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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Russian Empire is an organism unique in the world's history. It embraces an area greater than Alexander's conquests, than the solid dominion built up by Rome, than the realms overrun by Chinghiz or Timur; it is surpassed only by Greater Britain. This fact should prompt the citizens of both countries to sympathy and a mutual desire for fuller knowledge. It seems almost miraculous that All the Russias should have been evolved from a group of barbarous oligarchies which existed in a state of perpetual discord. For they are not held together by military force, as were all preceding empires, and as India was until the sense of loyalty to the British Crown had taken root, which has recently found such emphatic expression. Russia has the gift of imbuing all her subjects with a feeling of citizenship. The wonder vanishes when we reflect that her evolution is governed by nature's law of growth, whose workings are seen alike in the empire and the blade of grass. It is influenced by that mysterious impulse which moves the swarm of bees to quit their richly-stored hives and found new settlements elsewhere. Given a people with a colonising instinct and schooled by their environment to endure and conquer; given an absolute power with its roots set deeply in vital religion; and modern Russia is the inevitable result.

Whither tend the sources brought into play over a sixth of the globe's surface, in a population of 175,000,000, which doubles in seventy years? The answer has a momentous

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bearing on civilisation ; and is of especial importance to ourselves, whose sphere of influence marches with Russia's throughout the Asiatic Continent. Unhappily, Britons and Russians are separated by the breadth of Europe, by divergence in creed, language and politics. A friendship dating back to the spacious days of Elizabeth was destroyed by the Crimean War, which left behind it a legacy of suspicion and unreasoning hatred. The tone of the British Press is coloured by the very natural prejudices of political exiles who form a colony in every European capital ; and by the frantic terrors of that school which sees a menace to India in each stage of the Russian advance. No English writer has yet dealt with the wondrous revolution wrought in Russia during the nineteenth century. This work is an honest attempt to sketch its more salient features, which have hitherto escaped observation in the West.

The most potent factor in Russia's development is the Autocracy, which differentiates her from other European Powers, and imparts a singular interest to her history. That of France lost much of its charm when she broke violently from her past at the close of the eighteenth century. The story of modern Germany is one of man's triumphs over a grudging nature ; but our admiration for its founder is tempered by a conviction that he too often displayed a cynical disregard of justice and right. In Russia, on the other hand, we are fascinated by the constant recurrence of the personal equation. We trace the impress of heredity, education, and environment on a single mind ; and we see the reflex action of each in the movements of the gigantic frame which that mind controls. Taking this standpoint we find that the phases of Russia's growth were synchronous with the reigns of her Tsars.

In a territory dominated by a youthful and comparatively homogeneous race other influences necessarily asserted themselves to modify and sometimes to overmaster the ruler's deliberate policy. At the dawn of the last century educated

Russians were grouped in two opposing camps. The Old-Russians stood on ancient ways, holding that their country had naught to borrow from the West, with its survivals of feudalism, its effete conceptions of privilege and property. This party had offered a stubborn resistance to Peter the Great's reforms. Their opponents, the Liberals, dated back to that finished type of the enlightened despot; and received a mighty stimulus from the sympathy with French philosophers displayed by Catherine II and her courtiers. They cherished the ideals of material progress and constitutional liberty current in western Europe and America. In the absence of any parliamentary mechanism these parties had no battle-ground. We see the alternate play of divergent schools of thought rather than a balance maintained between opposing forces. Everything on the globe's surface is periodic; and Russian history is one of action and reaction. The era of reform which set in at the close of the Crimean War, and produced that stupendous measure, the abolition of serfdom, was succeeded by an era of severe repression.

Both sections underwent the evolution which nature imposes on all vital organisms. The conception of nationality, which has recast the map of Europe, converted extreme Old-Russians into Slavophiles, who sought to unite the scattered fragments of the great Slav family under a common banner. Their principles took root in Austria during the third decade of the century. They were fostered by Prince Metternich who, true to his motto, "divide et impera," ever sought to sow discord between German, Slav, and Magyar. Spreading to Russia, they were warmly adopted by the orthodox; and in 1867 a congress met at Moscow, on which every Slav community was represented. It served but to demonstrate the impossibility of common action. The curse of Babel was not responsible for the discordant notes struck at Moscow: it was rather divergence in religion and historical associations. Vainly did the Moscow Panslavists preach unity

under the Double Cross to Catholic Poles, whose hearts still bled for their country's woes; to Catholic Croats, Slavonians and Czechs, who preferred the sway of the house of Habsburg to that of a Russian Tsar. Undaunted by the partial failure of their crusade, the Slavophile committees which overspread Russia turned their attention to Serbs and Bulgars, who were identical with them in race, religion and language. Their manœuvres in the Balkans and at home produced the disastrous war of 1877—8.

Nations borrow from each other little save their vices; and the change undergone by the advanced section of Russian Liberals savours strongly of degeneration. Nihilism germinated in the brain of the old French philosophers; and, after passing through the alembic of German mysticism, it found a congenial soil in Russia. The resulting perversion of Rousseau's and Hegel's doctrines was elaborated in the medical schools—a focus of materialism; and in the universities, which differ radically from those of Great Britain. Russian students were miserably poor; and hunger is an ill councillor. They were not subjected to wholesome discipline, and found no outlet for their exuberant vitality in athletic sports. Moreover, this sombre gospel of negation touched an innermost chord of the Slav's nature, prone as it is to yearn for man's regeneration, and possessing a positive side which clings to a desperate cause. Thus Nihilism assumed three distinct phases. The first was a cult, with pass-words and peculiarities of costume, a passing fashion, to all appearance not more dangerous than those which the young men and maidens of this country affect. With the transient successes of the Paris Commune in 1871 Nihilists developed into a political party; and in the profound depression which followed the Turkish War of 1877—8 their tenets assumed the proportions of a highly-militant creed. After bringing Russia to the very brink of anarchy, Nihilism was shattered by the positive conceptions of faith and national life arrayed against it by Alexander III. Its successor is Social

Democracy, which finds disciples in the urban proletariat called into being by the industrial revolution now in progress. But Nihilism has left an enduring mark on Russian literature, and its trail is seen clearly in Leo Tolstoy's later writings.

The expansion of an empire is governed by other forces than mere phases of thought which are, of their very nature, evanescent. A glance at the map of Russia will show that she belongs geographically to Asia. Vast as the European provinces seem, when brought to scale with those of adjacent monarchies, they are hardly more than the fringe of a dominion stretching from the Baltic Gulf to the Pacific Ocean. The lines marked out by nature for Russia's advance lie southwards and south-eastwards of Moscow, the centre of her national life. Its rationale is to be found in—

(1) The colonising instinct, which prompted the communities settled on the river banks of ancient Muscovy to overflow and plant offshoots in all directions.

(2) The nomad instinct, grafted on the national character by its strain of Tatar blood. It should not be forgotten that, for several centuries, Russia was under the yoke of warlike tribes, who were driven to seek fresh fields by the desiccation of their pastures in eastern Asia. Gathering strength in these locust-like migrations, they overran eastern Europe and southern Asia; and were hurled back to their steppes by Ivan the Great in 1481—exactly four years after the termination of our Wars of the Roses.

(3) The blind impulse of a rapidly-growing population to burst from ice-bound coasts and gain access to warmer waters. Those attainable by Russia are the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the Pacific Ocean. There is something pathetic in the struggles of the Colossus to find scope for its superabundant energies.

The westward movement of 1813—15 seems to belie this theory. But in that case the impetus was not given by the genius of the Russian people. Those memorable campaigns

were undertaken by Alexander I at a time when his spirit was stirred to its depths by the French invasion. With this sole exception the course of Russian Empire held its way eastwards throughout the last century. Nicholas I went to war with Persia in 1826; with Turkey in 1828 and again in 1853. He pursued the conquest of the Caucasus, founded an empire on the Pacific coast, and secured control of the chief water-routes of Central Asia. Under Alexander II a footing was regained in the Black Sea; the Caucasian barrier was pierced; and Turkey was again attacked. Bokhara, Khiva, and Kokand—last relics of the Islamic sway in Central Asia—were humbled to the dust; and the Turkoman tribes were brought to heel. Alexander III pushed the Russian frontier to the confines of China, Persia, Afghanistan, and British India. Under Nicholas II the conception that Russia is an Asiatic empire has taken concrete form. Persia is now reduced to financial vassalage; and the continent has been traversed by a network of trunk railway-lines, which must work a revolution in the world's commerce.

A survey of this almost rhythmic movement leads to some very important deductions. A strong and civilised power which is brought into contact with barbarism has no resource but to conquer and annex. Our Indian Governors General, from Hastings to Dalhousie, were forced into wars of aggression in spite of appeals from their Honourable Masters in Leadenhall Street to confine their attention to commerce. Chernaïev stormed Tashkent with explicit orders from the Tsar in his pocket forbidding the enterprise. Again, Russia's object in seeking spheres of influence coterminous with our own is not the conquest of India. What profit could she reap from absorbing 300,000,000 of new subjects who are always within measurable distance of famine? She has no great middle class needing scope for its superfluous numbers. Moreover, Oriental races conquered by her become, *ipso facto*, Russian citizens, and acquire the right of settling in every part of the empire. Her

dealings with Bokhara and Khiva prove that she is loth to assimilate a highly-developed Asiatic state. She has studded Manchuria with military posts in order to safeguard the trans-continental railway routes; but she hesitates to annex that province lest Siberia should be overrun by Chinese emigrants. What, then, is the rationale of the Russian advance India-wards? It is to be found in a wish to apply a counter-irritant, should Great Britain thwart her real designs. In July 1878 we called checkmate at Berlin. A month later General Kaufmann concluded a treaty with the Amir Sher Ali, which placed his realm under Russian tutelage and produced the second Afghan War. Lastly, it is but too clear that the policy of our Foreign Office with regard to the Eastern Question has, as a rule, been one of undignified protest and panic. That policy plunged us into a war with Russia in 1854; it brought us to the brink of the precipice in 1878 and 1885; and it has destroyed our legitimate influence in Turkey, Persia, and China. The instinct of self-preservation should call a halt to vacillations unworthy of a great people, and lead us to seek a *modus vivendi* with our mighty neighbour which would embrace commercial as well as political interests.

CHAPTER II.

RUSSIA IN 1815.

THE cleavage-line between East and West was conspicuous in 1814, when the Congress of Vienna met in order to restore the balance of power after Napoleon's fall. With one exception the communities represented by the sovereign in person or by plenipotentiaries had arrived at the same stage of development. Dynastic interests were regarded as paramount; and, though the world still rang with the echoes of the French Revolution, the prestige of birth and privilege was nearly intact. As a counterpoise to these survivals of feudalism, each country possessed a great burgher-class, whose wealth and political influence were constantly increasing. At the base of the social pyramid was a multitude of agriculturists and handicraftsmen who enjoyed personal freedom, but had no voice in national affairs.

Russia stood out in high relief from this aggregate, swayed by common ideals. Her roots were still planted in the Oriental world, though a statesman's instinct had pushed her westwards. The first impulse to this movement came from Peter the Great. History records but one instance of a people's sudden uprising from infancy to vigorous manhood. Peter found his unwieldy empire a semi-Asiatic power, still bearing the imprint of the Tatar yoke which had paralysed her energies for two hundred and fifty years. Her isolation from the currents of modern life was complete. On the north-west she was cut off from Europe by Sweden. Poland, which for a brief period had

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mastered her, stretched on the western frontier from the Baltic nearly to the Danube. The Black Sea was a Turkish lake. Peter saw that Russia must be forced to enter the comity of Christendom. With a determination which knew no obstacles he gave her domestic institutions which raised her from the status of an Eastern oligarchy to that of a great European Power. His foreign policy involved the weakening of Sweden and Turkey and the dismemberment of Poland. These far-seeing aims were kept in view by his successors. With periods of retrogression, and even of anarchy, among the upper classes, and a constant degradation in the masses, the march of Russia from her frozen steppes towards civilisation was sustained throughout the eighteenth century. Peter won Esthonia and Livonia from Sweden, with a footing on the Baltic, and founded there a new capital as a window whence he might look out on Europe. Catherine II pushed her boundaries westwards by sharing in repeated partitions of Poland, the second and third of which were carried out during the Revolutionary Wars. She conquered the Crimea and obtained an outlet for her commerce on the Black Sea.

The Russia of 1815 had a population of 50,000,000, spread over 2,000,000 square miles and bound together by common religion, language, and tradition. She was no mere patchwork empire, such as Austria or Turkey. The central provinces were peopled by a Slavonic race which had proved its capacity for absorption and colonisation, and thrust communities of alien blood beyond its frontiers. It is true that even in Russia the eternal conflict between North and South had left indelible traces. The inhabitants of Great Russia, grouped round Moscow and stretching far to the north-east, were the most mixed, as they were the most progressive and numerous section. They had borne the full brunt of Tatar invasion; and among them was evolved the force destined to weld the majority of the Slavs into one Empire. Kiev was the centre of Little Russia, extending to the south-west. Its population possessed

all the characteristics of Southrons with more independence than such races usually display. White Russia embraced the governments of Vitebsk, Moghilev, Grodno, and Minsk on the Polish frontier, a land of splendid forests but marshy soil. Its people were ethnologically the purest, but were also the least advanced of the Russian tribes. The Baltic Provinces, inhabited by races of Finnish and Letto-Lithuanian stock, had been for centuries under Teutonic influences; and the culture of the upper classes was that of Central Europe. The western governments were inhabited by Poles, whose chequered history proves that the ties of kinship are less tenacious than those of civilisation and religion. Byzantium had given both to Russia, while Polish ideals were derived from Rome. The resulting hostility between these branches of the Slav family had once well-nigh wrecked the ill-consolidated empire of the Tsars: and it produced those iniquitous partitions which made Poland a mere geographical expression. But in spite of racial differences, inevitable in so vast an area, no European country exhibited fewer dialects than Russia, or less opposition in ethnological types. Her enormous population was as monotonous as her forest-fringed steppes.

While Russia's extent and her unknown strength overshadowed the compact military monarchies of the West, she lagged far behind them in internal development. In 1812 the urban population was considerably less than five per cent. of the whole. Petrograd had but 300,000 citizens in 1820; Moscow only 247,000 in 1823. The other towns were less the result of organic growth than of administrative aims. Save in Poland and the Baltic Provinces they were mere aggregates of villages. Peter the Great strove to build up a middle class by ranging the handful of merchants in guilds, the first of which was exempt from poll-tax and corporal punishment. But the burgherdom, which restrained feudal tyranny in the West, was still in embryo. External commerce was in the hands of foreigners. Handicrafts were in a rudimentary stage.