

RUSSIA IN WAR AND IN PEACE.

BY MICHAEL M. VIKTOROV.

SO much has been said and written in America and Europe concerning the role of Russia in the present "World War," and concerning the white czar's plans, intentions and purposes as the ally and defender of western culture, that a candid article on Russia from the pen of one qualified to speak should possess some interest, at least to candid minds. The present writer is of Russian birth though long since naturalized and Americanized—an American without a hyphen (as he flatters himself) who, however, has not lost his profound sympathy with and concern for Russian progress, nor his affection for the land and people oppressed and misgoverned by the autocracy and bureaucracy of Petrograd.

Let it be said by way of introduction as briefly as possible that the writer hurriedly left Russia when a mere youth of nineteen, not to seek a fortune in "the land of promise," not to better his economic condition, which at that time was fairly satisfactory, not to gratify any desire for adventure and change, but solely in order to save his life and liberty for what he trusted would be a career of modest service. He was a student and as such a member of a secret politico-cultural society in one of the leading provincial cities. The society, like many others, had for its object the political and economic emancipation of Russia or, as the government's official prosecutors always put it, "the subversion of the existing order."

The secret society was actually quite harmless; the members were mere boys and girls who were proud of their nominal and slender connection with a mysterious, awe-inspiring central revolutionary body in the capital and who had no thought of political crime. They called themselves "terrorists," it is true, and they knew enough of Marx, Lasalle, French Utopian socialism and British practical socialism of the Robert Owen school to regard themselves as Social Democrats of a somewhat nondescript species, but they did nothing and planned nothing in the way of terror. They devoured "underground" literature; they read the radical journalism of the day, Russian and European, and they sought to "convert"

other boys and girls to their style of thinking. They collected money occasionally for "the cause," giving theatrical performances and concerts, selling revolutionary journals and pamphlets, and giving away some of their own pocket money. Most of them were Gymnasium or *Realschule* students, and some were college freshmen. A few—very few—were skilled workmen or apprentices, and these were cordially welcomed by the "bourgeois" and "intellectual" members who were supported by their respective parents and who ardently admired the self-supporting, hard-toiling, noble and independent "proletarians."

A reasonable or humane government would not have taken such youthful, dreamy "revolutionists" too seriously, nor punished them mercilessly for their political activities and "plots." But whenever the government, acting on information supplied by spies or careless friends, arrested the members of such a group, the slightest evidence of revolutionary affiliations or activities sufficed to secure savage verdicts—banishment to Siberia with labor in the mines, solitary confinement in filthy prisons that often led to insanity, and even the gallows. The agents of the Russian government sometimes absolutely run amuck and act like infuriated madmen. When they are in one of these panic moods nobody is safe, and no allowance is made for youth, inexperience, juvenile enthusiasm, naïveté, ignorance and rashness.

Now, it happened that the secret society to which the writer belonged committed certain glaring indiscretions in the way of "propaganda," and the police apprehended several of its active members, including the "librarian" or keeper of the illegal books. A list of members' and patrons' names was found in the librarian's room. Those arrested had to take their medicine; two were tried and sent to Siberia, and two others received prison terms. But the leaders of the society decided to induce several other "suspects" to escape; they wisely thought that the provincial secret society had not done enough to resign itself to needless sacrifices and to justify the surrender of more victims to the cruel government. The writer, with several others, was urged to take a train at midnight and make his way to the Austrian frontier, which was not too distant. Money was somehow found; no other preparations were possible; not even a farewell to parents and intimate friends was to be thought of. The idea, moreover, was pressed upon them that Russia needed workers abroad as well as at home, and that even exiles had important patriotic tasks, educational and practical, cut out for them. Not without reluctance, not without doubts, the

writer and his comrades took leave of their native soil and made their way, without a passport and with much danger and difficulty, into western Europe and later to America.

Much has happened since that time in Russian life and politics. But what of the government? What of Russian freedom and civilization? What of the cause of reform and progress? Where do we in the west stand with reference to the still mysterious and unknown empire of the czar? To these questions let me now turn.

Russia has been described as a land of the most amazing contrasts. One meets in her the noblest and truest culture as well as the nakedest and most revolting savagery, the best education as well as the darkest superstition and the extremest ignorance, the utmost gentleness and charity as well as the most ferocious brutality. The truth is, there are several Russias not only in the familiar geographical sense, but in the unfamiliar moral and cultural sense. One of the Russias has no enemies; it is the Russia of Tourgeniev, of Tolstoy, of Gogol, of Kropotkin, of Tschekhoff, of Tchaikowski, of Tchernishevski. It is the Russia that has all her windows open to true western culture,—the Russia that is European, that recognizes the great need of domestic reform in every direction, and that has for several decades so eagerly and so profitably studied the best thought of Europe.

Another of the Russias is the Russia of the peasantry and the proletariat uncorrupted by the spies and the *agents provocateurs* of the autocracy. It is the Russia of the Mir, the Artiel (ancient forms of co-operation, which a benevolent and progressive government would have made every effort to protect and to perpetuate), the religious dissenters, the haters of official and stereotyped dogma and of bitter persecution in the name of the Christian faith. This Russia likewise has no enemies and many friends and well-wishers.

But there is still another Russia, the Russia of the tyrannical rulers, the selfish, perverse, bureaucratic cliques, the idle and useless grand dukes, the systematic grafters, the reactionary fanatics, the captains of the Black Hundreds, the organizers of "pogroms," the active and reckless apostles of hate and inhumanity. This is the Russia of the czars, of ministers like Plehve and Stolypin, of violent anti-Semitic and anti-German and anti-European newspapers, of hangmen and torturers. This is the Russia that makes war and concludes peace, that negotiates secret treaties, that crushes nationalities and races, that destroys every vestige of freedom at home and abroad. It is with this Russia that the world, alas, has had to reckon, and still has to reckon.

We shall presently glance at the recent record of this Russia. But before doing this it is well to pause and advert to the view of certain British liberals and liberal conservatives—a view not shared by other liberals or by laborites and radicals, by the way—that this Russia, the Russia of the white terror, of blood and guilt and unrestrained barbarism, is about to purge and reform herself, to abandon her evil ways, to repent of her crimes and atrocities, to take her place at the forefront of civilization and become a worthy exemplar and exponent of culture. A real Russian scholar, Professor Vinogradoff—an exile, by the way, who has held a chair in history at Oxford for many years—has called the war “a war of emancipation” for Russia, and the same expression has been used by other Russians. What do they mean? From whom did or does Russia as a power need to emancipate herself? Who has attacked her sovereign rights, and when? The Russian people need to be emancipated from their autocratic government and their incompetent and corrupt bureaucracy; but did the ruling spheres of Russia contemplate *such* emancipation when they took up Serbia’s cause last summer? Can it be said that Russia is in the present conflict because of her conscious or unconscious desire to overthrow or reform her governmental system? Any such statement is absurd on its face. Either by evolution or by revolution—probably by both—Russia will in the course of time emancipate herself, but her enemies are chiefly within her own household. There is not a liberal or progressive person in Europe who has not sympathized with the reform movement in the czar’s dominions, and if any despotic or reactionary clique in any other country had ever openly espoused the cause of Russian tyranny and obscurantism, the people of that country would have sharply resented and effectually nullified such aid and comfort to a foe of human freedom and human progress.

But let the strange and vague references to the “war of emancipation” be dismissed as the product of some confusion of thought and looseness of expression. A much more important point is to be noted here. If the Russian government, because of its alliance with France, England and Italy, is to turn over a new leaf, to repent and mend its ways, to turn liberal and forward-looking, assuredly this is the time to proclaim its intention, to announce the glad tidings. The opportunity has, however, been totally neglected. Immediately after the outbreak of the war a number of meant-to-be significant hints did appear in the British papers and in their Russian correspondence. The world was told, darkly, that great and joyful news might be expected from the Russian capital at any moment—

news that would vindicate Russia's government and make it altogether worthy of its allies. Especially positive and convinced was the London *Saturday Review*, the high Tory organ of Britain, that momentous internal reforms were imminent in Russia, and its readers were encouraged to anticipate wonderful happenings. All such predictions and forecasts have ceased. A change has come over the spirit of Russian correspondence and comment. In some English organs of opinion there are expressions of impatience, disappointment and indignation. Can we feel any astonishment at this? Let us see what the Russian government might have done, *would* certainly have done, had it intended to reverse its politics, *and has utterly failed to do*.

In the first place, it would have proclaimed wide and liberal amnesty for the majority of its political prisoners. Many fully expected such a step as this. Has it been taken? Not only has it not been taken, but when Bourtseff, the famous exile and successful assailant of the Russian police espionage system, with its terrorist adjuncts and its complicity in assassinations and crimes, returned voluntarily and impulsively to his native land last fall to place his ability and energy at the service of the government, he was cast into prison, promptly tried for treason and sentenced to a term in Siberia. The same fate overtook other revolutionists who had rashly reckoned without their Russian host and had assumed that the war meant a new regime at home and a change of heart on the part of the "popular" czar and the "heroic" commander-in-chief of all the armies. It should be stated that the treatment of Bourtseff was a deep shock to the British radicals, although they deemed it discreet to restrain their wrath and make their criticism mild and cautious.

In the second place, the government would have discontinued its policy of compulsory Russianization of Finland, of nullification of Finnish autonomy and liberty, and would have restored at least some of the high privileges that it had taken away from Finland contrary to solemn treaties and pledges. Has this been done? On the contrary, the Russianization of Finland appears to have continued without interruption or relaxation.

In the third place, equal right and equal opportunity in every direction would have been granted to the oppressed Jewish millions of Russia. Several hundred thousand Jews are fighting in the czar's armies; fighting without enthusiasm, interest or faith. They are suffering and dying for a government that denies to their people the right to own land in rural sections, the right to till the soil, the

right to enter certain professions, the right to educate their children, the right to settle in any section of Russia that is not set apart as a "zone" for them. They are suffering and dying for a government that treats them as outcasts and pariahs; that has instigated massacres and pogroms against them; that has slandered and libeled them; that has accused them of ritual murders, and that has rewarded insane degenerate monks and frenzied fanatics for virulent and truculent attacks on the whole Jewish race. Has anything been done for the Jews of Russia? Not a single, insignificant measure of amelioration has been vouchsafed to them. The campaign of persecution has not been suspended. And it has been charged that in Poland and Galicia the Russian generals and commanders have executed hundreds of Jews and brutally maltreated hundreds of others merely because of alleged suspicions that they had given information to the military enemy or had failed to give information to their own rulers, permanent or temporary.

In the fourth place, the Russian government might and would have granted actual autonomy to her own Polish provinces, instead of vaguely promising autonomy to a reunited Poland after the war in the event of Russian annexation of the Austrian and German parts of the old kingdom of Poland. This has not been done, either, and the American and other free Poles, it is plain from their actions and utterances, have little confidence in the promises of the Russian government. A manifesto appears to have been issued promising Russian Poland local self-government and the right to use her own tongue in the schools and elsewhere; but even Russian correspondents have thrown much doubt on the value and practical significance of this grant. They speak of conditions, reservations and restrictions that may break the promise to the heart even if it should be kept to the ear. Moreover, the Council of State may tack on additional limitations.

In the fifth place, the Russian people might have been granted some general measure of social and political liberty as a promise of greater things to come. Nothing whatever has been done by the government in the direction of reform. The government is what it has been. It has not seen fit, even during so soul-trying a conflict, to make a single concession to the spirit of liberalism. It has remained deaf to progressive appeal and advice; it has sullenly resisted every effort on the part of the most moderate reformers to convert the war into an instrument and agency of national progress.

What reason, then, has the Russian government given to any one for the belief or notion that it means to inaugurate an era of

reform and become a modern, enlightened, liberal government? The answer is, None. Can ground for such belief or hope be found in its general record, in the history of the last thirty or forty years? Is the Russian government better and saner in times of peace than in times of war? Let us see.

Prior to the war with Japan and the revolution of 1904-5, as all will admit, there was nothing in the conduct and policies of the Russian government to inspire respect, confidence or admiration. It had systematically suppressed all liberal and progressive activities and aspirations with a ruthless hand. It had driven young dreamers and idealists, whose sole desire and purpose it was to serve the peasant and proletariat millions, to rebel and adopt terrorist tactics. It had made popular education a crime and an assault on the "existing order." It had forbidden the discussion of political and governmental problems, and had ordered all the best books of modern times to be placed on its "Index." It had remorselessly imprisoned and banished editors and publishers for daring to disobey capricious and stupid police orders. It had so savagely suppressed the moderate reform societies and the labor unions that when these became revolutionary its reprisals and vindictive penalties knew no checks or bounds.

All this inevitably begot irresponsibility, lust, cruelty and corruption in government. The local satraps vied with one another in proving their loyalty to the autocracy. Bribery, waste, lawless official arrogance, rank favoritism, ignorance and brutality reigned in the empire, from one end to the other. Thousands of noble men and women were in prisons and fortresses or in the wilds of Siberia. Other thousands were forced to seek refuge in Europe and America. Russia had no room and no use for the best that she was capable of producing. The best only furnished victims for the gallows and the hangmen.

Revolution was unavoidable. It had to come sooner or later. The events of the eighties and nineties of the last century could have no other climax than a catastrophic upheaval. The war with Japan merely hastened the revolution. Russia's crushing defeats and disasters on land and sea only attested the bankruptcy of the regime, the dishonesty and the inefficiency of the military, naval and civil agents of the autocracy. The government was so completely discredited that the revolutionary forces saw their chance and took it. The army was thousands of miles away; the war had no supporters or defenders among the people; the labor unions could use the strike weapon without fear of the knout and the

bayonet. The intellectual and professional elements were free to make common cause with the proletariat. The revolution followed, and then the apparent surrender of the autocracy, the imperial rescripts and decrees proclaiming reforms, the Witte ministry, the grant of a so-called constitution, the creation of a national Duma and the assembling thereof. For a short time Russia enjoyed free speech and free discussion. The government was weak and the bureaucracy disorganized and dismayed.

But, alas, the peace treaty with Japan came too soon—too soon for the cause of Russian progress and the peace and welfare of the nation. The army returned and the autocracy recovered its audacity and its Bourbon stubbornness. The counter-revolution was not long in making its appearance. The concessions extorted from the autocracy were one by one withdrawn or nullified. The so-called "Fundamental Laws," or constitution, received the same cavalier and contemptuous treatment. The local satraps ignored the paper restraints on arbitrary power. The country was placed under martial law in order to get rid of inconvenient legal limitations. The first Duma was dissolved with little ceremony, not because, as the government pretended, it was "inefficient and incapable of service," but because it was fearless and honest, because it protested vehemently against the reactionary and nullification policies of the court. The electoral system was changed in violation of the laws the czar had signed and proclaimed. The object of this illegal change was to convert the Duma into an instrument of the aristocratic and privileged classes, and to reduce the representation of the liberals, the organized workmen and the peasants.

Other and similar measures followed in rapid succession. The freedom of speech and the press guaranteed by the Constitution became a snare and a mockery. Even the parliamentary debates could not be reported outside of the capital. Provincial editors were fined and imprisoned for republishing articles and reports which had appeared, with the censor's approval, in the newspapers of St. Petersburg or Moscow. The Duma itself was in serious danger. The leaders of the Black Hundreds urged the czar to abolish it and with it every vestige of the brief reform period. These fanatics had the support of the influential ministers and bureaucrats, and the liberals were fully prepared for a perfidious decree wiping out the Duma and the constitution. It is believed that nothing but shame, fear of European opinion, and the need of foreign money saved the Duma as an institution.

But although the Duma was saved, it was reduced to impotence.

The cabinet regarded it as a subordinate agency that might do routine work and meekly carry out the orders of the government. It was useful as a blind or mask; it passed budgets and authorized bond issues. It was deprived of all real power; its bills had no chance whatever in the upper chamber or Council of State. All its reform measures were foredoomed to failure. It found every way blocked. It could not help the Finns, or the Jews, or the Poles. It could do little for popular education or for simple justice and personal liberty. Meantime the ruling cliques, entrenched once more, were diverting national attention, to the extent of their ability, to sham issues, to alleged external dangers. Attacks on Germany began to appear in the inspired press. Anti-Semitic and anti-Polish campaigns were instigated. The government demanded extraordinary appropriations for defense and preparedness. A "National" party was formed to back the government. The true liberals and non-revolutionary radicals opposed all this and exposed the stratagems and tricks of the government so far as the censors and the prosecutors permitted criticism. But this opposition was of little avail. Jingoism and intolerant nationalism steadily made headway. Yet the abuses in the army and navy—the things that had caused the defeat of Russia in the war with Japan—were hardly touched. It was "unpatriotic" to tell the truth about the cabals and the corruptionists that controlled these services. Even moderate suggestions of army and navy reform were frowned upon and denounced.

This was the general situation in Russia on the eve of the present war. The liberal elements were profoundly pessimistic and disheartened. Many predicted the revival of the terrorist movement and revolutionary outbreaks all over the empire. The students and youth of the country appeared to be ready for another great wave of intense and tragic political activity. The best informed Russians, as well as sober-minded European observers, entertained but little doubt that the reaction or counter-revolution was heaping up explosive material and that another sanguinary upheaval against the Russian autocracy and bureaucracy was imminent. Some did not hesitate to say that a popular war alone would save the government and avert revolution. But was a popular war possible? The war with Japan had been extremely unpopular, and another such conflict might be absolutely fatal to the old regime. The course of the two Balkan wars afforded no opportunity to the Russian court. Its diplomacy had made enemies rather than friends in the Balkan peninsula. It was necessary to wait. Delay was dangerous, but there was no alternative. For, to repeat, the return to reform and

liberalism did not for a moment present itself to the ruling cliques in the light of a possible alternative.

The Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, one of "the little Slav brothers," gave the czar and his intimate advisers and agents their opportunity. They knew that a war over the question of Serb independence or sovereignty, and over Russia's moral claim to a sort of Slav protectorate, would be popular.

The rest is familiar history. Into the actual responsibility for the awful conflict the writer will not go in this article. He merely wishes to record the facts and to direct attention once more to the spirit and attitude of the Russian government with reference to reform, culture and civilization. So far, certainly, the war has not been a war of "emancipation" for the Russian people, or for any race or nationality subject to Russia. Further developments—good or bad—it would be unprofitable to speculate upon; comment may well await accomplished results.

However, in dealing with Russia's role and function in the present war, it is necessary to bear in mind one important fact—namely, that the Slavophil professions of the government and some of its literary spokesmen are essentially hollow and insincere. Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism as literary and historical factors in Russia are one thing; official and autocratic patronage of the smaller Slav states and principalities is a very different thing. The autocracy and its diplomatic tools have used the Pan-Slav idea, have exploited it, but have never shown any real belief in it except as another and less objectionable slogan for expansion and increased power and prestige. The idealistic Pan-Slav group, never very large or potent, was at one time intellectually and morally respectable. It had curious, semi-mystical and irrational notions, but it was honest. It believed that Russia had a sacred mission in the world; that she was working out a new civilization; that the west was effete and degenerate; that democracy, freedom, modern industrialism, individual rights and all the rest were false and destructive of true spiritual grace; that a benevolent, religious, divine autocracy was to be Russia's unique contribution to progress; that Europe and America would ultimately, after many troubles and anarchical disorders, adopt the Russian form of government. This was foolish and absurd, but it was historically explicable and it was honest. It hardly needs explaining why the autocracy and bureaucracy always welcomed this Slavophil doctrine and gospel. It was a good cloak for tyranny, for reaction, for Bourbon opposition to "western"

ideas. The fervent Slavophiles played into the hands of the blind, selfish, corrupt and cruel autocracy, but few of them perceived this.

The Russian liberals, the radicals, the social democrats and the other progressive parties and schools, have never shared a single one of the notions of the genuine Slavophiles, and they have, of course, always perceived and pointed out how the government perverted Slavophil ideas and converted them, so to speak, to its own pernicious use. But the Slavophil poets and essayists had little interest in territorial ambitions and in schemes of annexation; they really had the welfare of the peasant and laborer at heart, and they hoped to render the government benevolent and pure. To-day the old Slavophil school can hardly be said to have a following worthy of mention. The doctrine that Holy Russia has a great message for the world, is going to teach us how to make the autocratic church truly religious and the autocratic state truly benevolent—how to reconcile things the West deemed irreconcilable—is dead. No one takes it seriously.

The educated and progressive classes are patriotic in the rational sense of the term, but they have no illusions concerning Holy Russia. They know that Russia must continue to follow the West, to grapple with her political, social and moral problems as the West has grappled with these problems, and to curb and shackle her autocracy and her bureaucracy. Russia has many schools of thought, as the West has, but the alignment is the same there as with us. Russia has positivists, monists, Kantists, Hegelians, neo-realists, Bergsonians and what not. She has socialists and individualists and opportunists. Russia has been profoundly influenced by German thought—her greatest critic was a Hegelian, and some of her leading authors and economists are Marxians. But all these schools have this in common—they regard Russia as a backward power whose development must follow the western course of evolution. They wish to be national and to cultivate whatever worthy traits the Russian character may possess, but they have nothing but contempt for the notion that Russia can dispense with free institutions, with free criticism, with western culture. They have no sympathy with aggression and bigoted nationalism, with any policy that spells reaction within or greed and conquest without.

These elements will judge the war and its political or territorial consequences by one criterion—the political, social and moral progress of Russia. They will not long be deceived. There can be no change in their point of view, their philosophy of life.