

The New Russia

By Charles Johnston in "The Outlook," New York

I. Russia, 1905-1915

"With the war and without vodka, Russia is more prosperous than with vodka and without the war." This, the greatest single sentence ever uttered for prohibition, comes, not from a professional prohibitionist, but from M. Kharitonoff, Controller of the Treasury, speaking before the budget committee of the Russian parliament on January 25. The controller added that, owing to the extraordinary increase in the national savings due to prohibition, the enormous outlay occasioned by the war had caused no widespread hardship in Russia. As a proof of this, M. Kharitonoff cited the figures. The national savings, as shown in bank deposits between December, 1913 (seven months before the war), and December, 1914 (after five months' war), has been increased by 147 per cent. What a contrast, this, with the country's condition just ten years ago! For it is exactly ten years since the fall of Port Arthur, and the great battle of Mukden, which broke the power of Russia in Manchuria, was fought and lost in March, 1905.

In these ten years Russia has gained:

- 1—Civil and religious liberty.
 - 2—A parliament of two houses, rapidly becoming fitted to the national genius.
 - 3—A new principle of citizenship, affecting a hundred million Russian peasants.
 - 4—A new ideal in education.
 - 5—A new cultivated area of 50,000,000 acres.
 - 6—An increase in national revenue of \$500,000,000.
 - 7—A new epoch of agricultural and industrial prosperity.
 - 8—An added population of 40,000,000.
- It is doubtful whether, since the world began, any nation has ever made an equal ten years' gain.

II. The Russian Parliament

The Russian parliament was added to a strong sovereignty, not substituted for a sovereignty weak or already abolished. The result is, both elements of the national organism, the sovereignty and the parliament, continue to operate together, producing an admirably stable union. The one gives continuity and poise. The other gives free respiration to the national life. So Russia has a government not exactly like that of any other nation; in some things, like that of England; in some, more like that of the United States; in both, well fitted to her own needs.

As in England, the governing power in Russia is made up of three elements; the sovereign, the upper house, the lower house. The upper house consists of just under 200 members, and is somewhat like the upper house designed, but not yet formed, by the English Liberals; one-half appointed by the crown (for the king's creation of peers is, in fact, appointment to the upper house); one-half representing different powers and classes in the state. To show how thorough, thoughtful, and fair the Russian system is, it is worth while describing exactly in what way the elected half of Russia's upper house is made up. It is as follows:

Six are elected by the clergy; eighteen by the hereditary nobility; six by the Academy of Sciences and the Universities; six by the chambers of commerce; six by the industrial councils; thirty-four by the gubernias with local self-government (states); sixteen by the gubernias without local self-government (territories); six by Poland, or in all, as against 98 appointed by the crown—a total of 196. The lower house (Duma) elected in a way presently to be considered, numbers just under 450; about the size of the House of Commons, or our own House of Representatives.

The Making of the Duma: the Lower House

We think of the Duma as the Russian parliament. It is, in reality, the lower house of a bicameral parliament; the upper house, which was developed from the council of the Empire, being, as we have seen, in part elective. The Duma owes its existence to the Czar's famous proclamation, of October 17, 1905.

The First Duma met on April 27, 1906. It was largely made up of wild-eyed theorists and revolutionaries, who "made laws for an imaginary world," but had no grasp at all on the world as it now is. It was dissolved as hopelessly impracticable on July 9, thus closing a tempestuous existence of seventy-four days. The Second Duma was like unto it. Meeting on February 20, 1907, it was dissolved on June 3, with just over a hundred days to its credit.

Then the sovereign saw that he had opened the doors too wide. He made changes in the electoral system, applying the principle of the electoral college which, nominally, elects our presidents. These changes had the effect of throwing preponderant power into the hands of the landed gentry; the class which made the ablest parliaments the world has ever seen, the English parliaments of

serfs might purchase land from their landlords, paying for it in instalments to the state; exactly along the lines followed by Gladstone in 1881, and by Wyndham in 1903. But the vast majority of the peasants were left in thralldom to their ancient socialistic village communities; for, as Sir Henry Maine so convincingly showed, the real place of Socialism is the past, not the future. Socialistic experiments are throw-backs to ancient history.

There were in Russia, at the time of the Japanese war, some seventy million peasants, gathered in village communities, with a huge, straggling settlement of log houses as the centre of each. Of villages with not more than 100 inhabitants, there were more than half a million. The land about these villages, owned in common, was distributed every seven years, being cut up into little parcels,

could only be distributed with their consent and good-will. Then, for every village which did thus consent, it became necessary to lay out parcels of land of from thirty to forty acres for each family, in such a way that all would feel that they were fairly treated. Then of each such plot two maps had to be made, one of which was kept by the owner, while the other was filed at the ministry of agriculture. And last, but not least, the new farmer had to transfer his house to the centre of his farm. This was comparatively simple, seeing that a log house can be taken to pieces and put together again, almost like a house of children's building-blocks.

Already some 10,000,000 acres a year are being redistributed in this way—turned from communal to individual ownership; and as the peasants see the great practical benefits the change will go on still more rapidly.

Meanwhile the older land-purchase, not from the village communities, but from the landlords, had been making good headway. To aid this process the Peasants' Land Bank had been established in 1882, and up to the time of the Japanese war some 20,000,000 acres had been bought in this way. In November, 1906, a law was promulgated permitting all peasants who had begun the purchase of their holdings at the time of the emancipation to become freeholders of their allotments, all redemption payments still due being remitted. This splendid concession applied to about 280,000,000 acres.

So that in these two ways a new race of peasant proprietors is being built up in European Russia, while in the wheat belt of Siberia free grants of forty acres each are being distributed by the government. There is enough land of the highest quality in Siberia to settle ten million Russian families.

IV. Religion and Education

The old-time Russian peasants, grouped in village communities, ruled by their own customary law—practically, little self-contained republics—were nevertheless blended in a common unity—largely by the fervor and sincerity of their religion. "The people of the land," said an English writer two years ago, "have made it a vast sanctuary, perfumed with prayer and filled with the memories of their faith."

Thru this great religious nation, a new spirit is now stirring, a spirit of energy, of vigor, of hope. It is expressing itself, among other ways, in a new movement of education, applying primarily to the children of the vast peasant class, which now numbers a hundred millions. And with admirable good sense they are laying stress on the things practically useful to the new nation of peasant-proprietors. Thus very many villages possess their school fields and gardens, in which the children learn to plant and cultivate the fruits and vegetables and grains of their district. In addition to this, there are a thousand schools that teach bee-keeping. Three hundred give instruction in the culture of the silkworm. In nearly a thousand, trades and industries are taught, and hundreds more specialize in manual training. During the last ten years there has been much activity in the establishment of new educational institutions all over Russia, notably technical and commercial schools, under the new Ministry of Commerce. It is curious that the ministry and the Duma are pulling somewhat in opposite directions—in one part of the field of education the ministry favoring the classical side of the schools, while the Duma rather favors the scientific side. It is worth noting, too, that Russia has long held an advanced position in the education of girls. In university education, the drift at present is toward physics, chemistry, and the natural sciences generally.

V. The New Industrial Life

The long, white winters have had a peculiar influence on the industrial life of Russia, developing not so much "cottage industries" as "village industries," in which many hundreds of men and

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Three types of Russian soldiers: Bashkiren, Kirgisen and Tartars

the nineteenth century. On this basis the Third Duma was chosen, and met on November 1, 1907. It served the full five years of its legal existence and was succeeded by the Fourth, the present Duma, which met in November, 1912. In this fourth Duma there are nine parties, somewhat as in France, ranging from the Monarchists on the right, to the Socialists on the left. But one may say that practically two-thirds of the members are Moderates, while one-third are Radicals of various shades.

Curiously enough, it was only after the election of the Third (the effective) Duma, that the Russian revolution really got under way. But even while the revolution raged, the Duma, acting with the Czar's ministers and the upper house, was doing very effective work.

III. Turning the Peasants into Men

In his early days, Parnell asked Davitt whether there was any chance for an agrarian agitation in Ireland; whether the Irish peasants would follow his lead in a struggle for the land. "Yes!" answered Davitt; "they will follow you to the gates of hell!" There was something of the same fervor in the attitude of the Russian peasants toward the land; and, just as in Ireland, the practical settlement of the agrarian question by the various Land Purchase Acts knocked the bottom out of the revolutionary movements there, and turned the Irish peasants into staunch Conservatives, so the settlement of the land question in Russia, in a somewhat similar way, has taken all the steam out of "the Russian revolution" and is turning the Russian peasant into a sober, practical citizen of a wholly new and very desirable type.

To make a man an independent peasant proprietor of the Irish serf, it was necessary to buy out his landlord. In Russia, it was not the landlord, but the village community that had to be bought out. It is true that in 1861 Alexander II. planned a scheme by which the former

so as to give some land of each kind and quality to each household. So it might often happen that the holding of a peasant's family consisted of a hundred strips of land, some of them no larger than ten feet square, and as much as twenty miles from his home. He wore out soul and shoes walking from one little "cemetery-plot" to another; and, at the end, if he had made improvements, drainage, clearings, or fertilizing, he saw them all "redistributed"—practically confiscated—at the end of the seven years. The results were poverty, thriftlessness, apathy.

Why are the peasants of France the happiest, the richest, the most effective in the world? Because each one of them knows that he owns his farm down to the centre of the earth; and that every stroke of work he puts into it, every ounce of fertilizer, will come back to him and to his wife and children. On such terms any man will work and save, and the reaction on his character, in thrift, energy, providence, self-respect, will be of incalculable value.

It was to bring about a like happy result in Russia that the policy of Land Purchase, chiefly associated with the name of the late Premier Stolypin, was directed, and "Stolypin's Farmers," as the new Russian peasant-proprietors are called, are already counted by the million. Within a few years they will number a hundred million; a new race, strengthened, invigorated, rendered responsible and self-reliant; busy, thru intensive cultivation, enriching themselves and their nation.

The practical difficulties in the way of this great transformation were enormous; but the most serious have already been overcome. It required an army of land-surveyors merely to take stock of the lands to be converted, and this army had to be created and trained. This was successfully and rapidly done. Then the village communities had to be brought round to the new view, since their lands