

rumors of fearful poverty. On my arrival, though the Czar's officials—judge, clerk, and policemen—were all very amiable, I felt at once that there was something queer in the village.

"In most of these poorest hamlets the peasants go away in the winter to work in the factories of the larger towns. The younger men often leave for good. But here all were staying on right through the winter; they had done this for years, and so the population had swelled, the land had grown poorer, and now famine was working sad havoc.

"Why did they stay? All the faces were cowed and frightened; it seemed to me they all wanted to tell me something but were silent for fear of the Zemsky Natchalnik.

"As you may know, this Natchalnik is the Czar's 'Inspector.' He watches zemstvos and peasants alike. He is the tyrant of the district. He forces the peasants to elect his creatures for judge and clerk and road-mender. If any one opposes him he simply calls this person a dangerous conspirator and throws him without trial into jail. The wise Russian law provides that the Natchalnik can imprison a peasant without trial for only three days at a time, but I have known cases where a troublesome 'honest government' peasant was put into jail for three days, then freed for three hours, then put into jail again, and so on for weeks.

"This Natchalnik had cowed the whole village. In vain I went from hut to hut asking questions. Even at midnight I could not enter a hut and stay ten minutes before there would come a rap at the door; in would stride either the judge, the clerk, or the policeman; and at once the family would fall into gloomy silence—grandparents, parents, and children all staring straight before them in dull, hopeless dread.

"I gave up and started for town at daylight. About a mile out of the village, in a little wood by the roadside, some twenty peasants were huddled together talking in low, tense, angry voices. I asked the driver of my sledge what they were doing.

"'Oh,' he laughed, 'they're trying to think of some way to get rid of this Zemsky Natchalnik. He has a big estate here and he wants the very cheapest laborers, and so he has forbidden the peasants to leave the village; he knows that in this way the peasants must grow more and more, and so the wages he pays can grow less and less, until they all get to the starving place where a man can just barely stand up and keep on working.'

"Our sleigh had come up noiselessly in the deep snow; we stopped behind a clump of bushes and listened, but could hear nothing intelligible. Only over and over again the same low, indignant cry:

"'In the next village the *barin* gives two rubles a day and here this Natchalnik only gives half a ruble!'

"In the villages near by I found that many landlords heartily favored this Natchalnik. He had managed in their villages the same scheme—for a consideration. Their peasants were also shut in and wages had already dropped a hundred per cent. One landlord jovially remarked: 'We are living like cheese in butter.'

"On the other hand the factory employers in the neighboring town were groaning for lack of workmen. They had tried hard to break the Natchalnik's economic quarantine, but every effort was useless, for the Russian law provides that the Natchalnik may forbid any suspected peasant to roam out of the district. This shrewd official had simply applied the law wholesale.

"This Natchalnik is only the outpost of the Czar's bureaucracy. They