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Russians in Europe
and in
Canada



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THE GROWTH OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE.

The enormous plain, stretching from the Arctic Ocean south to the Caspian and Black Seas and the Caucasian Mountains, and from the Ural Mountains in the east to the Baltic Sea in the west, was, up to the 9th century, rather a wild country. The chief occupations were fishing and hunting, and hence the Slavic tribes which inhabited it settled mostly in the vicinity of the river basins and around the lakes.

The history of Russia may be divided into four periods:

- (1) The period of independent principalities (862 A.D.-1238);
- (2) The Mongol domination (1238-1462);
- (3) The Tsardom of Muscovy (1462-18th century);
- (4) Modern Russia (from the 18th century).

1. The first period was a time of strife between the various principalities. Each of the princes wanted to obtain supremacy over the rest. By and by, Novgorod, the seat of the first Russian prince, Rurik, was surpassed in importance by Kiev, which then became the seat of the Grand Duke.

The most notable event of this period

was the official introduction of Christianity in 988 by the Grand Duke Vladimir the Holy. By his order thousands of people were baptized in the River Dniepr by Byzantine or Greek priests.

As concerns the relations of the rulers to their subjects, it is interesting to notice that while during the modern period autocratic government has been characteristic, there was during the first period a kind of constitutional or even republican government. The princes were merely the leaders of the troops, and they strove to distinguish themselves by military exploits.

2. Unfortunately all the good that was just taking root was suppressed by the Mongolian invasion of the 13th century. The conflicts of the princes had so exhausted the strength of Russia that she could not withstand the Mongol pressure.

This period was a time of degradation and misery. But fortunately the Mongol Khans did not meddle much with the internal life of the country, but satisfied themselves with the south and south-eastern corner, where they lived on the tribute collected by the Russian princes, together with their own presents.

Notwithstanding the gloom and shame of this period, one lesson it taught Russia, viz.: the strength of unity. The principality of Moscow especially profited by this lesson, and in 1430, now no more a

principality, but a small kingdom, it threw off the Mongol yoke. By this time the enemies had become split up among themselves and were unable to bring Russia to her knees. Thanks to the isolation of the Mongols from the people, and the undestroyed internal order of life, Russia emerged as a free State not much defiled by the foreign yoke.

3. During the next period the Tsars of Moscow are the central figures. It is a well observed fact that harsh treatment makes people cruel to others. Accordingly, the tyranny of the Mongol Khans was now adopted by the Tsars.

In 1597 Boris Godunov, the temporary ruler, deprived the peasants of the freedom to offer their services to any landlord they pleased; they were, so to say, bound to the soil. This was the beginning of a serfdom which continued for nearly three centuries, and, for the mental and spiritual development of the people, was even more disastrous than the Mongol domination.

It was in 1613 that the present dynasty began to reign in the person of Michael Feodorowitch Romanov, the grandfather of Peter the Great.

4. Peter the Great (1689-1725), the founder of Petrograd, was the hero who awakened Russia from the lethargy caused by the Mongol domination. He made Russia a world-power and connected her with the

culture of Europe. With his reign begins the Modern Period.

Alexander the 2nd (1855-1881) was destined to lay the foundations of the temple of liberty for his peasant subjects. In 1861 he set free the peasants of the whole Empire, and each family was supplied with from five acres of land in the south to nineteen acres in the north.

Alexander "the Liberator" was assassinated, and the next reign was a frosty night after a sunny day in early spring. The ice was broken only by the events following the Russo-Japanese war. After various revolutionary uprisings a constitution was obtained by Russia on October 30th, 1905. The following decade was nothing but a struggle between the representatives of the people and the bureaucratic officials, which has been interrupted by the present war. But every thinking Russian is convinced that after the war is over a new era in the life of Russia will begin.

LIFE IN RUSSIA.

To one who comes to a Russian Province from a country like England the picture of Russian life must appear poor and monotonous. But it is only because one's eyesight is too limited to survey the vast panorama of the Russian landscape. After having traveled the country in different

directions, he will surely change his opinion.

The hunting and fishing Samoyades and the Lapps with their reindeer herds in the north; the nomadic Bashkirs, Kalmuks and Kirghiz on the southern steppes; the mountaineers in the Caucasus; the miners in the Ural mountains; the Asiatic tribes mingled with the convicts of Siberia; the fishermen around the lakes and on the great rivers; the workers on the sugar plantations and in the factories of the so-called little Russia, in the petroleum works near the Black Sea, on the waterways and railways—not to speak of the agricultural district in the centre and the great cities—all these make Russian life far from monotonous.

But not only is there variety, there is also a natural system in the whole organism. The Great Russians, the bulk of the population, occupy the centre with the two main points, Moscow and Petrograd, the one being the heart the other the head of the body. The Little Russians or Ukrainians in the south, and the White Russians, the Poles, the Lithuanians and the Letts in the west, with the other tribes and peoples, cemented by the humane spirit of the Russian character, would make one natural whole, if it were not for some unwise pressure from the Government.

All the different pursuits and occupa-

tions are based on agriculture; that is the backbone of Russian life. Generally the country people live in villages, the size of which varies from ten or twenty to some thousands of cottages. Each village owns an area of land which the villagers divide among themselves according to the number of families. As the number of inhabitants grows, the allotment to each becomes smaller. With the village in the centre, the allotments stretch out for miles in all directions, the strips being in some places only a couple of yards wide. But the late Premier Stolypin gave an impetus to a re-arrangement of village life. The common ownership of the land has been legally supplanted by private ownership. Time will show how the change will work.

The winter time among the peasants is vivified only by the musical temperament and the ceremonious Church festivals. The Russian youth simply live by music. Vocal music is the chief thing. The Russian song is the best expression of the national character. When in a group, they never sing just the melody. Without special training their voices expand in powerful broad accord. While the sopranos and tenors shoot up to the highest pitch, the basses descend to a depth which has become famous as "the Russian bass." Listening to the melancholy tunes, one seems to hear a dirge, while the cheerful element

breaks out into the gayest allegro. Besides, there is always variety, harmony, sympathy, and a strength which often passes over into passion.

By the reforms of the sixties of last century and especially by the revolutionary movement at the beginning of this century the minds of the young have been aroused, and they have become very eager for learning. The village schools are overcrowded. The High Schools and Universities, notwithstanding high fees, cannot accommodate all applicants, and take in only the most capable ones. And, as in everything else, so in education also, the Russian mind is not satisfied with a narrow scope. A Russian lawyer or physician or social representative will be ashamed not to know the masterpieces, not only of Russian literature, but also of the English, French, German and Italian world-famous writers.

If we take into consideration the fact that the whole of the best Russian literature is the product of the nineteenth century, and that fifty years ago the masses were all illiterate, we must admit that the progress of late has been extraordinarily rapid. But even at the present time there is in Russia very much darkness, superstition, hardship, oppression and discontent. The rays of civilization have not yet penetrated into all corners of the enormous

country. But the dawn is bright; the sun will soon have risen.

THE RUSSIAN CHARACTER.

It is a recognized fact that a nation, as well as an individual, more or less reflects the nature of its surroundings. In the Russian character we can trace many features that remind us of the mother country.

Many assert that the Russian character is full of contrasts, liable to pass abruptly from extreme mirth to the deepest melancholy. But Russia is not a narrow area enclosed by insurmountable mountains or dangerous sea. Wherever you happen to live you are always aware that the remotest Arctic regions and the sultry tropics are within reach.

But yet the bulk of the country lies within the temperate zone, just as the character of the people is generally moderate and good though liable to fall into fits of extremes.

Expansion, nearly unlimited vastness, is the main characteristic of Russia. Expansion, breadth of mind and soul, is the ideal for every Russian. He hates the cunning of the German; he cannot understand the reserve of the English.

Except in some southern regions nature does not provide the necessities of life without hard labor. Add to this the hardships under which the people have lived, thanks

to the fact that "there is no order in Russia," and one will understand why the Russians have become laborious, patient, and content with little.

Used always to live in communities, the Russians have become very sociable, good-natured and cheerful. Hospitality is one of the most attractive features of the national character.

Having undergone many hardships themselves, the Russians are very compassionate to others who suffer. It would be hard to find another nation so humane, so sympathetic with the desolate, the afflicted, the oppressed. For example, when during the present war some German prisoners arrived at a provincial town, the inhabitants, instead of mocking them or exhibiting signs of hatred, sighed in compassion and offered them eatables and even money.

But perfection is not the lot of mortals, and the Russians, like other nations, have their special weaknesses, which are frequently the direct consequence of their ideal features.

First of all, the breadth of their nature often leads them into excesses. Once a Russian takes to a thing, he does not recognize limits or bars. In eating or drinking, in dancing or fighting, he often goes to the extreme. The same excess is often shown in carrying out some humanitarian or religious idea. For instance, a peasant has

lived quietly all his life, but suddenly gets an idea that he should visit the holy places in Palestine. Without consideration of the consequences he will sell out his scanty possessions and set out on his journey.

The same disposition is responsible for the vulgarisms and indecencies that one frequently comes across in common life, literature, art and business. In the works of the best Russian writers you may stumble upon phrases or scenes that would not be tolerated in modern English literature.

Finally, his profound sympathy with his fellow-man makes the Russian an indifferent patriot. There is a special hatred in France for the Germans, the English regard some nationalities with contempt, and neither in France nor in England is any other people as highly respected as the native race. In Russia, on the contrary, the English are regarded as superior to the Russians, the French are found delightful, and the other nationalities are not treated with special hatred unless they violate the patience of the people.

In conclusion, we may say about the Russian character what was said about the country: it is vast and abundant, all it needs is order, observance of limits and rules. And there is only one Prince who can establish that order.

RUSSIAN RELIGION.

There is a proverb, "The Celts and the

Slavs are religious geniuses," which English-speaking people will, I think, admit as far as concerns the Celts; but it is just as true concerning the Russians who are the purest offspring of the Slavic branch of peoples.

The whole life of the average Russian is permeated by religion. Amid the scenes of vast nature, wresting his scant provisions from her tight grip, he has always been confronted with the Infinite. His resignation to God sometimes goes even too far, bringing him into passive indifference and inactivity.

"Without God not even to the threshold, but with God—no matter if the ocean is to be crossed," is a well-known proverb which well enough illustrates the facts stated.

In the morning the Russian never leaves his room without having crossed himself before the holy icons, which will be found in the poorest dwelling-places. It is a touching sight to see the poor workman, sometimes out in the open air, before beginning to eat his humble meal, piously uncover himself and make the sign of the cross. Every important undertaking is started in the same way, often with the additional words, "Now with God."

But not only in private life, in public affairs as well, every undertaking is inaugurated with a religious ceremony or a blessing by a priest. The opening of a hospital,

a school, a factory, a railway line, would not be complete without a religious ceremony. Even a common dwelling-place would not be occupied before it has been sanctified by the blessing, the cross and the holy water. And it is not a mere form. Here is the judgment of an English writer who has well studied Russian life:

“Granting all their superstition, conceding their ignorance, giving full credit to every unfortunate phase which the Christian religion takes among these peculiar people, he who travels the Empire from end to end, with eyes to see and ears to hear, cannot but admit that here is a power in human affairs, blind it may be, cruel oftentimes no doubt, but still reverent, devotional, and fairly saturated with a faith so deep that it is instinctive, and the likeness of which may not be met in all the earth.”

THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA.

The Russians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, which is a branch of the Greek Church. Until the thirteenth century all the priests in Russia were Greeks. Then followed the rule of Russian patriarchs, whose authority was equal, in some respects superior, to that of the Tsars. But Peter the Great, jealous of the sway of the patriarchs, abolished that office and substituted the Holy Synod.

The Synod is constituted of the three

metropolitans, a number of bishops and archbishops, and some inferior clergy, every one of whom is appointed and may be dismissed by the Tsar himself. There is also one lay member, the Tsar's Procurator, who is the real director of the Church's policy. Seeing the great power of religion in Russian life, the Tsars had to bring the spiritual leaders of the people into accord with themselves, or in case of a clash they would have had little support from the people. The best means to secure this end was to subjugate the Church to the will of their representatives, the Procurator of the Holy Synod.

This system worked wonderfully well during the dark ages of ignorance, but after the emancipation of the serfs the souls of the people awakened and began to crave for freedom of action and for more substantial spiritual food. The Orthodox Church, however, fettered by the Government, was even forced to make some steps backward. At a time when the search for knowledge and truth was, so to speak, raging, the Church strove to suppress every inquiry into religious questions. Books and periodicals, touching any religious or theological problem were strictly censored. The broader-minded priests were jailed in monasteries, excommunicated or exiled. The literature published or sanctioned by the Holy Synod in most cases was filled with

superstitious dogmas and miraculous stories of saints, relics, etc.

The calling of a priest thus became despised. Seminaries preparing young men for church work were deserted, their pupils trying to get into the Universities. The generally not high moral level of the priests continued to drop. While liquor was obtainable, indulgence in drink was very common among them. On some festival occasions the priest was quite forced to get drunk. For instance, on Easter Sunday, after the great feast, the Russians will not touch meat before it has been blessed by the priest. Walking from cottage to cottage, he is everywhere entertained with drink, so that at last he cannot walk without support.

The sermon has never played an important part in the Church services, and if a priest does not want to become suspected, he will adhere to the texts of the sacred literature chosen by the Holy Synod. Not once only have I heard younger Russians saying, "I know he (the priest) is telling nonsense and lies, but nevertheless I like the Church service." And that is characteristic at present of the Church. To the more enlightened minds she has ceased to be a spiritual leader. In some degree she satisfies the religious soul and keeps the people in national unity, but she fails in the greatest thing, viz. : sitting at the feet of the

great Master, listening to His Divine message and proclaiming the same to all. Absorbed in the cares of political and national life, she has deserved the reproach, "Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful, but Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

The sway of the Church having been greatly diminished, atheism has become a fashion for the more literate of the younger generation. They regard the Church and Church workers as the source of darkness and oppression. And of those who are still counted members of the Church there is a great percentage who have for long distrusted the Church leadership.

But the Russian soul being essentially religious, those who leave the Orthodox Church have to look for some other source of satisfaction for their spiritual thirst. Most of the younger ones plunge into the revolutionary propaganda, others become worshippers of the so-called "art and science," while the larger mass, generally the less educated but more religious, join the different religious sects that are flourishing secretly or openly all over the Empire, performing all kinds of queer rituals, and even carrying on immoral practices.

Certainly most of these substitutes fail to satisfy the needs of the thirsty soul, and the result is that Russia—her literature, her

art, her whole life—has been pervaded with a gloomy pessimism. “Our country is vast and abundant, but there is no order.”

RUSSIAN EMIGRATION.

As already shown, each peasant in Russia, as a member of a village community, is also a landowner. Attractive though such a system may seem, nevertheless there is also a dark side, namely, that it indirectly binds the Russian peasants again to the land from which formally, they have been set free. Wherever a Russian goes, he does not intend to remain, but always thinks of going back again to his own village, his real home, where, in most cases, his family is working and waiting for his return.

This is the chief reason why statistics show comparatively very few emigrants from Russia who are real Russians. The largest number of the emigrants from Russia are Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Letts and other nationalities, who are not bound with such ties to their native land.

According to the emigration statistics of Canada in the years 1901-1913, there have arrived in this country 67,378 Russian immigrants, besides the 10,000 Doukhobors. They have settled chiefly in the west, though there are considerable colonies in the east.

There are two great categories of Russian emigrants. On the one hand, there is

the revolutionary, the socialist, the anarchist; on the other hand, the common working-man, who is seeking abroad the means to eke out his scanty living at home. Generally those of the first group are more or less educated, while those of the second group are very often quite illiterate. Between these two classes of emigrants there is the least numerous, but in every respect the most promising middle-class, namely, the exiles for their religious convictions, and the young who are just entering upon life.

Although nearly all of them have been brought up on the land and used to agricultural life since their early childhood, the Russians are not eager to take homesteads or start farming here. Most of them work as laborers on the railway lines, or as lumber-jacks or bushmen in the woods, or try to find work in the cities or towns, because nearly all of them stand, so to say, with one leg still in Russia, and the other one here.

LIFE OF RUSSIANS IN CANADA.

The Orthodox Church here has even less influence over the Russians than in their native country. True, in every centre where there are Russians coming and going, Orthodox Churches are erected—of course, with means supplied by the Government of which the Church is a part.

But it is a matter of fact that the Orthodox Churches here are filled, not so much with Russians as with Orthodox Ruthenians, who, especially during this war, are willing to side with the Russians. Of the Russians, even those who used to attend the Church in the homeland rather regularly, here pretty soon drift away from her. Many a religious young man or girl has been lost in the alluring current of the worldly pleasures and material prospects of this country.

But how then do the Russians here satisfy the needs of their souls? The most eager of the political as well as the religious exiles try to organize some meetings for the propagation of their ideals. But, being in no relation with any larger body here of that kind, they usually get disappointed in their expectations and give their work up as a failure.

Those younger ones who came to this country without any fixed views, and those who are striving for something better, and can agree neither with the dogmas of the Orthodox Church nor with those of the political parties, feel very unsettled; they go here and there, try to do one thing and another, but rarely hit the real one; they try to learn the English language, organize one society after another, but the usual result is dissatisfaction, disappointment and giving up. True, it is partly due to the

unsettled way of life the Russians here are leading, but the chief reason is that there are no spiritual leaders among them. The intelligent Russians, those with higher education and great natural gifts, very rarely emigrate. In Russia or elsewhere in Europe they are better off and in greater esteem. Those who are forced to emigrate for political or religious reasons usually cherish very extreme views of life, and, as a matter of fact, prefer to settle in Russian centres abroad, i.e. in New York, Chicago, etc.

The mass of the Russians here are carried away with the general stream of material life. Their interest is to make here "Good money," then to return to Russia, and to have an easy life there. If in their neighborhood there is a Russian Church, they will not be unwilling to attend some of the services, especially on great festival days, e.g., Christmas or Easter Sunday. But they would not make a special effort for that, nor do they feel in any way uplifted by it. Their favorite distraction is a game of cards and a good strong drink. Thanks to the Prohibition Act, the situation in this respect is now much better in this country, but matters are getting even worse in places where liquor is freely obtainable. Deprived by the prolonged war of the hope of speedy return to Russia, and not being able to settle their minds and

hearts here, they try to drown their melancholy in liquor. Lately, for instance, I received a letter from a friend of mine who, while in Russia, was much given to drink, but here became a member of the Presbyterian Church, and thereafter led a very decent and sober life. A couple of months ago he had to leave Winnipeg for the United States, where he lives now in a large city, being a faithful Presbyterian there and frequently corresponding with the writer of these lines. This is what he writes about the Russians there:

“I am getting on here fairly well, but I deeply regret that I cannot have a part any longer in our social and spiritual life in Winnipeg. The Russians here are all drunkards and very ignorant, and I can't make friends with any of them. It is impossible indeed to have anything in common with people like they are. All that which we used to read in “Russicoye Slovo” (‘Russian Word’—a daily published in New York) while I was yet in Winnipeg, about the drunkenness of the Russians in the United States is true.”

That is what my friend writes. His judgment, I have no doubt, is rather exaggerated and premature. But anyhow it gives some notion of the sad moral conditions among the Russians there.

MISSION WORK AMONG RUSSIANS

Now let us see what has been and what is still being done to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

To say the truth, until the war broke out nobody seemed to care for most of the Russians in Canada. Without moral and spiritual leaders they were left to themselves and went their way as well as they could.

The Russian papers and periodicals published in America are the organs either of the Orthodox Church or of the extreme Socialistic parties. There has been no Protestant missionary work carried on among the people except the very little that has been done here and there by the Baptist and Presbyterian Churches. As far as the writer knows, there is only one missionary in Canada working exclusively among the Russians, and this one is supported by the Presbyterian Church. He began work in Winnipeg in May, 1913. At first he visited individuals wherever he could find them. In November, however, he opened a reading-room on whose tables are Russian papers and magazines and the Bible. At his meetings he endeavors so to present the truth as to set free those in bondage to ritualism, to gain the confidence of those who have lost faith in the Church and to stem the tide of revolutionary Socialism. The reading-room has be-

come popular and the attendance at the meetings has steadily increased. The work has created alarm and the people have been forbidden to enter the reading-room. But "a new conception of the Church is forming in many minds, while some have seen the King in His beauty and have sworn allegiance."

Meanwhile the Orthodox Church has lately become very active. Bishoprics have been established both in the west and in the east. New churches and cathedrals are to be erected. But this activity has nothing to do with the spiritual life or the moral standards of the people. The object is political. The Greek ritual is diligently practised, but little instruction in Bible truth is given, and the pure Gospel is not proclaimed. Is there any wonder that the Russians in Canada are not spiritually better off? Surely it is undeniable that this is one of those classes of newcomers to which the Canadian Churches owe a great debt of Christian service.