is always taken in tumblers set in a little metal frame with a handle. On the trains for the poorest passengers there is often hot water, and always at stations on the way; and emigrants, as they travel, may be said to do so teapot in hand. It is China tea and light in colour, and, as the custom amongst the poorer classes is to put only a moderate quantity of tea into the *tchinak* or teapot, to begin with, and to fill up with hot water as they go on drinking for an indefinite time, it must be very weak indeed at the end. Not even at the start is it strong, or what some public schoolboys call "beefy." At the end it can hardly have even a flavour of tea about it, though they go on drinking it quite contentedly. Across the Urals and amongst the Kirghiz I found the custom was not to put sugar in the tea but in the mouth, and drink the tea through it, and just above the Persian frontier jam was taken in the same way, to flavour and sweeten the tea in the act of drinking.

Russian houses, in the great cities, are much the same as in other capitals, though perhaps rather more spacious and richly furnished. The rooms for entertainment and daily use open out of each other, of course, and the beautiful stoves of porcelain have not, as yet, given way to central heating. Double windows in all the rooms are the rule all through the long winter, with a small pane let in

for ventilation; and thus a cosy and comfortable sense of warmth is experienced everywhere whilst indoors, which renders it, strange as it may seem, unnecessary to wear, as in our own country, warm winter under-garments. Comfortably warm by night or day, without extra clothing or extra blankets whilst indoors, and wrapped in thick warm furs when out of doors, the winter is not as trying in Russia as in more temperate countries. One takes a cold bath, indeed, in that country with more enjoyment than anywhere else, for, though the water gives an almost electric shock with its icy sting, yet, as soon as one steps out into the warm air of the bath-room and takes up the warm towels, the immediate reaction brings at once a glow of pure enjoyment. There is every comfort in a Russian house, especially in the winter.

The country house, or *datcha*, is a necessity for those who have to live in Russia all the year round, as the cities and great towns are very hot and dusty, and often full of mosquitoes in the two or three months of summer, which is quite tropical in its character.

Thus there are the two extremes, an Arctic winter and a tropical summer.

The country houses are entirely summer residences, with great verandahs and balconies and other facilities for life in the open, and are often placed amongst pine-woods or by the sea. Some of my friends use their *datchas* in winter also; and it is interesting to see how balconies and verandahs which in summer are filled with carpets, furniture, and plants, and are quite open on every side to meet the needs of the family and its guests all through the day in the open air, in winter are closed in by double windows fitted in on every side, and thus are made into additional and altogether different rooms.

The homes of the Russian nobility are very richly and artistically appointed in every particular. I stayed with friends a couple of years ago who had taken such an establishment for the summer; and furniture, pictures, china, arrangements and decorations of rooms all gave striking testimony to the wealth and cultivated tastes of the absent family. Even beyond the Urals, at the Kyshtim Mine, when first I visited it and was the guest of the managing director, I was amazed at the sumptuous character of his abode built by the former owners of the mine.

It is a vast building approached by a great courtyard and in the Greek style of architecture, with towers in different places giving it a fortress-like appearance in the distance. The rooms are extraordinarily large and numerous, and here and there are bits of Venetian furniture, old paintings, and rich carpets. On going straight through the great salon, which one enters from the outer door and into the open air on the other side, one is again under a great portico with Greek pillars, capitals, and frieze, looking out over a large sheet of water towards hills and forests. I could not help saying to myself in amazement the first time I went there, “And this is Siberia!”

I am not at all sure that social life upon European lines will not develop more rapidly in Siberia than in European Russia. Even now I do not know any railway station in Russia proper that can compare with that of Ekaterinburg, just where Siberia really begins, in all its arrangements for the travelling public and especially in the equipment of its restaurant and dining-rooms, where every comfort in the way of good food and good service is provided for the traveller, and French and German are freely spoken.

It is impossible to write on the general social life without mentioning, though one cannot do more, certain recent events which must have a tremendous influence upon Russia’s future, socially as well as nationally. There is, for instance, the Emperor’s proclamation against the *vodka* monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the government, which prohibits State *vodka* selling for ever. The effect upon the public life of the great cities has been astonishing already. No one could have believed that the “stroke of a pen,” so to speak, could have wrought such a change in the habits of a people. It remains to be seen, of course, how long the change will last; but, though Acts of Parliament cannot make people sober, it is a grand step in the right direction to decide that they shall not make them drunk, as the encouragement given by the State to the sale of *vodka* must certainly have done.

Could any other modern government have made a sacrifice such as Russia has made in giving up the expectation of nearly £100,000,000 of revenue for the social well-being of her people? Truly she deals with "large spaces!"

Moreover, the *vodka* proclamation comes in the natural course of things, and can have been but very little hurried by the war; for things were already moving in that direction. Last year but one – 1913 – a scheme of "local option" was introduced into the empire; and, in every commune within its boundaries, I am assured, men and women alike having the vote for the purpose, the inhabitants were allowed to decide for themselves whether they would allow *vodka* to be sold in their villages and towns. It was recognized that if the men enjoyed getting drunk the wives and mothers were the sufferers, and so they were allowed to vote.

The whole country, therefore, before the war broke out, was prepared to face a great issue. And the general war cry, "We've a greater foe to fight than the Germans!" shows how they faced it, and gives them that ideal which should enable them to go far. They are out for a holy war, and far-reaching influences are clearly at work which will profoundly and permanently affect the whole social conditions and well-being of the people.

Then there is the proclamation concerning the resuscitation of Poland. This also does not come at all as an overwhelming surprise to many of us, as it has been fairly well known that the Emperor, and some at least of his principal advisers, have for some time had ever-increasing constitutional, even democratic, sympathies. It has been more and more felt of late that what is called Russification, as practised towards the Finns, would go no further; and indeed, as far as they were concerned, would be reversed. No thoughtful person who has marked the trend of events since 1908 could doubt the direction in which higher and responsible Russian thought was moving. But who can possibly foresee the far-reaching effect of raising up a great Polish nation once more and recognizing the Roman Catholic Church as the Church of that part of the empire, with Russians and Poles, Orthodox and Roman Catholic living together in amity and international unity?

"I have just been staying," writes Mr. Stephen Graham in the *Times* for October 29, 1914, "in the fine old city of Wilna, a city of courtly Poles, the home of many of the old noble families of Poland. It is now thronged with Russian officers and soldiers. Along the main street is an incessant procession of troops, and as you look down you see vistas of bayonet-spikes waving like reeds in a wind. As you lie in bed at night you listen to the tramp, tramp, tramp of soldiers. Or you look out of the window and see wagons and guns passing for twenty minutes on end, or you see prancing over the cobbles and the mud the Cossacks of the Don, of the Volga, of Seven Rivers. In the days of the revolutionary outburst the Poles bit their lips in hate at the sight of the Russian soldiers, they cursed under their breath, darted out with revolvers, shot, and aimed bombs. To-day they smile, tears run down their cheeks; they even cheer. Whoever would have thought to see the day when the Poles would cheer the Russian troops marching through the streets of their own cities? The Russians are forgiven!"

No one who has known Russia and Poland before the war could read this description without deep emotion.

"A very touching spectacle," he continues, "may be seen every day just now at the Sacred Gate of Wilna. Above the gateway is a chapel with wide-open doors showing a richly-gilded and flower-decked image of the Virgin. At one side stands a row of leaden organ-pipes, at the other stands a priest. Music is wafted through the air with incense and the sound of prayers. Down below in the narrow, muddy roadway kneel many poor men and women with prayer-books in their hands. They are Poles. But through the gateway come incessantly, all day and all night, Russian troops going to the front. And every soldier or officer as he comes lifts his hat and passes through the praying throng uncovered. This is beautiful. Let Russia always be so in the presence of the Mother of Poland."

It is impossible to read of that scene also, and recall at the same time past relations of the two Churches here mentioned, without dreaming dreams and seeing visions of social unity such as

has never yet been known, both for Russia and all other countries to which she has so nobly and unselfishly given a social lead and invitation to follow on.

Note from p. 27, “M. Bourtzeff.” – There was a notice in the *Times* of February 4th last as follows: “A Reuter telegram from Petrograd of yesterday’s date states that M. Bourtzeff has been sentenced to deportation to Siberia.” I have never been able, however, to obtain any confirmation of this from Russian officials in this country, nor do the Russian Embassy know anything about it. I hope it will prove that a sentence was passed *pro forma*, and that the Emperor, as in Miss Malecska’s case, at once remitted the sentence, or that M. Bourtzeff was merely requested to live in Siberia for the present rather than in Russia, and I personally should think that no great hardship. I feel that we must await further particulars before being able to form correct impressions of this important case.

CHAPTER III
The Peasantry

It would be much more satisfactory to one's self to try and write a *book* about the peasantry of Russia, rather than attempt to say all that one wants to say in a single chapter, for there could hardly be any more interesting and promising people in the world than the peasant folk of Russia. The future of the empire depends upon the development and improvement of its agricultural population, as they form three-fourths, according to the last census of three years ago, of its grand total of over 171,000,000 souls. Russia thus leads in the white races in the matter of population, and possesses that splendid asset, which Goldsmith feels to be vital to a nation's advance and with which nothing else can compare when lost: —

"Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed can never be supplied."

It is upon coming to write even briefly and in an impressionist kind of way upon a class which forms the huge majority of Russia's population that the vastness of her empire and the different conditions under which her people live begin to be in some small degree apparent. It is no wonder that thoroughly well-informed and experienced writers, who have lived long and travelled far in the country and who are evidently quite to be trusted, should yet write so differently.

One will write as if the Russian peasant was only a degree better in his intelligence than the animals which share his filthy hovel, and no less brutish in temperament and nature. Fearsome pictures are drawn in some books I have read of the almost impossible conditions and indescribable filth in which men, women, and children, fowls, pigs, horses, cattle, and dogs herd together in a stifling atmosphere and sickening stench, where to enter is out of the question unless one is to be covered with vermin and contract some illness. All this may be true to the writer's own experiences, and he can only write and describe things as he has found them; but I too will do the same.

It is worth while to remember from the first that the lives of the peasant population of Russia must be as different in summer and winter as tropical heat is from arctic cold. In the winter all *must* crowd in together when the household is poor if life has to be preserved and defended against that appalling cold, when the one condition of the survival is warmth, or even heat. All outdoor occupation ceases, of course, with the one exception, it may be, of cutting, stacking, and carting wood. A peasant population, with a not very advanced civilization as yet, and little education – only twenty per cent. of the whole population can read and write – must, like the animal world, hibernate, come as it were to a standstill, rest physically and mentally, and prepare for the unremitting activities of the summer.

I remember once when staying in an inn at the top of an Alpine pass being impressed with the extraordinary energy and vivacity of the head waitress. She was simply untiring, always in good spirits, always at hand when wanted, unfailing in her attentions; however late a guest was up she was moving cheerfully about, however early one was down she was down before him helping to get things ready. When I was leaving I said to her, "I've been wondering when you get your rest?"

She smiled brightly, and said cheerfully, "In the winter, sir."

That's when the Russian peasant gets his rest also, and with the spring he begins his energetic life of farming and agriculture, of carting and labour. The long days are busy and all too short, the brief nights are hardly more than an interval. The whole land is full of movement, the air is full of song and music, the holidays marked by game and dance. Nothing could be more unlike the bitter cold and

gloom of Russia's long and terrible winter than the glow, brilliance, joy, and never-ceasing activities of her amazingly rich and life-giving summer. Her peasantry must present the same contrasts in homes and seeming temperaments, and two writers may therefore be widely asunder in their descriptions, and yet both write truthfully of the things they have seen and known at different times of the year.

To me the Russian peasant is, as to others who have known him at his best, an amiable, attractive, intelligent, thoroughly good-natured and altogether lovable creature. It is quite true that he can do, has done, and may again do some perfectly appalling things, but it has been when thoroughly worked up, as one of a crowd, and when every one else has lost his head. Terrible things which were not allowed to be known in Europe outside their frontiers, and now will probably never be known, were done during the revolution of seven years ago. But the Russian peasants are like children, as yet, and any one who knows and loves children knows perfectly well also what they are capable of, if they have any spirit in them, when thoroughly worked up, and when they too have for the time being lost their head and feel capable of almost anything that will hurt and pain and annoy. The peasants are in this, as in many other things, like children.

As soon as the statistics of the Russian peasantry come to be examined a startling fact comes to light. More than half their number – 582 out of every 1,000 – die before they are five years old. This means, as in the more inclement parts of our own country, that those who survive are a hardy race, strong and virile. The mortality is greatest amongst male children – over 600 out of every 1,000 – and those, therefore, who do live are strong enough for anything and of amazing vitality, as we have seen in the present war.

Not only are they vigorous and strong in physique, however, but there is nothing lacking in their intelligence, or Russia would not have the charm and fascination she possesses. Probably no country in the world, unless it be still agricultural France, can compare with Russia in the character of its peasant industries or their importance as part of the national revenue and resources. Probably the people will be stimulated to greater industry in this direction by the removal of the *vodka* temptation, and both cease to feel the desire for it and get something in its place. Just as a man I once knew who was led to give up drink and gambling at the same time, when wondering how he could possibly live without them, had to change his house and remove to another with a garden. There in gardening work he found his compensation, and at the same time added to the resources of his household. Thus may it be in Russia.[2]

The list of the Russian peasant industries is a long and interesting one, but I won't take up time in enumerating them, as they can be found in the *Russian Year Book*, or probably in most encyclopaedias. I may perhaps mention a few which have especially interested and attracted me, and will no doubt be brought before our own people in the Russian shops and exhibitions which are almost certain to be opened before long, and it must be remembered that I am speaking of peasant productions only.

There is the beautiful "drawn thread" work, lace-like in character, that all my friends say is unlike anything to be found in our own country, the making of which is promoted by the Princess Tenisheva and other Russian ladies, as well as embroidered and worked linen of all descriptions. Toys, and particularly large ornamental wooden spoons, of all kinds are made in great quantities by village folk, and painted boxes such as the Japanese make, but with Russian scenes upon them, in delightful shades of colour, and with rich and brilliant lacquer inside and out. Then there are hand-woven laces of different varieties, and, above all, the Orenburg shawls, exquisitely dainty and so fine that the largest of them will go through a wedding-ring, and yet warmer than Shetland wool. These also are hand-woven, and come from the province of Orenburg, just beyond the Urals.

Ironwork, again, is a speciality in Siberia, where they are said to be the best iron-workers in the world, though a friend of mine to whom I mentioned this, when I was showing him some perfectly wonderful and artistic specimens which had been given to me when I first went to Siberia, said, "That's

[2] Just as I go to press Mr. Lloyd George has told the House of Commons that productivity is already increased 30 per cent. in Russia.

because they have the best iron in the world." The stone or gem-cutting industry is an important one. Furs, from sheep and wolf-skins up to bears, as well as those of foxes, sables, elk, and reindeer, and other animals, are perfectly dressed by the peasants for their own use, as well as for sale. I have some exquisite work in coloured silks upon hand-woven cloth which had never been out of the tents where they were made till given to me, and above all I cherish a silver box which had been made in a Kirghese *uerta* or tent, far away upon the steppes, and was given to me when I had had services there after my long drive in the *tarantass*. It would hold about a hundred cigarettes, and was given to me for that purpose, is oblong in shape, with a lid of sloping sides, and is made from silver roubles hammered out and ornamented with that beautiful damascening that is said to be a lost art except for the peasants of the steppes. It is such a beautiful bit of workmanship that any one looking at it would think it had come out of a Bond Street silversmith's, until he turned it over and saw that the bottom is a plain piece of iron, rough and unornamented. Let no one think the Russian peasant unintelligent or unskilful or wanting in dexterity or resource. The wonder to me is that, with the few advantages and opportunities he has had, he is so capable, intelligent, and quick to learn as he is. And what is important for us to remember is that he loves to learn from an Englishman.

Then, again, we are told that he is brutish in temperament and of low ideals, and never seems to rise above his squalid surroundings. I don't agree that his surroundings *are* squalid. Simple they are, without a doubt, as the Canadian shack of three brothers I know is simple, and has nothing in it but beds and tables and chairs, their boxes and saddle-trees, etc., and all is bed and work, but it is not squalid. They have been brought up in a good and refined home, and yet find nothing incongruous in their present abode amongst the pine-woods.

That's what a Russian peasant's home is also, simple and yet attractive. It is built of logs, the interstices well plastered up with moss and clay to keep out all cold air, cool in summer and warm in winter by reason of the thickness of these outer walls; and it usually has an inner entrance or small room, before the large and chief living-room. There will be two or more small square windows in the latter, an *ikon* in a corner with a lamp before it and a shelf for flowers below – every one on entering looks towards it, bowing reverently and making the sign of the Cross – a very large stove of bricks, whitewashed, upon the top of which rests a wide shelf, carried along the wall as far as is necessary for the whole family to be able to find sleeping-space upon it. There will also be a long wooden bench, a great table, a few wooden stools, and a great cupboard, and, nearly always, cheap coloured pictures of the Emperor and Empress, whose portraits are to be found in all shops, inns, post offices, and places of public resort.

These are the simple surroundings described and made familiar to us by all writers of Russian stories of which peasants form a part, and all over the empire they are found just as Tolstoi, Dostoviesky, Turgenieff, and others bring them before us in their interesting tales. Take for example Tolstoi's *Where Love is there God is also*, *Master and Man*, and other parables and tales. When Martin Avdeitch is looking out from his small abode through his one small window upon the passers-by as simply as man could do, and yet with shrewd and discerning eyes, he is ready for the old pilgrim who comes into his life just at the right moment, and shows him the way to God.

Or take Nikita in *Master and Man*, in the same volume. In some ways he is extraordinarily simple, and does not appear to know how shamefully he is being exploited by his avaricious and grasping master. We are told in the story that he *does* know even though he goes on as if he didn't, and does his duty by him as if he were the best of masters, just as he does by an unfaithful and unfeeling wife. It would be difficult to imagine a peasant one would more love to know and understand than Nikita, strong, capable, affectionate, and shrewd, as he comes running before us in the story, to harness the horse for his master, the only man on the place that day not drunk, talking to the little brown cob which noses him affectionately, and in the end making a tremendous struggle for his own and his master's life, and winning through himself. Thus he goes on steadily as long as he lives, with

no other thought but that of duty, until he lies down beneath the *ikon*, and, with the wax candle in his hand just as he had always wished, passes away at peace with every living creature and with God.

There are no peasants like the Russians, or who think as they do. They are young, one feels, and "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts," and that is just what those who know them best find out.

A friend of mine told this story the other day at a meeting, at which we both had to speak, and I am sure it will bear repetition. A *moujik*, or peasant, was driving a German commercial traveller across the open country, and in the course of their conversation together his companion said to him: —

"Your countrymen are nothing but a lot of idolaters. You worship those *ikons* of yours, and bow down to them as the heathen do," and so on. The *moujik* was very indignant, and grumbled out his disapproval of all this.

"Worship our *ikons* indeed! We don't." And as they went driving on he suddenly drew up, and, pointing to a tree, demanded of the astonished traveller: —

"Do you mean to say that I would worship that tree?"

"No, no. Of course not! Drive on."

With a very disapproving grunt he drove on, and when they reached their destination, where there was a painter at work upon an outside door, the *moujik*, pointing to the paint-pot beside it, again demanded of the traveller: —

"Would you say I could worship that paint?"

"No, certainly not! You could not be so silly."

"But yet you say I worship an *ikon*, which is only painted wood, and can't see that I only use it to help me to worship God."

Let the reader reflect upon the way in which that peasant had been thinking over the charge made against him of idolatry, thinking what idolatry really was, and how far he felt himself from it. Let him try and imagine how one of our own agricultural labourers would think over such a subject if he were entering into conversation with us as he was digging in our garden, or driving us in a farmer's cart to a country station. I am writing this chapter in a quiet part of the country, and I can't conceive of any of the labouring people here even approaching that line of thought upon which the mind of that *moujik* began at once to move, though slowly enough no doubt, when he was told he was little better than a worshipper of idols.

I read the other day in a book on Russia that the peasantry are very dirty in person, and never wash; but again it must be borne in mind, as another remarkably well-informed and sympathetic writer[3] says also: "When people generalize about the intense misery of Russian peasants and the squalor in which they live they should remember that Russia is a large country, that it possesses a North and a South, an East and a West, and that what is true about one place is quite untrue about another." I shall be quite prepared, therefore, to be told by people who know Russia far better than I can ever hope to do, that their experience has been altogether different from my own, and I shall not dream of questioning or doubting the truth of what they say as far as their own experience goes.

In this vast area of which we are thinking there must indeed be great varieties of experience and conditions of life, and it is not contrary to what one might expect to find much nearer home, that the people of one village may be clean in their habits and those of another quite the reverse. But from all I have seen, heard, and read the Russian labouring and peasant class have a great desire to be clean. Nor is this a new thing at all in the national life. It is nearly forty years ago since Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace told us, in the first edition of his work, of the important part taken by the weekly vapour-bath in the life of the Russian peasantry, and described "the public bath possessed by many villages." How many villages of our own, even now, have a public bath? And how many of

[3] The Hon. Maurice Baring.

our own peasantry dream of having what is a perfectly ordinary and weekly habit of the Russians – the bath in his own house?

My Russian and Siberian friends tell me how they have always to arrange for their domestic servants to get a good bath, before they change for Sunday, every Saturday afternoon and evening. Mr. Rothay Reynolds says the same: "My friend took me to see his bath-house. Russians are exceedingly clean. In villages one may see a row of twenty cottages, and, thirty yards from them, a row of twenty bath-houses. The one the peasant showed me was a hut with a stove intended to heat the great stones placed above it. On bath nights the stove is lit, and when the stones are hot a bucket of water is thrown on them, so that the place is filled with steam. The bather lies on a bench in the suffocating atmosphere, soaps himself, and ends his ablutions with ice-cold water. In town and country it is held to be a religious duty to take a steam-bath once a week. Servants ask if they can go out for a couple of hours to visit one of the great baths in the cities. They go away with clean linen bound up in a handkerchief, and return shining with cleanliness. Admission to the cheapest part of a steam-bath is usually a penny farthing, but in the great towns there are luxurious establishments frequented by the rich."

There is another custom connected with the bath which testifies to the hardy character of the Russian *moujik*. They often rush straight out of the almost suffocatingly hot bath which they have been taking *inside* the huge earthenware oven that they all possess and, naked and steaming, roll themselves contentedly and luxuriously in the snow. This, as a writer has well said, "aptly illustrates a common Russian proverb which says that what is health to the Russian is death to the German" – a proverb which has had striking illustration again and again this very winter. Probably some of my readers saw the account of the arrival at the Russian front, soon after war began, of the bath-train which was so completely furnished and arranged that two thousand men could have a clean bath during the day or twelve thousand in the course of the week. No doubt others have followed since then.

The bath to the Russian has a certain religious significance also, as in Moslem countries; "and no good orthodox peasant," I have read, "would dare to enter a church after being soiled with certain kinds of pollution without cleansing himself physically and morally by means of the bath." "Cleanliness is next to godliness" is not a bad motto for any people, and possibly Russians will like to know that we have an order of knighthood which dates from 1398, and is named "The Most Honourable Order of the Bath," and mentioned regularly in the services at Westminster Abbey.

A great sense of initiative and personal responsibility, as well as corporate spirit at the same time, is clearly given early in life to the peasant mind in Russia, for nowhere, I fancy, in the world, except in countries where primitive ideas and customs still obtain, is there the same standard of village life and self-government. There are two kinds of communities. First, there is the village community with its Assembly or *Mir*, under the presidency of the *Staroshta*, who is elected by the village. He presides over the Assembly, which regulates the whole life of the village, distributes the land of the commune, decides how and when the working of the land has to be done; and it is specially interesting to know that in this most remarkable and exceptional village government of the *Mir* all women who permanently and temporarily are heads of houses are expected to attend its meetings and to vote – no one ever dreams of questioning their right to do so.

In addition to the village assembly and chief elder there is also the "Cantonal" Assembly, consisting of several village communities together, meeting also under the presidency of a chief elder. All this is, of course, a development of family life where exactly the same ideas of corporate duty in its members, and responsibilities in its head, are held.

It is evident that Russia has a great future if this view of self-government is gradually carried upwards. The right beginning in constitutional government, surely, is in the family, for there we find the social unit. A state is not a collection or aggregate of individuals, but of families, and all history shows us that the greatness or insignificance of a country has always been determined by the condition of its homes and the character of its family life. If from the family, village, and commune Russian

constitutionalists work slowly and carefully upwards, giving freedom to make opinions and convictions felt in the votes, just as responsibility is understood and met in the home, until one comes to the head of it all in “The Little Father”; and if he really rules – or administers rather, for no true father rules only – just as any good father would do, Russia the autocratic and despotic, associated in the minds of so many with arbitrary law in the interests of a few, enforced by the knout and prison-chain, may yet give the world a high standard of what the government of a free and self-respecting people ought to be.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.