

have found their English newspapers sequestered, day after day, because they were not subscribed for in this manner. In 1870, including printing of every sort and kind, there was but one printing-press in Russia for every sixteen thousand of the population.

THE NEW MILITARY SYSTEM.

The new military system of Russia, which excepts neither creed nor race, which carries the youth of all, German, Polish, Mohammedan, as well as Russian, far away from home, to make all alike soldiers of the Tsar, is the severe but effectual school in which these distinctions are being most effaced. One can see this in the streets, in the comradeship of oblique-eyed Tartars with bright Armenians from the Caucasus, of golden-haired boys from Finland with native Russians from the South, all speaking, or trying to speak, the language in which they are drilled, and by the knowledge of which they can alone hope to win higher pay and improved position. In every branch of the military service there are some educational facilities and even requirements. To these the troops are led by self-interest, and in some cases by stern punishments. Every impulse in the direction of personal advantage suggests to them to make the Russian language their own, and to direct their spiritual ideas toward that truest index of national loyalty—the Russian Church. The Russian military system is probably accomplishing as great a social reformation as that which was achieved by the abolition of serfdom.

That grand measure, the main glory of the present reign, has not yet effected all the improvement of the Russian peasant and his tillage which the most sanguine of its advocates expected would immediately follow the operation of the great ukase of 1861, and the belligerent power of Russia is reduced because of the unimproving condition of agriculture. Primarily, this is due to the general ignorance and poverty of the peasantry; and, secondarily, to the land system and the onerous taxation of Russia. It was very absurd to expect that twenty-two millions of people would, at a stroke of the Tsar's pen, advance by a leap from the display of the characteristics of slavery to the exhibition of the virtues of people who have for ages sustained the ennobling cares and the responsibilities of personal freedom. It may be said, without fear of contradiction, that the Russian peasantry will never be as the rural population of Germany or Switzerland, or even of less educated France, until they too are instructed, and until they, like those, are accustomed to the exercise of a substantial and duly responsible share in the government of the country. In many villages or communes of Russia, the peasant is disposed to say that the Emperor's benign policy has done him no good, inasmuch as it has resulted in giving him a harder master in the commune than he had in the proprietor. The advances which the Government has made to the peasantry for the enfranchisement of their lands, as well as the revenue resulting from taxation, are secured by making each commune equally with each indi-

vidual responsible for payment. In 1872, the State had advanced no less than eighty million pounds in respect of sixty-six million acres; and if the peasant fails to pay to the commune his due share of the interest and sinking fund upon the aggregate sum which stands against the name of the village and its local government in the books of the Empire, he is of course not unlikely to meet with severity from his fellows, who must make good any deficiency on the part of lazy or dissolute defaulters.

FIRE WORSHIP.

It is certainly very wonderful, upon a sandy plain, with not a tree nor a blade of grass in sight, to look upon a reservoir of liquid fuel thus drawn from this stony soil; yet to our thinking there was a spectacle much more curious, about twelve versts farther from Baku, when we came to one of the oldest altars in the world, erect and flaming with its natural burnt-offering to this day. Surakhani is an ancient seat of probably one of the most ancient forms of worship. For unnumbered ages, the gas which is generated by this subterranean store of oil, identical with that which caused the Regent's Park explosion, has escaped through long-established and inaccessible fissures in the limestone crag of which the hills in the neighborhood are composed, and the fire of this gas has lighted the prayers of generations of priests, as it blazed and flared away to the heavens.

For long, long ages, the worship of these flaming issues of petroleum gas at Surakhani has been maintained by delegations of priests from India, who have died and been buried upon the spot, to be succeeded by other devotees from the same country. It would, of course, be possible to extinguish the blaze, if one were to choke the fissures; and the people about the place say that sometimes, when the wind rises to a hurricane, the fire is actually put out. The gas, however, can then at once be relighted with a match. We saw this done, not, as of yore, with mysterious incantations, and the terrified awe of superstitious worshippers, but—to what base uses may gods come!—in order to burn lime for Baku, and to purify the oil raised from the natural reservoir in which the gas is generated. We thought that never, perhaps, had we seen a man more to be pitied than the "poor Indian," who is the successor of a long line of religiously appointed guardians of this once wholly sacred spot. There the light of this lamp of Nature's making flared on its formerly hallowed altar-place, maid of all work to half a dozen degenerate Persians, now subjects of the Christian Tsar, who thought of nothing but making lime, and of warming their messes of sour milk and unleavened bread. In another place the gas was conducted from the surface of the ground into a furnace, where it flamed beneath vats of petroleum, in the process of refining the native oil by distillation. Surely there never was such a pitiful *reductio ad absurdum*! Before us stood the priest of a very venerable religion, which has always seemed to me to be one of the most noble and natural for