

## RUSSIAN PEASANT RIOTS.\*

BY ERNEST POOLE.



ANG the leaders of these cattle; flog the others; flood the whole district with Cossacks—this is our only practicable course.” So spoke the head of the Chancellery in Kursk, centre of peasant riot districts, most wretched part of Russia.

The Chancellor leaned forward over his desk. Splendid shoulders, thick neck; broad, rugged face with heavy black beard; quiet, piercing eyes deep under bushy brows; a low, harsh voice.

“Our hands are tied,” he said impatiently. “Petersburg seems to have lost its head. To-day we get orders to be liberal, to promise reforms, to conciliate these cattle. To-morrow they say, ‘Flog! Hang! Stamp out!’ But to-morrow is only one day, and before we have time to begin our flogging, the next day brings more orders—to be ‘kind and liberal.’

“It’s a dangerous time for such hesitation. The whole province is in ferment. The Socialists are everywhere, straining to bring to a climax their work of the last thirty years. In the night they nail their manifestoes to walls, sheds, and fences; day and night they are in the huts, in the

woods, and in village tea-rooms; everywhere gathering groups and lashing up wild passions. Two weeks ago one group suddenly swelled to thousands; they swarmed like locusts over the district, burning a dozen estates in as many hours. We threw in our troops; the fire went underground. It is silent fire now, but ready to burst up again in an instant!

“You come here at such a time,” he continued grimly, “and say you wish to see these peasants. I shall show your letters to the Governor, but I tell you beforehand that he will never give permission.” He left the room.

I had come down the night before from Moscow with Ivanoff, my interpreter and colleague, proposing to find the truth about these peasants in southern Russia—the hungriest, most ignorant, most degraded of all the human millions who belong body and soul, by grace of God, to Nicholas the Second.

We had come direct to the Governor: first, because we wished to hear both sides of the story; second, because one week before, up in central Russia, the police had expelled us from a village, warning us never again to attempt looking at peasants without permission from the governor of the province.

We waited impatiently. Past the open door came brilliant uniforms. Waiters hurried through with trays of tea-glasses. Before us in the corner hung a Madonna in gorgeous frame of silver and gilt, and close below flickered the tiny wick lamp which never goes out. This was an ikon—one of the twenty million ikons

\* The sensational political developments in the Czar’s unhappy country give a peculiar timeliness to Mr. Poole’s Russian studies. In the profoundly true story that follows, a face-to-face study of actual conditions, Mr. Poole gives new and significant details of the horrors of peasant oppression, and traces the momentous results, including the people’s repudiation both of their God and their country, which the great crimes of the Russian autocracy have at last produced.