

condition of the Russian people, is the fact that the public opinion of this most pacific of all countries seems at first sight to possess an easily excitable Jingoism, making such criminal expedients particularly easy. Whenever there is some diplomatic complication, and some smell of powder in the air, the Russian Press seems as if intoxicated all at once with a war-like spirit, and provided the trouble lasts for some time, society seems to be ablaze. . . . When the Government gives the signal, there are dozens of papers ready to take the hint, and cheer for war as they would have cheered for peace, at the bidding of the authorities."

On these occasions, moreover, the cry for war is swollen by many who hate strife hardly less than they detest the Government. Rendered reckless by the wretchedness of their daily lives, they feel, rightly or wrongly, that as things cannot be made worse, any change must needs be for the better. It was thus in 1883, when war with Germany was in the air, and again during the late Afghan difficulty; and to the same cause may be ascribed, in the opinion of our author, more than half the "nationalist" excitement which preceded the Bulgarian War. But these patriotic outbursts, though affording the Government an admirable excuse for going to war, are never the cause of war. The Czar can either suppress or disregard them, as he may please. War may be made in the interest of the dynasty or from high (or low) political considerations, but never out of deference to the popular will. In a country where the people are voiceless, where there is neither freedom of the Press nor right of meeting, and the presentation of a petition is punished as a crime, public opinion can have no real existence. If, however, the nation could be consulted, wars of conquest would never be sanctioned. The peasants, who form the vast majority of the people, who furnish both the sinews of war and food for powder, want nothing so much as peace, and would vote for it as one man. On the other hand, there is one class of the community outside the official class who, though small in number, are great in influence, which they almost invariably use in favour of war. These are the traders and manufacturers, whose power lies in the fact that they are the only subjects of the Czar contented with their lot and well affected to his Government. The nobles, heavily hit by the emancipation of the serfs, and now all but ruined by the depreciation of land, are moody and discontented; the peasants, though loyal to the person of the Czar, detest his Ministers; the Army is contaminated with sedition; while many of the town workmen and the great majority of the educated are either actual conspirators or potential rebels. So it comes to pass that traders are the only body whom the Government can thoroughly trust. For the most part imperfectly educated, they care nothing for freedom, give their minds altogether to business, and repay the favours lavished on them by the State with unswerving devotion. It is to encourage this class, to increase their power and multiply their numbers, that the Russian tariff has been made even more protective than that of the United States; and in the hope of finding them fresh markets, the boundaries of the Empire have been pushed to the frontiers of Afghanistan.

On the other hand, as Stepniak well puts it, the masters of Russia have their legs confined in stocks which tighten in proportion as their greed for territory increases. "The material decomposition, the financial difficulties, the disorder in all branches of the Administration, including the Army, exercise the most salutary and cooling effect even on those who govern Russia." In answer to the question whether Russia cherishes hostile designs against India, he says that though some such idea may occasionally cross the minds of St. Petersburg rulers, it would be doing the Government of the Czar too much honour to attribute to it any strongly marked line of conduct whatever. Its policy in home matters is uncertain, vacillating, and contradictory. The Czar's Ministers "live from hand to mouth, thinking only how they can get through the day, and not knowing in the evening what they are going to do on the morrow." Can it be that men so wanting in decision, so halting in opinion as to domestic matters, act in foreign affairs with the constancy of aim and steadiness of purpose for which English Russophobists give them credit? Is it not rather the fact that in both these branches of administration the Government follows the impulse of external events, and yields to the pressure of the moment, without any fixed plan for the future. Stepniak regards the idea of an immediate campaign against India as an absurdity. Russia does not possess the material forces necessary for so vast an enterprise, her finances are in as evil plight as those of Turkey, and though her Army is formidable in numerical strength, and excellent so far as the *personnel* is concerned, it is eaten up by the gangrene of official peculation, which "makes greater ravages in its ranks than any enemy with whom it has had to cope." Let any who doubts this read the chapter entitled "The Russian Army and its Commissariat."

Stepniak has naturally much to say concerning the position and prospects of the revolutionary party, and he gives incidentally some interesting information as to the religious condition of the people, which may be thus summarised—the educated classes are Atheists, the members of the Orthodox Church heathens. Faith is found only among the sects—"all the truly religious elements of Russia are comprised in them." The number of sectarians is reckoned at fifteen millions, and they are continually increasing. "Their religion is a living power, inspiring and confirming all their political and social conceptions. They are the greatest moral force which moves the Russian peasantry, and their tendencies are necessarily Oppositionist and anti-Governmental." As the Nihilists belong to the educated class, they are naturally unbelievers; yet they do not, as has been erroneously supposed, seek to destroy either the official *culte* or the unrecognised religions. The former is so unreal and hollow that it would not be worth destroying; and dissent, including as it now does one-fourth of the rural population, may one day range itself on the side of revolution.

A similar misconception prevails as to the supposed anarchist tenden-

cies of Nihilism. Nihilists, it is true, hold Socialistic views; but views are one thing, demands another, and they ask only for such political reforms as would convert the autocracy into a limited monarchy with free institutions, and afford the people an opportunity of controlling their own destinies. The Government, however, will not grant this opportunity:—

"It tabooed not only Socialism, but everything tending to the good of the nation, to progress, and to general liberty. This necessitated a political struggle, and the battle began all along the line. The Socialists, recruited from among the well-to-do as well as from among the workmen, were the first to assume the initiative, and remained the most ardent in carrying it through. Was it because they are Socialistic? No; Socialism in itself has little to do with it. They possessed in the highest degree what urges people to similar struggles: the spirit of self-sacrifice, and the unbounded ardour of serving their country. A pure 'liberal,' a man believing in political freedom as the ultimate perfection of human society, may unite quite fraternally with their efforts."

And, in point of fact, the movement which was begun by Socialists is gradually losing its special character, and becoming thoroughly national and patriotic. It has been joined by many military officers and civilians, who have little or no sympathy with Socialism:—

"Thus, we may say that the Nihilist movement, which some fifteen years ago was commenced by a set of young enthusiasts of Socialistic creed, now under the influence of internal causes and the great spread of disaffection in the country, is tending to transform itself into a vast patriotic revolutionary party, composed of people of various shades of opinion, united in a common effort to destroy a tyranny obnoxious to all. They want to substitute for it a national government, in which all shall possess the possibility of working pacifically for the good of the country. Nothing can be more moderate, more just, nor give them a greater right to say they are working for the common good."

That this hope will sooner or later be realised seems to us as certain as any event which has not yet come to pass well can be. The method and time of its accomplishment are necessarily matters of conjecture. Stepniak counts much on the growing disaffection of the Army, and he quotes a letter from an officer, lately published in *Narodnaia Volia Messenger*, in which occurs the following significant passage:—"It is not the cunning of revolutionary propagandists that urges us to side with the Revolution; it is the Government itself—the Government which every hour makes of its officers gaolers, executioners, gendarmes, and the servants of every swindler."

An open insurrection without the active or passive co-operation of the military is, of course, out of the question. But the coincidence of a palace revolution or a partial mutiny with agrarian disturbances and an insurrection supported by the Nihilists, is quite on the cards, and would of a surety be fatal to the dynasty. This contingency is far from improbable. The national finances are in utter disorder, the peasants, impoverished by a bad fiscal system, and by a succession of lean years, crushed with taxation, and maltreated by the agents of power, are ripe for rebellion, not against the Czar, whom they regard as semi-divine, but against his Ministers and taxgatherers, who, as they believe, usurp his authority and criminally hide from him the sufferings of his people. They would, in fact, rebel against the Czar's Government in the name of the Czar. All the same, the rising would have to be dealt with as a veritable insurrection, and might have political results of the last importance. Yet even in the most favourable circumstances, the revolutionists, as Stepniak frankly admits, will have to encounter enormous difficulties. "With a much stronger tyranny against us than the Italian, whose struggle for liberty was the direst, we have to organise, on the soil of the enemy, in a country swarming with spies, what the Italian patriots could prepare on friendly ground. Such work presents incalculable perils and difficulties, and the further the conspiracy extends, the greater is the danger of its discovery. The revolutionary organisation may incorporate once more hundreds of the military and thousands of civilians, and this only to be ruthlessly destroyed in its bloom, to rise and once more be destroyed; the dreadful test being repeated again and again before arriving at the glorious and longed-for day of open battle."

But however desirable, it is by no means certain that Russian revolutionists will have the patience to bide their time, and keep to purely insurrectional methods. Russians, as the author observes, though born in an icy country, are nervous and excitable:—

"The word 'terrorism' has been uttered by the most popular of our clandestine periodicals, and it will not be at all surprising if we hear now and then of violent attempts against the persons of various representatives of the Government. It is a dreadful thing to take in one's hands to decide the life or death of men whose guilt would be better judged by the country. But it is the greatest injustice to set against Russian patriots as an accusation what is their dire necessity. No man or woman living in political conditions so entirely different from the Russian has a right to condemn them before knowing what these conditions are. And no Russian, however moderate he be, who knows and feels for the wrongs of his country, has condemned them in the past, nor ever will condemn them in the future."

That last assertion is certainly untrue, unless there be not a single Russian left who is also a Christian.

We cannot take our leave of this remarkable book without calling attention to the author's sensible and acute observations on Socialism. Though himself an avowed Socialist, he is no believer in the possibility of a social revolution. Political changes may be accomplished by violence, a street-fight may cause the destruction of a Minister or the downfall of a dynasty; but the economic changes involved in the Socialistic idea can be brought about only by general consent and voluntary co-operation in tentative measures deliberately taken and extending over a considerable period of time. Socialism, in short, he believes, is an affair of evolution,