

18 LITTLE GRANDMOTHER OF RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

"The peasant was free. No longer bound to the land, his landlord ordered him off. He was shown a little strip of the poorest soil, there to be free and starve. He was bewildered; he could not imagine himself without his old plot of land. For centuries past, an estate had always been described as containing so many 'souls.' It was sold for so much per 'soul.' The 'soul' and the plot had always gone together. So the peasant had thought that his soul and his plot would be freed together. In dull but growing rage, he refused to leave his plot of land for the wretched strip. 'Masters,' he cried, 'how can I nourish my little ones through a Russian winter? Such land means death.' This cry rose all over Russia.

"The government appointed in every district an 'arbiter' to persuade the peasants. The arbiter failed. Then troops were quartered in their huts, families were starved, old people were beaten by drunkards, daughters were raped. The peasants grew more wild, and then began the flogging. In a village near ours, where they refused to leave their plots, they were driven into line on the village street; every tenth man was called out and flogged with the knout; some died. Two weeks later, as they still held out, every fifth man was flogged. The poor ignorant creatures still held desperately to what they thought their rights; again the line, and now every man was dragged forward to the flogging. This process went on for five years all over Russia, until at last, bleeding and exhausted, the peasants gave in.

"I heard heartrending stories in my little school-house, and many more through my father, the arbiter of our district. The peasants thronged to our house