

CHAPTER XI

PEASANTS AND PROPRIETORS

RUSSIA is an agricultural country *par excellence*. Of its 164 millions of inhabitants three-fourths, or over 120 millions, are engaged in agriculture. It is a country of

The Land. peasants. The prosperity of the Empire, the state of the budget are dependent principally on the state of the crops. Even the political situation is largely dependent on the harvest. A failure of crops means a sudden failure of economic energy, a decline of purchasing power, a weakened budget, widespread discontent, economic and political difficulties at home and abroad. A run of good harvests, on the other hand, makes it possible to tide over a crisis and to recover from heavy strain. The great bulk of the Russian towns are simply market towns for the surrounding agricultural districts. Comparatively few are manufacturing centres, and even in the big cities, where the pulse of administrative, commercial, and industrial life beats strongly, the masses of the population have not definitely severed their connection with agricultural Russia. All the cabmen of the city are peasants, and a heavily-bearded cabman when driving his fare to a bank, a Government office, or a theatre will tell of the wife and children he has left at home somewhere in the government of Rizan, Vitebsk, or Nizhni-Novgorod to cultivate his few acres of land while he earns money in the capital. Most of the workmen in the factories are peasants by origin, and many have some more or less effective claim to land in their native villages.

The ties with the country are just as strong at the other end of the social scale. When spring comes and examinations are over, long express trains bear off the families of higher Government officials and deputies to country estates by river-side, in forest or steppe. The capitals are empty in

the summer because of the general exodus. In no country in Europe is there such a complete and prolonged cessation of the hum and bustle of city life as in Russia during the summer months. Slowly and with extraordinary difficulty the big cities are asserting their predominance, are emerging from the market-town condition and becoming complex, modern, urban organisms. But the power they gain during the winter constantly slips away during the long summer vacation, and the political and municipal energy that accumulates between October and June is dissipated between June and October. So great is the fascination of the soil, so directly and irresistibly does the great plain make its appeal.

It is the peasant who embodies most distinctly the connection with the soil, and the peasant is the most interesting person in Russia. But there are so many

The Peasantry. types of peasant, there is such a variety of character and custom that it is difficult to make general statements that will be absolutely true of all. "Not a village but has ways of its own," is a Russian saying. A Siberian peasant on the Yenisei is a very different kind of man from the Tula peasants on Leo Tolstoy's estate of Yasnaia Poliana, and the Cossack of the Don is at once distinguishable from the peasants of the northern governments of Olonets and Archangel. Within the limits of a single government very different types may be met with. In the northern districts of the Chernigov government the peasants have thin, sharp features and speak a dialect of Great Russian. In the southern districts of the same government a dark, broad-faced, broad-shouldered type prevails and the language is Little Russian. Even a single district may display considerable variations. In the Nizhnedievitsky district of the Voronezh government there are three distinct groups, known as Shchekuny, Tsukany, and Galmany, and representing clearly-defined varieties of custom, costume, dialect, and character. The Shchekuny are extremely conservative, ignorant, poor, dirty, and have the reputation of being great

thieves. Their neighbours, the Tsukany, pronounce many words differently, are a trading folk, busy, open, communicative, eager for novelties ; their women often wear silk and satin, whereas those of the Shchekuny wear only picturesque, old-fashioned, homespun costumes. The third group again, the Galmany, speak a slightly different dialect, are not averse from innovations, but are laughed at by their neighbours for their big, many-coloured, baggy trousers. In fact, the variety of types even within the limits of the Russian nationality is inexhaustible. There are many degrees of prosperity. Side by side with well-to-do peasants there are whole villages that live in wretched poverty. Judging by the dull-eyed, bent-shouldered White Russian peasants one sees amongst the Jews on the railway stations in the governments of Vilna and Minsk, one might easily jump to the conclusion that the White Russian peasants generally were a dead and alive, down-trodden people. Their life is certainly not a cheerful one, but that even the White Russians are not the dumb, driven cattle that many of them seem is shown by a little peasant's paper published in Vilna which prints numbers of stories and a good deal of pretty verse written by peasants, as well as reports of co-operative and educational work undertaken in various villages in the Western Governments. There are three main groups of Russians—White Russians, Little Russians, and Great Russians—and the differences between them are frequently greater than those between an educated Russian and an educated Englishman.

It would be absurd, then, to attempt to describe in a chapter the life of the Russian peasantry as a whole. In the present chapter some account may be given of certain villages on the river Volhov in the Novgorod government, not far from St. Petersburg, it being premised only that a great many of the features noted here are characteristic of all the central and northern governments of European Russia.

The village of Vladimirovo stands on the river bank about ten miles from the St. Petersburg-Moscow railway line, and

about half a mile away from a large country house to which the inhabitants of the village were a little over half a century ago attached as serfs. The village consists of one street, containing about thirty-five cottages and lined with birch trees. Behind the village stretch open fields with a long line of forest in the background. The broad, swiftly-flowing river is a highway in the summer. Steamers maintain communication between the railway station and Novgorod. Great rafts of timber with red-shirted raftsmen drift from the rivers beyond Lake Ilmen down the Volhov to Lake Ladoga and so out to the Neva and St. Petersburg. Barges are towed up early in the season and come down later with timber cut small or with immense stacks of hay. Sometimes the long, yellow barges spread magnificent sails and fly many-coloured flags, and with a fair wind go floating past bright green fields triumphantly up the stream, the steersman dexterously managing the heavy rudder. Then there are curious bulging craft, painted in stripes, with covered decks and sharp stern, big rudder and coarse sails. Such vessels as these come down by various rivers from the distant Borovichi district bringing crude pottery which the boatmen sell in the villages by the way. There are plenty of fish in the river and the peasants cast their nets and catch enough for food and for sale. All through the summer the river is alive with unceasing traffic, though nowadays the trade is nothing like what it was in the Middle Ages when Novgorod was a great commercial republic, and German and Italian merchants were constantly bringing their wares up the Volkov and carrying away rich stores of furs and skins.

But in November the Volhov freezes hard and remains frozen till April. Then all the steamers and boats and barges lie still, and the river becomes simply a smooth, white road over which sleighs go gliding in a long and silent procession. But the peasants of Vladimirovo are not greatly affected by the change. Unlike the peasants of the opposite bank they do not trade and they fish very little. Considering that

they live on a great river and so near the railway they are surprisingly unenterprising.

Their cottages are built of wood and are unpainted, yellow when new and grey within a year or two; with sloping shingle or thatched roofs and with the gable-end and glazed windows facing the street. The entrance is from the side. You mount a

**Where
Peasants Live.**

wooden staircase or ladder, push open a door, and find yourself in the upper or main floor of the cottage, the ground floor being mostly used for storage purposes. On the upper floor there may be one, two or three rooms, according to the wealth of the owner and the size of his family. A big, white-washed, brick stove occupies a prominent position in the main room, and on this stove the older people and the children sleep in winter. There is a rough table and a few chairs, a bed, and square, wooden trunks adorned with gaudy pictures; on the walls, cuttings from illustrated papers, in the corners ikons or sacred pictures, and in the middle of the room a child's cot suspended from the ceiling. Pots and pans on the shelves; on the landing at the head of the staircase a barrel of water and a dipper for washing—which is effected not by plunging and rinsing, but by getting another person to pour on the head and hands; then behind the landing lies the hay-loft where half the family sleeps in summer, and under the hay-loft is the stable. Living-rooms and stable are practically under one roof, but men and animals are far apart, and they do not herd together as is the case in Western Ireland, and the cottages are, as a rule, remarkably clean. Some of the women pile upon shelves and walls an incongruous variety of ornaments such as may often be seen in English farmhouses. Often there are pot-flowers in the windows. On the floor are mats of rough canvas, and occasionally there are family photographs on the walls. There is only one flower garden in the village and that exists because, in the first place, the owner's wife is cook at the manor-house where there is a pretty garden, and in the second place the owner

himself is the strong man of the village, and the boy who pulled up his narcissi would know what to expect. Behind some of the cottages are vegetable gardens with a fruit tree or two.

At the end of the village and behind many of the cottages are *baniyas* or Russian bath-houses, which are a necessity of

The Bath-house.

life to the Northern Russians. The *bania* is a low, wooden building, containing a large brick stove on which when it is heated cold water is poured so that the room is filled with steam. There are boilers for hot water. On one side of the room there is a tier of benches, and to lie on the highest bench where the air is hottest is the most effective way of taking the bath. The bath is a combination of perspiring and washing in hot and cold water, and the peasants aid the process by beating themselves with birch twigs. In winter the youths sometimes rush out of the *bania* and roll naked in the snow. Every Saturday the villagers take their bath, and this right through the year, so that it is altogether unfair to describe the peasants of Northern and Central Russia as being indifferent to cleanliness. On the contrary, they are exceptionally scrupulous in this respect.

In the centre of the village is a shop kept by a widow-woman, where sugar, tea, sweetmeats, cotton-fabrics, and a score of odds and ends are sold at a high price, often on credit. There is a tiny chapel or rather a shrine in which services are rarely held. The parish church is several miles away, but the church of the neighbouring parish is just across the river and the Vladimirovo peasants as a rule go there when they go to church at all.

Outside the village is a big, two-storied school building where about sixty children from all the villages in the neighbourhood are taught the elements. The girls

The Village School.

are taught sewing, and there is a carpentry class for the boys, with a special teacher and a well-furnished shop. This school, which owes its existence to the neighbouring landowner, is unusually large and well

equipped. Very often in the villages the school is held in an ordinary peasant's cottage, roughly adapted for the purpose. The Vladimirovo school is now maintained by the Ministry of Education. There are two teachers, a man and a woman, and the priest from over the river gives religious instruction. The only children's festival in the year is the Christmas tree which is usually provided by the landowner's family. Then the little boys and girls march round the fir-tree in a stumbling, hot, disorderly procession and gaze in wonder at all the marvels agleam in the candlelight amongst the dark branches. They sing lustily the songs they have been taught for the occasion and are full of struggling, despairing eagerness when the time for the distribution of presents comes. On the whole, the children live a jolly life. There are so many of them and they are always trooping about the village street together, the little girls arm-in-arm and sometimes singing in imitation of their big sisters, and the little boys striding about barefoot contemptuous of mere girls with hands deep in the pockets of long, baggy, patched trousers, or else racing off at full speed when big people find them robbing birds'-nests or getting within dangerous reach of forbidden fruit trees. In winter the most absorbing care of the mothers is to see that the children are warmly clad, but in the summer the boys go mostly bareheaded and their hair is bleached to a uniform white. There is no end to the children, six, seven, or eight being quite a normal number in a family, and it is a relief to the mother if a girl of eleven or twelve can go out as nurse to a neighbour for her keep, or if one of the small boys is made a shepherd lad. The bigger boys help their fathers, and the bigger girls may go out to service or else find work in the factory down the river. But in any case it is not easy to make ends meet, and the peasants frankly admit that it is not an unmixed evil if one of the children dies.

The problem of "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" is for the

peasants a tolerably simple one, especially as far as eating is concerned. The staple food is home-made rye bread, which is called black, but it is not coal-black, as most

Rustic Food. of us imagined when we read German stories in our childhood, but dark brown. This bread is pleasant to the taste and very nourishing, but to assimilate it a long training is necessary. It seems ill adapted to English digestions, and the older peasants often suffer violent aches and pains as a result of its use. Black bread is the staple, and the peasant can do an enormous amount of field-work on black bread alone. But this fact is not an absolute argument in favour of vegetarianism, for as soon as a peasant goes to work in a factory he finds that his strength fails him unless he eats meat; and even the workmen in a brick-kiln near the village declare they cannot do without flesh food. The peasant eats meat rarely, as a rule only on festival days. But every day there is a meatless soup of some kind, most frequently *shchi*, in which preserved cabbage or sauerkraut is the chief ingredient. Potatoes are eaten as a kind of sauce or condiment to bread; altogether the chief art in eating is to find ways of consuming the largest possible quantity of bread. Barley and buckwheat porridge is frequently eaten. For special occasions the women bake *pirogi* or pasties filled with cabbage, more rarely with rice, and still more rarely with meat. On their simple but monotonous diet the peasants seem to thrive fairly well, although digestive complaints are not infrequent.

To drink there is plain water and tea. Every peasant cottage has its *samovar* or tea-urn, and tea is drunk regularly, very weak and very pale, without milk. In drinking tea a small lump of sugar is made to go a long way; a tiny morsel is bitten off and held between the teeth and gradually melts as the tea is sipped. Peasants eat slowly and with great decorum, crossing themselves before and after meals.

But there is another beverage to which the Russian peasant is greatly addicted, and that is *vodka*, a spirituous liquor as

innocent-looking as water, but a most potent kind of brandy. On the whole, the peasant does not drink such an enormous amount of *vodka* as is supposed. The average consumption of alcohol per head is less in Russia than in Great Britain. But the peasant drinks at intervals. He remains sober all the week and celebrates Sundays and festival days by consuming enough *vodka* to raise his spirits; a very small quantity of *vodka* suffices to intoxicate him. On special holidays such as the festival of the patron saint of the village, there is heavy drinking, often leading to fierce quarrels in which knives are used, and sometimes murders are committed. *Vodka*-selling is the monopoly of the State. All over the country there are Government brandy-shops, in which the salesman or saleswoman hands out through a hole in a netting like that of a telegraph office bottles from long rows of shelves like those in a dispensary, for consumption off the premises. There is no State brandy-shop in Vladimirovo, but during one year there was a great deal of illicit grog-selling, and that was a bad time for the village, for the men were always drinking and their earnings melted away. Then the women revolted and took matters into their own hands. They went about the village and broke the windows in the cottages of the sly grog-sellers and made them give up the trade. Only one they left in peace. She was a widow, and they gave her permission to sell *vodka* until she could save enough to buy a cow. After this revolt the peasants were compelled to make journeys to other villages when they needed brandy. The women in this district do not drink, but that is not the case everywhere. In some of the districts around Moscow the women drink at least as much as the men and make a boast of doing so. And the nearer peasants are to the cities or to manufacturing districts the more they drink and the more demoralised they become. Sometimes a revulsion of feeling occurs, and in Vladimirovo several of the hardest drinkers occasionally go to the priest and take a vow not to drink, or in other words sign the pledge for six months or

more. And although they are by no means pious men they keep their vow.

Generally speaking, there is much more drinking now than there used to be. Increased prosperity means increased drinking. The more money earned the more

Drinking. *vodka* is consumed. The revenue from the

State monopoly has now reached the astonishing sum of 800 million roubles (over £80,000,000) per annum. And closely connected with the increase of drinking is the spread in late years of what is known as "hooliganism" in the villages. Hooliganism is simply purposeless rowdyism and crime, robbery and destruction for sheer destruction's sake. The old customs, the old etiquette and decorum are losing their hold, the *naïveté* and simplicity of former days are swiftly disappearing; the political upheaval has shaken the old faith, but owing to its failure to effect real reforms and to establish liberty it has given little opportunity for working in new ways. On the contrary, it has led to embitterment and a growth of espionage and to the spread of a brooding **suspicion**. All this strongly affects the younger generation and encourages the growth of the brutal instincts which find expression in the increase of wanton crime in the country districts. Hooliganism is, in fact, one aspect of that state of affairs, another side of which is reflected in the many sensational and vulgar crimes committed in the higher circles of society during recent years. Hooliganism and the increased consumption of *vodka* again largely explain each other.

The question of dress in the country is at once simpler and more difficult than it used to be. In former days all

Dress. garments were home-made, the fashions remained unchanged for generations and valuable costumes were handed down from mother

to daughter and long kept in the family as heirlooms. In the remoter districts, where the influence of the cities is not strongly felt, the older costumes are still worn, and often the women's costumes are complicated and beautiful, with

gorgeous headgear and veils and rich adornment of silver coins of various times and peoples. Occasionally, as in some villages on the Gulf of Finland near St. Petersburg, the old costumes are retained in defiance of the factories and proudly worn on Sundays. But in Vladimirovo the modern spirit rules. Of the typical, red, close-fitting woman's dress known as the *sarajan*, which is eagerly sought after as a curiosity, not a specimen is now to be found in the village; probably all have been cut up or worn to shreds. There are a few spinning-wheels and rough hand-looms, and the women weave a kind of course canvas and linen table-cloths and towels from the flax which is one of the staple crops in the district. Some of the women embroider for sale. But most of the clothing material comes from the factories. About once a month a Tartar comes round with a waggon full of cotton fabrics, and of these the peasants buy what they need for their garments. The women make their own and the children's clothing and also the men's shirts or blouses. In the autumn a tailor goes from cottage to cottage and makes rough suits and overcoats for the men. There is a felt-maker, too, who makes the round of the villages and beats out felt for winter boots. Very often nowadays the men buy their clothing ready-made, and the boys have to be content with more or less clumsy adaptations of their father's or elder brothers' garments.

In the district here described, and this is true of most districts near the main highways, the women dress in cotton skirts and blouses, and on their heads wear coloured cotton kerchiefs. The men wear a kind of rough European dress—German dress they call it here—with high boots and cotton blouses, known as Russian shirts, and in colder weather double-breasted coats buttoned up to the neck. Their headgear is usually a soft peaked cap. On Sundays the younger men flaunt shining top-boots and gaudily embroidered shirts. The younger women are quickly adapting town fashions which they probably bring home from the factory down the

river where so many of them are employed. The daughter of a comparatively poor peasant will walk on Sundays in elaborate dresses of a town pattern; none of them dare yet do such an unheard-of thing as wear a hat in the village, though probably they have hats stored away. But it is to be feared that some of them have already gone so far as to complete their transformation by wearing false hair.

O tempora, O mores!

The inhabitants of Vladimirovo are neither well-to-do nor very poor. They are not geniuses and are not enterprising, but they are no fools, and they are not stub-

Village Life. bornly conservative. They have no pronounced political opinions of any kind, take things very much as they come, rarely read newspapers, although during the war and the revolutionary years some of them went so far as to subscribe to the cheaper journals. Few of the men read books, but sometimes the younger women and girls read the story-books to be found in the school library. Nearly all the men have served in the army, but it is difficult to see what trace army life has left on them. Several served in the Japanese War and took part in some of the fiercest engagements, but they tell of their experiences in a humdrum way without the slightest display of emotion. One snub-nosed, broad-cheeked peasant, Alexei, received for his services in the war a premium of £50, which he spent on building a new cottage. He was also appointed military instructor in the school under the new boy-scout system, and aroused the merriment of the whole countryside by his attempts to drill rebellious schoolboys into the proper use of wooden guns. There are hardly any among the villagers who remember the days of serfdom. An old forester and his wife can sometimes be induced to recall the time when they were serfs. But they will not admit that there was any profound and essential difference between then and now, except that in the old days a peasant was bound to be more industrious, which they are inclined to consider was rather

a good thing. A former blacksmith, Gerasim, now dead, used to tell with pride that he was rarely flogged and enjoyed the favour of his master, who got him a very pretty bride, naturally also a serf, from another estate of his about twenty miles away. Gerasim fell in love with her at first sight, but he seems to have been a dull fellow and by no means handsome, and the girl cried her eyes out at being compelled to marry him. There was no help for it. It was the master's will, and they were the master's property. But for months after the marriage the bride would not look at Gerasim and turned her back on him every time he approached her. Of the stern master who effected this marriage and who lived in the early part of the last century it is related, amongst other things, that during haymaking and harvest he used to stand on a hill and watch the work through a telescope ; any peasant who showed signs of slackness he immediately had flogged. But the pre-emancipation period with its three days a week of compulsory labour on the big estate, the constant floggings, the purchase and sale of men and women, is a fading memory now. The younger generation has hardly an idea of what serfdom meant.

The effects of serfdom linger on, however, in Vladimirovo in a very curious way. Most of the peasants are very good fellows, not idle, and some of them witty and original. But, on the whole, they are strangely flaccid and lacking in initiative, and this is characteristic of most of the villages for a considerable distance along the left bank of the river. On the right bank a very different spirit is manifested. Just opposite Vladimirovo is a large village called Vysoko, which the German traveller, Olearius, notes having visited during his journey up to Novgorod in the seventeenth century. Here the peasants are much more prosperous, are more industrious, better dressed, have better houses, are more wide-awake and alert, more receptive of new ideas, more enterprising in every way. The chief explanation of the difference is a very simple one. Along the left bank the peasants were

the serfs of private landowners. On the right bank they were the serfs of the State, which meant that after the payment of a heavy tax a great deal of room was left for individual initiative. Then there is one other important fact that accounts for the difference in character. The villages on the right bank are the remains of the military settlements founded by Count Arakcheiev early in the nineteenth century. Arakcheiev was a fierce disciplinarian, and applied martial law to field-work and to every detail of life in the settlements. With the help of the cat-o'-nine-tails he got a fine highroad lined with birch trees built from Gruzino some distance down the river to Staraja Rusa beyond Lake Ilmen. The discipline was intolerable, and led to a terrible revolt which was ferociously quelled. But the sense of order and duty inculcated in the settlements in Arakcheiev's stern days has left its impress on the character of the inhabitants of the right bank until now. At the present time the difference between the two banks makes itself continually felt, and while the left bank on the whole remains passive and is sunk in routine, the right bank is undergoing some very remarkable changes. But before describing these changes it is necessary to give some account of the prevailing system of peasant land tenure and of the *mir* or village commune.

In Vladimirovo, which is a small village, the commune exists in a simple form. All the peasants of the village hold their land in common, and there is no rented

The Commune. or bought land to complicate ownership rights.

Fifty years ago at the time of the emancipation the Vladimirovo peasants received a portion of the land of the estate to which they had been attached. This land was in effect purchased by them, but the purchase was made through the State, the peasants gradually extinguishing their debt in the form of annual redemption payments which constituted an extra tax. The State in its turn compensated the landlord by means of a complex financial operation. The result, as far as the Vladimirovo peasants were

concerned, was that they secured in all about 630 acres of land. The way they put it is that they received $5\frac{1}{2}$ desiatins per soul, a "soul" then being a male householder. At the time of the emancipation there were forty-six souls, so that the total amount was 253 desiatins. This land was divided up amongst the members of the community in such a way that each received his share of forest, meadow, and field. But the system of allotment is a very curious one. If each peasant had his lot in one compact area he could deal with it fairly easily. This is not the case. Justice requires that good and bad soil, forest and bog, the far lands and the near lands should be as nearly as possible equally apportioned. So the land is cut up into narrow strips, and these strips cause considerable confusion, especially if they happen to become entangled with Crown lands or with landlords' land or land that has been bought or rented by individual peasants. This overlapping of strips is one of the most perpetually irritating of land problems in Russia.

In Vladimirovo, however, this particular difficulty is felt less acutely than in other villages, because the peasants' land is fairly clearly marked off from that of the estate on one side, and from that of the neighbouring village community on the other. And, indeed, the Vladimirovo peasants got such a small share of land that they have little difficulty in managing it. Every peasant knows his lot though it is not divided from others by fences or ditches, and disputes are rare. The land is owned legally by the whole community, and each member holds his land only in virtue of his membership. This does not mean, however, that all members of the community are equalised in the matter of wealth. Even if they were equalised at the beginning the lapse of years makes them unequal. The growth of population causes changes. Some families increase, others diminish and disappear. One family has many sons, each of whom has a right to land. Another family has many daughters who are married off and lost to their father's house. Sometimes if there are several

males in the family, some go to work in the towns or on distant estates and leave their father or brothers to work the land which in time practically passes into the hands of the workers. Some families are industrious and enterprising, others indolent and ready to forego their rights. In fact, there is no end to the possibilities of inequality. There exists a legal corrective to the growth of irregularities in the form of a repartition which may be undertaken by the community at certain intervals. But the peasants of Vladimirovo have not once effected a repartition since the emancipation. They seem to have thought it hardly worth while. Part of the surplus of population brought by the years has gradually drifted away and left the community very little larger than it was at the time of the emancipation. And there is a natural disinclination to upset established relationships. But a considerable disproportion now exists. Some families are richer and some are poorer. Some hold the share of two souls or more, others have only half a soul, and some have practically nothing more than the tiny plot of land on which their cottage stands.

The communal land was, until a few years ago, inalienable. It could not be sold or leased, and every peasant, so long as he was a member of the commune and had not forfeited his rights, had a certain safe and sure anchorage to which he might return when life in the world outside buffeted him too severely. The commune is a kind of mutual aid society, and the habit of united action ingrained as a result of centuries of communal life is one of the most marked features of the Russian peasants' character. Living together in a village, not scattered about on separate lots of land, possessing strongly developed social instincts, they are communicative, gossipy, given to lending and borrowing, observant of custom, retentive of tradition. And the communal system largely explains the extreme conservatism of the Russian peasant in methods of cultivation. It is not easy to effect innovations when, after all, your land is not your

own and the other members of the community resent the implied aspersion on the traditional methods. The peasants of Vergezha and all the other peasants in the neighbourhood, might get very much more out of their land than they do. With intensive culture a good deal might be done even **with thirteen acres**. There are, in fact, German and Lettish colonists in the district who prosper greatly on land of the same quality, but the Russian peasants have not shown the slightest disposition to adopt their methods.

The affairs of the community are managed by a *skhod*, or mote of which all the adult males are members. The *skhod* annually selects a *starosta* or elder, who on occasion summons the men for the transaction of necessary business by walking through the village, striking each cottage with a rod and crying, "*Na skhod!*" (To the mote!). In the exercise of his duties the elder is assisted by another peasant who acts as policeman, or *desiatnik*. The chief business of the *starosta* is to collect the taxes, to note their payment in a register and to convey them to the centre of the canton, or *volost*, a few miles away. The village mote discusses all matters that concern the whole village; the hire of a shepherd for the cattle during the summer months, the amount to be paid to the neighbouring landlord for the right of pasturing the herd on his estate, and many other such details of the communal life. Sometimes bigger questions are discussed. The peasants of the village of Kurino, up the river, decided some years ago after long discussion to acquire, through the Peasant's Bank, a Government institution which facilitates the purchase of land by the peasantry, a considerable portion of a neighbouring estate. The question of the interest to be paid to the Bank is now one of the many questions discussed by their mote. More general questions are occasionally touched upon. The mote may pass a resolution (called a *prigovor*, or sentence) urging the removal of an unpopular school teacher or priest, or the retention of one whose dismissal is threatened. During 1905 and 1906 many

communes discussed political questions, and a large number of peasants' resolutions were sent to the First Duma demanding a great variety of reforms, chiefly concerning land-tenure. Discussions of this kind have, however, now been pretty thoroughly checked by police measures.

For the peasants are not allowed to act independently. They are under constant tutelage. All the villages in a given area called a canton or volost converge on an administrative centre in the chief village of the canton which has a cantonal mote and a cantonal court under the presidency of a *starshina*, or elder. The books of the canton are kept by a *pisar*, or secretary, who is also the mainspring of the activity of the court. In the cantonal court cases are tried by customary law, but these courts are notorious for their corruption, and it is a common saying among the peasantry that a gift of a bottle of beer to the *starshina* and a rouble to the *pisar* is sufficient to secure judgment in the desired direction. The *uriadnik*, the lowest representative of the Government rural police, lives in the cantonal centre.

The canton contains another personage of great importance to the peasantry. It will be noted that the whole organisation of the canton is concerned only with the peasants. The gentry and other inhabitants of the area are not included in the administrative arrangements. The peasants are, indeed, regarded as being, as a class, in the position of minors, and this fact is emphasised by the appointment of special officials, known as *Zemskie Nachalniki*, Rural Overseers or Wardens of the Peasantry, whose duty it is to exercise a general oversight over the peasants in their respective districts each of which may include two or three cantons. Usually a prominent landowner of the neighbourhood is appointed Warden, and care is taken that his views shall be agreeable to the Government. The Warden has judicial rights with power to fine and imprison, and minor criminal cases are tried before him. If he is politically active and heavy-handed he may make things very unpleasant for the peasants, and

as an institution the wardenship is unpopular. But the peasants regard the Warden as the chief authority in the district, and their favourite threat is to appeal to the Zemsky. Thus Anna, the wife of Nikolai the forester's son in Vladimirovo, had endless trouble with her husband who had not only beat her, which would be considered a normal and a natural thing and a sign of affection, but openly insulted her, and although he earned a great deal of money practically starved her and the children. Several times she retired to her father's house to parley from there, but Nikolai never kept his promises, and finally she went off to lay all her troubles before the Warden. Kusha, a widow in a village down the river, had an incorrigible son of sixteen who beat her, turned her out of her own house, and threatened to kill her. She, too, applied to the Warden and had the boy put in prison.

Calling the Warden the Zemsky, as they do, the peasants continually confuse him with an institution of quite a different character, the Zemstvo or District and Pro-

The Zemstvo. vincial Council. The government, or province, is divided into uiezdy or districts, and the districts into cantons. But the Zemstvo organisation does not reach farther down than the district, and is not suffered to penetrate into the canton, since it represents local government by all classes in conjunction, modern ideas, the elective principle and a variety of other features distasteful to the bureaucracy. The work of the Zemstvo must, however, touch the canton at certain points. The Zemstvo maintains a certain number of schools, which are usually the best schools in the government. It keeps roads and bridges in repair, and a very important part of its work is the provision of medical aid. For this purpose it maintains doctors at various stations, and these doctors have a hard life, the area they have to cover in all weathers, winter and summer, being sometimes equivalent to an English county, while railways are few and roads are often excessively bad. The Zemstvo

doctor has been admirably described in Chehov's stories. To aid the doctor in his work the Zemstvo maintains in the larger villages roughly qualified male practitioners, called *feldshery*, or women practitioners called *feldsheritsy*, who deal with the simpler cases. There are small Zemstvo hospitals which are often forty or fifty miles apart. In certain governments, such as Kostroma and Voronezh, the Zemstvo has established admirable sanitation systems for the speedy provision of medical aid, the effective prevention of disease, and the instruction of the peasantry in elementary health principles. The characteristic feature of the medical aid given by the Zemstvo is that it is free of charge. It should be added that the principle of free medical aid for all who need it is firmly established throughout Russia, and is systematically put into practice in the cities.

The agronomists, or agricultural experts, are also maintained by the Zemstvo and give advice to the peasantry gratis, maintain experimental stations, and generally do what they can to modernise methods of cultivation, without achieving, however, the striking success that might have been anticipated. In the district here reviewed there is an agronomist who lives on the railway line at Chudovo, and has opened there on behalf of the Zemstvo a depot of agricultural machinery, the demand for which is steadily growing amongst the peasantry. The Zemstvo keeps regular statistics of the population of the government and its economic condition, and for this purpose employs at given intervals a whole army of statisticians, the greater number of whom are students of the Universities or technical schools. In Zemstvos that are more active and progressive than that of Novgorod other branches of work are undertaken. The Tver Zemstvo, for instance, has an excellent fire-insurance system, and in Moscow and a number of other governments the Zemstvo has paid great attention to the conservation and revival of those cottages industries which formerly constituted the chief occupation of the peasants during the winter months, and the products of which

have aroused enthusiastic interest at exhibitions in Paris and London.

The peasants have a voice in the Zemstvo. There is a limited number of peasant members in the District Council, but the landed gentry predominate. And it is certain that most of the peasants of such a village as Vladimirovo have not the faintest knowledge of their direct share in the Zemstvo organisation. For them the benefits conferred by the Zemstvo are sent down upon them by the vague, indefinite mass of powers and authorities which regulates all the details of their life. Zemsky and Zemstvo, the government Warden and the local government council, are for most of them very much the same thing.

The last few years, however, have shaken the peasant out of his traditional attitude and made him ready for change. And if the inhabitants of Vladimirovo and the left bank of the Volkov generally are little disposed to question the established order of things and to reach out after innovations, the inhabitants of the right bank are, as has been pointed out, in a different mood. There a process of transformation is at work, a process which means that in twenty years' time the villages affected will be hardly recognisable.

Some twenty miles up the river Volhov towards Novgorod lies a large village called Dubki, which a few years ago was in no way different from the other villages along the river. Now it has become a centre of progress, the scene of experiments that cannot fail to exert a great influence on the whole countryside. During the revolutionary period several young men in this village, like other young men along the river, and hundreds of peasants all over Russia, became infected with new ideas. They decided that they were Socialists—they were not very sure of what kind, whether Social Revolutionaries or Social Democrats, but at any rate they were very "left." Two or three of them fell into prison, as peasants who were

Life in
Dubki.

keen on politics were apt to do. In prison they talked with educated Socialists, borrowed books from them, and came out of prison more determinedly Socialist than before. When the reaction came they lost interest in general politics, and in any case they were far less interested in ministries and parliaments than in the practical task of improving conditions in their own countryside. They found that there were a great many things they might actually do without waiting for a general social transformation. In the first place they became co-operators, and here they found themselves in line with a movement which during the last few years has progressed in Russia by leaps and bounds. Co-operation appealed to their Socialist feeling, proved in practice eminently workable in the form of a co-operative store, and, moreover, it came naturally to the villagers, seeming as it did to them merely a new development of the communal principle to which they were accustomed. Other co-operative societies were started in villages along the river Volhov, and although the authorities at first frowned on the enterprise and held the initiators under suspicion they contented themselves with keeping out as far as possible the element of political opposition and suffered the movement to grow. In Dubki, as in hundreds of other villages, the co-operative store has greatly diminished the power of the village tradesman, who by his exorbitant charges and his methods of giving credit accumulates property at the expense of the weaker villagers and is known commonly as the *kulak* or fist. Moscow is the centre of the co-operative movement in Russia. The Co-operative Union, or Wholesale Society, is growing strong and influential, has a membership of 1,000 societies, and an annual turnover of £80,000, publishes several periodicals and a great many books and pamphlets, and the organisers as a rule take great care that Rochdale principles are strictly observed. The total number of co-operative societies in Russia is over 16,000. The movement has assumed such dimensions that co-operators in such a village as Dubki are already lifted beyond the

stage of lonely pioneer struggling and are strong in the support of a great organisation.

The word co-operation in its Russian form is hardly used by the inhabitants of the village. The store they call a *potrebilka*, which means simply a shop for consumers, and the union they call by the very familiar Russian name *artel*, which stands for an institution as characteristically Russian as the *mir* or commune. An *artel* is a kind of mutual liability association. Workmen frequently form *artels* as a guarantee against loss. The porters on railway stations are organised in *artels*, so are the floor-polishers, so are the messengers in red caps who stand at the street corners in the cities, so are the messengers in banks and business houses. The *artel* is liable for all its members, so that if one of them steals or injures property the *artel* has to make the loss good. The members of the *artels* pool their money and share gains as well as losses. Peasants from a village community often form themselves into an *artel* when they go to work at a distance, and local patriotism seems to form the basis of membership in the big *artels* in the cities, the men of Yaroslav forming one *artel* the men of Kostroma another, and so forth. The name *artel* is now widely used in the co-operative movement, and in this way a link of continuity is maintained with traditional Russian forms of association.

The co-operative store did not satisfy the ambition of the enterprising young men of Dubki. They were eager to engage in co-operative production. But for this capital was necessary, and the whole of their small funds had been exhausted in setting the store going, and in connection with the store a tea-room with a gramophone. They learned, however, that the Government had set apart a considerable sum of money to be advanced to peasants in small sums through the Peasants' Bank. It was not very pleasant for these young Socialists of yesterday to make application to the Government, but they were eager to work and they swallowed their scruples. The officials in Novgorod in their turn were

suspicious, but intermediaries were found, difficulties smoothed over, and the Dubki peasants secured enough money to start a co-operative butter factory with. The interest of peasants in the surrounding villages was aroused, three creameries were established, and now the factory is flourishing and sending large quantities of butter every week to a co-operative store in St. Petersburg. And this butter factory, again, is only one of hundreds that have sprung up in various parts of Russia during the last few years. Formerly peasants when they kept cows used the milk chiefly for rearing calves which were sold to the butchers. The market for milk products was a poor one, and it is still much poorer than it might be, chiefly because of the defectiveness of means of communication. Moreover, the peasants rarely knew how to make butter or cheese fit for the market. The Dubki peasants and others in the neighbourhood had to learn, and instructors came down and gave lectures and practical advice, and the wideawake young pioneers read and observed unceasingly.

Then their horizon was broadened by an unlooked-for event. One of them was sent abroad to study. There exists in St. Petersburg a society called *Zerno*, or "The Grain," devoted to agricultural improvement, and one of the good things this society does is to send promising young peasants to learn farming conditions in Western European countries. Occasionally its protégés are sent to Denmark, but since the society has a conservative and Slavophil tinge it prefers sending them to Slavonic countries. The young peasant chosen from Dubki was sent to Bohemia, where he remained for over a year working as a farm labourer. He soon learned the language, was keenly interested in all he saw, and since the Bohemian farmers are very up to date, he brought back with him to Dubki a host of new ideas about the rotation of crops, cattle-feeding, co-operation, the treatment of milk and butter and so forth. Luckily, instead of abandoning his village and seeking employment as a steward on a big estate, as peasants

of his knowledge and ability do most frequently, he remained in Dubki and threw himself into all its enterprises, so that the whole village gained by his interesting experience.

But it was not only the agricultural methods of the Bohemian farmers that had impressed Akeksei, the student from Dubki. He had been greatly struck by the swift pulsation of their social life, their choral societies, their reading rooms and lecture halls, their ordered festivals and, above all, by their strong national feeling. Some of the lessons he learned he tried to put into practice in his native village, and now the Dubkians are building a house, the lower story of which is to be used as a fire-brigade station, while the upper story will serve as a hall for lectures, choral festivals and dances. To inculcate patriotism was not so easy. Pride in the glories of the ancient city of Novgorod was stamped out long ago, and the peasants of the district are perfectly indifferent to their past and almost devoid of local patriotism. But Akeksei succeeded in doing the incredible. He induced a large company of his fellow villagers to make an excursion two hours' distance up the river to Novgorod, under the shadow of which they had lived all their lives, and to visit the old churches with a teacher who explained the historical associations. Nothing could have been more clearly indicative of a change of temper than this excursion.

The co-operative work in the village, passing as it did under the familiar name of *artel*, might be regarded as a

**The Break-up
of the
Commune.**

new development of communal methods. But another change took place in the village that involved a startling breach with communal tradition. The commune was broken up. Dubki was caught in the sweep of the private ownership movement due to the operation of a law promulgated first of all by Imperial decree at the instance of Stolypin after the dissolution of the Second Duma in 1907, and modified and developed by the Third Duma. This law annuls the obligatory character

of the village commune and provides that any peasant who so desires may secede, that is, he may claim as his own private property the share of the communal lands that falls to his lot. The principle is simple enough, but its elaboration and adaptation to general property laws and to the administrative system has involved a large amount of cumbersome legislation, while the execution of the law has been attended with great difficulties. Many progressive Russians have long felt that the communal system hampered individual initiative and was a bar to development, and have urged a transition to private property. But the new law had the disadvantage of being passed by the bureaucracy at a time of reaction when great embitterment prevailed in the country. And this circumstance combined with a lingering Populist idealisation of the commune as a distinctively national and Socialist institution made the intelligentsia and the Opposition generally regard Stolypin's action with great distrust. Thus the working of the new law, instead of taking the form of a unanimous and national effort, like the execution of the agrarian reforms connected with the emancipation of the peasantry, was left for the most part to the bureaucracy and suffered in consequence. But the fact that the work was real and new and interesting work attracted many of the ablest of the younger men who had only recently completed their education and entered the Government service, and the difficult transition to a new form of tenure was, in many instances, effected with tact and skill. The opinions of experts vary greatly as to the results hitherto attained. Frequently intimidation and force have been employed by officials in order to compel the peasants to abandon the commune. Applications for liberation from the commune have in many places led to fierce conflicts among the peasantry, and when a whole village abandons the communal system, the weaker peasants frequently sell their fragment of land, drink the proceeds and go under. But, on the other hand, a great many cases are on record where the break-up of the

commune has led to rapid economic progress. In Dubki, at any rate, the result has been wholly successful.

For the working of the law each government has a separate organisation under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture. A Land Commission is established, composed of officials and country gentlemen, and this Commission investigates the possibilities of putting the law into force in the government, marks out likely villages, sounds the peasants, and takes measures to make the provisions of the law generally known. In practice it is found better for whole villages to divide up than for individual peasants to go out of the commune. When a commune wishes to divide up it "composes a sentence," in other words, passes a resolution to that effect, and officials of the Ministry of Agriculture are immediately sent down to examine local conditions and to give advice as to the best way of carrying out the scheme. Then land-surveyors go to work, the communal land is divided up fairly according to the claims of each householder, the changes are registered, and thereafter he is free to cultivate, sell, or lease his land at his own pleasure.

In Dubki under the old system the peasants suffered greatly from the endless overlapping of strips of land. There was little pleasure in farming when a man's land was scattered about in narrow strips over a considerable area, and there was no solid satisfaction in ploughing even with a new steel plough when a strip was only a few furrows wide. But in the transition to private ownership these drawbacks have been removed. Every peasant now has his land in one or at the most three places, and can concentrate his energies in one spot with a sense that he has breathing space. All the peasants of Dubki are very well content with the new arrangement, the more so that they have been freed from the drawbacks of the old system without too violent a break with their regular habits. There are two ways, under the new law, in which peasants may pass into the private ownership stage. They may go out "on to *hutora*," that is to say,

they may leave the village, build a cottage on their allotment of land, and there live the solitary life of a farmer. Or else they may go out "on to *otruba*," that is, they continue to live in the village, going out daily to cultivate their land. The choice is often determined by the convenience or inconvenience of access to the allotment. Some of the allotments lie at a considerable distance from village, river, or road, and the impossibility of providing allotments that shall be equally convenient of access for all the villagers is one of the causes that most frequently deters communes from dividing up. The villagers of Dubki having divided up preferred to remain in the village. Their reason for doing so was very simple and human. "It would be very dull and lonely," they declared, "to be living scattered about on farms." So they continue to live their friendly village life with its wealth of new interests and new enterprises and seem to be perfectly satisfied with the choice they have made. They are prospering and putting money into their farms and improving cultivation, and they are doing something to ward off some of the dangers that come with prosperity by providing for the exclusion from all the societies and clubs of persons who engage in sly grog-selling.

The example of Dubki is infecting the neighbouring villages. The co-operative movement is progressing, the question of dividing up the communal property is being seriously discussed, and in several villages along the east bank of the river the partition has already been effected. In fact, a more profound and far-reaching change has taken place in the country during the last five years than at any period since the emancipation. It should be noted, however, that co-operation and the break-up of the commune are two distinct movements which by no means always coalesce.

What has been said as to the application of the new Land Law does not apply to Little Russia, the southern provinces of European Russia, where private ownership is the rule and the commune does not exist. And one effect of the change

now in progress will be to make the distinction between Southern and North Central Russia, which is still very marked, much less perceptible than it has been.

The increase of population in European Russia during the last fifty years and the inadequacy of the allotments granted

Other Attempts to Solve Land Problem. in many governments at the emancipation, have led to something like a land famine amongst the peasantry. The lack of land might not have been so acutely felt if improved methods of cultivation had been adopted, but for a great many reasons they were not, and the peasants had a very strong feeling that the only way out of the difficulty was to get more land. They greedily eyed the big estates of the neighbouring gentry, rented land from them when they could, and often took French leave, ploughing on their own account land belonging to the estates, ignoring frontiers between their hay meadows and those of the landowners, cutting timber in Crown or private forests. The hunger for more land, a deep-lying feeling that the peasants had been defrauded of their fair share explained the success of the agrarian agitation during the revolutionary period, the deafening outcry for land nationalisation in the First Duma and the frequent attacks of bands of peasants on big estates. The agrarian agitation was suppressed by means of police raids, the seizure of ringleaders, the development of espionage in the villages, and the stationing of Cossacks and rural guards on many of the estates in disturbed districts. But for the troubles caused by lack of land among people who live by the soil no generally effective remedy has been found.

The peasants themselves find various palliatives. Often there is work on neighbouring estates, ploughing, harvesting, or wood-cutting. But this does not suffice, and the peasants go farther afield, spending whole summers away from home working at all sorts of trades, at the fisheries, in the mines, or as wharf labourers. Sometimes they lose the habit of

regular work and join the bands of tramps and rovers and inveterate drinkers who winter in the cities and in the spring pour out in thousands to scatter over all the high roads, passing from village to village, from estate to estate, working occasionally in order to earn money for drink. Often the peasants with small holdings drive cabs in the town in winter and work at home in the summer, or else they find employment in the factories and settle in the towns leaving their plot of land to its fate. Factory workmen of this type frequently take advantage of the new Land Law to sell their land, and so finally sever their connection with the country.

But Russia is big and there is still land enough and to spare, and if European Russia is growing small there is space enough in Siberia. Ever since the emancipation there has been a steady emigration movement to Siberia, where the peasants settled on the waste lands which were so abundant, and for a long time troubled little about property rights, considering that what a man cultivated was his own. The movement eastwards grew strongly towards the close of the nineteenth century, was temporarily checked by the war, and was renewed with redoubled intensity after the revolutionary period. The State at first paid little attention to the emigrants or colonists. Peasants in the home governments heard of a favourable spot, and sometimes sent out one of their number to spy out the land. If he reported well they sold their stock and implements and took the long journey with their wives and families. Very often, however, they proved unable to adapt themselves to the new conditions, and returned to their native commune disappointed and penniless. Even now, when the emigration movement has assumed large dimensions and is better organised and regulated, about half the emigrants return.

It was the agrarian crisis of 1905 and 1906 that caused the Government to give closer attention to the emigration question, more especially since the country gentry, alarmed

by the crisis and balancing the drawbacks that were inevitable in either case, preferred to lose possible farmhands and see **the price of labour go up, rather than have their security endangered** by the constant cry for more land. The Government encouraged emigration by all the means in its power. It opened up extensive areas for colonisation in the Central Asian steppes, and in doing so narrowed down the pasture lands of the nomad Kirghizes who found the transition a painful one and plainly showed their ill-will to the Russian settlers. Beyond the Urals, through Chelyabinsk passed long trains loaded with peasant families, chiefly from the southern non-communal governments. Between 1906 and 1910 nearly 340,000 families, or over a million persons in all, were settled in Siberia and Central Asia. After 1910 the movement again diminished in strength, but there is still a steady stream of emigration to the East.

Siberia is, in fact, the Russian America. The number of persons of Russian nationality who emigrate to the United States was until recently trifling, and the bulk of emigrants to America from Russia were Jews, Poles, and Lithuanians. The Russians gravitate to the Asiatic territories of the Empire. **There various types meet and mingle.** The Russian character changes, tradition has slight hold. Hard common sense and a go-ahead spirit prevail. The towns are rapidly growing after the American fashion. Within seven years a village called Novonikolaeivsk, near the Altai region, has grown into a town of 80,000 inhabitants, and is the centre of an important dairying district. Siberia, that is to say, forms one of the mediums by which Russia is being Americanised. And Siberia, like America, has its colour problem, for there is great difficulty in keeping out an influx of Chinese labour which is cheaper and steadier than Russian labour.

None of the measures above described form a definite solution of the land problem in Russia. They are instalments

of a solution, attacks levied on the problem from different sides, concessions to a general spirit of economic change, to the demand for the liberty of movement which is one of the chief conditions of economic progress. The essential fact is that the period of stagnation is over, that the peasant sees ways before him of which he had never dreamed, and that the necessity and possibility of change are now generally admitted.

But if the peasant is changing so is his neighbour the landed proprietor, or *pomieshchik*. The estates of the country

**Landed
Proprietors.**

gentry are a characteristic feature of the landscape in Central and Northern Russia. The house stands preferably on a river-bank or on a hill-side. It is half-hidden amidst a grove of trees. Frequently, especially if the house was built, as a great many of the houses of the country gentry were, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it has a veranda and a balcony supported by massive white columns. Near the house there is almost sure to be a lime-tree avenue, leading to an orchard of apple, pear, and cherry trees. A flower garden, sometimes with artificial ponds, and a variety of outbuildings complete the number of immediate appurtenances to the manor-house. Indoors a wide entrance-hall, a big dining-room, a drawing-room, a kitchen full of busy, chattering life, stairs leading to all sorts of quaint nooks and corners, well-stocked store-rooms, libraries often containing old and valuable books, pretty, old-fashioned mahogany furniture, family portraits on the walls and generally a snug and soothing sense of leisure, security, and remoteness from the bustle of the world. Such is the home of the average *pomieshchik*. The government of Orel, of which Turgeniev was a native, was studded with such homes as these, and no one has described them more vividly than he. "Gentlefolks' Nests," he calls them, and this name with its lulling note of defence and security is still largely applicable, although the gentry no longer wield, as formerly, exclusive authority in the countryside, and the

disturbing forces of a new time are beating up against the white-columned mansions.

In some of the great estates stand splendid palaces with magnificent grounds as in Arkhangelskaia and Marfino in the Moscow government. And, on the other hand, there are land owners who by rank belong to the gentry, but who possess little land and live in a condition hardly differing from that of the peasantry. The steppe *pomieshchik*, again, is a type apart and so are pomieshchiks from beyond the Volga. In the south-eastern region and Siberia the conception of a *pomieshchik* as understood in the centre and the north of European Russia is simply lost amidst various categories of Cossacks, peasants, colonists, and big and small farmers of a more or less American type.

The typical *pomieshchik* has no exact counterpart in England. He is neither a country squire nor a yeoman farmer, though he may have features characteristic of both. Very often he is in the government service and devotes his chief energies to administrative work, regarding his estate merely as a place of repose and, under favourable conditions, as a source of income. During the winter months he and his family live in the city, and the estate is left in charge of a steward who may possibly be a German or a Lett, but is, as often as not, a shrewd peasant from a neighbouring village. There are honest stewards, but the average steward has an elastic conception of his rights and privileges, and the absenteeism of many proprietors, and the light-hearted indifference they often display to the business of the estate when they do come down to it during the summer months almost irresistibly tempt to speculation. Even if the proprietor is not in the Government service he probably prefers to live in the city or in the government town, and then it may easily happen that the owner of a considerable estate can barely scrape together enough money to pay the rent of his flat, while his steward on the distant estate builds himself a roomy and comfortable mansion. A landowner in the Novgorod

government built on his estate a house of stone. One day his steward came to St. Petersburg with a melancholy story of a storm having risen and the house having been swept away by the river Volhov. The landowner shook his head sadly, but it was long before he learned that the steward had simply pulled the house down and sold the materials. This experience must have disheartened the landowner for he sold his estate through the Peasants' Bank, then made unfortunate investments and was finally ruined.

Indeed the habits acquired by the gentry during centuries of serfdom are not to be thrown off in a day. When a man inherited an estate which, having serfs upon it, produced wealth almost mechanically, fed and clothed its proprietor and provided him almost without any exertion on his part with the money he needed for living in the cities and for travelling, he would naturally pay close attention to the working of the estate only if he were personally interested in agriculture or were resolutely bent on adding to his wealth. There were; under the old system, many *pomieshchiks* who scraped and saved and sat year in, year out on their estates without ever visiting the city, who flogged the maximum of work out of their peasantry, outwitted their weaker neighbours, and by dint of economy, careful calculation, and endless litigation succeeded in greatly increasing the extent of their property. These were the methods that secured for the Grand Princes of Moscow their supremacy over their neighbours. But the Grand Princes of Moscow also brushed aside the laws which led to an incessant disintegration of big estates by providing that all the sons should inherit equally. The ordinary *pomieshchik* could in no way evade this law, and the consequence was that after a father had spent a lifetime in extending the frontiers of his property farther than the eye could reach, his death would mean the splitting up of the estate into five or six fragments, and it was not to be expected that all the sons would inherit the acquisitive

instincts of their parent. Moreover, the habit of recruiting the ranks of the administration and of the army officers from among the country gentry encouraged the growth of the type of *pomieshchik* who drew his income from his estate without ever troubling as to how it was raised.

This passive and receptive attitude to the soil lingers on to a great extent among the country gentry, and its traces are constantly met with even on estates the proprietors of which are enlightened and progressive *Zemstvo*-workers, are eagerly interested in agriculture, and personally superintend the cultivation of the soil. A subtle fatalism seems to be latent in the homes of the gentry. There are endless difficulties, but it seems to the proprietors incredible that they should be insurmountable. A way out is sure to be found, things cannot be as bad as they appear. Some one is sure to help, either the Government or the elements or some vague, friendly Providence. Indeed, the gentry are just as responsible as the peasantry for the prevalence in Russian conversation of such comfortably optimistic phrases as *Obrazietsia* ("It will come out all right"), or the expressive interjections, *Avos* and *Kak-nibud* ("May hap!" and "Somehow or other").

The Government does a great deal to justify the confidence of the gentry. There is an institution called the State Land Bank, which was formed twenty-four years after the emancipation when it had become clear that the gentry for all their wealth in land could not cope with the difficulties of this new situation without direct financial aid. The Government needed a class of landed gentry, and since the gentry showed a tendency to let their land slip out of their hands, to turn it into money as soon as possible and then to squander the proceeds, it was the policy of the Government to find means for maintaining the connection between the gentry and the land. The Gentry's Bank accordingly advances sums on mortgage at a

State-aid.

low rate of interest, and on such easy conditions that the advance practically amounts to a donation which enables the Government to hold the land in trust for the mortgagee and to prevent its passing too rapidly into the hands of private money-lenders, or members of other classes. Even such paternal action often fails of its effect, however, and a quarter of the estates now mortgaged are registered as having passed from the possession of gentlemen into that of representatives of other classes. The total number of estates mortgaged in the Bank is over 26,000, the amount advanced on which is nearly 660 million roubles, or about 67 million pounds sterling. The greater number of estates mortgaged are in such central governments as Tula, Orel, Kursk, and Riazan. The Bank is a kindly institution, and until recently it was very tolerant of the weaknesses of the gentry, though it is growing stricter now. There is a pleasant ritual when the *pomieshchik* comes to pay interest on the mortgage; complaints on the part of the *pomieshchik* of hard times and inability to pay the full sum, commiseration on the part of the Bank officials, but insistence on the absolute necessity of paying the entire amount, expostulation from the *pomieshchik*, further demurring from the official, a little gentle bargaining, the retirement of the official to inner rooms where consultations are held, after which the official with a sigh accepts the smaller amount and remits the remainder until the following term when the scene is re-enacted.

All the benevolence of the Government does not avail, however, to establish any great fixity of tenure for the families of the gentry. The inheritance law

**Break-up of
Large Estates.**

is responsible for constant perturbations. The right of primogeniture does not exist in respect of purely Russian estates—the eldest son has an advantage only if the family possesses an entailed estate in Polish districts where the right of primogeniture does prevail—and all the sons inherit equal portions, while a daughter's interest is one-fourteenth. Then the growing

economic strength of other classes menaces the gentry. An emancipated serf makes money as a contractor and advances cash to his former master on the security of considerable areas of meadow or forest land ; the security is not redeemed, the land falls into the peasant's hands. He becomes a timber merchant, buys or mortgages forests from the neighbouring gentry who are usually glad enough to sacrifice timber to save their estates, to pay for the education of their children or for travelling, or to cover a variety of debts that have been contracted in the cities. The estates of the gentry grow smaller, those of the timber merchant grow larger. The merchant's sons inherit a large property and develop it. The surrounding peasants earn good money in timber-felling and rafting, for the merchant and the gentry find the wages for agricultural labourers rising and the difficulty of securing labour increasing. Some of the gentry shrink back in alarm before the growing difficulties, and after exhausting all possible methods of raising money on their land abandon the task in despair, finally dispose of their estates and become townsmen pure and simple. Others devise new methods of production and cultivation, build a starch factory and grow acres of potatoes to keep it going, start a brick-kiln if the soil is suitable, or a flour-mill, a distillery or some similar enterprise, or, if there is access to a good market engage in dairy-farming, or else try to improve the quality of their land by scientific manuring or by draining swamps. Those landowners who take their estates seriously and exploit their resources according to modern methods as a rule succeed in keeping their heads above water, but that section of the gentry which is unable to take a keen interest in agriculture and resigns itself to the will of kindly fates is being gradually elbowed off the land by pushing merchants and well-to-do commission agents and shrewd peasants and various keen-eyed financiers. Often the landowner sells his estate for a song, and has the bitterness of seeing the purchaser make a fortune out of land that he himself had considered valueless.

This flux in land tenure is inevitable under the modernising process through which Russia is now passing. The break-up of the peasant commune and the creation of a class of peasant farmers with private property means that these farmers, in so far as they are successful, will add to their property by purchasing land from the gentry. And so there will be from all sides a steady encroachment which only economically strong proprietors will be able to resist. The result will undoubtedly be immensely to increase the productiveness of the soil in European Russia—for it is in European Russia that the **change is chiefly felt**. It is obvious, even to the inexperienced eye, that far less is made of Russian estates than might be made, not to speak of the land of the peasants. The traveller who makes the railway journey via Berlin to Moscow or St. Petersburg is inevitably struck by the contrast between the level of cultivation in the estates and farms of East Prussia and those in Russia, and the difference between the agriculture of Central Russia and that of the Baltic Provinces is also very marked. A Western farmer habituated to the microscopic niceties of intensive culture on small patches of land is astonished at the waste, at the indifference to rich opportunities so often met with on Russian estates. The final break with the traditions of serfdom, the development of individual initiative and of a determination to exploit the resources of the soil to the utmost, to make money by farming instead of depending on barely aided nature, should mean a startling increase of national wealth.

Yet there is much to cherish in the period that is now passing away. It was a period that distinctly encouraged the development of the arts and the humanities.

A Retrospect. Russian culture was in the first instance and still largely is, a culture of the landed gentry. The qualities that have made Russian culture familiar to Western Europe came to consciousness in the society of the capitals and ripened to their mature expression in great works of art in the leisure of the estates. The novels

of Tolstoy, Turgeniev, and Goncharov are impregnated with the spirit of the period and stand as its permanent monuments. Tolstoy, during the 'seventies, before he experienced his religious crisis, managed his estate with great skill and energy and considerably increased his property. Turgeniev was a typical barin or gentleman, drawing an income from his estate, delighting in its associations, but incapable of devoting his energies to its management. There were books in the manors, and music, a pleasant interchange of visits, a broad hospitality, a happy manner at once courtly and genial, a life gracious and slow-moving, with a hundred protecting patriarchal ways and a caressing atmosphere of abundance and security. The spring exodus, too, from the towns with servants and bag and baggage, the long summer idleness, the rush back to the towns when autumn evenings became chilly—these are characteristic attributes of Russian culture which were directly connected with the estates. The life of the gentry had its unfavourable aspects, too, in a frequent laxity and distaste for effort. But the protest against the gentry came largely from the gentry themselves. It was a Liberal party among the gentry that led the movement for emancipation from the close of the eighteenth century onwards. There were liberals who gained the name of "The Repentant Gentry." A large number of the country proprietors did useful work in the Zemstvo and took part in the agitation for a constitution. A great many revolutionaries and so-called Nihilists belonged to landowners' families, and on being released from prison returned to their estates to rest. There was for a long time and still is a close connection between the gentry and the intelligentsia, and many characteristic features of the latter are explicable as a result of this connection. Altogether the contribution of the landed gentry to modern Russian culture has been one of first-class importance.

To balance this contribution there is the record of serfdom and the fact that there now exists among the landed gentry

a heavily conservative and reactionary element which is strongly hostile to progress and which loses no opportunities of checking the advance of the constitutional movement and of turning it backwards. This section of the gentry forms, in fact, the bulwark of the reaction. It represents the stubborn protest of a class that feels its economic and social position threatened by the forces of change. As though recognising that the elaborately traditional organisation for the protection of the interests of the gentry—the Assemblies of the Gentry with a Marshal of the Gentry in each district and government, various funds for the aid of the gentry, ward over the estates of minors and spendthrifts, education at the expense of the State in certain privileged schools and so-forth—were insufficient to stem the tide that threatened the existence of the class, they formed an Association of the United Gentry to whose influence the dissolution of the Second Duma and the modification of the electoral law were mainly due. In this organisation the gentry of Kursk take the leading share. Some of its members described themselves as *zubry*, aurochs, the last representatives of an almost extinct species, and the epithet was caught up by the press and public, is now in constant use, and characterises the general attitude towards the Association. This reactionary organisation does not include the majority of the gentry, who, to judge by the Duma elections, are generally Conservative Constitutionalist in politics.

But, at any rate, the change is in process, and is working itself out in a gradual encroachment of the new middle-class of the towns on the land, in the rapid extension, especially in South-eastern Russia and Siberia of the area under cultivation, in the growth of the wheat export trade from Southern Russia, in a very largely increased demand for agricultural machinery and implements, in a growing competition between industry and agriculture for labour and a consequent rise in wages, in the development of co-operation and the new movement of inquiry amongst the peasantry. It is an astonishing

process, so immense in its range and sweep that once begun it seems bound to acquire an irresistible impetus. It is the economic corollary to the recently completed conquest of the great plain. And before this prospect the difficulties and dangers of the present seem less formidable than when viewed in the narrow perspective of to-day.