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# SIBERIA

THE AUTHOR ON THE STEPPES

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# SIBERIA

BY

M. P. PRICE
M.A. Trin. Coll. Cambs.
F.R.G.S.

WITH TWENTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS
AND FOUR MAPS

LONDON: METHUEN & CO. LTD.
NEW YORK
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TO

THE MEMORY OF

MY MOTHER

## PREFACE

THE journey through Western and Central Siberia and the adjacent parts of Mongolia, of which some account is given in the following pages, was undertaken in response to the invitation of my friends, Messrs Douglas Carruthers and J. H. Miller, who were engaged in the scientific exploration of those regions. They were mainly interested in the physical characteristics of the Siberian-Mongolian borderland, and the geographical results of their investigations were communicated to the Royal Geographical Society by Mr Carruthers in March 1912. My own interests, on the other hand, had long been mainly associated with social and economic questions, and my special studies had been not a little stimulated by a visit to Canada some years before. The prospect was therefore particularly pleasing, and the opportunity offered of joining such an expedition to a little-known and rapidly changing country was not to be missed.

I was not disappointed in my expectations. For the greater part of a year I was living in the midst of a new society passing through a fascinating phase of development. Siberia is now where Canada was a generation ago. Just as the English settler in Canada has become a Canadian, so the Russian settler in Siberia has become a Siberian. Siberia is beginning to discover her needs, is gradually forming a public opinion of her own, and is shaping her own

policies, not infrequently definitely opposed to those of European Russia. The day may be one of "small beginnings," but it is not to be despised by either the political thinker or the economist. To the former is presented the spectacle of a people essentially primitive, but having all the material resources of civilization at its disposal. Will it follow one of the old paths? Or will it strike out a new one for itself? One feature is of peculiar interest. The inherited communal land system, which in European Russia is fast breaking down, is in Siberia still maintained in a modified form, and is utilized as a means of protection against the squatter and the undesirable immigrant. The causes of this modification, and the general tendencies of Siberian society, I have endeavoured briefly to set forth. I have endeavoured, too, to give an impression of the Siberian peasant as I know him; and after for some months talking with him, eating with him, sleeping with him, living with him, I got to know him fairly intimately. The better I knew him the more I loved him. Stupid and slow, perhaps, he may be, like all peasants throughout the world; but hardy, contented, tolerant and very friendly, he unites the Oriental sense of brotherhood with the greater directness and openness of the Occidental. In him, I believe, Siberia has as good material for the rank and file of her society as can be found. It is the leaders who are wanting.

To the economist Siberia appears as a land of limitless possibilities. No country in the world is so fertile as the black earth zone which runs in a belt across this vast area, with a population of not more than eight to the square mile. Here is a granary almost untouched that might supply all Europe,

while on its north lie virgin forests of valuable timber. The mines have been more extensively exploited; but much yet remains to be done even here with modern machinery and under more scientific direction. Two obstacles only now stand in the way of Siberia's economic progress—a progress which, I believe, will outstrip that of Canada—the lack of transport, and the short-sighted tariff policy of the Russian Government. Of these, the first is already being remedied: of a change in the second there are as yet no signs.

I have dealt with the economic future of Siberia to the best of my ability in the second part of the book, and have endeavoured to keep well in view the needs of, and the precautions to be observed by, the British investor. Facilities of railway transport should have a very great effect on the prosperity of the country, and Siberian railway stock will prove, I think, to be a valuable investment. A much greater business, too, might be done in agricultural implements and machinery of all kinds than is done at present. There will not, however, be much room for industrial expansion till the social development of the country reaches a higher level; and whether the country will ever be thrown open to settlers other than of Russian nationality remains to be seen. Speculation in land is not possible, as the land is wisely kept almost entirely in the hands of the Government.

In my last chapter I have given a very brief account of the social, economic and political conditions of that part of Outer China which lies beyond the southern frontier of Siberia. In the summer of 1910 I crossed a large area of this country in com-

pany with Messrs Carruthers and Miller, following the Chinese side of the frontier for over a thousand miles south-westwards to Eastern Turkestan. The economic and political relationship of Mongolia to Siberia is, in my opinion, sufficiently important to warrant this inclusion, and the present political situation in Outer China has made this relationship all the more pronounced. I have tried to analyse certain aspects of the Mongolian question, which Russia opened to the world in January 1912, and to indicate how British policy in the Far East is affected by this question.

My readers will realize that any description of territories so vast must be necessarily imperfect. But although it cannot lay claim to comprehensive treatment, I hope that it may succeed in showing that it is only by living among the people, as far removed as possible from officialdom, and by learning from their own lips the simple story of their lives, that the foreigner can ever hope to appreciate the true character of the Russian people, and to understand the real forces that are at work in the social structure of the Russian Empire—forces which will some day mould its policy and action. Grand tours, and receptions of English politicians and financiers by Russian officials, indicate only the state of feeling between the official classes of both countries. In neither country, and certainly not in Russia, is popular feeling represented by the official caste. The heart of the people must be sought. In Siberia, with its immense territory and its greater freedom from officialdom, the heart of the people can be found. I hope I have also shown what enormous latent power lies dormant in Eastern Russia, a force

which has been created by Russia's far-sighted rulers, and which must some day be reckoned with in the council of nations. Bureaucracy has many grave faults, but it has at least organized Russia's resources, and its future development must be left to wise and enlightened government tempered by growing public opinion.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Soboleff, of Tomsk University, to Tyan Shansky's "Rossya" (especially Vol. XVI. on the colonization of Western Siberia), to Mr L. P. Rastorguef, and to the various statistical publications and trade reports issued by the Russian Government, from which I have verified and supplemented the information obtained from my own observations. In the second part of the book I have, with the kind permission of the Editor, used material which has already been published during September and October 1911 in some articles of mine in *The Economist*. I have also received much valuable help in revising parts of my manuscript from the Rev. George Lewis and the Rev. Rudolf Davis. I take this opportunity of thanking them.

M. PHILIPS PRICE

TIBBERTON COURT
GLOUCESTER
*August 1912*

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# SIBERIA

## CHAPTER I

## ON THE GREAT SIBERIAN RAILWAY

IT was early in the month of April 1910, when I arrived at Moscow, which was to be the starting-place of my journey of 4000 miles along Russia's eastern frontier. Till recently few travellers from our shores seemed to be aware that there was any other way of visiting the Middle and Far East except by the usual sea route via India. Thus, following the beaten tracks of many thousands who have gone before him, the European traveller leaves his home and suddenly plunges, after the sea-voyage is done, into the old, yet to him new, world of the East, where he finds the ideas and institutions of the West veneered wholesale upon the Oriental framework. But there is another medium through which a traveller can approach the East, and perhaps learn to understand it a little by the way. Already in Moscow the Slavonic atmosphere is about him; and as he passes farther Eastward he becomes insensibly orientalized. The Anglo-Saxon power which overthrew the Moguls and thereby destroyed the relics of the Central Asiatic Mongol Empire in those regions, now dominates India and Southern Asia. But another power which, unlike the former, bore all the terrible brunt of the Tartar onslaughts during

the formation of the Mongol Empire and which thereby was thrown back along the path of civilization for many centuries, has since that time gradually grown and by peaceful penetration Eastwards conquered the Mongol and Tartar power of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. Gifted with powers of assimilation and adaptability to their natural surroundings, the Russian Slavs have shown themselves to be the great political European power which dominates Northern and Western Central Asia. Their civilization is not veneered on an Eastern framework; East and West are blended in them as wine of two different growths is blended by the wine merchant. And then there is the third political power of Asia, an Eastern power, which stands like a solitary figure amid the surrounding races. Recent events have demonstrated the mutability of things least susceptible of change; the Dragon Throne of China has been overturned; and what the future may hold we cannot tell. This third power, also—the most mysterious and ancient of them all—the wanderer on Russia's eastern frontiers encounters. In the fertile plains and barren tablelands beyond the Siberian and Turkestan frontiers, that power, once held by the Dragon Throne, now usurped by the five-coloured Republic, is still seen maintaining its feeble political influence over the ruins of the once glorious Turko-Mongol Empire.

Is not this then a new way of approaching the East?—a way which seems to have appealed little so far to my countrymen. The difficulties of language and lack of travelling facilities seem to bar the way, for once the great Siberian or the Central Asiatic railways have been left behind, the traveller must

traverse many hundreds of miles of steppe in open carts or crawl wearily with pack horses over the barren plateaus.

Moscow is indeed a fitting starting-place for a wanderer on Russia's eastern frontiers. The old walls of the Kremlin, which witnessed the growth of the principalities of Moscovy and the birth of Russian nationality, the power of Ivan the Terrible, and the victory of 1812, remind one that this is the ancient kernel from which this peculiar, semi-Oriental Slavonic Empire sprung. Looking eastward from the walls of the Kremlin, the eye meets naught but a boundless plain of pine forest. The kite soars above the old city, as above every Eastern town, while beyond the horizon lie the steppes across which the door lies open to Asia. What was there to stop the Slavs from penetrating eastward? What other means had they to keep themselves secure at home? From the eastern steppes they received the Tartar yoke, and the Tartar influence; back to the eastern steppes they have imparted, in the course of five centuries, their Slavonic civilization with just something of that Western culture which they have, I will not say assimilated, but acquired since the days of their leader, Peter the Great.

And yet one sees around one in the modern town the factories, workshops and offices of a European industrial system, with an industrial proletariat emerging from the old semi-feudal Slavonic Society. The Western influence which Peter let in through his window on the Finnish Gulf is being felt at last, and, through the Slavs, we here have it in process of transmission to the East. As we arrive at the station

of the Great Siberian Railway, which girds two continents, we see the magnificent terminal buildings rising as if by magic at the word of the imperial ukase, "Buit Darog Zalojen" (let the railway be built). What would Russia have been, what could she have done, without her autocrats, without her centralized administration, and without that gigantic machinery which secures a rough and ready law and order from the Gulf of Finland to the Pacific, and from the Arctic Ocean to the Afghan frontier, all dominated by an imperial will? Without these Russia would be now, as she once was, a mass of disunited intriguing principalities, which would never have thrown off the Tartar yoke, or, even if they had accomplished this, would have been absorbed by the Teutonic political power on the west. And that thought remained in my mind as on that April evening the Siberian express glided out of the great station at Moscow, and plunged into the darkness eastwards.

For two nights and a day the train crosses the southern agricultural zone of European Russia. Immense expanses of open plain gently undulate in wide sweeps up which the train crawls and down which it imperceptibly runs. The black friable soil is farmed on the "three-field" system, and from horizon to horizon one sees nothing but patchy agriculture and the cultivated fields alternating with areas of waste fallow. Little villages are crowded together under the shadow of the Greek church with its five-cupola bell tower and a couple of windmills, and the straw-thatched houses of wattle and mud, picturesquely scattered, remind the traveller of parts of East Anglia. The peculiar social and economic

conditions of the Russian peasant commune, once so powerful among the peasants of European Russia, developed to its fullest in these parts, and is now beginning gradually to die out, before the steady growth of peasant proprietorship. All over this land a peaceful social revolution is going on, and from it the Slavs will doubtless emerge as triumphantly as they did from the Tartar yoke.

Now the Volga is crossed, and after Samara a gradual change comes over the face of the country. The land is more steppe-like; although it is spring it is quite dry, and layers of slimy black mud no longer cover the ground where the wheels of peasant carts have plied. The atmosphere also is clear and dry, and there is an Asiatic colour in the view from the railway carriage. Undulating hills and little sharp escarpments of red sandstone break the almost level plain, and under the lea of these hills the Russian villages are settled, collections of four or five hundred houses together. The land, however, seems less cultivated than farther west, and large areas are under steppe grass. The villages here retain large common grazing areas for their flocks, and the land allotted to the plough is more and more restricted. Soon we see an Eastern figure. A Tartar on horseback is trotting by the railway-side and whips up his horse to race the train. A little farther and we see a village with straw-thatched houses of mud and wattle, but rising above are no longer the cupolas of the Greek church, but a little pointed pinnacle on which rests the star and crescent—a Tartar village—the relics of that power that once ruled Russia. But for the sign of their religion who would know that they were not Russians? Thus

the Tartar and Slav colonies lie side by side and indeed in the same village are often intermingled. A mixed village always has its Greek church and its Tartar mosque, one at each end, as if both were indispensable institutions in the life of the little community. Russian and Tartar have settled down together, but the relics of the old tribal distinction, based upon religion, remain. Religion, however, is not a barrier in everyday life between the Tartar and the Russian. Politically these mixed Tartar-Slav communes of East European Russia are one, and the village elects Tartar or Russian elders according to their personal merits without any religious bias; for bigotry there is none. There are no "Orange lodges," no memories of a battle of the Boyne among these peaceful peasants of Eastern Russia.

Now the train begins to head north-east to Ufa and the steppe-like country continues all the way, showing less and less cultivation and more unoccupied spaces, as we go along. Ufa, a Russian provincial town, is the last to the west of the Ural Mountains. The passage of the Urals, which begins some five or six hours after leaving Ufa, has little romance about it. This geographical dividing-line is in its extremity, where the railway crosses it, a range of low rocky downs. It is the natural division between the low plains of Perm and Ufa on the west and those black earth steppes on its east, which stretch uninterruptedly across Western Siberia for nearly 1200 miles to the mountains and plateaus comprising the Altai uplift.

Siberia does not begin till the Government of Perm has been traversed, and this territory stretches

across the Ural mountains, including a considerable tract of country to the east of that range in the watershed of the Tobol River. My impressions of the Urals at five o'clock in the morning from the observation car of the train were the same as those which I experienced when I travelled through the forest country of Northern Sweden, where the ground is rocky and undulating and covered with forest of medium growth. It is as if a strip of this country from North-Western Europe was planted down across the steppes of Eastern Russia.

Soon after the hills are left behind, the railway plunges into the steppes bordering Western Siberia and reaches the town of Chelyabinsk, which is geographically in Siberia, but administratively still in old Russia. Chelyabinsk is becoming an immigrant centre for the eastern part of the Perm Government, and the bonded warehouses of the Russian Imperial Customs give it importance as a distributing centre for commerce from the Far East and from European Russia.

For the next hundred miles eastwards little cultivation is seen. The country is an endless steppe with vegetation indicative of dry conditions, and the only cultivation or sign of human life is seen in patches near the stations. It looks as if the whole country, which is now only a grazing ranch, might be supporting an immense agricultural population. One hundred and eighty miles from Chelyabinsk we reach the town of Kurgan, the first town of importance in Siberia. Here we see greater signs of Russian colonization. Villages of recently arrived immigrants with clean new log-houses, covered with sheet-iron, painted red, appear as a striking contrast to the old

picturesque mud-walled and straw-thatched cottages of East European Russia. This is some of the richest land of all Western Siberia, being covered with black earth well adapted for cereal and dairy produce and capable of infinite development. It was not difficult to see that this would be some day the Canada of Russia, even if it was not so already.

The steppes in the neighbourhood of Kurgan were our first sight of Siberia. There was nothing to indicate the fact except the railway time-table, from which we learnt that we were now in the administrative area of the Tobolsk Government. Entering the western prairies of Canada from the eastern provinces one has just the same experience as here. In both cases, as one proceeds, one observes that the country becomes gradually less and less developed and the population more and more scanty.

The Urals are a purely geographical and political boundary between European Russia and Siberia, and the same physical and climatical conditions prevail on either side. Even the human element, although less in quantity on the eastern side of the hills, is much the same in quality, judging by what one sees on the railway stations. Hairy Russian peasants clad in fur caps and sheepskins hang listlessly about the wayside stations, waiting perhaps a whole day for a train, for time is never of importance in the East. Bands of immigrants from an eastward-bound train, waiting perhaps for hours at one place, squat about in groups all over the station drinking cups of tea and smoking. A freight train lumbers casually back towards Europe, with live stock, wool and hides on board; and judging by its rate of progress it might take a fortnight to arrive there.

THE SIBERIAN EXPRESS

IMMIGRANTS ARRIVING IN SIBERIA FROM EUROPEAN RUSSIA

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But everything is just the same as on the west of the Urals. Life is even quieter here, and nobody worries about time; the only difference is that everything seems a bit newer, especially the clean log-houses, and the whole country is less populated and less developed.

It was nightfall before the train reached the Ishim-Irtish steppes bordering the province of Akmolinsk. Dry vegetation began here, and gradually the signs of cultivation began to diminish. Looking south from a place called Petropavlovsk on the Ishim River, where the train halts, one sees an immense expanse stretching southwards to the Kirghiz steppes of the Semiretchensk bordering Russian Turkestan. How Asiatic it all seemed! Dry and open steppe, a clear atmosphere, a feeling of freedom which is so characteristic of the Asiatic steppes and so uncharacteristic of what one imagines of Siberia. Looking from the railway one sees a Kirghiz Tartar, surrounded by his flocks grazing on the undulating steppes, and here and there are marshy hollows and saline lakes surrounded by dense banks of rushes and reeds, the haunt of wild fowl. One imagines how away there towards the south is the great unending plain, and no break between here and the sandy deserts, where the Oxus and Sir Darya are swallowed up in the Aral Sea, where the Kirghiz and the Turcomans roam with their flocks, and around whose oasis the Turkish Usbegs and Persian Tadjics have for centuries made their flowery, leafy gardens. All are now under the care and protection of the great white Tsar. I wondered as the train sped eastward whether after my journeys in Siberia and Western China I should

be allowed to see the civilization of these romantic parts of the earth, or whether the stern passport regulations of the Governor General of Turkestan would shut the gates against so peaceful an invader.

In the second class of the Siberian express, which runs twice a week from Moscow to the Far East and has every conceivable comfort on board, including a restaurant and a library, the traveller can always find interesting company, if he is that way inclined. Russian officers returning to their regiments in Eastern Siberia are frequently met with. These gentlemen are generally very proud of themselves, nor do they let that pride suffer from lack of advertisement; but they are always most polite and courteous, like all Russians, and if you treat them like ordinary individuals they will show that under their uniform is a humanity which differs very little from your own. They are sure to tell you all about themselves, and their bravery and their personal contributions to the glory of Russian arms. But they are particularly fond of getting together in the corner of the library on the train in little coteries to enjoy a glass of cognac and a cigar. The place is soon filled with clouds of tobacco smoke and a perfect babel of voices is heard. Language pours forth in such torrents that not only does one fail to understand one word, but one marvels how any human being can manufacture at such a rate even reasonably grammatical sentences. Under such circumstances the Slav is a most communicative creature and bears strong resemblance to other races of the Continent, more particularly to those of Southern Europe. A stolid Englishman, unless he is accustomed to such social gatherings, is out of it.

But he can soon become accustomed to them, if he is willing, after he has been in Russia for a short time.

European commercial travellers are generally to be found on the train, usually German, but sometimes a few English business men. The German shows considerably more adaptability to his Russian surroundings than the Englishman, who gives one the impression that he is wishing to be back in England again. But the German is much more at home. He rarely is seen in Russia unless he knows the Russian language more or less thoroughly: he never stands aloof in discussions with Russian fellow-travellers, or dines at a lonely table as if half in fear of contact with them. The Englishman seems to keep himself in the background as much as possible, a failing which is reflected in his order-book.

The Russian commercial men are generally of a free and easy character, altogether more talkative, and, I should think, rather less shrewd than the German type. They are usually the representatives of Moscow or St Petersburg business houses dealing in tea, cotton, goods, wool, hides, etc., visiting their Siberian branch offices or agents at the different trading centres along the railway. I remember talking to one who was travelling for a firm at Irkutsk. He was over middle age and told me that he had done the journey from Irkutsk to Moscow twenty times in his youth, travelling by sledge in winter and cart in summer. In those days the great post road along which everyone travelled followed the line of the present railway. All eastward-bound traffic except the mails went by the river system from Tiumen and Tobol to Tomsk and even up to the Altai by water route alone.

"Siberia," he said, "was an even more isolated region in those days than it is to-day. It was more truly Siberian, and the bureaucratic influence of St Petersburg was less, though," he added, "it must be confessed, we suffered more in those days under irresponsible Government officials who enjoyed almost arbitrary powers. Now, however, the dead hand of St Petersburg is on Siberia. It is becoming Russified and absorbed into the bureaucratic vortex; but how can St Petersburg officials know our wants here? Siberia is for the Siberians." As I listened I seemed to hear echoes of similar denunciations by Canadian patriots at Ottawa concerning the actions of Downing Street politicians in London.

He seemed despondent about Russia's future, feared the corrupting influence of bureaucratic government, and only smiled when I suggested that possibly they were merely passing through the intermediate phase which might bring better conditions in the end. "If it has done nothing else," I suggested, "autocracy has surely held Russia together, while its evils are diminishing with the march of progress and reform." But he did not reply. Mankind, it seems, is ever ready to see the dark side of a change, and I have often noticed amongst Russians generally, something more than an innate conservatism. A passive apathetic fatalism, characteristic of Eastern minds, dominates them, and, as it were, overshadows their public spirit. And small wonder, when one thinks of the monotony of the country, with its endless plains and melancholy groves of stunted birch, and of the heavy hand of bureaucracy which so effectually stultifies individual effort. Hour after hour, mile after mile, each as the

last, the train rolled over the Baraba steppe, melancholy and monotonous. It is just the sort of country which would produce an apathetic and fatalistic trait in the human mind.

After Omsk the railway had plunged into this Baraba steppe between the River Irtish and Obi. Through this the train passed for the space of a night and a day. It is a vast flat plain with a comparatively dry climate and, although an immense distance from the Arctic Ocean, is only a few feet above its level, and has evidently once been an estuary of it. The soil is a deep black earth, and the moisture from the water table is not far below the surface. Considerable areas of lake and swamp stud the country on all sides, while the ubiquitous birch extends for miles and miles along the line. At present the steppe is but very little settled, and the possibilities of development are even greater than farther west. Most of the land is used for grazing, and considerable quantities of horned cattle are raised, especially in the neighbourhood of Kainsk, which lies half-way between the two rivers, Obi and Irtish. The area of the Baraba steppe is 50,000 square miles, and the country has an average density of eight persons per square mile. Towards nightfall the train reached Novo-nikolaevsk on the Obi River, one of the many Siberian mushroom towns, which in the last ten years, from a collection of little log-huts, have attained a population of over 30,000 inhabitants. The point where the railway crosses the Obi has naturally become a transport centre for the water-borne traffic from the Altai district along the Obi River, and from here the railway communication goes direct to Europe.

After the Obi has been crossed a change comes over the country. The land rises in rolling downs, varying from 500 to 600 feet above sea-level, and it is no exaggeration to say that this is the first break in the level plain which stretches from the Ural Mountains across the Ishim-Irtish and Baraba steppes for over 1000 miles. These foothills are the first step or north-western escarpment of the Siberian Altai uplift, and this uplift itself is the north-western edge of the great Central Asiatic plateau, which protrudes into Western Siberia at this point, and is skirted by the railway in its eastern course. We now see low rolling foothills of sandy loam and friable rock, covered with open forests of Scotch pine, spruce, and Siberian pine. Although the latitude here is the same as that of the steppes to the west, the higher altitude is favourable to forest growth. At intervals in the forests are areas of open, grassy country on which peasant colonies both old and new are scattered, but nowhere in such profusion as in the western steppes. The climate is more rigorous, and, although it was April, the snow, which did not lie on the western steppes, was lying here, the drifts in the forest being several feet deep. The peasants and immigrant colonists grow chiefly rye and wheat when the season permits, but autumn frosts sometimes intervene and spoil the latter. For the next twenty-four hours after leaving the Obi River the train passes at a leisurely speed of about twenty miles an hour through this undulating forest with its open patches here and there, studded with groves of birch. I have never seen a country more like Canada, and I particularly called to mind the forest country of North Ontario and Quebec as we passed along.

At a place called Taiga a branch line goes north to Tomsk. From here after 130 miles through forest country, with scarcely anything to break the featureless monotony of the land, the railway enters the Yenisei Government near the town of Achinsk. Another 100 miles of exactly the same undulating forest as before, with fewer and fewer signs of colonization and habitation, brings us to the great Yenisei River sluggishly crawling through the open flat beyond the forest and threading its way from the Mongolian frontier northwards across the centre of this great continent to the Arctic Ocean. Straggling along its banks for some two or three miles is the city of Krasnoyarsk, the chief commercial and administrative centre of this most central province of Siberia, the Yenisei Government.

Krasnoyarsk was the starting-point of our southward journey to the Mongolian frontier, and here, after travelling 4000 miles, half of which was in Siberia, from Moscow, we left the railway. The romance of such a journey is soon swallowed up in the tedious monotony of the scenery and the immensity of the country, which makes even Canada seem small in comparison with it. From the railway we could form some rough idea of the general progress which is being made in this part of the world; but the really instructive part of our sojourn in Siberia was yet to come.

## CHAPTER II

# A SIBERIAN COMMERCIAL TOWN (KRASNOYARSK)

KRASNOYARSK, where the railway crosses the Yenisei River, is the chief town of the Yenisei Government or Province, and the economic and administrative focus of Central Siberia. It is a town of some 52,000 inhabitants, increasing rapidly, but, being in the heart of the continent, its development has up to now been somewhat eclipsed by the western provinces. It is not a place that would have at first any attraction for the sight-seer, until, on closer investigation, here, as elsewhere, the cruder and intermediate stages of social organization in which it abounds are found to be quite as interesting as any other. From the railway station, which in Russia is always a mile or more away on the outskirts of the town, the tarantass, or four-wheeled cart, bumps along a wide cart-track, which reminds one of an unmetalled rural lane in England during a wet December. Soon I became aware that this was the principal street of Krasnoyarsk, where the Governor of the Yenisei Government resided, and by the dim light of a few tumbledown lamp-posts I saw the typical Russian houses, separated by wooden palings and courtyards. Many of them were built of new logs, while some were plastered over in a hasty fashion, as if pretending to be up to

THE MARKET SQUARE, KRASNOYARSK

A STREET VIEW IN KRASNOYARSK

date. In general appearance it was not unlike the outskirts of a mining town in North-East Canada that I remembered visiting some years before.

The hotels are like great two-storeyed barns, one of which we selected after a verbal conflict with the owner about the value of his rooms. One can generally obtain a room for a couple of roubles a night in a tolerable state of cleanliness, even in these wilder parts of Russia, but in this case we soon discovered that as far as back premises and so-called lavatories were concerned, the less we saw of them the better. For my part I decided, on inspection, to perform my morning and evening toilets in the Yenisei River, about half-a-mile away on the outskirts of the town.

One can generally get a fair idea of certain aspects of human life in a town like Krasnoyarsk by spending a few hours a day in one of the most frequented restaurants. As a boy I had always thought of Siberia as a country inhabited by fur-clad hunters, dwelling for months in snowed-up log-houses, or by exiles chained to barrows in the galleries of the gold mines till they fell dead of cold and exhaustion. These impressions received a rude shock when I beheld the type of humanity in the restaurant under our hotel, which styled itself "The Pride of Old Russia." Here were commercial travellers from old Russia, selling anything from peppermint lozenges to pianos, sitting chattering in groups over glasses of cognac and vodka; mining prospectors who had returned from up country, and gold washers fresh from the lower reaches of the Yenisei, Jewish fur traders and salt-fish dealers. Those who had been making money at gold dredging or such occupations

were testifying to their success by the size of the dinners they were eating, and the volume of the alcohol they were consuming, while sallow-faced students from the middle schools were already in the singing stage, prior to their final resting-places beneath the table. There was, moreover, a considerable contingent of persons of doubtful virtue.

The decorations in the restaurants and other public places of recreation and pastime were of a most primitive character. Walls covered with loud yellow paint, vermilion curtains, sky-blue sofas, seemed to be the highest efforts of local art, and to contribute no little to the enjoyment of the visitors. Some of the restaurants had stages for impromptu theatricals, but, judging from the quality of the audience, I fear that the art would not have proved inspiring or entertaining if I had witnessed it. Under such circumstances as the above I heard a gramophone bawl forth a Russian comic song, followed immediately by the strains of the "Songe d'Automne" and other beautiful waltz airs from Western Europe. What irony! The air which I had last heard in an English ballroom I now heard in a low coffee-house of a Siberian mining town.

Next day I strolled down to the quay on the banks of the Yenisei and found a rough wooden platform laid on piles against which some grimy paddle-steamers were moored. On the banks lay stacks of merchandise waiting to go up country by the first steamer as soon as the ice broke. There were sacks of flour from Tomsk, reaping machines from America, ploughs from European Russia, cream separators from Sweden and Germany, and bales of cotton manufactures from Moscow. Incidentally I may

note that I saw nothing from England, whose business men at present have been too timid in this land, where no one speaks English, to cultivate a trade which Germans, Americans and Swedes are capturing wholesale. On the banks stood groups of fur-clad men discussing the prospects of the breaking of the ice. Some of them were fur traders bound for Turukhansk and the far northern territories bordering the Arctic Sea; some were gold washers and prospectors for the Yenisei district; some were wool and live-stock traders bound for Mongolia or the Upper Yenisei basin. Among them was a yellow-skinned, slit-eyed man, dressed in Russian furs and top boots. He was a Russified Tartar, and his presence there gave the group an Asiatic character.

A little lower down the bank was a timber-yard, where rough boards had been hand-sawn out of great logs. Inquiries which I made from a hairy old Siberian, who turned out to be the "Hosyain," or the "boss," elicited the fact that these great planks, two foot wide and four inches thick, were being sold at what would correspond to the ridiculous price of one penny per cubic foot. I then realized how true it is that the value of an article depends not so much upon what it is, as upon where it is. The same articles in England would be twelve times that value.

That afternoon, in one of the restaurants, I met one person who indicated to my mind that, primitive though it seemed, Krasnoyarsk was not without a progressive element. He was a Russian gentleman, with whom I came in contact quite accidentally. He was managing a gold-dredging enterprise somewhere in the north, and his knowledge of all that was going on in the commercial circles of Central

Siberia showed me a Russian in a character quite different from that in which one generally sees him. He was full of enthusiasm for the future of Western and Central Siberia. "We have a land of magnificent prospects," he said. "We are in the condition that your Canada was before British colonization in the north-west, with the additional advantage of being even a richer country. The natural resources are in the land: furs, minerals, forest wealth, and a fertile soil for dairy and cereal produce; but the human machinery at present is not here in sufficient quantity, and that is what we want, We Siberians have been impressing this on the St Petersburg authorities. For years past we protested against criminal exiles being sent here to poison our social life. Now we have got our way in that respect, and the Government is alive to the necessity of encouraging the best class of peasant from old Russia to come and settle here, but what we still want is a better development of our natural resources, by means of branch railways from the trunk line, Government subsidies for public works in our chief centres, encouragement of Siberian industry, and, above all, a more forward education policy to suit the practical life of a Siberian trader and settler. We do not want to see our money spent on unnecessary military railways in the Far East, such as the Amoor railway, or on naval armaments on the Baltic. We want Siberia developed for the Siberians."

It sounded so much like the talk of a Canadian to an Englishman from the "old country." Western enterprise has laid its seed even here, accompanied by the material ideas of wealth and of general dissatisfaction with existing conditions.

"The worst problem," he continued, "are the Jews. I disagree with the Cadet Party and approve of the Nationalist Policy of political disability for the Jews. No one can exist along with them, for their standard of life is so different, and in time they will draw all the country into economic bondage under them. Besides, their dishonesty in the remoter parts of the Empire is often flagrant. I approve of a policy which restricts them to certain areas and denies them the right to hold land. In this part of Siberia, Jews of old standing only—namely, those who came here in the earlier days—are allowed to live."

He said he hoped Siberia would receive more consideration from Englishmen than it had received in the past. "Your countrymen are far too careless in these matters. You do not study local conditions or learn our language, nor do you try to cater for our markets. You expect everyone to speak English and to pay cash for goods, but the Russian peasants are without capital and require long terms of credit. Your agricultural implement firms must have representatives living out here on the spot who can speak Russian, understand local conditions and go about among the peasants; and you must be prepared to give long credit. I hope that in future Englishmen will become more interested in Siberia. Nothing tends more to create mutual understanding and foster goodwill than commercial relations. If English people had been more interested in Siberia and Eastern Russia they would never have backed Japan in her war with us, as they did. Now you see the fruits, for Japan is going to shut us all out of Manchuria, if she can succeed in doing so."

These interesting remarks gave me much food for reflection, representing, as they did, the views of an educated Siberian commercial man.

During the daytime while I was in Krasnoyarsk, I was able to get a glimpse of the municipal life of a growing Siberian commercial town. Primitive conditions and superficial imitation of Western culture were evident on every side. The streets were simply wide cart-tracks full of ruts, without any attempt at paving except for a few boards put down in the dirtiest places for the benefit of the foot-passengers, while modern conveniences which one finds in European Russia, such as drainage, paving, lighting and water supply, from public resources did not exist.

Scavengers call round periodically and carry away refuse, which they pitch into the Yenisei River, and water-carts, which consist of tubs on four wheels, are to be seen plying about the streets bringing water from the river. It is perhaps a good thing on the whole that there is no drainage system, for an inferior system is often more perilous than no system at all. A "Goratskoye-upravlenye," or town council, exists, and, if you take the trouble to hunt up the Local Government Statistical reports, you can find a publication which is supposed to record its activity, along with general statistical information about local Government institutions. Some of it is very interesting, although it always relates to conditions about five years old. It apparently takes in Russia at least so long to compile an issue for publication, probably at considerable expense, by which time the information is obsolete. That is very typical of bureaucratic Russia.

But whatever public conveniences are lacking here,

there is always the comfort that a bureaucratic Government has created the machinery on paper for providing and carrying them out should the public ever need them. Indeed, according to the statistical publications, there is no lack of committees in charge of public works and charities of all kinds. There is, for instance, an Urban Sanitary Committee with a long list of titled officials, whose activities apparently exist on paper only, a Hospital Committee, a Highways Committee, and a Committee for regulating the construction of houses—in fact, a sort of Town Planning Committee. But for the present it seems that the Siberian Urban public are quite happy without these European conveniences; the householder, providing for his own comforts and interests, gets along very well in a primitive state and is as contented as if he were living in the wilds. In justice, however, it should be noted that the hospitals in Krasnoyarsk, of which there were three, are well organized. In fact nearly every town in the government has one or more, maintained at public expense. According to statistical information, in the Yenisei Government, with a population of just under one million, over £20,000 a year is spent on hospitals, surgeries, rural doctors and public dispensaries.

One does not expect to find in a Central Siberian town many signs of Western culture, or of any development of public institutes for the educational or scientific training of the minds of the people. But although they certainly do not obtrude themselves before one's eyes, nevertheless, like the public works committees, they exist on paper, and to a limited extent in practice. In Krasnoyarsk, for instance,

there are two public middle schools or gymnasia, for boys and girls, where the classical curriculum of the Government is taught, including Latin, German, French, history, geography, and a certain smattering of theoretical science, which is taught only from books. Then there are a large seminary, or priests' training college, seventeen urban elementary schools kept up by the urban authority, where the rudiments of reading and writing are learned by the citizens, and one small technical institute for teaching mechanical work among the railway employees. Education, therefore, is not utterly neglected.

There is also a public library, which consists of a low dingy shed with dusty second-hand novels. These seemed to have been cleared out of some library in Moscow to make room for something better. A sluggish youth in uniform, acting as the librarian in charge, did not look as if he could even read.

At the north end of the town, facing an open space, there is a great barn-like building made of plastered wood, which is called the museum. The idea of a museum in Siberia struck one as ridiculous at first. Inside I saw a remarkable collection of articles, some of which were very interesting, but all of which were without much order or arrangement. Stuffed birds, in various stages of moth decomposition, were pushed up against a very good collection of local minerals, geological specimens, and some interesting maps. The curator, who, I afterwards gathered, was a political exile from Poland, showed a superficial knowledge of everything, but very little real knowledge of anything. It gave one the impression that the authorities, feeling bound to be up to date, had copied the Western European models and grafted

them on to a crude Siberian framework, whether it fitted or not. Assisted by a handful of enterprising private citizens who had made collections at their own expense, the bureaucratic machine did the rest. To satisfy bureaucratic minds an elaborate account was kept of how many people entered the museum in one year, and yet not a penny was spent to preserve the specimens in that museum from dust and decay. On the surface it looked as if the higher Government officials in Russia are in advance of the people in their ideas of progress, but their enthusiasm seems to be more for programmes than for performances. Thus all the material for a scheme is found and great labour is expended, but one thing is lacking—namely, the men to work the machine. The majority of those we saw all round us preferred to spend a large part of every day leisurely sitting on the doorstep, cracking nuts or getting drunk on Sundays and holidays. And yet the people complain that the Government is not enlightened and progressive, and does not study local needs.

But if the educational institutions of a young Siberian town are certainly not up to European standards yet, there are others which more nearly attain this end, and to some extent act as their substitute. In most towns throughout the Eastern Empire the military authorities are always in evidence, and along with the vodka factory generally possess the finest buildings in the towns. There is always a great "kazyerm" or barracks in every important place, as if Siberia were under an army of occupation. And indeed Siberia is a useful training-ground, especially as it is near the Far East, where political conditions are always apt to be volcanic.

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When one sees the great barracks for six or seven thousand troops, generally consisting of large log-houses (very like ordinary dwellings, only a little bigger, and surrounded by wooden palings), scattered in various parts of nearly every town, one realizes what an incubus of uneconomic expenditure militarism must be to the community. Youths at the best age of their lives are taken from home and put where they learn to use a rifle and to drill, but during a large part of the day they are to be seen idling about the barracks squares, eating nuts in company with their fellows. I used to talk to some of them while I was in Krasnoyarsk. They seemed to have no other idea in life except to get back to their villages. The discipline is no doubt good, and the fact that they see some of the other parts of the Empire has beneficial results, but the disadvantages would be less and the advantages more if these raw peasant youths were taught reading and writing, first of all, before they learnt the gentle art of murdering their fellow-men. If they then had facilities to learn useful trades they would be more fitted for work in the newer parts of the Empire, and thus they would become useful members of society, instead of remaining an incubus upon the Russian taxpayers at the best time of their lives. However, political conditions seem to demand that states should keep a large percentage of their youths in uneconomic employment for the best time of their early lives. This is especially so in the East. Here racial differences among nations are more clearly marked than in Western Europe, where such differences are, or ought to be, less.

The policy of the Government has always been to

THE YENISEI AT KRASNOYARSK

MILITARY BARRACKS AT KRASNOYARSK, HEADQUARTERS OF THE SIBERIAN INFANTRY

mix the component races of the Empire as far as possible, and thus they send Poles to serve in Siberia, Finns and Letts to Turkestan, and Siberians to the Polish frontier. For instance I talked to several youths outside the barracks of the Siberian regiment in Krasnoyarsk who had come from districts as widely apart as Bessarabia, the Caucasus, and Archangel. The same principle underlies the policy of political exile. This mixing of races from all parts of the Empire has the effect of breaking down racial and religious barriers, and in this respect is undoubtedly progressive, although it is a somewhat crude method of bringing about this ideal. In other respects, however, it defeats the Government's own object, for it enables progressive ideas to be propagated more widely, and the reactionary element in the Government seems to be foolishly afraid of progress. Military service also helps in the levelling of social classes, and this is perhaps more the case in Russia than in most countries. It is true that the officers are seen driving about the streets of the town in "drofskies" with an air of social exclusiveness, but this in Russia is more apparent than real, and on the other hand you often see them talking and smoking with private soldiers. There is really no very great social barrier between officer and private, and the Russian officer, although often inefficient at his duties, is generally popular with his men.

In the big square opposite the cathedral is the bazaar. Formerly the greatest commercial media of exchange, the bazaars or public fairs are now gradually losing their importance in Siberia. In the old days the only means of exchange for the isolated

inhabitants of the district was to meet once or twice a year at a big autumn fair in some central spot, where a fur trader could exchange his furs for corn, or a peasant his local produce for boots or clothes. But this old system is fast breaking down, and the advent of the railway was the first step towards bringing Siberia into closer contact with Europe. Wholesale commercial firms in Moscow are now establishing branches in such places as Krasnoyarsk and sell their goods wholesale to the smaller retail firms scattered about the country. Quicker transit, bringing buyer and seller closer together and facilitating a greater volume of trade, is now the order of the day. And so the trade of the annual fairs has fallen steadily year by year, and the warehouses and wholesale depots for the import of Moscow manufactures and the export of local produce have steadily grown. The annual fair still takes place every autumn, chiefly for live stock and grain, but the volume of its business declines year by year. During spring and summer the bazaar square is deserted, except once a week, when a few peasants from the immediate neighbourhood have stalls where they retail local produce for the consumption of the town. The prices current at the fairs are interesting and show how economic laws of supply and demand operate in these distant parts. The long distance by rail to the European markets precludes the profitable export of much local produce, and since the richness of the land floods the market in ordinary years with superabundance, the price of food and local produce is phenomenally cheap. I found the following prices current at Krasnoyarsk in the spring of 1910.

| | |
|---|---|
| Meat (beef) . | 4d. per lb. in towns ; 2½d. per lb. in villages. |
| Bacon (cured in Siberia) | 5d. to 8d. per lb. |
| Wheat flour . | 1½d. per lb. (retail price). |
| Wheat grain . | 30 kopuks per pd=¼d. per lb. =1s 6d. per bushel, autumn price. |
| Butter . . | 1s. per lb. (the only article exported). |
| Eggs . . . | ¼d. each ; ⅛d. in the villages. |
| Rice . . . | 6d. per lb. |
| Beet sugar . . | 5½d. per lb. |
| Siberian brick tea | 10d. per lb. |
| China tea . . | 6s. 6d. per lb. (2s. Government duty). |
| Timber . . | Redwood deals 3 × 11, 1¾d. per ft. cube.[1] |

I believe that a man can live on the local produce of the country at a very cheap rate, and indeed subsequent experience in the surrounding villages proved that a diet of eggs, bread and tea does not cost more than one shilling per day per person. Nor is the cost of living in a Siberian town much higher than in the villages. On the other hand, everything except pure necessaries is inordinately expensive and very inferior in quality. Siberians are chafing under the monopoly of the Moscow manufacturers who, sheltered by a high protective tariff, sell inferior articles at high prices. Moreover, in the remoter districts clothing, other than the rough Siberian homespun clothes and sheepskin coats, is nearly fifty per cent. in advance of Moscow prices.

[1] Compare these figures for the average wages in Krasnoyarsk given on p. 36.

But this excessive cheapness of Siberian natural produce will not always continue; when the economic demands of the seething populations of Western Europe with their industrial proletariat grow greater, Siberian natural produce, now only a drug on the local markets, will command a real value. At present only such articles as have a sufficiently high value in Europe to bear the cost of a long rail journey will find their way from such far-off places as Central Siberia. Such articles are furs, minerals, dairy produce, and certain valuable kinds of Siberian pine timber. Meanwhile, thanks to the railway and cheaper transport, the present tendency is for prices of Moscow manufactures to sink below the high level of former days, while prices of local agricultural produce, although at present very low, are showing an inclination to rise, and this will probably continue, especially as more and more is exported to Europe.

The economic life of Central Siberia, therefore, is changing slowly from the primitive condition of the past, where each economic unit of the community provided most of its few requirements and disposed of the surplus to its neighbours in the annual fairs at very low prices. With the growing division of labour, the facilities for exchange are increasing; and the whole country is now placed in closer communication with Europe than before. The effect of this is here reflected in the social condition of the people, for under these new conditions the standard of living is becoming higher. Siberians living in those parts where communication by rail or river is fairly easy are now no longer content with homespun hemp clothes, raw-hide boots and wooden spades, but

buy, if they can, Moscow calicos, and cheap iron implements to help them in their field work. The rise in the standard of living, largely assisted by the building of the railway, helped to bring about these economic changes. Foreign traders in Siberia cannot pay too much attention to the social conditions of the country, and they must always bear in mind that the class of goods sent to Siberia must suit an as yet primitive, although developing, civilization.

One of the most important factors in effecting these changes is, as I have indicated, the development of communications: cheap transport here, as elsewhere, is naturally the principal agent in breaking down the old condition of economic isolation. The great railway which crosses the continent from east to west is now fed by the river traffic, running north and south, and in time branch lines will be constructed to run parallel with the rivers to certain localities which are known to be peculiarly rich and favourable to colonization.

As I describe in Chapter IX., the proposed new route by sea from Europe to Siberia via the Arctic, and Yenisei estuary, which has been established by Captains Wiggin and Webster, may have great effect in cheapening the cost of transport to Central Siberia, and seems, moreover, within reach of achievement. The hope, however, of subsidizing this route by rebates of the customs dues on goods imported thereby must not be too much relied upon. The influence of the manufacturing interests in old Russia, who have a great power over the Government, is more than likely to be exerted against all attempts to lower the import tariffs in any parts of the Empire. Having regard to the economic relationships between

Russia and Siberia, only those articles will be allowed rebates on importation by sea to Siberia which do not compete with any interest in old Russia.

The strata of society in Krasnoyarsk differ little from one another. Nowhere in Eastern Russia are social distinctions much emphasized, or the grades of society very sharply divided, and the general impression left on my mind was that society there was not unlike that of other young countries that I had seen, especially on the American continent. The officials of the bureaucracy are, of course, surrounded by a halo of exclusiveness in their offices in St Petersburg and the chief provincial towns of the Empire, which they rarely seem to leave, but, these excepted, the society in any town along the Siberian Railway is very like what one sees in a mining town in Northern Canada. Generally speaking, there are no real social barriers in Central Siberia between the rural agriculturists, the urban citizens, and the merchants. There are no divisions separating rural from urban society. The poorer citizens, the tradesmen, and even the lower grades of officials live in the same kind of houses and treat one another, when not at their duties, as equals. Yet although there are few social barriers which prevent intercourse in Siberian society, nevertheless social castes do exist, as in old Russia; but they seem to have been created chiefly for administrative purposes.

Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, in his great work on Russia, at the end of the first volume refers to these social castes. His theory is that social groups such as peasants, urban citizens, civil and military officials, etc., have become formed as the natural result of Government administration, but that the

autocratic power has hitherto been strong enough to prevent these castes from ever acquiring political power and formulating policies for their own objects. It is indeed probable that as Russia emerged from a feudal state of society, and as social castes gradually came to be formed, the powers of these castes became clearly defined by laws and regulations of the autocracy. Hence economic and political antagonisms between the social castes have been far less developed than in other countries of Western Europe. What struck me most in Krasnoyarsk and other towns of Central Siberia was that, although socially the castes seemed to mix in everyday life, nevertheless for official and administrative purposes they remained very clearly defined. Thus I used to find that so-and-so called himself a peasant ("krestyan") from a certain district, and so-and-so an urban citizen ("meshchaneen") without land; one man was registered with a guild licence to trade up to a certain annual value, another was an urban merchant of the second guild, while another had been born a Cossack and was liable to Cossack military service. In addition to these, I often came upon the case of a peasant who, although living in a town, retained his land under his village commune. As a member of that social caste he was still liable for his taxes on that land to his commune, although he was no longer living the life of a peasant. Everyone, in fact, has to be registered in some social caste. Again, the trades are classed in guilds according to the volume of their business, and pay guild taxes to the Government; the peasants who are settled on the land are registered in another class, and so on. But all this does not prevent the castes from mixing in everyday

life, and in many ways the class distinctions are even less in Siberia than in old Russia. Thus there are very few nobles and no landlords, for the State owns all the land. Indeed, society in Siberia compares with that of European Russia in much the same way as society in England compares with that in Canada. Those social castes that do exist are useful for taxation and administrative purposes, but up till now the autocracy has prevented them from obtaining political power, and so from becoming socially divided.

Racial castes also, based on religion, theoretically exist, but are not recognized for purposes of administration, except in the case of the Jews. Poles, Finns, Letts, Armenians, Georgians and Tartars are classified in Siberia, for administrative purposes, along with Russians, according to their social castes and not according to their race and religion. A separate list of Tartars and Armenians in some districts of Siberia is often published by the Statistical Department of the Government, but they are not treated as a political entity.

Modern European economic influences are also making themselves felt in Siberia, and in the growth of the industrial proletariat, which, in company with higher commercial organization, is having the effect of so submerging the old social castes, such as peasants, burghers and traders, that it will soon become impossible to separate them out even for administrative purposes. It is not improbable that in time everyone will come to be registered according to income, and be assessed for taxation on the same principle as in Western Europe, and that the old system of Trade Guilds and Guild Taxes will disappear. Indeed, one would also be tempted to

assume from the analogy of Western Europe that the growth of the industrial proletariat, which seems to be spreading throughout Russia, will not only break down these old social castes, but create new ones under the headings of Capital, Middle Class and Labour. This movement will be intensified if autocratic and bureaucratic power weakens and constitutionalism gradually strengthens. Then will follow a landless, wage-earning proletariat, and the inevitable contest between Capital and Labour, as we have it to-day in Western Europe, the tendency to which is so deeply deplored in Russia by the Slavophil patriots of the old school. As far as Siberia is concerned, my impressions are that this is the direction in which society is moving, and I doubt if the old Slavonic social conditions will survive in Siberia as long as the same conditions have done in European Russia, where sentimental traditions are naturally stronger than in the new country.

On the other hand these new conditions will not grow in a day, for at present in Siberia the wage-earning proletariat are an almost negligible percentage of the population and are only confined to some of the smaller trades in the towns, the railway employés, and the wharf and steamship labour on the rivers. For the rest, taking the population of the Yenisei Government as an example, out of a total population of 787,778 in 1908, the principal social castes existed in the following proportions :—

Peasants, 584,000 — five-eighths of the whole population.

Merchants associated to Guilds, 983.

Burghers or urban citizens with small occupations, 52,118.

Of the latter class of burghers only five per cent. can be classed as wage-earners, and even they are not wholly dependent upon their labour for their livelihood. For a period of the year they work for hire, but at other times they supplement their earnings by carrying on small trades at home.

Domestic industry is still much in vogue in Central Siberia. The weaving of flax for rough clothes, the making of felt boots and sheepskin coats and caps, wheelwright and blacksmith work are all carried on in the home on a small scale, generally without hired labour. The chief wage-earning industries on anything like an extensive scale at Krasnoyarsk are the Government vodka factory and spirit distillery, a small skin-curing factory, glass-making, and brick and timber yards, while a considerable number of hands are employed on the railway and on the wharfs.

As one would expect under conditions where labour and wage-earning are only just developed, unskilled labour is cheap, but skilled labour is very dear. Thus in the spring of 1910 in Krasnoyarsk I found that unskilled labour on the railway and wharfs was paid from 1s. 9d. to 2s. per day, whilst shop-assistants with small clerical knowledge, mechanics and carpenters were much in demand and could get from £4, 10s. per month with food and lodging all found.

Krasnoyarsk reflects the economic and social life of the Yenisei Government of Central Siberia. This vast territory, of which Krasnoyarsk is the centre, is populated at the average density of eight per square mile. Five-eighths of this population are peasants, one per cent. are wage-earners and only two per cent. can

read and write. Under these circumstances one does not expect to see a social and economic system like that of Western Europe springing up in a day. Great as are the economic possibilities of Siberia, no one can blind himself to the fact that its future economic development must not only go hand in hand with, but be directly dependent on, the social and political evolution which is now in progress in the Russian Empire.

In Krasnoyarsk no less than in other commercial and administrative centres of Siberia one can see this gradual change in progress. Not much is to be seen of the old Siberia of our youthful imaginations, where convicts work in gold mines and fur traders dwell isolated for months in snow-clad forests. The former have been replaced by political exiles who go about as ordinary citizens and speculate in gold concessions or work on the land, and the latter one only sees if one goes far enough into the remoter districts. What we see to-day in the more populous parts of Western and Central Siberia is the development of the natural resources of the country—its minerals, furs, live stock and agricultural produce—the growth of wholesale commerce with European Russia, the indications of the decline of domestic industry, the beginnings of workshop and small factory industry, and the gradual rise of a wage-earning proletariat. We also see a Slavonic civilization, pure and simple, planted on the land direct from old Russia. There is no large native Siberian population or a native element racially and religiously differing from the Russians, and no native question to distract its administrators as in Turkestan and the Caucasus. The little Finnish tribes in the northern

forests are inferior in numbers to the Russians, and, thanks to the adaptability of the Russian colonists, it is not unlikely that many of them will become socially absorbed and mingle completely with the Russians. The Mussulman Tartars of Kazan and Tobolsk, the relics of the old Siberian Khanate, have long ago been politically absorbed and only remain distinct in religion; and here the utmost tolerance is shown. The whole field of Western and Central Siberia has been laid open to colonization by Slavonic civilization with all its peculiar semi-European characteristics, as they have grown there in the course of five centuries. Siberia only differs from old Russia as any young and new country would differ from an older and more established one, or just as society in England differs from that in Canada or Western America.

A tourist then in a Western or Central Siberian town finds much material for meditation on the earlier stages of the evolution and the development of society. He may be adversely struck with the crudity of the human kind in a Siberian commercial town, and with the scum which tends to collect there. But one does not look for beauty or romance or anything which appeals to the higher nature of mankind in such places as these. One finds, however, a society in one of its most interesting stages of development and one which will thoroughly repay study and sympathy. After all, we know that in Western Europe we must have passed through a similar phase ourselves, and that even the outlying parts of the British self-governing colonies are passing through such a phase to-day. But whether the evolution will be exactly on Western European lines, or

whether the Slavs in their Eastern Empire will develop a social condition distinct from that of Western Europe, a civilization peculiar to themselves and tainted with the atmosphere of the East, the future alone will disclose.

## CHAPTER III

# A JOURNEY ON THE SIBERIAN POST ROAD (ATCHINSK TO MINUSINSK)

A TRAVELLER in Siberia always finds that there are two periods of the year in which he must not look for comfort in travel. The so-called roads are practically impassable for a month or six weeks during the spring thaw, and in the early winter. Nor are they always pleasant at other times; for in July the heat and dust from the friable soil cause no small discomfort. But even in the height of summer progress on the road is possible at a reasonable rate, whereas in spring and autumn travelling is almost impracticable.

The change from season to season is always sudden. The snow melts within a month: almost before it is gone the grass literally shoots up, and for a few weeks a vegetation of indescribable luxuriance abounds, such as one never sees in temperate climates. But when the moisture of the snow is followed by the dry heat of summer, the beauty of the vegetation begins to fade, the verdure disappears, and the landscape assumes the new charm of that glowing beauty which characterizes the steppes, until the winter begins to cover it again with its snowy mantle.

It was during the period of melting snow, when the roads were in an almost impassable condition, and the ice on the rivers had not broken sufficiently

to make navigation possible, that my two companions and I set out to accomplish our journey of 280 miles from the Siberian railway to Minusinsk, the last town on the Mongolian frontier in the Yenisei Government of Siberia.

The town of Achinsk on the Siberian railway, about eighty miles west of Krasnoyarsk, was our starting-point. Thence the road leads southwards for 100 miles across ridges and undulating hills of open forest, and for another 150 miles over rolling steppes along a stretch of country called the Abakansk steppe, till it finally reaches Minusinsk.

In Achinsk we found a typical provincial town, with perhaps less European conveniences than Krasnoyarsk, but with a quieter and more respectable population of the truer Siberian type. It is a market town and the centre for a considerable area of country into which immigrants from old Russia are gradually moving. Here agriculture shows every sign of successful development. There were traders, too, of various nationalities, and I remember an interview with a remarkable personage, whom one would not have expected to meet in Siberia. He was a Greek who, born in Turkey, had become a Russian subject, had lived in Manchuria, and had now come to settle in Siberia. A man of such wide experience could not fail to have some knowledge of the world, and I was interested when he told me that in his opinion the southern parts of Western and Central Siberia had the most prosperous future before them. He had left Manchuria because he could not face the commercial competition of the yellow races, the Japanese and Chinese, who had in the last few years, since the Russo-Japanese War, become very active

there. The only place in Asia where Europeans might profitably settle, in his opinion, was Southern Siberia, where there is a European white population with a uniform standard of living, so that all can compete on more or less equal terms. This interested me not a little, especially in connexion with what I heard and saw later in Mongolia.

We set out from Achinsk one April afternoon with two tarantasses and three baggage carts. The tarantasses in this part of Siberia are carts with wicker framework, not unlike open baskets on four wheels, in which two people can just squat or lie down. We said good-bye to the railway, which we were not destined to see again for many months, and crawled southward, bumping over half-frozen ruts and staggering over half-melted snow and black, slimy mud. The so-called post road, which was only a much-used track, led across undulating country covered with open forest of birch, spruce, and Siberian and Scotch pine, called by the Siberians the "taiga."

We passed many places where clearings had been made in the hollows of little valleys, and here the Government surveyors had been at work setting out plots of land for new immigrants who were to arrive from old Russia that summer. Several of these new-comers were already there and had begun constructing their houses, preparatory to ploughing up a bit of land as soon as the snow melted. These immigrants had received from the Government Immigration Bureau 200 roubles in cash and enough seed corn to sow ten acres. Loans of this description are always repayable without interest, in instalments extending over thirty years, beginning

the third year after settlement. In fact the Government encourages immigration to Siberia in much the same way as the Canadian Government invites immigrants to Western Canada. All over the country we saw new tracts being opened up. The resemblances were great, the contrasts no less significant, and things did not wear the same aspect as in Canada. Here we missed the backwoodsmen living in isolated log-houses, far from the beaten track. The Russian system of immigration is always typically Slavonic; a whole community, or a part of a community, migrates and forms a common colony, which settles down in the wilds and creates a little isolated society of its own.

Darkness now came on and still we crawled along through the open "taiga." More and more tedious became the journey and still no signs of our destination—nor for that matter did we know where we were going to rest that night. At last we stopped at ten o'clock by the shores of a frozen river, which turned out to be the Chulim. One of our men said that the next village was a couple of miles on the other side of the river. We could not cross the river in the dark, as the ice was not strong enough to bear the carts. It was necessary, therefore, to take the baggage over bit by bit on a small sledge next day, and meanwhile stop the night on that side. It was pitch dark and freezing hard and we had no food, so our prospects were not cheerful. Soon a barking dog told us that some human creature was about, and we then found a low wooden hut by the shore of the frozen river in a desolate spot. We went inside, thinking to find a resting-place for the night. In a room about twelve

feet square, a good part of which was taken up by an enormous high stove, were at least a dozen hairy Siberian peasants. Some were dressed in greasy sheepskins and others scarcely dressed at all; some were lying on the top of the stove, just under the roof; others we fell over as we tried to cross the room; piles of greasy clothes and sheepskins, mixed with old paper and remnants of meals, lay about the floor; the temperature was stifling, and the atmosphere of the hut was past expression. This was my first experience of Siberian wayside huts; it was not my last. In this case we discovered that some "old stagers" from the forest, returning to their village, were resting the night in this hut. It remained for us either to "tumble in" with them, or stay out under the freezing sky.

After eating some bread and drinking a cup of tea with the Siberians we concluded that we should get more rest if we tried the keen atmosphere outside. So we spent the night sleeping on the top of the baggage carts, wrapped in sheepskins and felt mats, and found that the fifteen degrees of frost had no ill effects on our repose.

This sort of experience gives one a good idea of what a Russian can endure in the way of extremes of atmospheric severity. As I have said, there were fifteen degrees outside; yet, after tramping the forests all day long in sheepskins, those peasants could still bear the same clothing without turning a hair, and could sleep on the top of a stove under atmospheric conditions such as I have described. Clearly the nervous system of such a human being must be very similar to that of the lower animals.

Next morning we got a small sledge and hired

some men to drag our baggage over to the other side. When it was all over a violent altercation arose. Our Caucasian servant had struck a bargain with one of the Siberians who had agreed to do the work. When the operation was completed each side seemed to interpret the agreement in a different light. As is usual in Asiatic or semi-Asiatic society, a verbal war, which lasted some time, broke out between our servant and half-a-dozen Siberian peasants. These skirmishes generally end in smoke, or at the most a few feeble pushes or attempts at blows between the belligerents, but in this case the fiery Caucasian seemed to think his honour at stake, and a loaded revolver was produced as an armament policy to back up diplomacy. This necessitated the intervention of a third person in the shape of one of my companions, who, by a simple financial operation, relieved the tension between the two parties. A few minutes later we were on our way southward, while half-a-dozen Siberian peasants might have been seen settling down on the banks of the Chulim River to get drunk on vodka. Such blackmail a traveller in the East has to endure sometimes.

All that day we trekked southward, and succeeded in accomplishing thirty miles, although the tracks were full of mud and half-melted snow, and the side streams swollen with flood water.

The route lay over undulating country, the forest having been here largely cut away by peasant colonies of old standing. Most of the land was growing steppe grass, and barely one-fourth was under cultivation. Patches could be seen here and there where land had been cultivated for some years and had then been left to grow wild ; here birch and

coarse grass were now growing, marking those waste patches distinctly on the hillsides.

It was obvious that the farming was quite primitive. No manure was used, for the soil was a rich, black mould. Who can say, having regard to the vast area of the country, what population such a soil might not support if farmed on a more scientific system?

Measured on the map the day's journey seemed miserably small — no more than the length of one's thumb-nail. We had passed hill after hill, crossed stream after stream, and two rivers of no inconsiderable size, and had seen village after village with its church appear before us and vanish behind us. Yet how much farther were we on our journey? The immensity of the country began to overpower me—it was beyond my conception. I had been struck before with great distances in Canada, but when a journey of thirty miles is practically as nothing on the map, and covers a negligible area of the Yenisei Government, which in turn covers only a fraction of the total area of Siberia, it is enough to stagger anyone who tries to conceive distance. I began to ask myself if we should ever reach the end of our journey. And then I seemed to lose the sense of time—to Oriental travellers a desirable and almost necessary qualification. How can one be happy in the East if one has to fight against time, the old enemy of the West?

The villages which we passed on the way were Russian in every aspect. Streets were wide and full of ruts and slime. The houses had log frames and rough-hewn boards for the roof. They had a clean and well-kept appearance and were surrounded by fences of wooden boards. Through the fence a

gateway opened into a courtyard where the live stock were kept. A stream generally runs behind the village, and the manure from the yards is pitched in heaps along its banks, being carried away each year by the spring floods. Inside we always found the houses neat and clean. There is a large room with a brick stove, taking up perhaps a quarter of the room. In this the family eat, live and sleep, some on the stove, and some on the floor, while a separate small room is kept and reserved for visitors or others who are not members of the family. The rooms are whitewashed, and each member of the family has a steam bath every week, in a hut kept for the purpose outside. The notion that the Russian peasant is habitually dirty is most mistaken. Here, at all events, the average Siberian peasant's house could compete with the best cottages in rural England. The temperature of the rooms is generally rather a trial to such as are not used to extreme cold outside, and sealed windows with a stove inside.

The peasants themselves are pleasant, childlike people, quiet and meditative, but always ready to give or receive information from a stranger if they are well treated. In fact they are like all peasants throughout the world that I have ever met. I have never yet seen any among the white races of mankind that differ very much below the surface.

Continuing our journey we found that fifty miles south of the railway the Chulim River makes a great bend, following the sweep of a long ridge of high land, which is covered with "taiga" or open forest. Across this we had to make our way through snowdrifts and forest tracks. It is one of the outlying ridges of the Kuznetsk Ala Tan, which is itself a

north-east outlier of the great Altai uplift. The peasants at the last village shook their heads and did not care about setting out to cross it. But after some trouble we set off and for half-a-day we staggered along rising land through open taiga, proceeding at the rate of no more than two miles an hour. At midday we came to a little village called Klyuchee in the middle of the taiga, and more than half-way up the ridge. Here some hardy Siberian "old-timers" lived with their wives and families. Life must be none too easy for the peasants, as the summer here is shorter at that altitude and the land less productive than on the lower ground. But they all seemed fairly contented and prosperous, judging by the clean and tidy houses. They were all of the real Siberian type, knowing nothing of old Russia, or even of Siberia except for the district where fate had placed them. In fact, although similar in extraction and nationality, these old Siberians are a race apart from European Russians, and owing to their isolation they have developed more hardy and independent characters.

From this point we took our sledges and progressed rapidly over snowdrifts and through forests of pine and spruce, all still in winter's grip. In the evening we dropped again to lower altitudes, and the forest ended as we entered the village of Tukaiskaya, where we spent the night in a peasant's house, and supped on eggs, bread and tea. We partook of this fare three times a day for the greater part of a whole week, after which we should have been glad never to see an egg again. Eggs in these villages cost $\frac{1}{8}$th of a penny each, and, as we could not eat more than ten a day, our daily food bill was seldom more than sixpence

per man. The peasants themselves lived on eggs, brown and grey bread, made from rye and wheat, and "shchee" or soup made of salt cabbage and mutton. This is their daily food; and every household seemed to have it. I doubt if any English peasants have better fare than that, if as good. Furthermore, the healthiness of the peasants was remarkable, judging from their robust colour and sturdy frames.

Next day the country underwent a great change. The forests were gone, and so was the snow. Dry steppe-like vegetation began to appear, and the melancholy groups of birches began to dwindle. Agriculture continued in patches along the hollows, but the tops of the rolling downs were utilized for grazing only. Soon we reached the Chulim River, which we crossed at the village Korelskaya. Beyond here lay what was unmistakably the steppe. What a change from the forests and snowdrifts of the previous day to dry grassy steppes, where the snow had melted weeks ago, and the grass was being burnt with fires in order to hasten the growth of the spring vegetation!

This was part of the Abakansk and Minusinsk steppes, a large area of dry country with a low summer rainfall, lying to the north of Sayansk Mountains and to the east of the Kuznetsk Ala Tan in the Altai system. Shut in by high catchment areas on all sides except the north, these steppes form one of those dry evaporating basins which are met with in Southern Siberia in these latitudes. The outside edges of such areas adjoining the forest country, similar to what we had just passed through, are suitable for Russian agricultural colonists. The

peasants here could get wood from the forest not far distant, and cultivate cereals; but droughts are occasionally severe, and lines of wells have often to be dug to ensure a water-supply. The central and dryer parts of the basin, however, are hardly habitable for Russian peasants. Here cultivation is not possible, and only stock-raising is carried on by natives, whom we saw now for the first time. These were the Abakansk Tartars, relics of the Turko-Finnish races, who live a nomad life upon these steppes.

Travelling now became easy. We trotted briskly and sometimes gallopped over the open steppes. The clear, dry air, and feeling of freedom which the steppes always engenders was most exhilarating after the forests and snows of the previous days. Although it was Siberia still, everything now had an Oriental feeling about it.

We reached the Yenisei that afternoon and during the evening gallopped on to the next village some fifteen miles away. We crossed rolling downs of dry steppe-land, and here and there were collections of tumuli or so-called kurgans, the burial-mounds of the earliest inhabitants of these districts. Around them were upright stones like obelisks; passing by a forest of these in the evening light is a weird sensation to the traveller.

As darkness came on the grass fires, like little glowing lines on the hills beyond, denoted the presence of Russian colonies, where the peasants were burning the grass of the previous year. The glowing lines advanced, retreated, expanded, dwindled and grew again as the wind blew them hither and thither. They acted as the beacon lights which led us on to the next Russian village, where a colony of Siberians

were settled on the banks of the Yenisei as it flowed through the steppe.

That night was Easter Eve. The whole village had been apparently fasting for some weeks past during Lent, for I had observed, passing by in the former villages, that the peasants had been denying themselves meat. That evening after midnight they were going to be released from their durance, and so the whole village sat up quietly while the priest burnt incense and chanted prayers before the icons and tallow-bespattered altar of the little Greek church. Toward midnight a large company assembled at the church, while the priest monotonously droned "Gospody pomuilui" (Lord, have mercy). At the stroke of midnight, when the church was full, the priest, with uplifted hands, declared "Kritus voscressenny" (Christ is risen), and instantly, with shouting and yelling, the whole company rushed out of the church into the streets. Revolvers, tin kettles, everything and anything with which a noise could be made, was pressed into service, and a terrific din ensued which lasted for half-an-hour. Then the crowd began to disperse to their homes, where they were going to break their fast with an immoderate consumption of food and drink. The reaction after so immoderate a fast is not surprising. Next day most of the inhabitants of the village were in various degrees of intoxication, and it was only with some difficulty and considerable delay that we managed to get horses and men to take us on to the next village.

To celebrate Easter and the close of a long fast by getting thoroughly drunk is the Slavonic ideal of enjoyment! But the vodka spirit is pure, and

it is better that the peasants should get thoroughly drunk once and again on pure spirit, than continually soak at impure beer or whisky.

We now crossed the rolling downs of the eastern part of the Abakansk steppe heading southward. Away to the east was an endless expanse of steppe with several salt lakes in the hollows. Over the steppes roamed large flocks of horses, cattle and sheep, while on the tops of the hills, where patches of snow still lay, were little groves of melancholy birch, and here and there one or two stunted larch and pine trees could be seen, relics of the northern forest, holding out against the steppe vegetation, which crept up from below.

It was soon apparent that the Russians were not the only inhabitants of this country. In several of the villages men could be seen dressed just like Russians with tunic, belt, breeches, high boots and fur cap, but with squat faces, black eyes, partially puffed eyelids and black straight hair. They were Russified Tartars, and with hair cut short had much the same appearance as Europeanized Japanese. Some of them were living in the villages and, judging from several half-breeds who were to be seen about, had even intermarried with the inhabitants. Indeed one of our drivers who took us for a short distance was a half-breed. He was a jolly, communicative fellow, singing pretty little Tartar airs, as the tarantass jogged along over the steppes. In this connexion I may note that Russians seem to have that most valuable of all qualities for colonization—viz. the power of intermingling with the subject races with which they come in contact and of submerging racial distinctions. Thus those of the Tartars, for

whom in time the wild nomad life loses some of its attractions come into the Russian villages, settle down, and marry Russian girls, while Russian youths go off and pick up Tartar girls from the steppes.

Out on the steppes we saw little round tents of felt called "yurts," which gave an Asiatic character to the scene. Here were the Abakansk Tartars, true Asiatic nomads, living in their yurts with their flocks and moving from place to place. A little farther on we saw in the hollow of a stream by some poplars another curious erection. It was a log-hut, not like an ordinary Russian house, but octagonal, and imitating apparently the round felt yurt. It was a sort of mongrel house which some of the Tartars have adopted through contact with the Russians. Built of the same material as the Russian houses it imitated as far as possible the round shape of Tartar yurts or tents. I found that the Tartars use these round log-houses, built in sheltered corners, as a permanent winter abode, while in the summer they still use their portable felt tents and roam over the steppes, pitching them where the grass is suitable.

I had a talk with an old Russian peasant in one of the villages about the Abakansk Tartars, and I asked him how the Russian peasants got on with these Tartar neighbours. "All right," he said; "they are quite peaceable people. Sometimes a Tartar will steal your horses, but not so much now, and those who like to live with us in the village become one of us. After all, we are brothers." "And what sort of religion have they?" I asked. "Oh," he said, "they worship God." "Does that mean your God?" I asked. "Yes, sometimes," he said. "Then he has more than one god," I asked. "When some-

one in the family is ill," he replied, "then they call in the shamman witch doctor to drive away the bad devils. When we have someone ill the priest prays to the Bogomater (Mother of God); but for Tartars, the shamman beats a drum and the illness goes. That is his business, and that is our business, but never mind, when they are well they come to church. We are all brothers."

This curious medley of religious ideas is interesting, showing as it does the Tartar actually in process of Russification. The Abakansk Tartars were originally nature-worshippers, as all the native tribes of Siberia once were and as many of the tribes still are. They held in reverence the objects of nature, such as rivers, lakes, hills and trees, and used a witch doctor to beat a drum and drive illness away from a family. But by contact with the Russians they began to imitate their religion, and when they found, as they sometimes did, that the shamman doctor did not answer, they took to praying to the Bogomater in the Greek church of the Russian village. It illustrates, too, the forbearance of the quiet Russian peasant. "We are all brothers," he says. "God made Christianity for me, and Mohammedanism for the Kazan Tartar. For the Abakansk Tartar he made Christianity too, but if he finds that his shamman doctor keeps the devil away and does him good, let him use him, as we use our felsher, or village doctor."

We came one afternoon to a Russian village called Borodina, in the middle of the steppe. The Russian peasants were all on a prasnik or holiday, and would not move a finger to take us on to the next village, so we had to stay there for the day. The whole village, young and old, was engaged in holiday-making,

which for most of the day seemed to consist of doing nothing in particular, and doing it continuously. Groups of old peasants sat outside their doorways on low benches, chatting and eating pine seeds, without a plentiful supply of which you rarely see a Siberian. Unlimited time seemed to be hanging on their hands, but they were quite cheerful about it. An English country village is a perfect Wall Street compared to a Siberian village during the Easter holidays, and one could not help thinking how much material wealth these people might accumulate if they only utilized a portion of their wasted time. But perhaps they don't want to accumulate riches, and they certainly are happier without the frantic rush of the Westerner after purely material objectives. If happiness is to be measured by wealth, then the Siberian peasant is less happy than a city financier, but if it is to be measured, as I believe it really is, by contentment of mind, then the Siberian peasant is the happiest man alive. It seemed strange that money would hardly bribe these peasants to leave their village even for a few hours, and take us on to the next. But nearly everybody in this world ultimately has his price, and with the Russian peasant it can be found in cash too, only it is a good deal higher during an Easter holiday than at ordinary times, and the bribe has to be made sufficiently attractive to lure him on to the steppes, away from his doorstep and his bag of pine seeds. Moreover, in these circumstances the peasants have a habit of collective bargaining, which, though decidedly useful to themselves, is often exasperating to the traveller. It is rather trying to be held up by the whole village and told that there are no horses

anywhere, when a few minutes later you see a whole herd being driven in from pasture; or to be told that there is no one to take you on, when the whole village is full of idlers; or to be asked a price six times greater than the fixed post road tariff, because, while no one wants particularly to do the job, still everyone is ready to join hands for a little plunder. The village community thereby creates a monopoly into which it is very difficult to drive the wedge of competition, although occasionally one finds a single peasant ready to break the ring and get the whole job for himself at a reduced rate. The power of collective action and bargaining is one of the greatest assets of the Russian peasant.

From Borodina our track lay over the steppe, undulating in wide sweeps. The vegetation became dryer as we sank into the hollow through which the Yenisei River flowed. We passed over some little streams half frozen at the sides. We had to cut our way through the ice into the bed of the stream, in order to put the carts over. At length some groves of poplars ahead told us that the Yenisei was near, and we soon saw the great river, which was about a quarter of a mile across and full of drifting pack ice after the spring thaw. This was not encouraging, but an old Siberian assured us that we could get over with our luggage. After the usual delay the first batch was taken over and watched anxiously as the poplar "dug-out" was rowed up stream for about two hundred yards, hugging the banks and pushing its way through masses of half-melted ice, which made it quiver from stem to stern. When this was done the boat was rowed straight across the river, being carried down by the current

some hundred yards. It thus drifted with the ice without coming in contact with it.

When all was safely over we repaired to the neighbouring village, where we found Easter festivities going on. Groups of youths and girls were stiffly and solemnly dancing simple peasant dances in the streets to the music of an accordion, an instrument which is always very much in evidence in Russian villages. The interior of the houses had been white-washed and decorated with sprays of fir-trees, and Easter cakes, part of which is given to the priest, were to be found in every house. After a meal in a peasant's home and a pleasant chat we continued our journey.

The last stage to Minusinsk was easily accomplished. Travelling southwards over rolling hills, we sank down at last by a long incline into a flat plain across which the Yenisei winds. Situated on a bank of the river and at the north end of the so-called Minusinsk steppe was Minusinsk itself, a typical Siberian town of wooden houses, overshadowed by three or four Greek churches with green cupolas. It has a population of about 15,000, and is the last town of the Yenisei Government before the Mongolian frontier is reached, and the economic and administrative centre of a large area of country.

Down the main street of the town our horses gallopped on that April afternoon, kicking up clouds of dust, and waking storms of protests from numerous street dogs. Of course there were no hotels in Minusinsk, so we set out to try and find some private individual who would be disposed to have a party of four hungry people and three cartloads of baggage

quartered on him for a fortnight. After several unsuccessful attempts a meek-looking man informed us that he had an empty top storey over his shop which he would be pleased to place at our disposal. Thither we repaired, and found a nice lot of empty rooms suitable for us and our baggage. We arranged with the apparent owner of the house to pay the sum of one rouble a day for this, and as the bargain seemed extraordinarily cheap we got to work at once and began hauling our baggage in.

Suddenly there was a bolt from the blue in the shape of an old woman, who appeared, spluttering with rage, and said the house was hers, and she would allow no one in under four roubles a day. Meanwhile the first man had decamped, which made the situation decidedly awkward, but our sharp Caucasian servant was equal to it. He disappeared for five minutes, leaving us to the tender mercies of verbal avalanches, and in fear of having our eyes scratched out. He then returned accompanied by a police officer whom he had called in as an umpire, having duly squared him with a couple of roubles and a glass of vodka. The case was then presented to this impartial legal tribunal, and after much verbal warfare the decision went in favour of the defendants, which meant that our bargain of one rouble held good.

We then wanted to find out the real owner of the house, so as to know whom to pay, and to be sure that no third party would turn up and claim fresh rights. But having given judgment for the defendant the police officer seemed more favourably inclined for another glass of vodka than for any more verdicts, and disappeared forthwith, leaving us still hopelessly mystified.

It eventually turned out that the old woman was the real owner, and so, strengthened by the arm of the law, which in turn had been strengthened by vodka, we settled into our novel abode over the shop of a Siberian frontier town.

## CHAPTER IV

# A SIBERIAN PROVINCIAL TOWN (MINUSINSK)

EVERY traveller before he has been long in the Russian Empire will become acquainted with prasniks or holidays. On a very large percentage of days in the year the Greek Church ordains that, because a tradition exists that some obscure saint, whose very existence may perhaps be open to question, performed a miracle or died on that day, the whole commercial and economic activities of the Empire are to be altogether suspended. These holidays are spent simply in eating nuts, doing nothing and getting drunk; and if, like my companions and myself, the travellers should be so unfortunate as to arrive at a Siberian frontier town after a week's journey in carts, and find the Easter prasniks just begun, he will experience no little inconvenience.

The first night we were in our new abode we thought it might not be out of place to get something to eat. Our servant and I went out into the town to try our luck. As usual, outside on the doorsteps of the houses sat groups of men and women, eating pine seed and doing nothing. "Where can we buy something to eat?" "Don't know," was the reply. "Are there no shops?" "All shut, holidays." "When will they be open?" "Don't know."

"How long do holidays last?" "Don't know." Passing on we came to a place where it appeared that eggs were to be sold, and we accosted the owner, who was squatting outside and eating nuts. "Have you some eggs here?" "Yes." "Can you get us some?" "No; the shed where they are kept is locked up." "But can't you go and open it?" "No; it is a holiday." "Well, we will give you a higher price because it is a holiday." "I have not got any eggs at all," was the reply. It was obviously hopeless to do business with anyone in such a mental condition as that, and everybody else we tried was the same. At last, in despair, we hit upon a Jewish bootmaker, and entered a low, dingy room quite unlike the clean Russian houses we were accustomed to. There was no difficulty in getting the Jew to do business, but the quality of his fare was distinctly below that of his Russian neighbours. All he could produce was a mouldy loaf of bread and half-a-dozen eggs that had seen better days. However, with that and some scraps that we had left from our journey we made our evening meal. On subsequent days it was always a struggle to get food enough to keep us going, as long as the Easter holidays lasted, and as for attempting to make preparations for the further journey it was utterly out of the question until these people awoke from the mental torpor of the religious holidays.

Meanwhile I amused myself as I had done at Krasnoyarsk, in studying humanity as it was exhibited in Minusinsk.

The next day there happened to be a great function at the Greek church in connexion with the celebrations of Easter week. Early in the morning small

groups of citizens and peasants from the country round paraded the streets, carrying icons or sacred pictures, and chanting with uncovered heads. The church bells, which had been making the small hours of the morning unbearable, were now even more aggressive. One of the most indispensable parts of the "Pravo-Slav" religious ceremonial is its bells. From the Isaaki Cathedral at St Petersburg to the poorest village church they are rung on the same principle. A tiny bell, which makes a noise like a tin kettle, rings for a few minutes, just enough to irritate you when you know what is coming. Then, half-a-tone lower, so as to be precisely discordant with the first, comes another bell with a rather fuller sound; and after these two have jarred upon the ear for a few minutes comes another, a little lower down the scale, and then another, till finally a "Big Ben" booms out, to complete the babel of discord. When you have two Greek churches, one on each side of your house, all of whose bells are out of harmony with each other, and whose "Big Bens" are just half-a-tone different, then you may have some idea of the sort of frenzy into which we were driven after three days. But if the Russians are not exactly musical with their bells, the same cannot by any means be said of their voices. As I stood in the church, having pushed my way through a dense crowd of citizens and peasants, and listened to the men chanting, I felt that in no country in the world had I heard so full and rich a harmony of deep male voices. After the service, while the band plays the National Anthem, "Long live the Tsar," the priest blesses the water and sprays it over the people and on the soldiers lined up outside the church. As I looked

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AT MINUSINSK

THE TOWN OF MINUSINSK

A RELIGIOUS PROCESSION PASSING THROUGH THE STREETS AT EASTER

on this sight, I thought of the imposing ceremony that I had witnessed at the great Cathedral of Isaaki in St Petersburg a few weeks before; here it was again, though with less pomp and circumstance, in these far-off lands. All over the vast Russian Empire, in many thousands of places, from the Gulf of Finland to the Sea of Okhotsk, this ceremony was being performed at that very hour. Was it not the religion, which the Slavs inherited from the Eastern Empire of Christian Rome on the Bosphorus, that bound them and made them under the guidance of their autocrats the colossal (if unwieldy) national and political entity they have become?

When the religious functions were at last over we were able to set to work at some of our business. The chief means of transport in Siberia is horses, and as we intended crossing the Russo-Chinese frontier, and visiting Mongolia, it was necessary to supply ourselves with a caravan. Ponies from Western and Central Siberia are not so good as those from the Eastern and Trans-Baikal districts, nor are they so hardy as the little ponies from the Mongolian plateau across the frontier to the south. These horses from the Minusinsk country were of the mongrel type, mixed doubtless with all sorts of Tartar, native Siberian and Mongolian breeds, but being chiefly used in the open steppes were not first rate in rough and forest country. However, as it turned out, they were most of them hardy compared with anything in Western Europe, and could endure long stretches without food.

One morning we strolled down to the market-square and found a weekly bazaar going on. Local fairs and markets in these more outlying and isolated

districts of Siberia are still important institutions, much more so than in such places as Krasnoyarsk, where direct communication between buyers and sellers and wholesale and retail dealers is now fairly established.

On that morning we found a good assortment of native types from the countryside assembled in the market-square. There were Siberian peasants, Kazan Tartars, Abakansk Tartars and Cossacks. Some were buying horses, some selling produce which was being weighed upon the public scales, and some were bartering over cattle and live stock. We had only to pass the word that a horse was wanted, and instantly half the population in the bazaars swarmed round us. Dozens of animals were produced, but it soon became impracticable to do any business. Whenever we tried to get at the value of a likely-looking animal, a jabbering crowd all tried to explain at the same moment that the price which was being asked by the owner was the correct one, and that we ought not to give less. It was apparently just the same in Siberia as in other parts of the East. No individual seemed to be able to do business on his own initiative, but required a whole crowd of his friends to back him up and support him in a bargain, and whenever you try to introduce the elements of competition you are overwhelmed in a babel of voices all declaring that the seller is in the right. So, after making a few futile attempts to do business, we decided to tackle them in truly Western fashion. We gave out that all who wanted to sell horses should come to our house with those horses. The next morning half Minusinsk appeared in the streets before our house and the crowd was so thick that

special police were sent by the authorities to look after it. Every conceivable type of horse was brought, good, bad and indifferent. Our first job was to weed out those with worn hoofs, blind eyes and sore backs from the remainder, and we finally selected thirty. I was then deputed to ride them all up and down the main street of Minusinsk, while the whole populace of the town was looking on. One old Tartar brought a horse from the steppe, and in a rash moment I got on his back without a saddle, for he looked to me to be a quiet creature. But before I knew where I was I found myself careering down the main street at a mad gallop, the animal buck-jumping and kicking to get me off, while I was pursued by the mounted police and the populace on foot as if I had been robbing a bank. Fortunately with the aid of the police I stopped the horse before he reached the outskirts of the town, for he was making straight for his home on the steppes, and probably would not have stopped till he got there. I then experienced something of the "feel" of a Tartar horse's mouth, and was careful after that to pay due attention to the bit. After a few more of such incidents we got the number of possible horses down to twenty, and then we told the owners that we were only going to buy five (although we really wanted ten), and that each man was to come into the house to bargain alone. Inside everything was made as official as possible. We had an impromptu doorkeeper and usher, and the interpreter and one of us sat at the table, surrounded by papers, pens and ink, in order to give the whole thing an air of importance. The wretched fellows, who had never seen such solemnity in horse-dealing

before, for once had to fall back upon themselves, instead of on a host of jabbering friends. Our keen-witted Caucasian servant was more than a match for them, and a trial of strength in the gentle art of Oriental blackmail, accompanied by torrents of unintelligible sentences, gradually ended in victory for the Caucasian. It was indeed almost impossible to keep one's face and avoid giving the show away while the farce went on. Here was our hired Caucasian blackmailer, a member of a subject race, outmanœuvring the dull-witted Slav in his own country. This was my first real introduction to business in the East. Eventually we got our horses at the reasonable average figure of £3 per head.

During the course of our stay in Minusinsk we had on more than one occasion to visit the local branch of the Siberian bank. The only bank in a town like Minusinsk is naturally the place to feel the pulse of local commerce. Thither repair the retail buyers of live stock or grain in the autumn to discount their bills on the wholesale firms at Krasnoyarsk or other big towns on the railway; and in the spring traders bound for Mongolia come to borrow lump silver which they hope to exchange for skins and wool across the frontier. A low, dingy wooden building with a signboard over the door was the best that Minusinsk could do in banks. At the entrance there stood a dirty, slovenly policeman with a loaded revolver and a fixed bayonet, a precaution which every bank in Russia still takes in case of conflict with certain members of society who have peculiar ideas about private property. This arm of the law, however, was not a very inspiring per-

sonality. He seemed to be engaged in the usual apelike habit of eating nuts. Inside the bank, before a long counter, was a motley assortment of Minusinsk traders, mostly Russians and Kazan Tartars, who had casually strolled in some hours before to get a bill of exchange drawn or a cheque cashed, and had been waiting many hours, squatting in the corner of the room in true Eastern style. It did not take long to discover that this was, after all, the true East with only a thin veneer of West upon it. Behind the counter was the row of loutish-looking clerks who might have just been brought in from ploughing the fields. They were engaged in leisurely writing out forms in large childlike letters, as if they were at a board school examination, stopping every few minutes to drink cups of tea, which were in a continuous process of circulation among the bank staff.

The chief clerk was an anæmic youth with an academic air, who had evidently not been to the barber for at least twelve months. He had been let loose from one of the middle schools after having acquired a knowledge of reading and writing, a smattering of history and geography, and a little dangerous political idealism. The bank manager, who was surrounded by a halo of sanctity in a special room, and to whom we presented letters, was an evil-looking creature, who looked as if a not remote ancestor of his had been sent away from old Russia for old Russia's good.

After a brief conversation we expressed a desire to draw some cash, and I was therefore left to attend to this process in the main room of the bank. I first had to wait till the greasy crowd of Kazan Tartars and Siberians had completed their financial

transactions, for which they had been waiting all the morning, and that took at least an hour. I then explained what I wanted to a red-faced youth across the counter, who seemed partially to understand, and retired to the corner of the room. I waited till the hand of the clock had once gone round and then was asked by another red-faced youth if I would explain again what I wanted.

After another half-hour's wait I was informed that I had come to the wrong counter, and must go to the other end of the room, where another beautiful specimen of this menagerie was perched up on a high stool. It took roughly fifteen minutes for my ideas to filter in, another fifteen minutes for them to digest, thirty minutes more for them to be executed, and fifteen minutes more for the final signing of paper and handing over of cash. I left with the conviction that next time I had occasion to visit a Siberian bank on business, I should have to make a day's expedition, and take all my meals with me, and possibly even a bed for the night.

But I sympathized with the occupants of that bank, although they greatly inconvenienced me. They made a heroic attempt, while I was there, to put on the mantle of Western civilization, and to imitate, as far as they could in their crude, childlike way, an economic institution which was obviously beyond their powers of comprehension. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Nevertheless the beginnings of greater things were there ready for development, and I am one of those who believe that the Slavs some day will develop their crude human material on Western lines.

I must now relate something of our relations with

officialdom in Minusinsk. We duly made acquaintance with the Uesdy Nachalnick or local authority, who is an official appointed in each district and responsible to the governor of the province. In the absence of local representative institutions in Siberia he corresponds to our County Council, Standing Joint Committee, and Quarter Sessions combined in one, and is the most powerful administrative authority in the district. But, as usual in official Russia, he refers everything that he cannot or does not want to deal with to the next authority above him—namely, the Governor of the Yenisei Government. Directly under his control come the civil officials who administer both urban and peasant affairs, the collector of taxes, the urban police officials and the "Stanovy Preestof," who is the head of the rural police. When we went to call on this gentleman we had to go through the usual red-tape formalities in connexion with passports and special permission to cross the frontier. This permission had been granted to us in St Petersburg, and held good apparently for a certain route only; our names, nationality, description, destination, contents of baggage, value of guns and ammunition had been telegraphed out to Minusinsk and had been sent on to every frontier post for 2000 miles along the Russo-Chinese frontier. But one route only, by which we had intended to go, had not been described exactly enough to satisfy bureaucratic minds, and as it was an unused route, where, as we ultimately found out, no frontier guards were kept, it was considered most important to refer the matter to the Governor of the Yenisei Government. Bureaucratic red tape could not possibly allow three foreigners to cross the frontier at indefinite points

lying between two routes, for the passport, although specifying the routes, did not specify the area between them. Therefore permission to cross the frontier by any new route lying between these two points must at least be referred to the governor of the province, and, if necessary, to St Petersburg. In spite of this apparently ridiculous formalism one could not but be struck with the extraordinarily intricate passport system which controls the movements of all persons both native and foreign in all districts throughout the Empire. Our names and all about us were known to all frontier officials from the Yenisei Government to the Ili frontier in Western China. No native Siberian can move from his village without a village paper stating who he is and where he comes from and whither he is going. To leave the Empire a Russian subject must have a special passport from the peasant official in charge of the "volost" or district, in which he lives. And so this marvellous system works throughout the length and breadth of this great Empire; no one can move without the risk of having his papers demanded, and everyone can be traced if he is wanted for anything by the authorities. The expense of keeping the system in working order must be enormous, and one doubts its practical use, although no one can doubt that it works with reasonable efficiency.

The powers which the Uesdy Nachalnik exercise, without responsibility except to those officials above him, are, of course, liable to abuse, especially in remote districts. For instance I remember meeting the Uesdy Nachalnik of Minusinsk in the streets one evening while we were in the town, and being asked by him whether I would buy a gold concession which

he had acquired in the mountains to the south from peasant communes. It seemed a little remarkable that an important official should be able to obtain gold concessions from the subjects he administers and then sell them to foreigners. I could hardly imagine the mayor of an English town or the chairman of a county council or a deputy chief constable of a county embarking upon a similar speculation and hawking it about the public streets. Undoubtedly there is corruption in the remoter parts of Siberia, but the opinion of everyone I conversed with was that in this respect improvement has taken place of late. Corruption is a social disease, and is not confined to Russia alone. In Siberia the officials are the victims of the environment which is created there by nature. Low pay and isolation from effective control are great incentives to the mischief. The rising scale of officials' salaries and greater centralization of government is having the effect of diminishing it, although the latter tendency will also bring evils of another kind in its train, if carried too far. Public opinion is the only thing which in the long run will put a stop to it, and although growing in European Russia, it is at present too little developed in the remoter parts of Siberia to have any effect. The day will come when public opinion will be sufficiently strong to ostracize officials who hawk gold concessions in the public streets.

Another official at Minusinsk, whose acquaintance we made, was the inspector of mines and mining concessions for the southern part of the Yenisei Government. This post exists in every district of every Government, but it does not seem important

to the bureaucratic mind whether there are mines in the district or not, so long as the post exists. It was obvious to me that there was a great difference between the Canadian and the Russian method of administering mining concessions. A Canadian can register a claim and within a few days obtain the sole right of exploitation, but a Siberian has to encounter formidable regulations and long interviews with uniformed officials who are especially deputed to deal with mineral rights.

One would have thought that the post of a mining inspector would be filled by someone with a knowledge of his subject, but that is not thought necessary by the Russian Government. The gentleman whose acquaintance we made was a pensioned military officer of partly German extraction, who gave us a hospitable welcome and did everything to procure for us practical help and advice about travelling on the Russo-Mongolian frontier. His knowledge of mines and minerals did not appear to be vast, and he seemed to be more at home when he sat down to tea with us and recalled the military exploits of his earlier days, the memories of the Russo-Turkish War and the Battle of Plevna, in which he had taken part.

As one would imagine, public representative institutions at Minusinsk were limited both in number and in function. There is a town council elected by those who pay the apartment tax, but the duties of this body seemed to be even more restricted than those of the same body at Krasnoyarsk. The upkeep of an almshouse and a small town hospital, the repairing of a few primary school buildings, and the maintenance of tracks or so-called roads in the town

in a fairly level condition seemed to be all that it had to do.

As regards education, the maintenance of the urban primary schools generally falls in part at least upon the urban local authority. In a town where wood is cheap, a low wooden building with desks and forms can be erected for a couple of hundred roubles and the only charge on the district is for repairs and the purchase of books, while teachers' salaries are found by the local branch of the Imperial treasury. And so the seeds of enlightenment are sown in these remote corners of the Empire, and the children of the citizens and of the local peasants learn to read and write their mother tongue. But the march of progress is slow, and in a town like Minusinsk with 15,000 inhabitants only five per cent. of the children are at school, and about that percentage of the whole population are literate.

In the middle school or "gymnasium," of which there was a boys' and girls' branch at Minusinsk, a more advanced education is given for the payment of £15 to £20 per year per pupil. In company with a Russian gentleman I visited it one day and found a large two-storeyed building, with spacious classrooms and modern appointments. This was the only middle school for the whole of the southern part of the Yenisei Government of Siberia, and held at that time about 400 boys and girls. The expense of this establishment is met partly by the pupils' fees and partly by Government grants, and the whole administration of the middle school education is under the education authority in Krasnoyarsk, which in turn is directly under the Minister of Education in St Petersburg. In this school I found boys

and girls from twelve to eighteen following the Government curriculum, which is the same all over the Empire from Poland to the Far East. The type of education is very similar to that of the classical side of our public schools in England, except that perhaps less attention was paid to Latin and Greek and more to French. French and German are obligatory, and English, Latin and Greek are at present optional. Elementary science was taught, but from books only. Such scientific instruction, to my mind, would tend to create only foggy notions about the laws of nature in the minds of the human raw material of these parts of Siberia. The lessons were accompanied by no sort of practical demonstration ; and the teachers indeed informed me that they had never done any practical work themselves, and frankly stated that all their information came from books.

In fact the Government does not encourage modern scientific education in the middle schools, and is more desirous of instilling classical education into the minds of the growing Siberian *bourgeoisie*. In so far as they insist upon a grounding in history, geography and the German or French languages, I am inclined to think that this middle-school policy is right. The fault lies in not giving sufficient facilities elsewhere for the more practical scientific side of modern education, by the opening of technical schools and universities throughout Siberia. There is only one university in the whole continent where modern education can be obtained, and that is at Tomsk. Attempts to start one at Irkutsk have been vetoed by the Government in spite of the fact that all the money has been found by the Siberians themselves.

The Siberians are very bitter about this, for they feel that they are being deliberately cut off from modern education by the officialdom of old Russia.

There is one remarkable monument in Minusinsk which marks the advance of education and enlightenment in Central Siberia during the last decade. This is the museum, which is, in spite of the isolation of Minusinsk, the best in all Siberia. Many towns in Siberia have museums created by the order of officialdom of the same type as that which I saw at Krasnoyarsk. In Minusinsk, however, there lived a few years ago a cultivated Siberian gentleman. A keen enthusiast on more than one scientific subject, he spent a large part of his life in the creation of a museum which should be representative of all the scientific knowledge of the Southern Yenisei Government. The museum building, which along with the vodka factory and the prison shares the distinction of being among the finest in the whole town, contains collections of geological, botanical, archæological and historical interest, and also exhibits showing the economic possibilities of Southern Siberia. It is remarkable that such an educational monument should have been created by a private individual and his friends in Siberia without the aid of any Government department, and this indeed shows the Russian character in a very different light from that in which we usually regard it. There are no more enlightened people than the Slavs if once they are thoroughly imbued with Western ideas; but the number of those who really absorb these ideas is so far very small.

I found another interesting example of the extra-

ordinary diversity of the Russian character in the acquaintance that I made with a certain Mr S—— in Minusinsk. He was a cultivated and well-to-do gentleman who had settled there in order to study the archæological remains in which the district abounds. Absolutely oblivious to the wild country and the primitive social conditions around him, he was so preoccupied with his work that he could hardly think of anything else. One morning I went to call on him I found him in a typical Russian house, busy writing a paper on a scientific subject. It was to me passing strange to meet here a man whom you would associate rather with the old court at Trinity or with Balliol than with a Siberian frontier town. On my arrival he welcomed me with the cordiality of a true Russian, and although he began his conversation with general subjects he could not long keep away from his scientific theories on the early inhabitants of those districts. For an hour he held forth to me with the almost fanatical enthusiasm which is so typical of a really educated Russian. I noticed, too, that he seemed to have a thorough knowledge of the detail of his subject, such as one more frequently finds among the Germans. Other Russian scientists whom I have met have generally been fervent and enthusiastic, but erratic and truly Slavonic in nature, and the enthusiastic and impressionable character of a cultivated Slav blended with the laborious thoroughness of a Teuton is a combination as rare as it is excellent. I learned much from this gentleman and spent many hours with him.

A provincial town like Minusinsk, the last urban centre before reaching the Mongolian frontier,

although more primitive in some respects, is, nevertheless, pleasanter than the towns nearer to so-called civilization. The quiet life of old Siberia is still most prominent here. The business of everyday life is slow and old-fashioned, and society is more dignified and less obtrusive than in those towns, situated on the great railway, which are permeated with Western influences.

Being the centre of a certain local trade, capable of a great future, and also of the barter trade with the Mongol and Finnish tribes on the frontier, modern commercial methods have just begun to develop even here. The population in Minusinsk consists chiefly of urban citizens or "meshchaneeny," who are without land. They carry on trade with the Abakansk Tartars and the Siberian peasants of the neighbourhood, and many of them engage in small domestic industries which they carry on in their homes, such as the making of coats, boots, small ironwork, etc. Others keep stores and little shops, while others, especially Jews, deal in furs, which come in from Mongolia. There are, of course, the civil officials and the usual military forces stationed in the town. But besides this there are a few Russian gentlemen of private means, engaged in various academic pursuits, and a few political exiles of high culture, one of whom I had the fortune to meet.

The backbone of society in a Siberian provincial town is to be found in the growing commercial *bourgeoisie*, or middle class, which in recent years has been created by the economic activities which are springing up on every side. There is the frontier wool trader, who earns his 400 roubles

a year and lives in a four-roomed house with varnished tables and cheap furniture; there is the Kazan Tartar, who deals in horses and imitates the social habits of his Russian neighbour; there is the Russian watchmaker or the Polish hairdresser, who has left his home, perhaps for political reasons, and finds that in Siberia he can easily earn 450 roubles (£50) a year, while his food and general living cost him only half of what they do in old Russia. Just as the Englishman, if he has enterprise and a little capital to start with, improves his position by crossing the Atlantic to Canada, so can the Russian from the old country, if he is ready to endure the rough and free life, find a more open field for his enterprise and a more remunerative return for his labour when he crosses to the east of the Urals.

There is, as in every town in Russia, a boulevard or square space in the middle of the town where some stunted trees try to grow. When I was in Minusinsk, just after the winter snow had melted, the boulevard was like a ploughed field, while during the summer the heat and dust render the spot equally unfavourable for an urban pleasure-ground. A few rickety old seats are scattered about, and occasionally the colonel of the regiment stationed in the town allows the band to make discordant sounds on a Sunday afternoon. To this Garden of Eden every summer evening repair the fashion of Minusinsk. Well-to-do traders are to be seen with wife and family dressed in the latest costume, which was probably the fashion in Western Europe ten years ago. Children play games and roll in the dirt, while parents sit on benches and gossip. Smart young officers strut about in

uniform with stick and spurs, and carry on diplomatic flirtations with the other sex. The poorer citizen on very festive occasions can also be induced to leave his doorstep and his bag of nuts, and walk with his wife, family and perambulator. In fact, human nature is much the same in this little Siberian frontier town as at Hampstead Heath or Earl's Court on a Bank Holiday. The difference that exists is superficial only and due to local circumstances, but beneath the surface *Homo Vulgaris* here has much the same habits as the same animal in Western Europe.

The chief thing that strikes a traveller is the absence of any indulgence in those sports of which Englishmen are so fond. There is no sign of a football or cricket club or of a racecourse. The only recreation is eating and drinking, doing nothing and walking on the boulevard to see other people in their best dresses. They appear to regard physical exertion for the sake of bodily exercise as mere waste of time. On the other hand, while at first I looked on the indolent Slav, who has no notion that time moves, as a reckless waster of a most valuable commodity, I have often wondered since whether I was quite fair in thus judging him, especially when I think now of the time-wasting crowds at a Saturday afternoon football match in England. In fact the "Citizen of the World" may be studied with advantage, and the old proverb, "So many nations, so many customs; so many men, so many minds," is an excellent corrective to critical infallibility. Perhaps here as elsewhere the *via media* is the safest.

In Minusinsk Slavonic civilization and the Russian social system are everywhere predominant. Never-

theless besides pure Russians there are Mohammedan Tartars of Kazan and Tobolsk; but these are in a minority and, except in religious matters, have few distinctive characteristics. They must not be confused with the Abakansk Tartars, who are the native aborigines of the southern part of Central Siberia. The Kazan and Tobolsk Tartars are Mussulman Russian subjects, who originally came from old Khanates of Kazan and Tobolsk in Western Siberia and European Russia, before they were overthrown by the early Russian Tsars. Most of those in Minusinsk had been born and had lived there all their lives, but a few had migrated recently from European Russia and Western Siberia. On visiting the houses of one or two, I expected to find some old Tartar "Hadji," with a skull-cap and turban, sitting squat-legged on a raised dais, surrounded by carpets and prayer rugs, and attended by veiled women from the harem. But I was disappointed. I found instead a Russian log-house. The room inside was furnished with tables and chairs, there was a samovar of tea and Russian food, and the family wore Russian clothes and spoke Russian, calling each other by Russified Tartar names, such as "Islamof," "Achmetof." In fact, by continual contact with Russians, though without any systematic Russification by officialdom, these Tartars were slowly losing their national characteristics. But their religion survives as strong as ever; for, on the one hand, the Russians make no attempt to proselytize, nor on the other do the Tartars show any signs of breaking from their old faith. Christian Russian and Mussulman Tartar in Siberia, as in old Russia, mutually respect each other's religion, and inter-

mingle socially; as subjects of the Tsar they live their everyday life on terms of civic equality, enjoying the same privileges and bearing the same public burdens.

Perhaps the most interesting acquaintance that I made in Minusinsk, and one to which I attached the greatest value, was that of a certain gentleman who, on account of his previous history, his social isolation, and his high culture, was surrounded by a peculiar halo of tragic mystery. Formerly he had held high office in St Petersburg, but he was supposed to have become involved in certain affairs connected with secret police spies. Trials behind closed doors ensued, and, falling into Imperial displeasure, he had been compelled to live in this remote part of the Empire, socially ostracized. Not only was he a man of position and culture, but also a man of wealth. In the land to which he was exiled, however, money could not create what he formerly enjoyed in the centre of European civilization. Although he and his family lived in a large house with many well-appointed rooms, they had no servant now to attend to their wants. Hastily laid meals and untidy rooms contrasted in my imagination with what their surroundings must have been in the political and diplomatic circles of St Petersburg's society. This is the type of exile to whom one's sympathy most extends. The political exile from the peasant class or lower grade of urban citizen finds in Siberia an opening for his enterprise in a new land of riches and plenty. But to the cultivated man, who has moved in the social circles of the European capitals, exile to such a place as this must be little short of social death. When I went to call upon him he

came to the door himself, and showing me in through a room where he and his wife had been having their evening meal, ushered me into a room beyond. I noticed his calm, philosophical face as that of a man who had evidently endured mental strain with stoical fortitude; but his wife, more nervous than he, showed signs of former anxiety. It seemed strange indeed that I should be sitting in company with two members of high Russian society, now ostracized by exile to Siberia, and stranger still to partake of their intelligent conversation on topics of human interest. First of all I was interested to know what sort of restrictions were placed upon the exile's liberty. I found that he was not allowed to leave the district in which he resided, and that every week he had to sign his name in a book kept at the house of the chief "Nachalink." With that exception his life was free. He had money and he could live as he liked and go where he wished within that district, but he was continually watched by spies, who dogged his footsteps wherever he went. I was surprised to find that he, too, had caught the fever of modern commercialism, which is beginning to run throughout Siberia. He related to me how he had acquired gold concessions on the Mongolian frontier and was hoping to find capital to float a syndicate for working them next year. This was not at all my idea of the life of a Siberian exile. Instead of being made to work himself in the galleries of the gold mines till death released him from his chains, the exile now floats syndicates to work these mines.

He spoke little about himself, and I thought it best not to draw him; so we kept to the one topic that was foremost in my mind—namely, Siberia and the

Siberians. He told me that he was much impressed with the richness and the possibilities of Siberia; but, with the shrewdness of a cultivated man of the world, he realized that the primitive state of society and the inefficient and centralized bureaucratic administration were influences which precluded a very rapid and sudden development. He complained of the low standard of education in Siberia, which he said was far below the standard of even old Russia as regards the percentage of the population that could read and write. Nor did he hold out hopes of much improvement till a greater outlay of public money for elementary schools is sanctioned by the Imperial Government. But, he continued, difficulties lie in the way. Military railways on the Amur, strengthened fortifications in the Far East, and an immense standing army in Siberia, besides the constant drain of Russian peasant youths, who are being drafted into the army from all parts of the Empire, impose a gigantic and unproductive burden on the community, which it is almost impossible adequately to estimate. The overweighting of the finances of the Empire is crushing out progressive expenditure, and yet this is the policy favoured by those in authority in St Petersburg. Having once created unproductive official posts, the vested interests which become firmly established upon them use all the influence at their command to prevent their removal. Nevertheless, as he pointed out, and as I was bound to admit, Russia is not the only country where progress is arrested by the growth of the unproductive burdens and vested interests which fatten on war and rumours of war. And indeed I had to own that Russia, with her long land frontier

and close proximity to the Yellow and Mussulman races of Central Asia, from whom she is divided by radical differences of race and religion, has far more cause for shouldering these burdens to preserve her peculiar nationality than any of the nations in Western Europe, where racial divisions are becoming submerged by the steady growth of international trade and finance.

We then discussed the relations of Siberia to European Russia, and I was interested to find that he agreed with me in comparing them with those of Canada and the United Kingdom. In Siberia, he said, the land is richer and less occupied, and the life is freer and less restricted, so that the Siberians have developed a more independent character and resent being treated like protégés by old-fashioned bureaucrats in St Petersburg. At present Siberia has only eight members in the Duma—far below its proper representation, according to population, as compared with European Russia. In fact Siberia is purposely under-represented, so that she may not become too powerful in the Duma. But it is not merely Russian officialdom, he continued, that Siberia has to contend with. There are great commercial vested interests in old Russia which oppose the growing feeling for Siberian local autonomy. If a Siberian local administration were formed it might carry out many fiscal reforms which would affect the interests of the great manufacturing trusts in Moscow. It might agitate for free ports at the mouth of the Yenisei and Obi and thus let in cheap foreign manufactures, making Siberia a less easy victim of the artificial monoply in cotton goods and small manufactures from European Russia. At present

the Siberians are paying enormous prices for inferior manufactures, and have no voice in the Duma, so that special fiscal autonomy for Siberia would be strenuously fought by the great manufacturing interests. These Moscow trusts with millions of capital at their back are powers which the Government of Russia is forced to serve and obey, and so the development of Siberia is retarded by the high prices of the manufactures and machinery which are essential for agricultural and industrial development. But, he added, the subordination of Siberia to the commercial interests of old Russia is having the effect of creating a national feeling, and a desire for local autonomy, with a parliament in Tomsk and the right of fiscal autonomy such as the British self-governing colonies now enjoy. The question of Free Trade and Protection is one which Siberians consider vital for their future development, but they are powerless in face of the great interests of old Russia.

All this struck me as being remarkably analogous to the struggle which is going on in Canada at the present time between the agriculturists of the north-west territories and the manufacturers of the Eastern provinces, by whom the agriculturists are economically dominated and from bondage to whom they are endeavouring to free themselves.

"But how can the Siberians govern themselves as yet?" I asked. "Is not their state of society too primitive to develop a coherent public opinion?" Public opinion is growing, he said, in the towns, and particularly in those of Western Siberia along the railway, but the large bulk of the population are peasants, often isolated in colonies far distant from each other, and this makes the growth of public

opinion in Siberia slow. "Am I not right, then," I said, "in assuming that although the Siberian national sentiment, and the demand for local freedom, is becoming more and more pronounced, still the vastness of the country and the isolation of the bulk of its inhabitants, will cause many years to elapse before public spirit and coherent opinion can ever become a real force?" "Yes," he said, "that is true; but come it will, in the inevitable change that comes with everything that is human." And I felt myself that his words will some day come true.

The pleasing conversations which I had with this exile were certainly the most interesting and enlightening that I had while I was in Siberia. Many political exiles are men of the most highly cultivated type. They and their forerunners of previous years have been not so much a disturbing as a progressive element in Siberian social life, introducing, as they do, new ideas from Western Europe and old Russia. They are subject to special laws and are kept administratively apart in a social caste of their own. A traveller is sure to encounter them on his way through Western and Central Siberia. Often drawn from the peasant or the lower urban citizen class, they have been sent out to Siberia for political reasons, and once settled in a Siberian village among the other peasants they take up land and merge in the community. I saw several such exiles in the parts of the Yenisei Government which I visited, and in no case was their social condition inferior to that of their free neighbours around them. In fact more than one declared his intention of remaining in Siberia after the expiration of his sentence. To these people exile opens up a new

field for enterprise in a young and fertile country; it has the same effect as it would have upon an Englishman if he were sent to Canada and settled on the Western prairies. But in the principal towns of Siberia one always comes across the other type of political exile, cultivated, academic men who are sent to live in places where there are none around them of the same social or intellectual standing as themselves. A student from a university, or a cultivated Moscow gentleman, is thus made to live in company with Siberian peasants, gold miners and fur traders. To such as these exile is indeed a hardship.

There is certainly no great hardship in banishment to Siberia, but suffering is frequently inflicted in the administration of exile law. The object of that law is to isolate agitators, and to achieve this result the exiles are placed in contact with persons with whom it is difficult and often impossible for them to associate. Of course the whole system, according to our ideas, seems foolish; but the system, originated in order to deal with a dangerous revolutionary movement, sometimes includes persons not wholly connected with this movement. It must be remembered that one cannot treat a young country, just emerging from a primitive state, where new ideas often take a dangerous form, in the same way that one would treat a more developed people. It is on much the same principle that the Government of British India has arrested and deported political agitators who are believed to be dangerous to the existence of its authority in that country. In fact, in all countries which are in an early stage of political development, certain minds become obsessed with

revolutionary formulæ and panaceas, which are always pushed to logical and consequently often unwarrantable conclusions. Russia is no exception to this. England had similar experiences in its earlier history; India seems to have been passing through such a phase lately; in Russia also the existence of this revolutionary element has given an excuse for the reactionaries to use the system of political exile to hamper the actions of their opponents. In Siberia, however, the system defeats its own ends, and is often rather an agent for the spreading of progressive ideas than for the suppression of revolutionary movements. It is therefore not improbable that the system will in time die a natural death.

One evening while we were in Minusinsk a somewhat imposing personage, dressed in an old uniform with medals and other emblems of officialdom, came to our house. We wondered whether we were wanted by the Siberian police, for our visitor was the governor of the local gaol. We discovered, however, that his object, so far from being to arrest us, was to find a purchaser for a certain gold concession, in which he and some other officials in Minusinsk were interested. Not long before an advantageous offer had been made to us by the administrative official for the district, but I confess that I was even more surprised to have the offer of a gold concession from the governor of a prison! We informed the gentleman that this was not the object of our visit to Siberia. We entertained him at tea, and found that he was a pensioned military officer of a genial and pleasant type with the casual manner which characterizes all Russians. He had no objection to con-

versing with me about the prison which he controlled, and I thereupon took advantage of his communicative nature to obtain some useful information.

"I took the post," he said, "because I wanted a job, but it is a thankless office and unpleasant to be always an agent of punishment. It is not my nature to be thus, but I took the post because when I left the army I had to do something." I asked him if the common gaols in Siberia were overcrowded. "No," he said; "I have 200 at present in Minusinsk and room for 300, but they are continually going and coming."

On further inquiries I ascertained from him that each of the six towns in the Yenisei Government had a town prison, and that there were sixty-seven volost or district prisons in the rural districts. They were entirely kept for the punishment of small offences, which came under the jurisdiction of the "Mirobny Sud," or local stipendiary justices of the peace. Convicts, however, are never sent to these prisons.

I was afterwards able, by studying the statistical publication for the Yenisei Government, to ascertain the number of convictions and imprisonments in certain years and thereby to form some idea of the state of public morality in Central Siberia. I found that in 1909 there were 7896 convictions for indictable offences—*i.e.* one per cent. of the population. Of these ·3 per cent. were punishable by imprisonment and the rest by fines. The principal offence was theft, which accounted for forty per cent. of the total convictions. Most of the remainder consisted of offences against Government regulations. Threatening and intimidation formed about twelve per cent. of the convictions, and there were 160 convictions for

murder (*i.e.* two per cent. on the whole). The condition of public morality in Central Siberia, therefore, is very much what one would expect in a country inhabited mainly by peaceful peasants; the inhabitants are no less law-abiding than those of the average European country.

Before he left, the governor asked me if I would like to see the local gaol, and on expressing my desire to do so I was taken, a day or two later, to the "Tyumerny Zamok," a large, one-storeyed building, whitewashed and covered with red sheet-iron and surrounded by a high mud wall. Inside the building were large rooms, like dormitories in a private school, where the prisoners lived and slept, and which they all shared together. Men and women were kept in separate parts of the building, but they frequently saw each other in the course of the day in the large courtyard, where there was an open space for an exercise-ground and for the gymnastics in which the prisoners indulged. Inside the rooms were very clean, and it was almost difficult to believe that you really were in a prison. The place seemed to be pervaded by an air of informality and much resembled an ordinary boarding-house. There were about 200 prisoners in the gaol, and there appeared to be ample room for that number. Unfortunately I had not much time for further conversation with the governor, as he had business elsewhere, but one of his subordinates gave me some idea of the methods which the Russian authorities pursue in dealing with prisoners. The system in Siberia is just the same as that in any other part of the Empire. In the common gaols nothing is provided but bread and tea and a place to sleep in. The prisoners are,

however, permitted to work at any useful occupation, but they must work hard if they are to live well. A prisoner who is in gaol for a week or under will not find it worth while to engage in any special work, and will generally prefer the discomfort for a short time. Those, however, who are sentenced for a month or more can get leave to carry on inside the prison any work they may have been doing before they came inside; if they have no occupation, they can undertake work that is specially provided for the prisoners. This consists of certain small trades such as the making of sledges, rough wheelwright work, carpentering and the making of any useful article which can be disposed of in the neighbourhood. The money which the sale of this work brings in is put to the credit of the prisoner's account by the prison officials, and he is enabled to draw up to that amount from the prison shop in order to provide himself with any comforts that he requires.

I found that the earnings of the prisoners in the six urban prisons of the Yenisei Government for 1908 was as follows:—1379 prisoners who were confined for periods of from one week to three months made total earnings of 12,770 roubles (£1419). Thus a prisoner who earns ten roubles (£1, 2s.) in a month can, in the country, where food is cheap and the standard of living low, provide himself without much difficulty with more than the necessaries of life. As far as I could judge, the disadvantages of this system were: first, that those prisoners who had no knowledge of the particular kinds of work adapted to a particular locality would not fare so well as those who had; and, secondly, that the competition of prisoners in a limited labour market has the effect

of replacing certain trades by prison industries and thereby tending to lower the standard of living. This latter objection, however, has less weight in the remoter districts of Siberia, where industrialism is scarcely developed as yet, and where certain small trades can very well be left in the hands of local prisoners without any serious interference with the economic life of the community. On the other hand, there are considerable advantages derived from the system. The prisoners' ordinary fare is poor, as it ought to be, and the conditions under which he is compelled to live are worse than that of his home, unless he engages in useful work and thereby earns some money. In this way punishment for the offence is accompanied by an incentive to become a more useful member of society, which is the general principle upon which all prisons ought to be run. It was quite obvious to me that, whatever advantages or disadvantages the system possessed, it had evidently been thought out carefully, and that the system in vogue in European Russia had been transferred with but slight modifications to the eastern parts of the Empire.

## CHAPTER V

# LIFE IN A SIBERIAN VILLAGE

IT was on an afternoon of an April day, as the last touch of winter was disappearing, that I drove into a small Siberian village, the last outpost of the little Slav colonies which are scattered in every available corner of the Yenisei basin from the great railway southwards to the mountains of Mongolia. The village, about half-a-mile in length, consisted of two long straggling rows of single-storeyed log-houses, built on the open ground, where the birch and pine forest had been cleared. The usual broad space of about eighty yards separated the two rows, and here the passing to and fro of carts for a generation or more had worn deep ruts and hollows in the black earth, which were now filled with stagnant water. A small stream ran across the village, its banks covered with piles of rubbish and manure over which dogs, cows, sheep and other domestic animals roamed aimlessly. This was the village refuse-heap, which had accumulated during the last winter, and portions of which are periodically swept away by the spring floods; for no one here puts any value upon such an article as manure when the land will yield twenty bushels to the acre by the simple process of ploughing and sowing. Even in the straggling street bony specimens of cattle wandered about from one house door

to another. The long winter's fast had made them hungry and lean, and they seemed to be begging for food. A rough-looking mongrel elk-hound lay at the door of each courtyard, while the long-legged Siberian pig rooted about in the streets and on the rubbish-heaps.

It was on such a scene as this that I entered after two days of travelling in a tarantass south-eastward from the town of Minusinsk toward the Mongolian frontier. This was the last village on the edge of the great and almost impenetrable forests which lay on the north side of the Sajansk Mountains dividing the Russian from the Chinese empires. "Kooda! Raz Pashol!" My "Yemshchik" cracked his whip, as the troikas of three Siberian ponies galloped furiously into the little village assailed on all sides by barking dogs and stared at by groups of hairy, fur-clad Siberian peasants. There was no hospitable post station at this place, where, by Government orders, a room and samovar of tea and bread must be provided at a special tariff for all travellers. This was far from any post road, and the last post town had been left some forty miles behind. I therefore had to look about and find some well-disposed Siberian peasant in this isolated spot to have compassion on me and take me in.

That morning there had been a service in the church, but all was now quiet. A few of the men were working leisurely in the yards at the back of the house, shifting hay and setting hemp to dry, but no one was working in the field that day, except the common grazier. A regular village institution in Siberia, he had taken the sheep of the village to nibble the dry remains of last year's grass on the

steppes, some six or seven versts away. So eighty per cent. of the able-bodied men that afternoon had nothing in particular to do, and were doing it very well. Groups of five or six peasants sat on the benches at the entrance to the yards of their houses, chatting and eating the usual pine and sunflower seeds. As soon as it became known that a foreigner was in the village, glad of an excuse for something to do, the groups began to break up and a small crowd of kind but empty and lazy faces began to collect around me and I heard the following remarks:—"Who is it?" "English engineer!" "Gold seeker!" "Yes, he must be after gold, for the English always know where gold is." "Is there going to be war with China?" asked a youth who had just completed his military service and was hoping to settle down at home again. Not feeling exactly disposed to discuss Russia's foreign relations at that moment, I ignored the question and proceeded to explain that I was the advanced guard of a party of three Englishmen on their way to Mongolia. A considerable crowd had now collected, and it seemed almost hopeless for me to explain what I wanted, especially as they all talked at once in true Eastern style. But a few kindly old peasants quieted the crowd and told them not to press round me; for, they said, "after all, he is our brother." It was not long before these old men grasped the situation; several volunteered to take me in, and after some inspection I fixed on a square log-house in the centre of the village.

Inside, the house consisted of two rooms, one of which was inhabited by a middle-aged couple and the other was kept as a spare room. A rough wooden bedstead stood in one corner and the familiar

huge square brick stove, serving both for heating and cooking, took up nearly half the available space in the room. A rough bench and a table completed the furniture, while the household utensils were kept in a small storeroom at the back of the house. The rooms had been whitewashed with scrupulous care for Easter. It is usual to assume in Western Europe that Russian peasants are very dirty and unpleasant to live with. As far as Siberia is concerned, however, especially in the remoter districts, I never have seen cleaner houses or peasants with more self-respect. In fact, the cleanliness and self-respect seemed to increase in direct proportion to the distance from civilization.

I noticed an interesting circumstance connected with the size of the rooms in a Siberian peasant's house. If the head of the family originally built a large living-room, with a view to retaining his children when they grew up, the younger generation would continue to live together with the older, marry, and raise up a third generation all under one roof. If, on the other hand, the paterfamilias was unable or unwilling to build more than a small living-room, the younger generation would go off, marry and make another home for themselves. One sees both kinds of household in a Siberian village. In each case the power of the family to provide for its needs is approximately the same, for, whether the family remains together or is dispersed, each one, when grown up, is entitled to take up a certain proportion of land from the commune.

There is little pretence of decoration in the house of a Siberian peasant, and the only attempt in this

SIBERIAN VILLAGE YOUTHS

TWO GENERATIONS OF PEASANTS LIVING UNDER ONE ROOF

direction consists in keeping during the summer a few pots of flowers in the windows. In this manner the peasants show a certain appreciation of surrounding nature, which is after all the forerunner of art. But beyond that the Siberian peasant's artistic taste is poor. There is, of course, in every room the usual icon, which is a brass picture of saints, often coloured very crudely, decorated with artificial paper flowers, and covered with the grease of old candles, which have dripped on to it from time to time. Then a few crudely coloured pictures, such as you find in the house of every peasant throughout the world, are used to adorn the walls. They depict the comedies and tragedies of life in little homely tales or fairy stories. One sees in a peasant's living-room a series of pictures representing the life of the child until he becomes a man, supporting his parents, raising his family, and finally sinking to old age; a fight in the Russo-Japanese War was often a favourite theme; an exciting hunt after wild animals or a shipwreck at sea; religious history and events in the lives of certain saints; pictures of heaven and the other place, according to the untutored hopes and fears of these children of nature. In fact, these represented the short but simple annals of the poor; and they are much the same among the peasants of every land, whether they be in Siberia, French Canada, Spain, Finland or rural England. The mind of the poor gravitates naturally toward the tragedies of life. The climax of the urban type might perhaps be found among the inhabitants of an East-End London slum. But the ideal of the peasant is more peaceful. His life is quiet and his mind less harassed, and so he balances more evenly the comedy and tragedy

of everyday life. The Siberian peasant's little picture-gallery on the walls of his log house betokened to me a quiet and contented conception of the world in which he lived.

When I had got settled, I went out into the village street and wandered about. There was evidently something going on that evening, for small groups of peasant girls of all ages could be seen sitting or standing in front of some of the houses singing little catches of songs, the words of which I could not comprehend. Every now and then they were joined by a few more, and before long they became the nucleus of a small crowd. They were singing little ditties evidently well known to them; one of their number began the first words of each verse, and the rest followed in two distinct harmonies. I was surprised to find that these simple peasants should have developed, quite naturally and without training, the capacity for singing their native songs in harmony, and I doubt very much if in any southern English village a similar phenomenon could be observed. Indeed the harmony was remarkably good, although the voices often tended to be harsh. The tunes also were pleasing to the ear. Their little wandering *motifs* in the major key denoted peaceful and contented minds, and were the reflections of the life and existence of those who rendered them. This was the evening of one of the many religious holidays which abound throughout the Russian Empire. The adult peasants, typical representatives of a northern race, were celebrating the holiday by sitting on their doorsteps and eating nuts, while some of them were getting drunk. But the younger generation were doing what I had not seen before,

they were celebrating the occasion by little impromptu concerts and by vigorous recreation.

Large crowds of youths and girls now collected and walked about aimlessly. Then all at once they broke off into separate groups. The older youths began tracing out circles in the middle of the street, and started to play a game which very much resembled English rounders. As I stood watching I was asked by a peasant youth to come and join them. I did so, and created great merriment whenever I clumsily missed the ball with the wooden stick. Some of the girls also, fine and healthy creatures and almost as strong as some of the youths, joined in the games. Others walked round and round in circles singing in harmony little verses from folk-songs. Then one of the girls was put into the middle of the ring; they all closed upon her and a tussle ensued as she tried to escape from the ring as soon as possible. It was a rather rough game, as I found when I subsequently played it with them; and when I was put in the middle I certainly did not relish the position. If Siberian girls play the same sort of rough games that are played by Lancashire collier youths, one can imagine what sort of games the Siberian boys play.

Some of the girls now formed into two rows, hand in hand, facing each other, and each side sang a line from some well-known folk-song. One of these songs I managed to understand, and found it related a story (common to the people of all countries) about two lovers and an angry parent. When they came to some little dramatic incident in the narrative, one of their number would step forward and act the little scene, and when it was finished would retire

into the line amidst the cheers of the little village audience.

What struck me most in the social gathering that I have just described was the public spirit of the village community. It was a gathering not of different families but of a whole village, combined as one family, a gathering in which the individuality of each family was submerged. It was a distinctly different type of crowd to what one sees at a fair or flower-show in an English village. No family groups stood aloof, and no pairs of youths and girls went arm in arm apart. The whole village seemed to be living together a life of social intercourse, the like of which I had never quite seen before. It was a condition of society very favourable to the growth of a public opinion, as I show later in dealing with village institutions.

Not long after sundown the youths and girls had all returned to their houses, and quiet reigned in the village. I sat outside the house where I was staying and chatted to some friendly old peasants, who were most inquisitive to know all about me, while I in return tried to get all information I could from them about the country that lay beyond the frontier. "Ah!" they said, "it is a wild country. There is no bread there and only one place, at the house of a certain fur trader, where there is a chance of getting any vodka." "Why!" they added, "bread there costs 2 roubles 50 kopeks sometimes. But there is plenty of gold in the rivers, and some of our brothers have obtained rights to work on some of them, and we will sell you some of these rights." Thereupon a youth pulls out of his pocket a pebble, stained yellow with iron, and exhibits it, fully confident that it is worth 1000 roubles.

TYPICAL SIBERIAN PEASANT WOMEN

It is interesting to note what passes through the peasant's mind when he is asked to describe the wild country beyond his frontier. He always thinks of it in terms of bread and vodka. His estimation of the country is in inverse ratio to the prices of bread there, and in direct ratio to its facilities for obtaining vodka! The gold attraction plays a certain but, I think, a secondary part in his estimation. In fact, he is like a child who thinks of his immediate bodily comforts before all else. At the time I almost relished the idea of rough fare, without bread and vodka, but had I been six months older I should probably have thought more wisely, and my ardour for wandering in trackless forests on the off-chance of seeing primitive Finnish tribes would have been severely cooled.

I then asked the old men what they thought of the native Finns and Mongols across the frontier. "Oh! neechevo, all right, they can live on very little food, but they have good skins and wool to sell." "How do you get on with the Chinese over there?" "We don't see much of them, but we hear they will be coming there in large numbers before long to overrun our country and our land." And then I was asked again if I knew when there would be war between Russia and China. I replied that I thought their fears were quite unfounded, and that the quiet Chinaman was rather afraid of being disturbed by Muscovite bayonets than thinking of disturbing his neighbours. Then a middle-aged peasant told me that he had been out in the Russo-Japanese War in Manchuria, and had seen the yellow people. He was much afraid of them, he said, and hoped they would not attack Russia again. "We do not want

to hurt other people. We want to stay at home and live with our wives and cultivate our lands."

The distorted ideas about the yellow races in the minds of these peasants interested me not a little. It is clear that there would have been no Russo-Japanese War if the Siberians could have spoken in the matter, and indeed it was obvious that they had been kept in ignorance the whole time of what they were fighting about. Beneath all there was a vague feeling of fear of the yellow races, such as the Japanese and Chinese, which they never seem to bear towards the Finns and Tartars; but being true Russian peasants their first desire was for peace and good-will with their neighbours. I then questioned my companions as to what were their occupations during the year. They replied that for most of the year they were engaged in "growing bread for themselves and their families," which occupied them in the spring and autumn. In the winter they said they went into the forest to cut what timber they wanted, and remained there for a few weeks, returning to spend most of the winter at home in idleness. A few of them went off for expeditions each year into the forest, and remained away for months at a time. During the summer these more enterprising peasants spent their time in fishing on the rivers and lakes in the wild country along the frontier, salting their catch and bringing it home in the autumn. Some of them spent the summer seeking for gold, which they wash from the gravel in the upper reaches of these rivers, while others who are skilled in the chase go after the furs during the autumn, or find the encampments of the Finnish tribes, where they barter tea for fur and sable. Some of them, they

told me, actually make houses in these wild places and live there all the year round, coming back to see their friends and relations in the villages occasionally.

I then questioned them as to their past history and who their fathers were, but, as I expected to find, they had no ideas on this point. The village, they said, was eighty years old, and their fathers had come there from some of the neighbouring villages on the steppes. They had trekked toward the forests and made their colony on its edge. Their fathers and grandfathers had lived in those villages before them, and as far as they knew they were Siberians, who had always lived in Siberia. "Then you know nothing of European Russia?" I said. "Most of us have never even been to Krasnoyarsk or seen the Siberian railway," they replied. Here I was, then, among the true Siberians who knew nothing of old Russia, to whom "The Great White Tsar" is a mere name, and whose life is spent among the woodland glades and dark forests of the remoter parts of the Siberian provinces. We kept up our conversation till late in the evening, when I retired to the house of the peasant whose hospitality I was enjoying.

During my stay in this frontier village I made the acquaintance of many other village characters, for although the individual peculiarities of humanity are not perhaps so much developed in a Siberian as in an English village, they nevertheless do exist, as doubtless they do in every rural community throughout the world.

One evening I was sitting on a bench outside a peasant's house, talking with some of the peasants, when I discovered that one of their number, a youth

dressed a little better than they were, was none other than the village schoolmaster. Surprised to find that there was even a pretence of education in this remote place, and knowing, as I did, the indispensable services which a village schoolmaster renders in an English village, I straightway hastened to find out all I could from him concerning his functions and his view of life in general. I found that he had studied at a middle school or gymnasium, but not having had facilities for going to the only university in Siberia, that at Tomsk, he was compelled to seek a living by becoming a village schoolmaster in this remote corner of civilization. His only task consisted of teaching or trying to teach thirty children, in a village of over 1000 inhabitants, how to read and write the elements of their mother tongue. He admitted that the task was not difficult in itself, but it was one for which he had never had a training, nor had he even learned himself the rudiments of the art of teaching. He gave me the number of the peasants in that village who to his knowledge were able to read and write, and they proved to be but two per cent. of the total population. Complete apathy towards education, he said, existed among these peasants, and when they know their children can write the alphabet and read a few sentences they take them away from school, in order that they may help them in their daily work upon the land. "No education is compulsory," he said, "and there is, after all, no real reason why the children should learn even what they do, because they forget it all, nor do they ever use it again in later life." And then an old peasant sitting next to me said, "Why should we trouble about our children's education? They

will not go to the towns, and if they do they will become bad. We want them to remain here and help us with our work upon the land." Just so might a small English farmer have spoken about modern "schooling." It seems that education in its early stages must always be hindered by the apathy of all those who estimate the value of human life by mere animal strength, and regard it as a machine to be worked for material ends only. But there was something very natural about these peasants who could not see the use of education. Why should they? Their visions are limited by the life of isolation that they lead, and it was to me a cause for wonder that they had even heard of the word "education," or knew its meaning. The schoolmaster went on to say that there was a question of making education compulsory throughout the Russian Empire. "But," he added, "how is it ever possible to set up a compulsory system of education throughout a vast country like Siberia? It is difficult enough for the Government to administer the country as it is, to collect the taxes and perform the most general functions of government, but it will be a great work to introduce a system of compulsory education like that of Western Europe, and it cannot come for many years."

Later on the schoolmaster took me to see the little school. It was a low log-hut, with rude wooden forms. It had been built, he said, by the commune, the latter providing the books, and the only contribution from the State was a small salary to himself of 100 roubles, or £10 a year, which just enabled him to live in the village on the same level as the peasants themselves. Everything was of the roughest and

most rudimentary kind. It was almost pathetic to see the crude efforts at rudimentary education made by these peasants in order to enlighten a few of their children.

One evening I found myself in conversation with another village character. He was the priest's assistant and choir trainer. At his request we took a little walk together to the outskirts of the village, and for some minutes as we walked along he remained silent as if pondering over something in his mind. Suddenly he turned to me and proceeded to ply me with one question after another about the country from which I came. "What political parties are there in England?" he asked. "Is there a Revolutionary party?" To this I replied by asking what he meant by a Revolutionary party, and I was informed that it meant an organization for the destruction of ministers and governments. I tried to explain that such a policy had not yet appeared in England, and proceeded to ask what good he thought such an organization would do. A blank stare came in his face; an expression which asked, "How could anyone with any education or culture doubt that an organization for destroying governments was necessary for the welfare of the State." What he proposed to put in its place appeared in his mind to be quite a secondary matter, which he refused even to discuss when I broached the matter to him. "An organization," he added, "is necessary to make the ministers of the Tsar go——!" and then with a gesture he imitated the explosion of a bomb. I realised then that I was in the presence of a member of the Socialist Revolution Society, and possibly of a former active member of that body for whom the authorities had

prescribed a little pure country air in a remote frontier village of Siberia, as being more beneficial to mental health than an explosive factory in a back street in Warsaw. So here he was now, in this remote district, assisting the village priest in chanting and incense-burning on Sundays, and ruminating over projected assassination of ministers on weekdays. After studying the phenomenon of this mental disease, and deciding that it was a deformity which I could not comprehend, I took leave of this gentleman, and decided that it would probably not be wise to be seen in his company more than was necessary. The day after this incident happened to be Sunday, and early in the morning groups of peasant youths in bright red and blue tunics sauntered casually down the main streets of the village, while one of their number played Russian peasant airs upon the accordion. I somehow felt much safer in company with these innocent peasant youths, who, although strong, hardy and independent, would not hurt anyone unnecessarily, than I did in company with an assistant acolyte who was an exiled member of a socialist revolutionary society.

On that Sunday morning the bells of the little wooden church began tinkling and booming as they always do in Russia, and a crowd of peasants thereupon collected for the morning service. Eager to catch a glimpse of the religious life of this little community, I joined in the crowd and pushed my way to the little church. One or two of the peasants whom I knew recognized me and gave me a friendly wink, but otherwise I passed unheeded as one of them. The church was like any other of the Pravo-Slavonic faith, with a raised altar studded with brass

icons and a simple nave without seats where the congregation stood. A middle-aged priest, with long flowing hair, large eyes and the restless absent look of the dreamy mystic, sang in clear tenor voice the Pravo-Slavonic chants. All the while he waved incense jars, and opened and closed the doors behind the altar, giving fitful glimpses of the little chapel beyond. From a group of boys standing by the side of the altar came the responses to the chanting of the priest in rustic harmony, and at each response the standing congregation devoutly crossed themselves. Although there was no particular position assigned to the members of the congregation, it was noticeable that the youths, girls, and older members with children, stood in three groups apart. This I believe is generally the case in other parts of the Russian Empire, especially among the Armenians. The grouping of the congregation according to age and sex appears to be independent of family ties. In fact, in public worship, as in Siberian social life in general, the idea of the community prevails over that of the family. As usual the women were far more strongly represented among the congregation than the men; the latter prefer to rest in their houses after their work in the forests and the fields. To the women, however, a church service comes as a break in the monotony of their lives, when they can see brilliant icons and hear the chanting of the priest and choir.

After service I met the priest, and he showed me with great pride his icons and so-called sacred relics, which looked as if they had been recently ordered from Moscow. He then took me to his house, which was certainly the finest in the whole village. He had

SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN THE VILLAGE OF KUSHABAR. ON THE RIGHT IS THE HOUSE WHERE THE AUTHOR RESIDED FOR THREE WEEKS

THE VILLAGE STREET OF KUSHABAR, THE LAST RUSSIAN PEASANT OUTPOST, ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE MONGOLIAN FRONTIER IN THE UPPER YENISEI

three splendid rooms, with much the same sort of comforts as I had seen last in the Siberian towns along the railway. There was even a gramophone! A gramophone at the last Siberian outpost village on the Mongolian frontier was certainly a surprise to me, and while we drank tea and ate bread the instrument performed. My host, the priest, was far more interested in his gramophone than he seemed to be in his spiritual flock, and when I referred to them a blank look came over his face. It was as if he wished to say, "I have performed my duty in the church this morning by saying prayers and burning incense; what further interests are the peasants to me, when I have a samovar of tea and a gramophone?" I wanted to find out how much interest he took in the people's education, but I found that he was quite indifferent, nor did he take any part in the elementary teaching that existed in the village. I managed, however, to extract from him the confession that education was perhaps not a bad thing, only it was not his sphere, and consequently he did not bother about it. As a matter of fact, in many places in Siberia the Church has played no inconsiderable part in elementary education, although now its activities are being generally surpassed by those of the State. In this village the school belonged partly to the commune and partly to the State, and so the priest had nothing to do with the teaching, and was apparently only too glad to be rid of the trouble of it. The village priest as I saw him in Siberia, and again later in other parts of the empire, is always the jovial monk, contented with his lot. And he may well be, for he lives in a house built for him by the peasants; he receives, even in the

smaller villages, a salary equivalent to about forty pounds a year from the diocesan funds, which are under the administration of the Holy Synod; and besides this, he is continually receiving marriage, birth and funeral fees, and on every religious holiday contributions of food and money from the peasants. The village priest does next to nothing, and is perhaps the best paid man in the whole village. Nor does he seem to enter much into the lives of the peasants or help them in illness or distress. At the same time, men like these independent peasants in a communal state do not seem to stand in much need of priestly parental care on the social side. The commercial element is strong in the religion of a Siberian village. So long as the priest discharges his priestly functions the people are satisfied, while the priest is not disposed to do more than the work for which he is paid. The essentially material way in which they look upon each other's functions is rather characteristic of Russian society, and also, I think, of other Eastern countries.

I remember one evening sitting with some peasants outside their house, in company also with our Caucasian servant. The latter was in a facetious mood, and as the conversation turned on the subject of priests he said, "What do they care about you peasants, and your wants? All they care about is singing prayers which neither you nor they understand. The chief chant they sing is: 'Give us more money.'" There was a general titter all round among the Siberians at the southerner's caustic joke, and it was very evident that they all agreed more or less with his remarks.

Even as far away, therefore, as in the remote

corners of Siberia the seeds of the emancipation of the peasantry from the priests have been sown. The peasants are beginning to ask themselves why large sums should be given to village priests. But, in spite of its faults, this much one must say for the Greek Church in Russia. Unlike the Roman Church, it is not the determined foe of "Modernism," nor does it enforce the maxim that "ignorance is the mother of devotion." It is true that it does little to help education, except in the most elementary way; but generally speaking it is indifferent, not hostile, to educational progress. It clings pertinaciously to the past, and keeps a firm grip on its revenues. An instance came to my notice in Siberia of a woman who changed over to the Roman Church on marriage, and had to pay to her former village priest the capitalized sum of her annual value to him! Russia in the future will probably see emancipation from the economic rather than from the spiritual thraldom of the Greek Church.

While I remained here I tried to discover all that I could about the social systems under which these peasants lived, and about their habits and customs. I went with them in the forests, I talked to them at the plough, and joined the children at their games in the little village street. More than once I went on little shooting trips for the day with Siberian youths who knew the woodlands, or roamed on foot over the grassy meadows, dotted with little groves of birch, along the edge of the great pine forest. We roamed among majestic giants of Scotch pine, through which one could walk for a whole day and imagine oneself in some great hall supported by noble pillars. There was a vast expanse of this beautiful forest

lying between the agricultural zone of the steppes and the dense conifer jungle which lay along the Mongolian frontier. This zone of pine forest stretched in endless undulations of forested hill and vale for hundreds of miles, from the Altai Mountains to Lake Baikal. Here and there we came across open glades where the forest had been cleared by man or by a natural fire, while in the valley bottoms torrential streams bounded away to the great rivers which swept in a mighty flood from the frontier mountains north-westward to join the Yenisei. By the sides of these streams were little marshes studded with alder and willow copse, just as in rural England, but here it was all wild, without a sign of any human being except an occasional fur hunter's winter trail. Large flocks of duck and teal rise as one approaches the marshes, and in half-an-hour one can shoot enough to satisfy the demands of the larder and even one's love of sport, for the latter becomes quickly satisfied when there is superfluity of game. The peasants who came with me were true children of the forests. They knew the woodland tracks, the fords across the streams, the feeding places of the duck; they could recognise the call of the great black woodpecker, they knew the habits of the wood-mice, the haunts of the bear, the shoals where the fish abounded, and they could fell the largest pine or carve a dug-out boat from a poplar log.

It is worth some little digression to describe the Siberian spring, as indeed it is worth a journey of many thousands of miles to experience it, for there is no period of the year at which Southern Siberia is more beautiful. The snow was just melting when

I made my first acquaintance with the pine forests. After it had gone I roamed one morning into the forest with a Siberian peasant as a companion. The rivers, filled with snow-water, had risen to the height of spring flood, covering the low marshes and swamping the grassy meadows. After a little while we came across an open grassy glade, where we found a little hut. Here an old Siberian peasant kept his bees, coming occasionally to visit his hives, which were cut out of hollow pine logs and picturesquely thatched with dry grass. What a romantic spot! In the pine forest, where the snow had just melted, the grass was beginning to shoot up, growing with those spear-like apexes which betoken rapid growth; and the music of many wings indicated the activity of the bees, collecting honey from the thousands of spring flowers that were bursting forth. The growth of the vegetation is indescribable. No sooner had the snow gone than millions of grasses, forget-me-nots, orange trollius, anemones, peonies and wild onions had shot up, and were forming an emerald carpet inwrought with the choicest colours of the forest. I had visited this glade in the pine forest a week before, when the snow was lying, and now I found myself wading two feet deep in herbage such as I have just described. All round me I heard the echoes of spring. I heard the call of the cuckoo ringing in the forest, the cry of the great black woodpecker, the chatter of the finches and the crossbills in the pine-trees overhead. A brilliant sun, a gentle breeze, and the fragrance of growing grass combined to perfect the picture. Beyond the pine forest there was a zone of aspen poplar, in the cool shade of which I often wandered. Nature here was not bursting

with life, but its beauty of another kind was indescribable. For hours one could pass by the stems of the aspen poplar, like silvery pillars supporting overhead an emerald canopy of foliage, which rustled and quivered in the wind. Beneath my feet lay an endless carpet of anenome and peony, and as evening came on the slanting rays of the sun pierced sideways through the forest, and as they fell they lit up the silvery trunks with a splendour that was almost dazzling. Here and there in the poplar forest I came across open patches where the wild bird-cherry and spirea bushes were blossoming in profusion, making a natural shrubbery such as might surround a country mansion in England. Yet everything was wild; no sign of a human being all day long, and only the blackbird warbled in the cherry-trees and the great black woodpecker chattered from a dead poplar stump. Never before have I seen anything like the beauties of a Siberian spring. The sight of forested hill and vale stretching as far as the eye could see, throbbing with plant and animal life, in an atmosphere as clear as crystal, filled me with a new sensation and made here existence a deep and subtle joy. I felt that if the ideal in the next world is that of a boundless field of joyous, throbbing life, then the Siberian forest in spring more nearly approaches it than anything I have ever yet seen upon this earth.

One afternoon I wandered out from the village in another direction. I set my face away from the forest, directing my steps aimlessly towards the north, where I knew the peasants had their cultivated lands. As the villages in those districts were situated at the edge of the great forest, the cultivated lands all lay in a long belt, fringing the forest. Here the

FORESTED HILL AND VALE

ZONE OF ASPEN POPLAR ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE SAJANSK MOUNTAINS IN THE UPPER YENISEI PLATEAU

land undulates in graceful sweeps as on the steppes, but is covered with fine black mould of unsurpassed richness. Patches of half-dry swamps with tufts of marshy grass lie in the hollows; groves of graceful Siberian birch, interspersed with an occasional pine, are scattered in profusion over the natural meadows. It looked as if the pine forest had once held undisputed sway here, but that the hand of man, and possibly the increasing dryness of the climate or other agents of nature, had caused the timber army to retreat. But even now, where cultivation was neglected, little birch and pine trees appeared again, fighting as it were to reclaim the ground that they had lost.

Here, again, the natural meadows were all bursting with spring, the emerald-green of the vegetation surpassing even the verdure of Ireland. Birch-trees which a few days ago, like cold and melancholy ghosts, stood waving and sighing at the last touch of winter, had in a single night become covered with brilliant foliage, and now, like forest fairies, were waving and dancing at the approach of their spring lover.

Turning my steps toward the cultivated lands, I found here and there upon the natural meadows strips of rough plough, where the peasants had been scratching the surface for their spring corn. I now came across one or two log-huts where the peasants were storing their implements, and where they sometimes sheltered for the night instead of going home. A man's plot of land is often three or four miles from the village, and so it becomes quite an expedition when he goes forth for the day to attend to its cultivation. But the Siberian peasant is too well off to take life other than leisurely. He starts for his

field in the early morning, driving his cart with two or three horses. He scratches his ground lazily all day, and if the weather is fine during spring sowing and autumn reaping he rests for the night in his little hut. But at other times of the year he leaves his land severely alone. No hoeing or weeding is done, and during the summer no one looks at or tends his patches of wheat or rye, for often he goes fishing or seeking for gold in the wild country along the frontier.

Now I came to an open forest glade surrounded by graceful birch and a few sombre pines. Everything here was wild and primitive, and nature was bursting through from underneath the superficial work of man. Down the glade might be seen little copses of willow and wild cherry, while in a marsh beyond stood a heron, statue-like, watching the fish in the stagnant pools. Nature was undergoing her first discipline. An old Siberian peasant was leisurely ploughing the rich black soil with the aid of a horse and an old-fashioned wooden plough. The worker did not seem surprised when I appeared from out of the forest glade and approached him. One would have thought that the apparition of a stranger clothed in a rough gaberdine, with a grisly beard on his chin and a knowledge of a Russian language which obviously betokened another nationality, would have disturbed his labours in this secluded forest glade. Perhaps he thought I was a Tartar or one of the nomad Finnish tribes which roamed the forest. "Your land is rich and gives much bread?" I asked. "Neechevo," was the reply, which is the usual blank expression signifying neither approval or disapproval. "Is this your land?"

READY FOR THE PLOUGH

FERTILE BLACK-EARTH AT THE EDGE OF THE GREAT FOREST BELT IN THE UPPER YENISEI

THE GROWTH OF ONE WEEK

A GLADE IN THE SIBERIAN FORESTS COVERED IN SPRING WITH FORGET-ME-NOT, PEONY, TROLLIUS, AND WILD ONION

"I and my brothers have it together," he answered. "And how many pounds of corn can you grow here?" He stopped and lit his pipe. "This land is new," he said, "and sometimes gives 200 pounds on the desyatin, but we have some old land over there and that only gives 100 pounds; if the frost comes in the autumn it gives less. That old land has given us our bread for many summers past. It must have rest now. So I work on this land, which has not been touched before and is still young." "Do you ever use the manure of your horses or cattle?" I asked. "Not needed," he said. "We throw that outside the village, and the snow-water in spring carries it away. We have no trouble except the autumn frost, which often kills our wheat and makes our rye give less, and how can manure help us?"

This was a homely lesson in agriculture, which I had not thought of in quite the same light before. After all, there was sense in what the old man said. The boundless extent of virgin soil on the edge of this forest zone is such that he need not worry about those rules of husbandry which we consider indispensable in Western Europe. These peasants, therefore, treat their land superficially, and when one plot is exhausted move to another.

I could not help thinking how much better off these peasants were than their kinsmen in European Russia. There the land is limited and the population large, but here a little colony of Siberian peasants have a tract of land nearly as big as an English county, most of which could be roughly cultivated if the forest and scrub were cleared.

The old man now stopped his horse, and we sat down to smoke our pipes on the edge of a little

willow copse. "And you," he said, "from whence are you?" "I come from Europe and am going to Mongolia," I replied. And then came a remarkable question. "Where is Europe?" I then discovered that his knowledge of geography did not extend beyond the southern parts of the Yenisei Government of Siberia. It sounds almost incredible, but is nevertheless true, that I, a foreigner, sat for some minutes with this old Siberian peasant, explaining to him that there was such a place as old Russia which along with other countries was called Europe. I found that he had vaguely heard of England, Germany and France, but they meant nothing to him. He had heard of the growing power of Japan, and was obsessed by a vague fear of the Chinese peril. This was the boundary of his political horizon, but how could it be otherwise in this vast country, in a corner of which he had lived for all his life. Then he plied me with many questions about Europe. "What sort of land is it there, and how much bread does it grow?" In reply to these puzzling questions I made a few hopeless attempts to enlighten him, and then proceeded to try and find out more about him and the system under which he lived. "Yes," he said, "I and my brothers work this land together, and divide the bread amongst ourselves." "But do you all do like that?" I asked. "Many of our comrades have their own plots for themselves, but my brothers and I keep this land together as we did when we were children. And we have not changed since then." "And what do your sons do?" I asked. "They have gone away. One is serving as a soldier and the other has got his portion of fifteen desyatines, which he claimed from the com-

mune five years ago, and has now built his own house."

The evening was now coming on, and the old man and I began to think of making for home. The plough was thereupon left, and the horse was tied to the rough cart. "Ride home with me," he said, "for the way is long and darkness is coming." Soon another party of peasants who had been ploughing some land beyond joined in. And so a party of five peasants and myself squatted on a rough open cart and jogged steadily in the darkness back to the little village. As we went I asked them more about the system under which they held their land. "The land," they said, "is common [obshchee]; we all have a right to our part of it." "To whom do you pay your taxes?" I asked. "To the 'Obshchestvo,'" they replied, and by this I knew they meant the village commune. "We are the commune," they continued, "and we can divide up the land as we wish when we have paid our taxes to the 'Nachalnick.' In some districts they distribute the land so that each man gets a fresh piece every few years." "Have you had your portion of land for long?" I asked. "Fifteen years ago we divided the land, and I and my brothers have kept our land since then." "Will the land be redistributed again throughout the village?" "How am I to tell you?" he said; "we have much land and many of our brothers wish to keep it for themselves, for they have worked on it for many years. But for me, 'Vsyo ravno' [it is all the same]; I do not mind." This puzzled me not a little, but I learned more the next day, when I had the good fortune to converse with some other members of the commune.

Next day I happened to stroll past a little wooden house in the middle of the street, over the door of which was written the words "Selsky Upravlenye." As I happened to know one of the peasants who was sitting on the doorstep outside, I stopped and began to chat with him. I soon discovered that this little house was the meeting-place of the "Mir," or commune. When I heard that there was at that moment a meeting of the commune, I readily accepted an invitation to go inside and hear what was going on. On a row of wooden benches round the three sides of the room sat some two dozen hairy and venerable peasants. At a writing-desk in the middle of the room sat a youth, to whom I was introduced as the "pizar," or secretary. He was an academic person, with considerable ideas of his self-importance, and at his side sat a member with the weight of some threescore years upon his head. He was the "staresta," or chief elder of the village. A sort of select committee of the commune was sitting to consider the question of some taxes which had been claimed by the Krestyansky Nachalnick, or official in charge of peasant affairs, for certain lands recently reclaimed from the forest. I suggested to the staresta that I might be intruding on their private business, but was reassured and offered a seat behind him, where, like a foreign representative in the strangers' gallery, I listened to this little village parliament.

The conduct of the business seemed rather informal, and more like a friendly chat on a topic of common interest. But sometimes a speaker poured forth his views at length with gesture and no small volubility, reached his rhetorical climax, and

ended with a little peroration. They were true Slavs, and even the severity of the Siberian climate did not freeze the stream of eloquence or chill the power of rhetoric which always seems to characterize the Russians.

Here then were the Hampdens of this remote Siberian village, sitting in conclave to withstand the little tyrants of their fields. And as I listened I wondered whether here in this village parliament there might not be some mute inglorious Milton, or a Cromwell eager to sweep away abuses. But for the fact that they were buried in the recesses of this remote spot, why should not some of them rise to fame and have a share of the pomp and glory of the world ?

> "Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
> Their homely joys and destinies obscure,
> Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
> The short and simple annals of the poor."

After talking for some ten minutes they agreed that one of their number should meet the peasant official to settle the claims of taxation, but I noticed that no vote was taken, and the opinion of the meeting was arrived at by mutual agreement. I then discovered that the next subject on the agenda appeared to be myself, and I was forthwith plied by the assembled company with all sorts of questions about myself and the land from whence I came, questions similar to those which the old ploughman had asked me the day before. These I answered to the best of my humble ability, but everywhere it was clear that the outlook of these peasants could not extend beyond this corner of the great Slavonic Empire in Northern

Asia. I then tried to find out something from them about their village gatherings and the nature of their commune. "We elect our staresta every three years," said the pizar. "Every man in the village who has a house and who pays taxes for his land can choose him." "How do you elect him?" I asked. "We all assemble and we talk about it till we decide who is to be elected," was the reply. "But don't you have many candidates?" I said. Here the staresta interposed with a statement to the effect that no one of the peasants was anxious to hold his office. It was clear, then, that there was no hotly contested election with opposing candidates, no rival policies, and no vigorous campaigns in Siberian village politics. In fact the office of staresta seemed not unlike that of a president of a large and unwieldy committee, bringing with it a maximum of responsibility and a minimum of honour, and the procedure of electing this president evidently consists of inducing an unwilling peasant to accept the mantle of his predecessor. "What does the staresta do?" I asked. "He has to speak for us with the Krestyansky Nachalnick, and if necessary to interview the Uyesdy Nachalnick at Minusinsk, who is over all. And then he meets the starestas of every commune in this volost, and with them he discusses matters of common interest." "What is a volost?" I asked. "The volost is a collection of communes in a certain district, and a collection of volosts in their turn compose what is called an Uchastok, or administrative division." And then they showed me a published list, issued by the Government, of all the divisions, volosts and communes, with full details of their population and geographical position, throughout

the length and breadth of the Yenisei Government. This marvellous publication I subsequently obtained, and found of much interest as demonstrating the extraordinary administrative system of the Russian Government, which succeeds in penetrating even to the wildest spots of Siberia. The villages are thus kept together in small geographical divisions, which are utilized by the Government for administrative purposes. Over each Uchastok, the Uyesdy Nachalnick appoints a Stanovy Preestof, who is a police official in charge of civil law and order; a Krestyansky Nachalnick, who collects the taxes; and a Mirobny Sud, or justice of the peace, whose duty it is to hear all judicial cases which the peasants cannot settle among themselves. This, briefly, is the administrative machinery which seemed to be at work in this part of Siberia.

From the above conversation I gained the knowledge that the staresta is the delegate of the commune to represent them before these officials. Moreover he pays the communal taxes for the peasants in their names, and generally presides over the meetings of the commune. Thus the commune or the majority of the male peasants in the village have a very democratic power, based on household suffrage, and the staresta is really more of a delegate than a representative.

I was anxious to find out from them how the administrative machinery was applied to the native Finnish and Tartar tribes, and I asked them whether the Abakansk Tartars, whom I knew to be not distant neighbours of theirs, were divided into communes, volosts and Uchastoks. They told me that the Abakansk Tartars also elected a staresta, or elder, and divided themselves into large communes

which were separated out over the steppe, each commune, however, being brought in along with other Russian communes under the volost, and these in turn under the Uchastok. Furthermore, the Tartar starestas meet the Russian starestas on the Volost Council on a footing of perfect equality and discuss matters of common interest, and probably help each other against the officials over them. In fact, as I heard, and as subsequent investigations proved, the native Tartar and Finnish tribes are regarded by the Russian administration as native communes ranking alongside those of the Russian peasants.

The powers of the commune seemed to be very extensive. The heads of each family in the village are collected in the commune with full power to deal with all purely communal affairs, both judicial and economic. "If a man does something wrong," I asked, "can the commune give punishment?" "For serious criminal cases, such as murder," they said, "we must refer to the Mironby Sud, which exists in each volost; but we have very few such cases, for our brothers are peaceable [smierny]." For small disputes the commune meets, discusses the offence and can give punishment. Thus if a man has a dispute with a neighbour over a boundary, if he is drunk in church, quarrels or fights, the commune can give justice. "How much can they punish a man?" "That is not certain, for we sometimes make offenders pay in money and sometimes in vodka. Then the offender must give the oldest members of the commune each a bottle of vodka at his expense." This struck me as a practical if somewhat crude way of dispensing justice.

"How do you give out the land to your brothers," I asked? "Each man," said the pizar, "is entitled to have fifteen desyatines [40 acres], and another eight desyatines for each adult son living at home with him. He can take more if he wishes, but for this he pays at a higher rate." For his fifteen desyatines he pays a rent to the commune and the commune pays the Krestyansky Nachalnick. Besides this, the peasant pays a small house tax, a barn tax and a tax on the head of his live stock. Thus the economic functions of the Mir, besides the collection of taxes assessed by the Government officials, lie in the allocation and control of the agricultural land.

"I have heard," I said, "that you sometimes redistribute your land, dividing it up so that each peasant changes his plot. Is this so?" "Some years ago," the staresta answered, "we divided the land again, because some new peasants immigrated here and we decided that they must not have all new land, which was too good for them as new-comers. So we divided up the land again between the new-comers and the old inhabitants, so that each should have equal shares of new and old land."

"If a man works on his land and improves it, can he not keep it for himself and his sons?" I asked. "If the commune thinks that he must let some of his brothers have it, the commune has the right." "But does the commune do this often?" I asked. "Not for some years has it done so," was the reply. "Some of our brothers have kept their land for many years, and their sons hold it now and they do not wish to change. They can speak and have a voice in the commune, so perhaps it will not change. If they always live on their land the commune will

leave them alone. But some of our brothers go away for a long time to hunt sable in the forests or trade in Mongolia. Then the commune has the right to say who shall have the land, whether they must still pay for it or whether others shall have it."

From this conversation it appeared that in this village a feeling had arisen against the redistribution of the land except under some special circumstances, such as immigration of new colonists or temporary emigration of fur hunters to Mongolia. Thus the land of peasant families, who lived in the village all the year and worked on their holdings, had not been disturbed for some time. The commune, however, as the peasants said, retained the right to control the distribution of all fresh land brought into the commune, so that no man should have more than his share. The system is therefore communal in its essence and tends towards the levelling down of individual enterprise, but signs were not wanting of a movement to secure a sort of vague security of tenure for those peasants who settle and confine themselves entirely to cultivation. On the other hand, I heard of other villages in this part of Southern Siberia where periodical redistributions had taken place during the previous five years. A majority of the commune could carry this out, thereby confiscating all improvements that had been made by the peasants on their holdings. This is the system of land tenure which used to be in vogue throughout European Russia and which is now fast disappearing. In Siberia it still has more force, for where the population is sparse, the land plentiful, and the system of agriculture primitive, this communal land tenure can be better tolerated. In fact, under such

circumstances the commune often has a progressive force. For, as the peasants told me, it safeguards them against the encroachments of squatters and wandering immigrants, and it co-ordinates and regulates the arable holdings, causing each peasant to make common cause in taming nature just where such collective action is most required.

Here, then, was a "socialistic" system—a system in which the little State owned the means of production—in process of change before the forces of "Individualism" and the rights of private property. A movement the very antithesis of that towards which the proletariat of Western Europe are said to be trending. Which of these two movements is "progress" and which is "reaction"?

Such a village as I have been describing is typical of the little communal colonies which lie scattered in all spots where cultivation is possible on the edge of the great forest zone which surrounds the Siberian-Mongolian frontier. In their general type they are very similar to those of European Russia, except that there is an atmosphere of prosperity which is not always the case in the old country. If a traveller tries to observe human nature in a Siberian village, he may at first fail to sympathize with the people or see any common bond between himself and them. He will be struck with their rather indolent and shiftless character, which is the common trait of all Russian peasants, the somewhat austere severity their life, and the absence of all pretensions to art. But even if he may see defects in the Slavonic nature, still if he observes intelligently he will soon be struck with the lovable, childlike character of the

Siberian peasant. He will gradually come to see how the communal social state in which these peasants live, although it has some disadvantages, suits the Slavonic nature and has enabled it in Siberia to carry Slavonic civilization to the remoter corners of the empire where the individual Russian colonists would probably have failed. One sees evidences of this tendency to collective action in the power of the commune over the peasant holdings, the right of land distribution which exists, the communal grazing of live stock, the common barn for provision against bad harvests, the village games and the social life of the village in general. Among these peasants the business of one man is the business of everybody. The whole village is interested in what the outsider would regard as the private affairs of one of their number. For instance, we found that no peasant would sell to us a horse or anything that we wanted without first consulting with the whole village about the price, and it was always a very great difficulty to introduce the element of competition. Even in their own domestic arrangements one sees evidences of the free and easy relationship existing between the members of the community. The cattle and pigs belonging to different peasants wander together about the village, stray into the yards of those who are not their owners, and pick at the hay. No great trouble seems to ensue, and I often used to compare such episodes as this with what would probably happen if in an English village one man's pig broke into another man's allotment and ate his turnips. In Siberia the blessed word *neechevo* (nothing—never mind) seems to be an antidote even for circumstances such as these. On the other hand,

THE COMMON GRAZIER OF THE VILLAGE FLOCKS

THE HOUSE OF A SIBERIAN VILLAGE PRIEST

I observed that although the family is to a great extent merged in the community, the functions and duties of the sexes seemed to be kept very strictly apart. To the man falls all the outdoor work—the management of the land, expeditions to the forest and general bread-winning. The women, on the other hand, although quite prepared to turn their hands to hard work such as haymaking and harvesting whenever special help is required, have their sphere in the house. Here they rule with a rod of iron. It is always pleasant to see an old Moujik returning from his day's work, seat himself down in his house and give himself over entirely to the cares of his wife. The Siberian peasant woman is a true matron of the finest type. I sometimes found two or three generations in one household, yet, as far as I could gather, no serious domestic quarrel seemed to arise. The fact that they were living there all together was an indication to me of the contented communistic character of the Siberian peasant. I cannot imagine such conditions existing in an English village.

At the same time no one can deny the fact that the life of the Russian and Siberian peasants tends to create a dead level of society, and a mental apathy and lack of enterprise among the individuals which compose the society. Whether the communal system creates these social and mental conditions, or whether these conditions create the communal system, is a subject that I will not enter into here. It is sufficient to note that, for those who remain in these villages, there is but little incentive to wholesome progress. Desire for change and material advancement does not seem to appeal to the majority of these peasants. So rich are the resources of the

country that they can with little labour satisfy all their material wants. Any further enterprise they may show is not likely to yield them greater fruit, because the heavy hand of the commune is liable to descend, imposing restrictions upon them and limiting their holdings. On the other hand, without this communal life and the social co-operation which it involves, it is difficult to see how the Slavs could have succeeded in colonizing the vast territories that they possess. Self-reliant as the Siberians are compared with the European Russians, there are, nevertheless, not many of them so independent of mutual support as to be able to exist in wild remote spots without their village communes. A few of the more adventurous peasants in the remoter districts break away from the commune and go off on their own, fur hunting or trading with the native Finns. These hardy Siberians often make their permanent abodes in the heart of the dense forest on the frontier country which divides Siberia from Mongolia. Here they build their solitary huts and live in the depths of primeval nature. Magnificent specimens of humanity, they more closely resemble the Canadian backwoodsmen than any men I have ever seen. I shall take the opportunity of describing them in the next chapter. To the majority of Siberians, however, the village commune seems to be an indispensable part of their lives. They may go off for a time on their own into the forest, but the majority prefer the social life which enables them to pass the long dark winter nights in dancing and singing in their log-houses, or drinking in each other's company. Furthermore, they find that when practical and material difficulties confront them, such as bad harvests or peculant

officials, they can deal with them much better as a commune than as individuals. Historically the commune is an institution of social defence, formed by a people not very independent in character, for the purpose of overcoming the difficulties of nature, and of defending themselves against the tyranny of local Government officials. In the early days, when the power of the central administration over minor officials was less than it is to-day, the oppression of the communes by unjust taxation and other acts of petty tyranny was much greater. The system, therefore, has grown with the people. It is almost uniformly a feature of primitive society. But as conditions change, so this social system will also change. Stricter discipline over petty officials will in time diminish corruption, while the increase of population and the decrease of available land will in time bring into existence more intensive systems of agriculture, under which the individual will become more and more desirous of keeping the fruits of his labour for himself. All these forces will tend to break down the restrictions which the commune imposes upon the individual, although the Siberian peasants will probably always hang together in colonies for the sake of each other's society. But the conversations which I had with the peasants themselves and with some of the elders of the commune undoubtedly suggested that even in these parts of Siberia a movement was on foot for the greater recognition of individual rights by the commune itself.

Generally speaking, I was most favourably struck with the economic condition of the Siberian peasant and with the apparent prosperity which seemed to

exist, especially in the remoter villages such as I am describing. I found that each male head of a family is entitled to a share of the communal land which he cultivates himself, and the produce of which he is entitled to retain. He is, moreover, practically self-supporting, and his chief articles of food—bread, meat and cabbage—cost him nothing except his labour, for he produces them all himself. Winter is, of course, the hardest time for him, but he provides for this by keeping certain supplies of meat underground in ice, and by salting part of his cabbage produce, which he uses to make cabbage soup, an important article of diet among these people. Much of his clothing also costs him nothing. The sheepskin coat, felt boots, and rough flax clothes are made locally by the peasants themselves. Almost the only expenditure of the year, except that for tea, tobacco and sugar, is for Moscow cotton prints out of which the women's clothes are largely made. Direct taxation, of which I give figures elsewhere, is extremely low, except on tea, sugar and tobacco; and there is generally an ample margin with which the peasant can buy those few extra necessaries and even a few luxuries to brighten his home.

The economic condition of the Siberian peasant shows, in fact, in a striking way how comparatively prosperous peasant communities may become when they are surrounded by fertile land and are content to live simple lives.[1]

I had many surprises while I was in Siberia. Instead of convict prisons I had seen modern urban centres springing up amidst every sign of the growing spirit of Western commercialism. Instead of un-

[1] See also Chap. IX., p. 231.

inhabited wastes, I now saw wide tracks of the black earth zone dotted over with peasant communities, quietly pursuing their agricultural occupations. The agriculture was indeed rude and primitive, but the peasant farmers were living their simple lives with few wants and apparently few cares.

I have in this chapter attempted to give a description, admittedly imperfect, of the social and economic conditions of the Siberian peasants, from information which I gathered during the time that I lived in their midst. To one who wishes to see something of the real life of the Siberian peasant, and glean some small idea of the conditions of his existence, the isolated village communities at the head of the main valleys and tributaries of the Yenisei in Central Siberia are the most likely to present the truest pictures. It is these peasants, along with the fur traders and frontiersmen, who are the pioneers of Russia's Eastern Empire in Asia. For centuries past, by dint of their rapid increase, their hardy nature and their social organization, they have overcome the natural and physical difficulties which beset them. The Canadian settler is willing to go off on his own, build his log-hut in the backwoods and live a life of terrible isolation for months, perhaps years, for the sake of the material gains that he sets his heart upon. A few Siberian hunters and traders do this now for the sake of greater gains, but, speaking generally, the Siberians overcome the natural obstacles around them by attacking them in unison. As, however, communications improve and urban centres begin to spring up where villages were before, these pioneers move on as an advanced guard, avoid-

ing the semi-civilization of the growing commercial town. And so they trek northward to the toundras, eastward to the Pacific, southward to the mountains of Mongolia, till they are stopped by some natural barrier or by some political boundary, and here you still can find these primitive village communities, these advanced waves of the Slavonic ocean.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE SIBERIAN BACKWOODSMAN AND FRONTIER TRADER

IN relating my experiences in a peasant village I have, in the last chapter, had occasion to refer to that class of Siberian who, on account of his greater independence and enterprise, has penetrated single-handed to the remote corners of Siberia, and become the pioneer of Slavonic trade and influence in the wilder spots of Russia's Eastern Empire, in the sub-Arctic forests and on the frontier plateaus.

The agricultural colonization of the Slavs is confined to a belt lying between latitudes 55 and 57 in Western Siberia, and to a tract of country in the foothills of the Altai, in the Tomsk and Yenisei governments. North of these districts lie immense stretches of almost uninhabited country. First comes the sub-Arctic forest zone stretching northward for 700 miles and eastward right across the whole continent. This great conifer forest, probably the largest in the world, lying just above sea-level, and unbroken by a single hill, is dotted with countless swamps in its southern latitudes and with areas of stunted scrub all along the toundra border. It is traversed by the great rivers Obi, Irtish and Yenisei, and along their banks the colonies of Siberian traders have for many decades past made their abodes. Tobolsk, the principal town of Western Siberia, was

one of the earliest settlements of Cossacks and Russian fur traders. From here they spread northward, and founded Surgut, Narim, Beryoza, Obdorsk and Yeniseisk.

But Russian village colonization in these northern latitudes does not extend beyond the banks of the main rivers, for nowhere else are the typical communal colonies of Siberian peasants, who live by fishing, trading and cultivating rye, to be found. On all sides these little colonies are surrounded by a boundless expanse of forest, scrub and swamp, and in the farthest north by the frozen toundras.[1] In these sub-Arctic forests and wastes between latitudes 57 and 62 a sparsely scattered semi-nomadic population of Siberian backwoodsmen live—men who have left their villages on the rivers' banks and gone off pioneering in the wilds alone. The vastness and monotony of the land which surrounds them, and the length and rigour of the winter season, are in striking contrast to the beautiful and fertile black earth steppes and the foothills of the Altai in the south. It is under the former conditions that one sees Siberia in that uninviting aspect which has in the past always figured so largely in the European mind.

The principal and in fact the only other inhabitants of these forests and toundras are the native Finns, who live a nomadic life, fur-hunting, fishing and keeping reindeer. They are the relics of the so-called Ugrian tribes which once covered Siberia and formed no doubt an important element in the Tartar Khanate, which was overthrown by Yermak and his Cossacks. With these natives the Siberian colonies along the rivers have intercourse, trading in fish and

[1] See Ethnographical Diagram of Western Siberia.

fur, for many of the more independent and enterprising of these North Siberian colonists leave their original villages and go forth into the wild country, where they find the native nomad Finns on their own ground, and where they often live with them a semi-nomadic existence themselves.

Across the toundras and through the forests there are certain tracks, well known to these Siberians, and along which they proceed by means of sledges and sometimes on snowshoes. Over the unending level plain of conifer forests and mossy swamp these pioneers push their way, travelling partly by boat along the rivers during the summer, and the rest of the way by sledge through the forests during the winter. Here, perhaps, in some open spot where two rivers meet, they build their log-huts and live with their wives and families throughout the greater part of the year. To these little trading stations come the nomad Samoyedes and Ostiaks, generally in the winter months after they have finished their sable-hunting. Wandering south from the toundras with their reindeer they pitch their encampments of birch-bark wigwams in these flat mossy wastes. Here, sheltered by scrubby forest, they make their winter quarters hard by the log-houses and stores of the Siberian fur trader. During these winter months the natives barter the products of their autumn hunting for such articles as flour, tobacco and tea, which the Siberian keeps in his little store. And so Siberian and Finn are thrown together for many a long winter's day, during which the sun rises only to set again, and the bitter Arctic winter holds the surrounding forest and mossy wastes in its snowy grip.

But the life of the Siberian in the sub-Arctic forest is by no means confined to fur-trading with the Finns. He, too, by force of circumstances, adopts the customs and habits of the Samoyedes and Ostiaks. Frequently, during the autumn, he goes off to the forests alone to hunt squirrels and the cheaper fur-bearing animals which are caught with specially trained dogs. He is generally wise enough, however, to make use of the valuable hunting instincts of the natives, whose knowledge of the chase and forest craft he knows by experience to be superior even to his own. I remember a Siberian fur trader, whom I met in Krasnoyarsk, telling me that in the Turukhansk district he hunted furs only in those districts where the native Finns never go, for, he said, it paid him better to let them do the hunting and to barter with them for their furs in the autumn. When, therefore, the hunting after the second fall of snow is over, and the native encampments have been brought to the lower reaches of the river, the Siberian traders who have there built their huts and have their stores, get their best chance. At that season of the year one may not infrequently see priceless black sable exchanged for a few pounds of tea, or a dozen squirrel-skins given for a little bag of flour. The Siberians in trading generally keep to particular districts and to special native encampments. Thus one has his hut and stores at the mouth of one river, where he monopolizes the fur products of a certain encampment of natives, who winter there, while fifty miles beyond, separated by great expanses of flat forest and swamp, is his neighbour's sphere of influence.

But during the summer, when the natives have

taken their encampments far away to the recesses of the forests or have trekked to the toundras bordering the Arctic, then the Siberians either return to their nearest market town along the main rivers, where they exchange their goods and visit their friends, or turn their hands to fishing in the rivers and lakes near their trading posts. Here again they find the natives useful as a means of attaining their ends. Certain tribes of Samoyedes and Ostiaks, who keep no flocks of reindeer and do not live by hunting, engage largely in fishing. Some of these natives have fishing reserves on certain lakes, and here they turn their religion to practical account by holding these waters sacred to their shamman spirits. The Siberians respect these native traditions, and so the fishing here is only done by natives, from whom the Siberians purchase their fish. Along the desolate shores of these lakes the traveller can see in summer the little native encampments with the rafts and nets of the fishermen. Here and there are little huts visited by the Siberians once or twice a year, when they come to offer the little necessaries of life in exchange for the native catches of fish.

But there are other parts of Siberia besides the sub-Arctic forests and the toundras which are favourable to the isolated life of the trader and hunter. Those physical conditions which in the far north of Siberia create fur-bearing forests, and rivers and lakes abounding in fish, produce the same effects in more southern latitudes along the Siberian-Mongolian frontier. Where the great plains of Western and Central Siberia rise on to the first step of the Central Asiatic plateau, the hardy Siberian frontiersman and

pioneer is again found, having pushed his way southward from the last village colony. As the country rises on to the plateau, so the steppes give place to open forest, and open forest to dense jungle of conifer, or to park-like stretches of larch forest, accompanied by vegetation of great beauty.[1] Here rivers run in all directions among an intricate maze of mountain masses and ranges. Some of these streams drain into the great Siberian rivers, while others sink away and dry up in the plateau districts to the south. It is along some 2000 miles of this type of country, from the upper waters of the Amur River in the Far East to the high plateaus of the Siberian Altai, that the political frontier between the Russian and Chinese empires has been roughly fixed in the past. It was along this artificial line that Siberian Cossack colonization in the north found a natural barrier against the Mongol tribes and the outposts of Chinese civilization in Asia. In the wild secluded spots of this frontier region one can still see the relics of a still more ancient civilization, which was compelled to retreat before the invasion of both Cossack and Mongol. Here in dense forest and on plateau steppe live the scattered tribes of nomad Finns and so-called Altai Tartars. Here, too, the Siberian frontiersmen have penetrated, as they have also done in the sub-Arctic forests and toundras of Northern Siberia. Some of them live for most of the year in the last communal villages on the Siberian side of the frontier, and from these, during autumn and early winter, they trek southward into the frontier country, where Siberia and Mongolia meet. Like their brethren in the north they spend the early

[1] See Map of Vegetation Zones of Western and Central Siberia.

winter months in bartering fur with the forest natives or wool with the inhabitants of the plateau steppes. But some of them have been tempted to make their abode in this wild country, and to live here all the year round, where not only can they trade in the winter, but can fish during the summer months in the rivers and lakes, and even themselves hunt for the cheaper furs. So they make rough log-huts and build their stores in suitable spots along the frontier, and even place them on what is nominally Chinese territory on the south of the artificial Russo-Chinese frontier. For by the provisions of one of the early Russo-Chinese treaties a fifty-verst (thirty-three-mile) neutral zone was allowed on either side of the Siberian-Mongolian frontier, where in the plateau forests and steppes the subjects of both nationalities are permitted to settle and trade unmolested. In forests the Siberian generally finds himself alone among the fur-hunting Finnish tribes. Here the whole country is open to him, and although much of it is nominally Chinese territory, no Chinese official is seen from one year to the other. He is, therefore, the only pioneer of trade and civilization in these parts. But on the frontier steppes he has to meet the Chinaman who comes in from the south to barter with the native Tartar and semi-Mongol tribes. The cosmopolitan population of these plateau steppes along the Siberian-Mongolian frontier is an interesting study for the traveller.

While I was travelling in the southern part of the Yenisei Government in the summer of 1910, after my experiences in the Siberian frontier village, I had occasion to visit the neutral zone along the

frontier where Siberia and Mongolia meet, and on the plateau steppes of the Kemchik, a tributary of the Upper Yenisei, I spent some days in a frontier wool-trading centre. Here I saw the type of Siberian frontiersman to whom I have referred above. The little trading settlement was the first that I had seen since leaving the last Siberian village north of the Sayansk Mountains. Here in an open valley steppe through which a broad, rapid river flowed, surrounded by sparsely timbered hills, I came upon a collection of log-houses, mud huts and felt tents, wherein lived a cosmopolitan crowd of every conceivable race that the adjacent parts of Siberia and Mongolia seem capable of producing. In this no-man's land, which is not administered directly by any political authority, the scum of human society seemed to have drifted in from Siberia on the north and Mongolia on the south. Here one could see the native Tartars of the district, a branch of the Altaians, with high cheek-bones and black slit eyes, betokening no small admixture of Turkish and even Mongol blood. Their encampments of round felt tents or yurts lay scattered indiscriminately about the outskirts of the settlements, surrounded by piles of garbage, where pariah dogs prowled and snarled, and where the native children with diseased skins and running sores grovelled and rolled. They were the true native element of the place, collected round a trading centre where they could exchange their wool and skins. Judging from their appearance, however, their partial absence of clothes, and the filth and disease among them, they appeared to represent the poorest and most miserable of a not very flourishing community. In fact all those natives who could do so

A VARIED ASSORTMENT OF MONGOLS, TARTARS AND SIBERIANS ON THE RUSSO-CHINESE FRONTIER IN THE UPPER YENISEI

had moved their flocks during the summer to the higher parts of the steppes, where pasture was better. But the poorest, who possessed the smallest flocks, and who were unable to undertake long and tedious treks, continued all the year to hang around these cosmopolitan trading centres, where they could make precarious livelihoods by partial dependence on the Russian and Chinese traders.

Besides the natives of this frontier country, there were some Abakansk Tartars, another Turko-Finnish people who had come in from Siberia. They, too, were either dealing in wool or serving the Russian trader. They are a people well worthy of note, for here they seemed undoubtedly in a stage of partial Russification. They had evidently abandoned the nomad life on the steppes and had taken to sedentary habits, engaging in commercial pursuits along with the Russians. Their houses were built of logs in a hexagonal shape, showing thereby traces of both Russian and Tartar influence. I went inside one of these Tartar houses and saw a family at a meal. They were dressed in Russian clothes, and were sitting on low benches round a table in the middle of the room. Their food, consisting of bread, soup and tea, was just like that of the Russians and quite unlike the ordinary fare of the nomad Tartar. When they finished their meal they crossed themselves, showing clearly the influences of Russification upon them. But in the shape of their houses, and the scarcity of furniture, they still showed traces of the old Tartar habits. As I looked on their dark Tartar faces, their Russian clothes, and their short-cut hair, I was forcibly reminded of a Europeanized Japanese.

The representative of the European in this place

was, of course, the Siberian; but, in spite of his importance as the chief trader in wool and native produce, he seemed so absorbed by his surroundings that, though European still in face, his life and habits were far more Asiatic. In this place, it seemed, the Tartars were becoming Russified, and the Russians becoming, to some extent at anyrate, Tartarified. Among the Siberians here were several who were by no means anxious to return to Siberia. Some of them, I gathered, were wanted for the completion of their terms of military service, and perhaps for other offences of a more serious kind. Here they were in a sort of voluntary exile, for no one seemed to trouble much about them. A Russian official came over once a year to settle any disputes arising among Russian subjects, but it was not difficult to avoid him in such a country as this, and meanwhile they were making a living by trading with the natives. There were always two types of Siberian wool trader. One, for instance, only came for a few weeks from Siberia, with the object of picking up all the surplus wool and skins of low quality, which they could bring back to Siberia and sell in the autumn fairs. They were living in temporary felt tents, just like the native Tartars. The Siberians of the other type spent most of the year in this country, and had built for themselves permanent log-houses of the typical Siberian kind. Some of them, finding logs scarce, had run up walls of mud and wattle with roofs thatched with rush, in partial imitation of the Chinese houses. On entering these houses I always found a typical Russian room. A comfortable, homely feeling came over me as I entered, all the more welcome after many days of weary trekking

over steppe and through forest. I felt that I had found something at last which indicated European life again. There was the wooden table and chair, the samovar of tea, the baking oven, the baby in the spring cradle suspended from the roof, European clothes, white-skinned faces, and the blue, kindly eyes of a Russian housewife. This class of Siberian frontier trader, at least, had not lost much of his Russian character, and although he was constantly associating with Tartars on terms of equality, he nevertheless retained the material conveniences of Russian peasant life. These Siberian wool traders always bring their wives and families with them, carrying everything by horse caravan. While they are out in the wilds they always look after their personal comfort. Even in the depths of the desert plateaus one can see in the wool traders' huts such articles as jam, biscuits and white bread, luxuries which the natives in their yurts would never see in the whole course of their lives. The food of the native Tartars consists of milk and mutton, and on this, through centuries of custom, they seem to flourish. The Chinaman contents himself with tea and a bowl or two of rice a day, with an occasional delicacy from Central China. But the Siberian must have his cabbage soup, his meat, his dried rusks and his brown bread, and wherever you find him there you will also see some indication of European civilization.

In this little encampment of which I am speaking, all round the Siberian traders' houses and huts, were scattered the felt tents of the Tartar natives. Some of them were on the open steppe, while some nestled inside the little enclosures surrounding the Siberians' houses. Many of these Tartars had become servants

to the Siberians, and were helping them in collecting, packing and despatching wool and hides to Siberia. In the courtyards I observed how the Russian and Tartar children played games together, mingling as though they were one family. How strange it was to see! How slight the difference here between Russian and Tartar! The Eastern Slav is born to conquer and assimilate the Asiatic races, because in character and in habits he is so Asiatic himself that he can in fact absorb his neighbours without either absorber or absorbed being aware of the process.

But, besides Russian and Tartar, there is another element in the population of this frontier steppe. Here for the first time I saw that enigma of the East, the Chinaman. Seven years before, as I was assured by a Russian, there was not a Chinaman in the place, but now half-a-dozen little shops, built of mud bricks, had sprung up, testifying to the recent Chinese activity in the western part of the Celestial Empire. In these little shops one could buy Chinese brick tea, silk and little choice articles from the flowery land, and there sat the moon-eyed celestials cross-legged on the counter ready to barter their wares. Behind these little shops there was often a den where an old Chinaman would be preparing an evening meal, a messy brew of some choice seaweed brought all the way from China. How weird and uncanny these people looked! I instinctively gravitated toward the Russian, for him I knew and could understand, whereas of the Chinaman I knew nothing. Here he was in the farthest corner of his empire, the same as he always is, laborious, thrifty and most mysterious. His standard of living was utterly different from anything I saw around me. The

wretched native Tartars appeared no better socially than the pariah dogs that prowled around their tents. The Abakansk Tartars from Siberia and the Russian traders were pleasant, childlike individuals, whose views of life, its comforts, its worries, did not differ very materially from mine. But the Chinaman was something quite different. He stood apart, an isolated social mystery, but perhaps on a higher plane than any of us. As a Russian trader tersely remarked to me one evening as I was talking to him on the subject: "These Chinese! You cannot live with them; they know too much."

Some days later I decided to set out and visit some encampments of native Tartars, a branch of the Altaians, who, I heard, were spending the summer on the high Alpine meadows. Taking Alexieff, a Siberian wool trader, as a companion and guide, I set out, and passing from the cultivated millet-fields we rode across a stony desert, and came to the foot of a barren mountain mass. Following up the bed of a mountain torrent, and winding through gorges of barren rock on every side, we at last emerged into an open plateau covered with Alpine meadows, gentians and saxifrage, and scattered over with clumps of larch. A little distance beyond, nestling in a hollow, lay a beautiful mountain lake, the shores of which were surrounded by meadows and variegated with patches of forest, while dotted about the plateau lay encampments of the native Tartars, who had come there with their flocks for the summer pasturage. This was the summer camping-ground of this branch of the Altai Tartars, and hither, Alexieff told me, he repaired each summer to barter

wool and skins from these natives. As the sun was going down, he suggested to me that we should go to one of the native yurts and rest there for the night. So we repaired to one of the encampments on the edge of the larch forest in this romantic plateau. It was very like an English gipsy encampment. Here were a dark-skinned people living a wandering life in round felt tents, just such as one would see in a gipsy camp-ground on an English village green. Perhaps this was the kind of life which all mankind once led. A squat-faced little man with broad cheek-bones and slit eyes, and dressed in rough sheepskin, came to the door of the tent. He was hideous. The sight of him at first repelled me, especially as I thought of the terror which these men once struck into the hearts of mankind when they swept over Asia and plundered Europe. But now they were only harmless, peaceful shepherds, and I reassured myself. "Ahmed Bar" (the Turkish greeting), said the Tartar, with a bow, and ushered me in. Inside I found a round space, where smouldered a log fire, the smoke of which was issuing from a hole in the roof. The women's quarters were on the right as I entered, and here an old Tartar woman and two girls were squatting on the ground preparing some food, and shyly hung their heads as my Russian companion and I entered. All round were signs of the nomad life these Tartars led. Skins of fermenting mare's milk or "kumis" could be seen hanging on a triangular frame; crumbling cheese was drying in a pan near the entrance, while some of the girls were rolling horses' hair and wool for the manufacture of felt, and others were distilling spirit in crude wooden vats from kumis. Alexieff and I

squatted by the fire, and opposite us sat our Tartar host, with his legs crossed in true Eastern style. We exchanged tobacco and cigarettes, lit each other's pipe—a symbol of courtesy in the East—and then Alexieff and the Tartar began to talk volubly in a Turkish dialect. For several minutes they talked, and the old Tartar listened with a phlegmatic air, puffing at his long pipe and passing occasional remarks. The conversation was upon horses and cattle, the price of sheep's-wool in Siberia, the prospect of the autumn fairs and of the Siberian wheat harvest, and the clemency or otherwise of the weather. I longed to join in the conversation, but the Russian language was of no use as a means of communicating with the Tartars. I felt at a grievous disadvantage, for how could I enter into the life of these people if I could not communicate with them? But at any-rate, while I was in this tent, Alexieff showed me how easily the Russians get on with the native Tartars. They win the respect of Asiatic races as no one else can do. They talk with them in their own tongue at their own firesides, they sleep in their tents by night, they personally conduct business with them, exchanging wool for tea. Indeed it was evident to me that Alexieff had become intimate with these natives by dint of peaceful persuasion and gentle influences. How different from the overbearing tone of a British colonist or a British soldier in an Eastern colony. Though a Russian, Alexieff could without difficulty socially adapt himself to the Tartar. "Do you often spend much time in the year among these Tartars?" I asked. "Generally for three months in the summer I live in a yurt amongst their encampments, collecting wool and skins, and during that time I rarely see

another Russian," was his reply. "Are you glad to return to your Russian fellow-citizens?" I asked. "Of course," he said; "how could I be otherwise. These Tartars are pleasant and peaceable, but they are not like my Russian brothers; they are not of our type (*Volost*). For example, you cannot get bread or cabbage soup or vodka here, and the life is wild and tedious in these lands." It was clear, therefore, that the Siberian wool trader on these frontier steppes of the Altai, tolerant as he is of his Tartar neighbours, is more at home in his village, where he can satisfy his everyday necessities more nearly than he can in a Tartar encampment. But, unlike the British colonist, his preference is based less on social than on economic grounds. He can naturally enjoy his life better in a village of his Russian fellow-citizens, for there he can get his bread, his soup and his vodka, while on the steppes he must be content with cheese and kumis. But, socially, he has not the smallest objection to associating and living with the Tartars, for the sake of those material gains which come to him through trading with them. So little, in fact, do social considerations worry him that he even intermarries with them, if he cannot find a Russian girl to suit him. The Siberian frontier wool trader, like the Siberian peasant, has a tolerant mind, he is peaceable and childlike, and his ideas of life are somewhat material.

That night we roasted some mutton on a spit over the fire, used our fingers for forks, and then lay on the floor of the tent wrapped in felt blankets along with the rest of the Tartars.

After spending a few more days in the encampment

I took my leave of these Tartars and rode off the plateau down the valley to another little frontier trading station, where I arrived at the house of a Siberian wool merchant, who entertained me hospitably. His little house was built of larch logs and mud plaster, and here in this isolated spot on the Mongolian frontier steppes he lived with his wife and family all the year. Close by was a little storehouse where he kept his wool, skins and other articles of local produce. His little plot was surrounded by a pale fence, and inside the yard Siberian cattle and Mongolian horses wandered about, just as I had seen them do in the Siberian villages north of the frontier. His mode of life, however, was more free here. He could ride wherever he pleased upon the open steppes, and over the low desert hills, for, as the Siberians said, the country was "clean"—that is, free from forest. He was surrounded by the native Tartars, who came to him with the products of their flocks and herds. There was no troublesome commune to interfere with his grazing or ploughland rights, no official to come and assess him for special taxation in these wild spots. Several times a year, however, he returned to Siberia with his goods, bringing back other wares. Inside his house I found a typical Russian room, which once more reminded me of a Siberian peasant village and appeared incongruous in its surroundings. At once a comfortable feeling came over me, as if I was at home again. Surrounded by primitive nomads, whose social ideas I could not understand, I felt that the Siberian was my brother. That evening we had a pleasant and somewhat cosmopolitan gathering in the house of this wool trader, which,

as usual under such conditions, ended in a carouse. There was a most interesting collection of different races and nationalities gathered round this place. Besides the wool trader and his wife and other Russian traders, there were two Abakansk Tartars from Central Siberia who were his servants, a local Tartar native of the district, also a servant, and two Kazan Tartar wool traders, who were breaking their journey here on their way to Mongolia. In addition to these, during the evening a sleek-faced Chinaman looked in, but, needless to say, he did not join us in the revels. Sitting down at a table with a samovar of tea and dishes of soup, hot meat and bread, we conversed on all kinds of topics, chiefly those of a more material nature. We discussed the price of food in different parts of the frontier districts, the quality of wool from the Kemchik, and the news which had filtered in about the prospects of the wheat crop in the Minusinsk district north of the frontier. The social atmosphere, in fact, was thoroughly utilitarian, as was only natural in such a wild spot, where one's first considerations are for personal comfort and the satisfaction of immediate bodily necessities.

After the vodka began to go round some Russian love songs and ditties of the Siberian post road delighted the company. Then we became patriotic and toasted each other's sovereigns, and made impromptu speeches in Russian, complimentary to each other's nationality. And so we spent the evening, Russians, Tartars and Englishman, worshipping at the shrine of Bacchus. My interest perhaps mainly centred in the two kinds of Tartars sitting at the table, each in his own stage of Russifica-

tion. There were the Abakansk Tartars, natives of Central Siberia, who had been in contact with the Siberian peasants all their lives. Half Christian and half native-worshippers, no strong religious feeling separated them from the Russians, and they were as much at home in a Siberian's house as they were in their own rough log-huts, which, as I described above, imitate the Russian house in material and the Tartar yurt in shape. These, as servants of the Russian wool traders, sat down to break bread in the house of their masters, for the social, racial and religious barrier between the two was very slight. They had advanced one stage in the process of Russification beyond the native Altaians who lived in felt yurts on the open steppes outside. The latter, although always having intercourse with the Siberian frontiersman, nevertheless have as yet lost nothing of their nomad Tartar habits.

As for the Kazan Tartars, representatives of the other group who sat at table with us, except for their shaven heads, skull-caps, and little pointed beards, which gave them a slightly Turkish expression, no one would distinguish them from the Siberians. In habits and manner they were completely Russian, nor did their strict adherence to Islam prevent them from breaking bread with us that evening. As I looked from the Kazan Tartars to the Abakansk Tartars and then to the Siberian wool trader, sitting round the table together, I saw before me two races in the process of gradual absorption by the third. The Kazan Tartars, through centuries of contact with the Russians in Europe, have absorbed Slavonic civilization, and, as this gathering showed, the two were now going forth together, as subjects of the

Tsar, to colonize and trade in these undeveloped parts along the Siberian frontier. The common ties of everyday life, which are always particularly strong in such places and in such circumstances as these, had brought Siberian frontiersmen and Kazan Tartar socially together. But the process of Russification was evidently natural and gradual, and on that account quite peaceful. Whatever may be the nature of the national movements going on in European Russia at the present time, they have not struck root here, for in contact with wild nature Russian and Tartar tend to sink their social differences under the influence of common economic ties.

Next day, in order to see something of the Chinese traders who, I heard, had recently settled along this Mongolian frontier zone, I visited one of their houses and trading posts, which was near to the Siberian trader's post. Although within a short distance of each other, the Russian and Chinese competitors rarely met. A social barrier seemed to divide them and to shut off intercourse completely. The Russian is generally prone to fraternize with all sorts and conditions of Asiatics, but between him and the Chinaman there is a gulf, the result of two distinct standards of civilization. The house I went to visit was that of a Chinese merchant, who had come originally from Uliassutai in Mongolia. It was made of mud bricks, with a flat roof and lattice windows and doors. The courtyard was surrounded by a palisade of brushwood, and several little mud shanties were dotted about in the yard, in the dark recesses of which the Chinaman stored his wares, cooked his food and carried on his daily transactions with the natives. A peculiar, indescribable smell pervaded

the air as I entered the yard, a musty smell, like that of a mixture of oil and cheese. Inside the house was a long, low room, where two or three moon-eyed celestials, clothed in dark blue tunics, lay dreamily on raised couches. On a table near by was a tin of Chinese tobacco and something which looked like an opium pipe. One of them was busy over a little stove preparing some messy dish, some delicacy, such as seaweed, fungus, bird's nest, or some weird edible, the value of which only the Chinese know. At the end of the room there were shelves filled with all sorts of wares—household utensils, cheap crockery, bricks of tea, tobacco and a few articles of Chinese art. On the counter in front of this a Chinaman was sitting with his legs crossed, bargaining with a native over a fur cap. There were tobacco pouches embroidered with Chinese silks, pictures of weird Chinese figures, men with grotesque Chinese faces in even more grotesque attitudes, there were porcelain jars with the willow pattern, delicate paintings of Buddhist gods with forbidding faces, and fire-breathing dragons exquisitely coloured on rice paper. Everything in the house was as weird and uncanny as the inmates themselves, but upon the whole more attractive than repellent in its grotesqueness.

What a contrast indeed to the crude-coloured prints of the Tsar or Russian generals that I used to see in every Siberian trader's house! There could be no doubt as to which of these two peoples were on the higher level of civilization.

But yet I felt ill at ease in this place. I conversed through the medium of Russian with one of the Chinaman. But his cold, uncanny manner reacted upon me. He thought I was a Russian; nor did I

undeceive him, and yet I felt there was a gulf between us that I could not bridge, try as I might. I could not sympathize with him as I could with the Siberian across the way. His outlook on life was different. How could there be any fellow-feelings between us? How could I understand one who reclined all day in such an artificial atmosphere as this? The Chinaman is no child of nature like the Siberian. He gives one the impression that he is living in another world. And I had an uncomfortable feeling that the Chinaman represented a higher type of civilization than the Siberian, a reflection degrading for me, who could only associate with the latter.

These Chinamen lived here all the year round, and in these wild spots along the Siberian-Mongolian frontier had set their trading stations, which they had built in the same style and adorned with the same taste as any Chinaman would in the heart of the Celestial Empire. Every two or three months one of their number returns to the nearest Chinese town in Mongolia to sell his goods and obtain supplies. In this particular house there were three brothers trading together and dividing the profits, but they had no family, for by Chinese law they had not at that time been allowed to bring their women to these frontier districts. After a few years of this life of exile they generally returned to their families and resumed their old life in Inner China. And so, exiled from wife and family, and living a sedentary life indoors, continually eating messy delicacies in small quantities throughout the day, the Chinese frontier trader passes his life in these remote spots until he has made his money or until death overtakes him. Remarkable business honesty, a great capacity

for bargaining, cheapness of living and laborious thrift, are the qualities which characterize them as much on the Siberian-Mongolian frontier as they do in the heart of China itself. By these qualities they compete against the influence of the Siberian traders, and indeed the Chinaman more than holds his own, for while he will live upon a bowl of rice a day with a few native delicacies brought from Central China, the Russian must have his "chai peet," his samovar of tea, and his meal of meat and bread at least twice if not three times a day. The Chinaman's standard of civilization both social and economic was unlike anything I had ever seen before in my travels, and obviously betokened a highly developed and cultivated race with remarkable power and energy, against which the more primitive Siberian finds it very hard to compete. Here, on the neutral ground of the frontier steppes which border Southern Siberia and North-West Mongolia, these two civilizations meet.

Leaving the plateau steppes where Siberia and Mongolia meet in the Altai and plunging into the heart of the forest country, which surrounds these steppes and covers also a large area of the valleys along the Siberian-Mongolian frontier, we find another type of hardy, independent frontiersman. He too has left his fellow-peasants in the last outpost village, and has migrated along with his wife and family to some spot where he can carry on trade in furs with the native Finns of the forest; where he can hunt in the taiga (or virgin forest), or fish in its unknown rivers and lakes.

In the same summer as I visited the Siberian wool

trader on the Kemchik steppes of the Siberian-Mongolian frontier, I also visited their fur-trading brethren, who live on the same latitudes at higher altitudes in the Upper Yenisei forest plateau.[1] All along this frontier, from the Upper Amur to the Altai plateaus, wherever there is fur-bearing forest, there one can see the solitary houses of the Siberian fur trader, the pioneers of Russian commerce and Slavonic civilization in these remote corners of the earth, just as the Siberian wool traders are its pioneers on the steppes. The houses of these Siberians are typically Russian in every respect. Situated on little grassy flats and surrounded by primeval forests of pine, spruce and larch, may be seen the little log-houses, fresh and clean, with just that type of roof, and shape of window and door, that reminds the traveller of what he saw in the last Siberian village north of the frontier. Inside the little stockade there is generally a rude shed, where a few cows and horses can harbour against the severities of the winter. Another is kept for storing furs, valuable sable, or wapiti horn, while nailed up against the walls of the house are skins of elk and other big game, the products of the chase. In another little shed, often built up against the house, is a store where tea, sugar, sacks of flour and little oddments are kept for barter with the native Finns. In the yard outside are fishing nets hanging up to dry or waiting for repair, and barrels of fish, perhaps from some remote lake in the forest, ready to be sent off to the nearest Siberian market town on the raft, which lies moored to the river bank. Inside the house one sees a typical Russian room, always the same, whether it

[1] See Map of Vegetation Zones of Western and Central Siberia.

POPLAR DUG-OUT BOATS USED BY SIBERIAN FUR TRADERS ON THE UPPER YENISEI

be in the wilds of Mongolia, on the Cossack steppe, or on the Afghan frontier. Outside this little oasis of primitive civilization nature runs wild. It is surrounded by forest, traversed only by the little tracks that lead from one Siberian's hut to the other. Occasional glimpses can be had through an opening in the forest of some weird conical mountain, or some jagged peak, covered with debris of boulders. Great rivers, broad and rapid, run through the dense jungles of spruce and poplar which cling to their banks. Along these rivers the hardy Siberian pioneers have pushed their way, exploring step by step each year in their poplar "dug-outs." Inside the forest the denseness of the vegetation is phenomenal, and the growth of moss and fern which covers the ground and grows in profusion upon the trees reminds the traveller of the tropics. Everything is saturated with moisture, and the atmosphere is stifling in its humidity. Dank and dripping vegetation, masses of rotten moss and timber, give everything the appearance of the bottom of a well. Moreover, there is far less sign of life than in the beautiful pine and larch forests which border the cultivated lands of Southern Siberia, such as I have described in the last chapter. An oppressive silence fills the air instead. Now and then there is a mysterious hoot overhead of some unseen bird in the tops of the spruces. Like a ventriloquist, it sounds far away one minute, and just above your head the next. A creepy feeling comes over one each time it hoots, for it seems to be the evil spirit of the forest mocking at the traveller. But it is only a great spotted cuckoo, a denizen of the sub-Arctic regions. This indeed is a land of mystery, a mystery which breeds super-

stition and is reflected in the lives of all that live therein.

The extraordinary isolation of his existence in this forest country bordering Siberia and Mongolia, produces in the Siberian frontiersman an independence of character which is unknown to the peasant colonies on the north of the frontier ; and the farther one goes into these wild districts, the more self-reliant and individualistic does the Russian become. Instead of hanging together in little groups, each relying upon the other, every man is engaged in his own business in his own way, and is dependent upon his own initiative only. The character of these pioneers, moreover, is in many respects even more attractive than that of the peasants farther north. There is never any tendency among men to intrigue against a stranger who wants to deal with them, as the peasants in the communal colonies sometimes do. On the contrary, one is struck with their frank and straightforward nature. Those that I met reminded me more of the typical Norwegian and Swedish peasants or the Canadian backwoodsmen than any I had ever seen in Russia before. I had always thought that such types did not exist among the Russians until I saw them in the summer of 1910 in the country where the Siberian Yenisei Province borders North-West Mongolia. Here they form the most advanced guard of Slavonic civilization.

I found from inquiries that these men were originally peasants from the communal peasant villages in Siberia farther north, who began by making their visits every autumn to the native hunting tribes in search of furs. After a while they had found it easier to make their headquarters in

this country and so they built their houses in these wild frontier spots, often on the Chinese side of the frontier. Here they live with their wives and families, and a few horses and cattle which they drive through the forest, and only return to their old villages once or twice a year to renew their supplies and dispose of their furs.

During my journeys in the Upper Yenisei plateau in 1910, I had many opportunities of studying the Siberian frontier fur trader. While wandering in this country my companions and I often had occasion to visit their trading posts; we made our camps beside their log-houses and partook of rough meals with them and their families; we even accepted their hospitable offers to sleep under their roof, and more than once I stretched myself out on the rude wooden floor of a Siberian trader's log-house or in the out-house across the yard, where the stores and skins were kept. I remember staying with one in particular, who was a Cossack, originally from the Trans-Baikal country. He had come into the country with his wife and family some years before, after serving his time in the Far East. He was a rough but genial man, and his knowledge, in fact, was far greater than that of any Siberian peasant I had met, although his opportunities for learning had been no greater. He had never been out of Siberia and Mongolia, but he knew his map of Europe well. He could ask intelligent questions about England, and he had a general idea of the position and character of India; but, like all the rest of his kind, he was obsessed by the fear of the awakening of the yellow races. It was in his little log-house at the junction of two rivers, on the Upper Yenisei, that we

first heard definitely of the death of King Edward VII., two months after the event.

On another occasion, entering a hut at a wild spot at the source of the Yenesei, I found a fur trader and his family who seemed different from the other Siberian frontiersmen I had previously seen, although I could scarcely describe in what the difference consisted. On the table I saw a newspaper printed in a European language that I could not understand. The arrangement of everything in the room seemed different, and there were certain articles of food upon the table, such as cheese, that I never saw among the Siberians. After a few sentences of conversation in Russian I found that I was in the house, not of a Siberian at all, but of a Lett from the Baltic province. I tested him to see if he understood German, which I knew would be one of his mother tongues in his original home, but he had forgotten most of it, and only retained a knowledge of Lettish. We therefore fell back upon Russian as the best means of communication, although it was the mother tongue of neither of us. It turned out that this man and his family had left the Baltic province in early youth, whether for political or other reasons I did not learn. He had settled in a frontier village in the Yenisei Government among the Siberian peasants, and, being of an adventurous nature, he had decided to seek his fortune in the forests across the frontier. Once a year, indeed, he returned to Siberia, where he got news of the outer world, and an occasional paper from the Baltic province. I asked him if he intended to go back to his old home again. "No," he said; "I am happy here. I have all I want, and no one to interfere with me, but if I went back, I might be worse off." So he lived in this

remote spot in the larch forest on the Mongolian frontier, separated by a hundred miles from the nearest Siberian village. The whole country was open to him. He could trade with the encampments of native Finns ; he could fish in the river that flowed at his very door ; he had an endless stretch of woodland meadow for his flocks to graze upon. Was he not better off than in a Baltic town, amidst "the fretful stir unprofitable, and the fever of the world" ? Thanks to his hospitality, I spent two nights with him and his family. We sat down to meals of bread and cheese and I fancied myself back in Finland or Scandinavia. I observed with interest various little signs of the family's Lettish nationality. In some respects, however, they had been Russified by constant contact with the Siberians. Nor had they apparently suffered by it, for they had been influenced by some of the best types of humanity that the Russian Empire can produce.

On another occasion I came to a Siberian fur trader's house, the farthest outpost up that particular valley. Here lived a very fine type of Siberian, who had pushed farther than all his neighbours into these wild parts. He lived in a well-built house with a large cattle-yard and trading store. Inside were spacious, well-furnished rooms, with portraits of the Tsar and other celebrities and public men. All his belongings, which were of a kind to be a credit to anyone, wild as the spot was, had been brought up over some hundred miles of river and forest. At the meal which he hospitably set before me, I found him a genial and communicative companion. Moreover, his intelligence and culture were almost startling. He might have been an educated Moscow gentleman,

judging from his knowledge of history, geography, politics, literature and affairs in general. It is, indeed, true that the very finest types of Russians, both physically and intellectually, find their way into these frontier districts. He had been for thirty years trading on the Siberian-Mongolian frontier in the Upper Yenisei, and I asked him what changes he had observed since he first came there. "Formerly," he replied, "we did very good business, for sable was very numerous. But for every four black sable we saw then, we only see one now. Besides, Safianof [another trader] and myself were then alone in this part of the country, but now we have Cafkas, Skobeff, Kriloff and twelve others in this valley, all working on the same ground." "And what effect has the coming of the Russians had on the native Finnish tribes?" I asked. "When I came here first," he said, "we saw the natives very little. They stayed away in the forest all the year, as if they were afraid of us. Their condition was very bad, and one winter, I remember, it was very severe and many of them died of cold and hunger. A tribe that we had seen with forty tents had only twenty left the next year. Gradually they began to come to us, and we gave them flour, tea and sugar when they were starving in the winter, and they gave us skins and sable which they had caught in the autumn. They come regularly now, and give us their furs in exchange for those articles which we bring up from across the frontier. There is never a famine among them now, for they can always change squirrel and sable furs for tea, sugar or flour." "Do you not wish to return to your comrades in the Siberian villages?" I asked. He looked at me with kindly eyes and

said: "It is God's will that I should live here among the natives; for me it is all the same. At first it was tedious, but now I am accustomed to the taiga and the wild places. They have grown with me and mingled in my nature."

Often did the Siberian frontiersman talk to me in that rather fatalistic strain, a strain which is characteristic of his race. But in addition to this I often noticed other traits in his character which indicated to me that he had, to some extent, modified his Russian nationality. He referred little to his comrades in the Siberian villages: his mind was fixed upon his life out there in the wild country, where he could pursue his independent life unaided and unhampered by the village commune. He was, I think, less of a true Russian and had more of the true Siberian aboriginal element about him. For in his ideas he seemed strangely out of touch with his peasant kinsmen on the north of the frontier, or even with his wool-trading brethren of the frontier steppes. His isolation in the depths of gloomy forests and almost unknown wooded valleys had a peculiar effect upon his nature. I thought I could discern that his national ideals and even his national religion had been to some extent modified. After all, is it not natural that alone and surrounded by wild nature from year to year, unable, except on rare occasions, to return to kinsmen in the frontier villages, his national consciousness and even his national religion should lose much of its reality? Indeed with the Russians their nationality is their religion, and their religion their nationality, and when the one grows weak through natural circumstances, the other will weaken too. Nor can we marvel

at this, for, after all, the doctrines of the great religions of the world were in their early days but thinly veneered upon a groundwork of that universal religion revealed by nature, the earliest and most natural religion of mankind. From Constantinople on the Bosphorus, Christianity spread through Russia into Northern Asia. From Mecca and Stambul, Islam ran like wildfire across Central Asia into China ; while from Urga and Lhassa, the Lamas of the yellow religion quietly grafted on to the Mongol and Tartar tribes of Northern Asia those distorted superstitions which now surround the memory of him "Who sprang from the Lotus." But the moral doctrines and ideals of these three religions were presented in many parts of the world to a humanity that knew no objects of reverence except those agents of nature which it could see before its eyes. And so it was that these revealed religions so often degenerated into a low and superstitious fetishism profitable mainly to priests, Mullahs and Lamas. But I venture to suggest that in many parts of the world the old nature worship is still the fabric of man's moral structure. Under the influence of national exigencies it is generally obscured, but under the influences of nature it tends to revive. Thus, in contact with nature from their cradles, the natives of Siberia learn to look with awe and reverence upon the mountains, forests, rivers and lakes. So did I when I found myself alone in the dark and endless pine forest, or upon some rugged peak with piles of jagged screes in an uninhabited country, remarkable only for its featureless monotony. It was then that I first learnt to understand the native reverence, and fear of the spirits of nature, which imagination con-

jures up in those desolate spots. The silent mystery of an expanse of forested hills begets the craving to see what lies beyond, and calls one as if to find the spirits that are hidden there. The same mental atmosphere is begotten also among those Siberian Christians whose lot has been cast among similar conditions. The isolation of his life has produced in the character of the Siberian fur trader an indifference and apathy to national ideals and national religion. He tends to lose his Russian patriotic sentiments and to become indifferent to the orthodox faith. The nearest church is perhaps a hundred miles distant across the mountains and forest. Perhaps he does not visit it for several years, and when he dies he is buried without a service in a little grassy glade beyond the enclosure within which he has always lived, and nothing but a paling erected round the mound will be left for future generations. Children are born and not christened, and marriages are solemnized by consent of parents only. Isolation has not only bred apathy towards the national religion, but also an inclination towards the superstitions natural to the country. A Siberian in this isolated spot applies the names of the Christian saints, that he has heard by name, to those localities which he knows well. A spot where two rivers unite it called the place of St Peter and St Paul, or a place in the valley where gold is known to exist is called the place of St George Pobedonostseff (the victorious), or a grassy tract where cattle can graze may be called Bogdanof ("granted by God"). And so nature is woven into their religion, as it must be with all those who are brought in contact with it for long. In the words of the Russian writer, Tyan Shansky,

"In the eyes of the Siberian a living nature is imparted to the forests, hills and glades, peopled as they are with the spirits of their departed friends." A Siberian frontiersman is a child of nature. Taming Nature as a pioneer, he is in turn tamed by her.

## CHAPTER VII

# HISTORY OF THE COLONIZATION AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION OF SIBERIA

THE earliest inhabitants of Siberia are lost in the obscurity of the Stone Age. All traces of them were obliterated in the dark northern forests, and on the frozen toundras, and, though a few scattered remains are found on the burial-mounds of the southern steppes, these give us but a faint glimpse of the primitive culture and civilization of the aboriginal Finnish races who had their origin in Western and Central Siberia. That an ancient people in the age of copper and bronze already existed on the upper watersheds of the Obi, Tom, Chulim and Yenisei is proved beyond doubt, and, according to the Russian archæologist, Aspelen, the earliest traces go back some 1000 years B.C. But who these people were, what was the extent of their culture, and whether they were the same people in evolution from the Bronze to the Iron Age, it is impossible to say. All we know for certain about these Siberian Finns is, that racially they formed part of the pre-Turanian or pre-Turkish people of those regions, and socially formed part of the civilization which was earlier than that of the Mongol Empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D. Originating in the watersheds of the Western and Central Siberian rivers, this early civilization seems

to have spread in the remote, almost prehistoric, ages across Northern European Russia even as far as modern Finland, where it has since been absorbed. Certain tribes of these Finns are mentioned by name in the earliest Chinese annals, as being a fair-haired, blue-eyed race, and from this and other information it is clear that they inhabited large tracts of what is now Western and Central Siberia about the second and third century A.D. From the third to the sixth century of the Christian era considerable racial movements seem to have taken place, accompanied by numerous wars and contentions for the possession of the best places in Western and Central Siberia. A new racial element began to appear, and the so-called Turkish races, with round brachycephalic skulls, broad cheek-bones and straight hair, began to press up from the south. During the fourth and fifth centuries certain of these Turks, known as "Hunni," were found contending with and alternately ousting and mingling with the Finnish aborigines of Southern Siberia. By the eleventh century the Khan of the Hunni had acquired authority over the whole Altai districts, and many of the races in the Upper Obi and Chulim rivers became modified by this new Turkish element, as is seen from the skulls in their burial-mounds of this date. Two people known as Hakaz and Hunni exerted considerable power from the fourth to the ninth centuries A.D. in these districts, and they traded with Arabia, Tibet and China, as we see from the pottery found in their burial-mounds. Thus it came about that the Finns of Southern Siberia became modified by the Turkish stock, and a population was formed in which both Turkish and Finnish elements were found in every

stage of admixture. The pressure of the Turks from the south caused those Finns that did not become absorbed into the new type to migrate into the northern forests of Siberia, where they probably mingled with others of the same race as themselves. These Finns the early Russian pioneers called Ugrians.

In the thirteenth century arose the great Mongol Empire. The Mongol nomads set forth on their conquest, somewhere near the upper sources of the Selenga River, just south of Lake Baikal and in the country to the east of that inhabited by the Turkish races, with whom they were probably connected by racial and physical ties. The generals of the Great Khan penetrated into Siberia, subjugated the tribes along the Yenisei, Obi and Irtish, and chased the rest into the forests of the north. The Hakaz and other powerful Turko-Finnish tribes became satellites of the Mongols, joined their forces, and afterwards helped in the formation of the feudal Mongol Empire. Those Finnish tribes who would not submit were forced to retreat to the northern forests or to the upper plateaus of the Altai, and the remote corners of the Upper Yenisei, where their relics are found to this day. But this empire was too ephemeral to last, and in the fourteenth century the Mongol power weakened, and the influence of the "Golden Horde" began to wane. At once certain of these Turko-Finnish tribes of Southern Siberia revolted, and set up independent political authorities or khanates, the chief of which centred round the Ishim and Tobol rivers in Western Siberia and was called the Khanate of Sibir. It was not long before this Turko-Finnish khanate accepted Islam, which was becoming a great religious force in the East about this time, and

so Sibir became the representative of the Mussulman power in the country east of the Ural. Ancient Finnish culture now had gone. The people of Sibir ceased to use runic writings or to bury their dead in mounds as their Finnish ancestors had done, and assumed the customs of the Mohammedans. From this time forward the Mohammedan khanate of Siberia came into conflict with the ever-growing power of the Slavs on the west of the Urals, and so began the time-honoured struggle between Christian Russia and Mussulman Turk, which has been fought out again and again from that day to this, ever since Russia began to live as a nation.

The first acquaintance of the Slavs with Siberia began in the early part of the eleventh century A.D. The different principalities of which the Slavonic race was at that time composed, the tsardom of Muscovy and the great republic of Novgorod, began first to have relations with the Ugrian-Finnish tribes of North-West Siberia. These regions were rich in boundless supplies of valuable furs, which were highly prized even in those days by the Russians. Thus we hear of the republic of Novgorod early in the eleventh century sending fur collectors to Eastern Russia, where they encountered people called Ugrians, who from their descriptions can be no other than the Finnish races as seen in the Samoyedes and Ostiaks of to-day. These pioneers collected furs, exchanged their wares, and returned to Novgorod, but not long afterwards they penetrated again into the great unknown, and this time crossed the Urals, where they found forests stretching in limitless expanse to the east, full of rich furs, and inhabited by other tribes of Finns whom they had never

seen before. This country east and west of the Urals they now called Ugria. But, as was so often the case in those early days, it was not long before the peaceful interchange of Slavonic wares for Ugrian furs developed into piratical exploitation. The representatives of Novgorod began to *demand* tribute of furs to be *given* annually to "Lord Novgorod the Great," as that early Slavonic republic called itself. But there was resistence at first, and fierce fights took place between the Ugrian tribesmen and the Novgorod tribute collectors during the twelfth century. Novgorod, however, remained virtually the overlord of Ugria until the early fifteenth century, while the Mongol power still extended over the Turko-Finnish races of the Southern Siberian steppes.

In the early fifteenth century, however, arose a new factor in the struggle. The Mongol hordes of Central Asia had by this time lost their power, and the republic of Novgorod showed signs of weakness. But the tsardom of Muscovy was gathering strength, and about the middle of the fifteenth century the Tsar, taking advantage of the growing weakness of the republic and of their failure to collect their tribute in Ugria for some years, sent an expedition of armed men to collect the tribute for himself and to establish his rights in that country. His authority grew till he had established a sort of overlordship over the Ugrians. Henceforth the authority of Novgorod disappeared on the east of the Urals, and before the end of the sixteenth century the proud republic bit the dust under the heel of the Muscovite Tsar, Ivan the Terrible. Moscow thus became overlord of Ugria; but early in the sixteenth century we

hear no more of Ugria as a name. The northern part of the great fur-bearing forest in the lower waters of the Obi was now known as Kondia and Obdoria, while the lower forest bordering the steppes was known henceforth as Sibir. In Kondia and Obdoria, inhabited by tribes of Finnish hunters, the authority of the Tsar was more or less respected, but in Sibir for the first time the Slavs came in contact with the Siberian-Tartar khanate, and the conquest of this power by the Russians extended over the greater part of the sixteenth century. After the wane of the Mongol power, this Siberian Tartar khanate seized the opportunity for independence, and the centre of the new political power was established at Sibir, near the junction of the Ishim and Tobol tributaries of the Irtish. Much internal dissension marked the history of the Siberian khanate during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for those khans who had just become converted to Islam created much discontent by energetically stamping out all relics of the old Finnish shammanism and nature-worship among their subjects. Numerous faction quarrels, feuds and usurpations took place, and finally Khan Kuchum, who is believed to have been a Turk from Central Asia, and descendant of Dengiz Khan, set up his authority at Sibir. Meanwhile Ivan the Terrible was known to be harbouring designs against the khanate, but he was too much engaged at that time in crushing the Mohammedan khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, nearer home, to take more than an academic interest in far-off Siberia. At last Kazan and Astrakhan fell and the way to Siberia was clear. Ivan sent to Kuchum in 1569 and demanded tribute, but his envoys were plundered and killed. But he was now in a position to

attack and to proceed against Kuchum with a view to overthrowing him. Then it was that Yermak appeared upon the scene and enacted the rôle which has caused his name to live in the history of Siberia. But the personality of Yermak is shrouded in myths, and it is not improbable that the exploits of several individuals may have been merged into one heroic national character. Besides the Yermak personality in the conquest of Sibir, a certain Anika Stroganof is also intimately associated with him. Stroganof was a salt merchant in the province of Archangel in the north of Russia. He had for some years carried on a trade with some of the Ugrian Finns who came across the Urals to exchange valuable furs for salt. During the khanship of Ediger he had even sent over some servants of his to do barter trade with the Siberian Tartars at Sibir, and to exchange valuable furs for trifling articles of commerce. By this means Stroganof amassed considerable wealth, and the Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, anxious to encourage the relations of Moscow with Sibir, in order to compass the latter's downfall, offered to Stroganof large tracts of land in Eastern Russia on the Kama River, from whence he might open up closer relations with the khanate. While Stroganof was busy at these projects, Yermak appears. According to some stories, Yermak was a brigand, who was continually plundering the trade routes of South-East Russia which Ivan had been trying to open with Bokhara and Persia. One story relates how, on being caught on the Volga and being sent to Moscow for punishment, he begged Ivan to pardon him, if he went forth and reduced the Siberian khanate. Another story is that Ivan's soldiers

chased him off the Volga and that he took refuge on the Kama River, where Stroganof's concessions lay, and proceeded with him to accomplish the overthrow of Sibir. Undoubtedly both these men worked together for the common end, for Stroganof had the knowledge of the country and Yermak the dashing energy. Both were jointly responsible for the result, but on Yermak has fallen the glamour of the popular hero. With Stroganof's aid, Yermak prepared an expedition to Sibir in 1579, and after eighteen months of great hardship he reached the Tara River with 500 men, only a fraction of the force. Undaunted, however, he met the overwhelmingly superior force of Kuchum Khan on the Tobol River, utterly defeated it, and, while the khan fled, entered Sibir in triumph in September 1518. The Tartars everywhere submitted, and Yermak found himself transformed from a Cossack freebooter to an autocrat as powerful as the Tsar of Moscow.

But Yermak's triumph was short-lived. The Tartars, who had only retreated into the forest, proceeded to harass the little band of Cossacks. One night, as Yermak was returning to Sibir, after an expedition to reduce an outlying Tartar stronghold, he was surrounded on an island in the Irtish River, his Cossack band was annihilated, and he, according to tradition, committed suicide by drowning. This calamity destroyed for a time the power of Russia in Siberia, but in 1587 we hear of a certain Cossack of the name of Chalkoff being sent by the Tsar of Moscow to accomplish the recapture of Sibir. So the Khan Kuchum had not time to recover his power before he was again confronted with these formidable Cossacks, and this time he finally suc-

cumbed, and Sibir never again fell from the hands of the Muscovite.

During the next eighty years, up to the middle of the seventeenth century, the Cossacks not only consolidated their hold on the lower and middle Irtish River, but swept across Northern Asia to the shores of the Pacific.

The Siberian Mussulman power being broken, the Cossacks followed the line of least resistance, along the shores of the principal Siberian rivers, building forts and stockades, and advancing length by length. In 1591 Beryoza was founded, in 1593 Tara and Obdorsk. From the Irtish they followed up the banks of the Obi, reaching to Surgut and Narim in the early seventeenth century, and thence across to the watershed of the Yenisei, till at length they reached Krasnoyarsk, and the shores of the Chulim. Later in the seventeenth century they reached the Lena River, and the Yakutsk country, and before the end of the century were established on Lake Baikal, where they subdued the Mongol tribes of Buriats. The Finnish tribes in the northern forests submitted everywhere to the new-comers, being of a shy and more peaceable disposition. But the Mongol and Turkish elements, and the remnant of the broken Siberian khanate, took many years before they were really subjugated. Some of them remained in the lower forest zone, and, settling down peaceably under the Cossacks, became like the Kazan Tartars of European Russia, and are known to-day as the Tartars of Tobolsk. The rest, however, retreated southward into the steppes and plateaus on the Upper Irtish and Obi rivers, and, mingling with the tribes already there, became Tartar nomads of the

Altaian and Kirghiz type. Farther east, around Lake Baikal, nomad Buriat tribes, a northern branch of the Mongol race, held out for many years against the Cossacks, but were finally subdued. The continuous raiding of these nomads into the Cossack forts and stockades, and the absence of any natural boundary to shut them out, of necessity caused the Cossacks to move southward, as opportunity presented itself, to secure subjugation of these Tartars. The first line of defence in Western Siberia during the eighteenth century reached Chornafsky, on the Tobol River, Omsk at the junction of the Om and Irtish rivers, Biisk on the Upper Obi. A second line of defence, beyond this, stretched some hundred versts up the Tobol River, to what is now Semipalatinsk. South of these Cossack lines the Kirghiz Tartars roamed and raided, while south-east lay the great natural sanctuary of the Altai Mountains, into the plateaus of which the Altai Tartars and other relics of the Finnish races had been retreating for centuries past.

The Cossack defences consisted of block houses and stockades established across the steppes, between which communications were kept up. This means of defence, although unsatisfactory, was only a temporary expedient, and prepared the way for farther advances into the steppe for the purpose of occupying the territory beyond, and of pushing all those who would not submit farther away, till some natural geographical line was reached.

The Russian system of sedentary agricultural colonization was in direct antagonism to the nomad life of the Tartar, and, as was the case in European Russia, so in Siberia these two economic systems were

for centuries in conflict with one another, until the former and higher system ultimately prevailed. The attainment of this has no doubt been aided by the more peaceable character which the Tartars have been assuming as time goes on, coupled with a gradual tendency on their part to abandon nomadic for sedentary life, through contact with the settled Russian population, and through the gradual contraction of the grazing areas. But the population of the southern steppes of Siberia, being more suited to nomadic than to sedentary life, has naturally been slow to settle down under Russian influence.

So this early Slavonic civilization gradually moved across Central Asia, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the complete subjugation of the Tartars in the southern steppes can only be said to be a comparatively recent accomplishment. For as in the history of European Russia, so in that of Siberia and Central Asia, the Russians were compelled in self-defence to adopt the policy of gradual expansion across the steppes in order to secure their own safety from Tartar raids, until some natural or strong political boundary made farther advance unnecessary.

The Southern Siberian steppes, which imperceptibly merged into the steppes of Turkestan, possessed no such natural boundary behind which the Tartars could be driven and kept. The conquest of the Turkestan steppes during the latter half of the nineteenth century was therefore only the consummation of the process which had been going on in South-East European Russia and South-Western Siberia during the previous century. Southward the Russian frontier has in recent times been pushed up to

the mountains of Afghanistan, and to what is now Chinese Turkestan, where other political powers, assisted by natural boundaries, have arrested the Slavonic wave. In this process of absorption the khans of Khiva and Kokand, the ameers of Bokhara and other relics of the Tartar power in Turkestan, have now fallen from their high estate and are overshadowed by the two-headed eagle, while the begs of Kashgar and other rulers of the eastern portions of this former Mohammedan Empire became absorbed by the Dragon Throne at Peking.

So it came about that the Slavs began their relations with Siberia among the Ugrian Finnish tribes in the northern forests, and then proceeded to overthrow the Turko-Finnish Mussulman power on the Tobol and to spread south-east and eastward, till they were at last stopped by the power of China. Thus the door for the colonization of the richest lands of Siberia, between the steppe and the forests, lay open, and the subsequent history of Siberia shows how a wedge of Slavonic immigrant colonies has been pushed into this fertile zone. This land, being the best for agriculture, was suitable to the sedentary Slavs, and the immigrants who pushed into this agricultural zone effectually separated the Tartar nomads in the steppes bordering Turkestan from the Finnish tribes who retreated to the Northern Siberian forests and to the Altai plateaus. In these so-called Finnish aborigines one still sees the impure relics of an ancient and primitive civilization which existed in Siberia before ever the Slavonic or the Turkish or Mongol races were heard of. But the relics of this older civilization only form a fraction of the present population of Siberia. The last three

centuries have witnessed the overwhelming development of the Slav race, represented in Siberia by the early Cossacks and their descendants, the exiles, and finally the peasant immigrants. Under the Government of the Tsar all are now brought together in one political entity, although the tribal distinctions between Finns, Tartars and Russian are still just discernible. And thus we trace the early development of Russia's Eastern Empire in Northern Asia with all its possibilities of future greatness.

The colonization of Siberia has naturally depended upon the changes and social movements which have gone on in European Russia since the Slavs first crossed the Urals. Through contact with Asia, and through the influence of the Mongol and Tartar invasions during the Middle Ages, the European Russians were prevented from advancing along the same path of agricultural, industrial and social progress as the other nations of Western Europe. Some outlet, therefore, for the increasing population was necessary, and the way was open to the East, where the absence of any considerable natural barrier gave access to the vast regions of Siberia, into which, ever since the fourteenth century, the Slavs of Europe have been gradually penetrating.

Following close after the Cossacks came the commercial pioneers whose object it was to open up trade with the Finnish tribes in the north and the Tartars in the southern steppes, and for a time these two Slavonic social elements were alone in Siberia, uncontrolled by any power in old Russia.

But the authorities in Moscow and St Petersburg were not long content to leave the colonization and

social evolution of Siberia in the hands of these early settlers. It has not infrequently happened that nations emerging from a mediæval social state, and having an Imperial future before them, use the undesirable portion of their population as a means of colonizing the outlying portions of their empires. The tsars, therefore, in the middle of the seventeenth century, were by no means exceptional in sending convicts to Siberia, and the practice, thus begun, was continued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even the story of Yermak leaves one in doubt whether he should be classed as a convict exile or as a Cossack, who had been sent to conquer the Tartars. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries not only were criminals thus exiled, but prisoners of war from the western frontiers—Poles, Letts, Germans and Swedes—were banished to the wild regions of the East. Such was the zeal for colonizing the new eastern territories that even the lowest and worst criminals were utilized for this purpose, and in the reign of Catherine the Great the death sentence was temporarily commuted in order to give effect to this colonial policy.

This explains how it is that Siberia has come to be popularly regarded as a penal settlement. But although the convicts played their part in the early civilization of these regions, and although their influence on the little Cossack and trading communities, which sprang up side by side with them, was altogether injurious, it must not be forgotten that the immigrants from European Russia during the nineteenth century have been a counteracting force, and it is extremely doubtful whether convict colonization has left its mark on the present in-

habitants of Siberia to such an extent as is generally supposed.

The ill effect was certainly intensified in the early years of the nineteenth century, when the discovery of mineral wealth in certain parts of Siberia led to an hysterical scramble for wealth among all classes of the little Siberian population. As soon, however, as these discoveries came to the ears of the home authorities, the doors to all private exploitation were closed, and in the name of the Tsar and his ministers the mineral wealth of the eastern provinces was annexed by Government officials. It was then that the working of the mines by compulsory convict labour originated, and it was during the first half of the nineteenth century that most of the harrowing tales about convicts in Siberia came to be so extensively circulated in Western Europe. Still, it must be remembered that the convict exiles have by no means played so important a part in the colonization of Siberia as is generally believed. In course of time the number of imported convicts began to decrease. They were, moreover, often physically and mentally weak, and, as they were unable to stand the rigours of the Siberian climate, the death roll was enormous, and their descendants, therefore, are far from numerous. The influence of this criminal element on Siberian society was, however, most baneful at the time. Often a prosperous little Siberian village would be invaded by a gang of convicts, who had been ordered by the authorities to settle in the district. It was difficult to confine them to their proper quarters, and they roamed about the country, no better than gangs of thieves. Even when they settled down to work at the respective

tasks allotted to them, they were forced to live socially separated from the older inhabitants. The absence of women, moreover, among the convicts, and the refusal of the older inhabitants to give their daughters in marriage, tended to generate a moral pestilence. The Russian Government at last realized that the indiscriminate mixing of criminal exiles, harmless political exiles and peaceful colonists was a danger to society, and would be certain to breed more criminality and political discontent, and prevent the peaceful economic development of the country. As early as 1870, therefore, attention was directed towards the Siberian problem, and from that time till the end of the century the Government, by administrative action, has attempted with more or less success to prevent the mixing of criminal exiles with peaceful colonists. The convicts were henceforth confined more and more to the north-eastern territories on the Lena River and to certain parts of the Far East, while political exiles and immigrant colonists were confined to the fertile lands of Western and Central Siberia. This policy is carried out to this day, and all convicts, other than those in the prisons of European Russia, are confined to special prisons in Far Eastern and North-Eastern Siberia and to the island of Saghalien on the Pacific Coast.

Perhaps the most important factor in the social development of modern Siberia has been not the convicts, nor even the Cossacks, but the peasant immigrants from European Russia. These were divided into two classes: those who immigrated under the supervision of the authorities, and those who immigrated independently of it.

The numbers of the latter class were very great, especially in the early times, and such immigrants were generally known as "samovolny" or voluntary immigrants. Their coming was largely brought about by the social conditions which at that time existed in European Russia. The growth of feudal serfdom, which began in the seventeenth century and continued through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, caused the stronger and more independent members of society to become fugitives, and to seek new fortunes in Siberia, where the remoteness and isolation of the country was their refuge. They came in waves corresponding with the severity of the spasmodic feudal oppression which continued in European Russia all through these times, and they were accompanied to some extent by the members of certain persecuted religious sects and by dissenters from the Pravo-Slav faith. These religious and voluntary exiles settled in the remote corners of Siberia, as far as possible from the hand of officialdom, and founded communal colonies as in European Russia. They intermarried with the Cossacks and even with some of the native Tartars and Finns, and so their descendants formed the Siberian branch of the Slav race, a strong and independent, though rough and primitive, people, who, while retaining their customs and habits as Russians, have lost their true Russian national sentiment. The samovolny, however, were not favourably regarded by the Russian Government, who, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, did all they could to stop these wandering immigrants and voluntary exiles. But the vast size of the country made the control of immigrants exceedingly difficult, and it was not

until the latter part of the nineteenth century that the immigration to Siberia came to be thoroughly regulated. This was largely brought about by the increased power of officialdom in Siberia, which grew as the country developed, and this factor, combined with the abolition of serfdom in European Russia, had the effect of stopping unauthorized immigration, and of paving the way for an organized system under a State scheme.

But another class of immigrants came into prominence during the latter half of the nineteenth century. These were the political exiles, who for offences of a political nature were required by the authorities to settle in some remote part of the empire, where their influence might not be felt. Siberia was naturally a most suitable place, and the Government was not slow to utilize it for this purpose. During the intellectual revival which followed the abolition of serfdom in the reign of Alexander II., wild and often exaggerated ideals of progress and reform seized a certain section of Russian public opinion. It thereupon became the fashion for the authorities in European Russia, as it still is to some extent, to send out cultured Polish, Finnish and Russian youths to exile in Siberia, whenever their views were considered to be too far in advance of the times. These exiles, although not sufficiently numerous to form a large section of the Siberian community, had nevertheless great influence upon its social development, and on the formation of progressive public opinion in the growing Siberian urban centres.

But undoubtedly the chief element in the evolution of Siberian society, especially during the last fifty years, is to be found in the peasant immigrants from

European Russia, who have voluntarily settled under Government supervision on the fertile lands of Western and Central Siberia. Even from the earliest times the Government has aimed at colonizing the black earth zone, a large area of country, lying between the northern forest and the southern Tartar steppes, suitable in the highest degree for the agricultural development of the Slavonic people. This colonizing movement spread first along the banks of the rivers of Western and Central Siberia, and was principally directed along the shores of the Tura, Tobol, Tavda, Upper Irtish and Obi. To encourage this colonization, exemption from taxation for three years was granted by the Russian Government in 1889 to all authorized immigrants from European Russia. In addition to this, half the taxes were remitted for a subsequent period of three years, and exemption was also granted for a time from military service. In 1898 a loan of 80 roubles (about £9) was made to each family of immigrants, and this was ultimately increased to 140 roubles (about £15) in cases where special difficulty was experienced by settlers. At the present time grants often reach 200 roubles (about £22) a family in certain localities. These loans are repayable in instalments without interest over a period of years. Within the last ten years a Government survey staff has been appointed, and all new land set apart for immigrant communes is now carefully surveyed, plotted out and assessed for loans and subsequent taxation. In addition to loans in cash the Government now gives to every settler in his first year sufficient seed corn to enable him to sow three desatynes (7½ acres) of land. Moreover, in many of the

immigrant districts agricultural implement depots have been established, where machinery can be bought by the settlers at cost price. The Government has indeed done everything possible within the last twenty years to encourage organized colonization in Siberia, and has to a large extent succeeded in planting communal colonies along the wheat-growing belt of Western and Central Siberia, which are the exact replica of those in European Russia. Some idea of the immigration of peasants from European Russia can be gathered from the following fact. Between 1894 and 1903 there emigrated from European Russia into the governments of Tobolsk and Tomsk 590,000 people, the average numbers per annum during these dates being about 60,000 a year. Between 1905 and 1908 over 1,000,000 immigrants settled in the governments of Tobolsk, Tomsk, Yeniseisk and Irkutsk, at the average rate of 300,000 a year. In the year 1909 the immigration of these same regions reached the total of 500,000, which since that time has been exceeded by a still greater figure.

Siberia has therefore been colonized in the past by five distinct social classes of the Russian community:

(1) Cossacks or military pioneers, who laid the foundations of the Eastern Empire.

(2) Convicts, who during the early part of the nineteenth century were utilized for work in the gold mines.

(3) Wandering peasant immigrants or samovolny, who voluntarily immigrated and settled in the remote parts of Siberia without authority.

(4) Political exiles, who were sent for political offences and settled as colonists in certain districts, from which they were not allowed to move.

(5) Authorized voluntary immigrants, who came from European Russia and settled under Government supervision.

Of these five, during the last twenty years, the latter type of immigrant has played the most prominent part in the economic and social development of Siberia, and the policy of the Russian Government has been to colonize the most fertile parts of Western and Central Siberia with this class, in order to develop the resources of the empire on modern economic lines, and to provide a growing population to strengthen the eastern frontiers.

Since Siberia has always been connected in the eyes of the Western European public with convicts and exiles, it may be of interest here to examine more closely this section of the community, and to see what part it now plays in the evolution of Siberian society. As I have shown above, great changes have come over the exile system in Siberia during recent years, and the growth of peasant immigration has been accompanied both by a diminution of the number of the criminal prisoners sent into the country, and also by a better regulation of those that remain.

There are recognized under the common law of Russia the following classes of prisoners:—

(1) "Katorgeny Rabotniki," or criminal convicts, sentenced for the worst offences to penal servitude in certain parts of the empire.

(2) Common prisoners, sentenced for smaller

criminal offences to serve short periods in prisons or common gaols, such as exist in each district of the empire.

(3) Political prisoners, who have committed purely political offences, and who are compelled to reside in certain districts under police supervision.

The first class of prisoner is confined to special convict prisons which are under the same regulation and management now as the majority of convict prisons of most European countries. Nearly all the convict prisons in Siberia are in the Far East, at such places as Nerchinsk, on the Amoor River, and on the island of Saghalien. These convicts are forced to do hard labour, but very few of them are now used in mines, because the Government now has practically no mining properties which it works itself in Siberia. Convicts have recently been used as navvies for the construction of the Amoor railway. Thus criminal convicts are no longer seen in Siberia, except in the eastern territories, and, moreover, the number sent from European Russia is much less than it formerly was, for Siberia is no longer looked upon as a convict settlement.

The second class of common prisoner is the same in Siberia as in any other part of the empire. I deal with him in Chapter IV., in describing my visit to a local gaol in Minusinsk.

Perhaps the most important class of prisoner, and one in which the greatest interest is taken by public opinion in Western Europe, is that of the political exile, of which there are two kinds.

There are, first, those sentenced by a court of law under proper legal procedure, and, secondly, those sentenced without trial by "administrative order"

of the Minister of the Interior. This is one of the worst features of the Russian judicial system, which is still in great need of reform. In effect it means that the Minister of the Interior can under martial law, which is still in force throughout the empire, cause anyone to be arrested and transported to any place, where, it is considered, he may have a less injurious influence on those around him. This, of course, is a great infringement of the elementary rights of citizenship, and so far the reforms in Russia have failed to abolish it. It is generally applied to persons suspected of having taken part in revolutionary movements, and against whom there is not sufficient evidence to allow of an indictment being drawn up and presented before the judges. These two classes of political exiles are further divided into exiles "with rights" and exiles "without rights." The former has practically the same economic rights as the free citizen; thus he can possess land in Siberia, settle on it and derive his profits out of it, and he can also work for wages or engage in trade. This class of exile can have little to complain about. Those, however, who are exiled without rights are in a very different position. They are restricted to a certain number of small trades, and their annual turnover is limited. They are allowed, however, to earn the current wages for their labour, and are employed generally on wharfs, railways and steamships, or, if they are in the remoter districts, on the post roads. A certain number of political exiles belong to this category, and indeed in Western and Central Siberia they amount to very nearly one-third the total number. An able-bodied exile of this class, however, can always earn a good living in some of the towns along the

railway, and to the ordinary uncultivated Russian there is not much hardship in this form of exile; but it is rather severe upon all those who are physically weak or accustomed to an intellectual life. Many of the political exiles of this class band together and form co-operative societies to protect the interests of their members in some of the larger Siberian towns. They use this organization as a means of obtaining work for each other, and as a sort of labour bureau. It also assists necessitous cases, and acts as a bank where they can lodge their savings. The exile association of Krasnoyarsk in 1907 had funds equivalent to £400, all of which had been accumulated by the members of that society, working in different occupations.

The movement for the reform of the exile system has undergone a chequered career. In the year 1900 an Imperial Manifesto abolished punishment by exile for all kinds of convicts and political prisoners, and for a time it seemed as if the whole system would die out. But in 1904, in the great period of reaction through which Russia passed at the end of the Russo-Japanese War, culminating in the revolution, this punishment was re-established for political offences. In spite of this reaction, however, an improvement, brought about by purely administrative means, took place in another direction. As I mentioned above, the worst classes of criminal convicts gradually came to be confined to certain parts of Siberia, more especially the eastern parts, while the western and central parts of Siberia have been set apart for the politicals only. While there has been a great decrease in the number of the criminal exiles, there has been no abatement in that of the political exiles to

Siberia. In the year 1906, 45,000 political exiles were sent, and settled mostly as colonists in various parts of Western and Central Siberia, and since then the number sent from old Russia has varied from 8000 to 15,000 a year. In the year 1909 there were in the Yenisei Government a little over 50,000 political exiles undergoing sentences of various lengths. The majority of these will probably remain in Siberia even after their sentence has expired, since all but the most highly cultivated find there an opening for social and economic improvement such as they would never find in European Russia. While, therefore, it does not look as if the Reform movement has tended to reduce the number of exiles for political offences, Siberia has no longer the terrors of a penal colony. The number of convicts has been reduced; those that are sent, being drawn from the worst type of criminal, are strictly confined to special prisons in certain districts, so as not to interfere in any way with the peaceful economic development of Western and Central Siberia. Speaking generally, the economic condition of political exiles has greatly improved during the last decade; but it would be a great reform, without any danger to the Government, if the system of exile by administrative order without trial were abolished. This last is still a serious blot on Russia's judicial system.

The administrative system in Siberia at the present day does not differ from that of European Russia. Civil Government is in operation throughout the western and central provinces. The same liberties are allowed to, and the same restrictions are imposed on, Russian subjects in Siberia as in European

Russia. The Government, of course, is very centralized. The general administrative council for each Siberian province or government is directly under the authority of the Minister of the Interior. It is presided over by a civil Governor who represents that Minister, and is aided by councillors nominated locally and approved in St Petersburg. The usual weakness of bureaucracy is thus displayed, for responsibility always rests upon the higher authority, who is generally too far away or too much engaged to attend to or direct local policy. On the other hand, without central authority, administration over the vast and isolated districts of Siberia would be impossible, and Siberia would never have become what it is.

The business of the Governor's Council is delegated to committees which control the different executive departments. These generally consist of the following :—A department for Urban Affairs, for Peasant Affairs, and for Justice ; a Prison Committee ; an Education Board ; a Land Valuation Staff, and a Public Health Department. All these departments and committees are ultimately under the control of the Minister of the Interior in St Petersburg. Directly under the authority of the Imperial Finance Minister is the local branch of the Imperial Treasury, which is engaged in the assessment and collection of Imperial and local taxes. Under the Minister of Agriculture comes the Agricultural Organization Committee, the Local Immigration Committee and the Land Survey Staff. Then there is the local branch of the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, the local Department of Justice, and the local military authority. All these departments are under their respective bureaus in St Petersburg, and the local

Governor is generally *ex officio* a member of most of them. Thus, theoretically, a most complete administrative system is in operation in almost every part of Siberia, modelled on European lines; but it must be remembered that a great deal of this exists on paper only.

Representative institutions are but little developed in Siberia. Eight members are elected to the Imperial Duma from Siberia by indirect vote. In view of the enormous difficulties of establishing electoral systems in such a vast continent, the chief representation naturally falls on the traders and citizens of the towns.

Local representative institutions have not been formed in Siberia. Zemstvos or provincial councils elected by popular vote are as yet unknown. The chief towns, however, possess their town councils elected by the residents who pay the "Apartment Tax" (Kvarterny Nalog). In the rural districts administration is under the control of a "peasant affairs" official appointed by and responsible only to the Uyesdy Nachalnik, or local representative of the Governor.

The "Zemsky Smet," which is a proportion of the Imperial taxes allotted by the Imperial Treasury for such local purposes as roads, bridges, hospitals, drainage, etc., is administered in the rural districts by the peasant officials, and in the towns by the elected town councils.

As yet, however, slight interest is taken in public matters by the peasants, but there is no doubt that public opinion is developing slowly in Siberia. The more advanced classes of the urban population, influenced by the free and independent life in Siberia,

are agitating for a progressive policy, and resent the old world stagnation which they think dominates the policy of the St Petersburg Government. The political exiles and their descendants have been not so much a disturbing as an educational element in the Siberian social life, for they have been the means of introducing progressive ideas into Siberia from the seats of culture in the West. Amongst other things there is an agitation among the urban Siberians for greater representation in the Duma, increased Government grants for Siberian education, universities, and public development schemes, while resentment is frequently expressed when Siberian taxes are utilized for constructing military railways, or for similar schemes in other parts of the empire.

Indeed the germ of Siberian national consciousness is developing at the expense of Russian national consciousness, and the traveller in Siberia is forcibly reminded of a similar development in the British self-governing colonies.

I will conclude this chapter by giving a brief review of the principal groups of Siberian natives, and of their past and present relationships with the Russian colonists of Siberia. Although the percentage of Siberian natives to the total population is very small at the present day, still there are large tracts of Siberia which are uninhabited except by them, and, since their economic value as fishers and hunters is of considerable importance to the Russians, it is not out of place to examine the social status of these natives in modern Siberian society. The early Russian colonists who settled in the northern forest

regions and along the Mongolian frontier before the value of the black earth belt was known, were compelled to live for months and even years among the Finnish and Tartar tribes of those regions. After the establishment of the Cossacks in that country, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hostility between the two races dwindled, and the relation between Cossack and Siberian traders on the one hand, and native Finns and Tartars on the other, became one of forbearance, if not of cordiality. Being also of a nomadic nature the Cossack and the trader often adopted the habits and sometimes the clothing of the natives, while, on the other hand, the natives would often imitate Russian customs, and even in places show signs of giving up their nomadic life. Many of the Tartars, especially on the plateau steppes, even before the coming of the Russians, engaged in a rude agriculture and sowed rye and millet. The tendency to give up nomadic life and to settle was especially pronounced in the plateau steppes of the Altai, where the Russification of the Tartars has gradually and almost imperceptibly been at work for the last century. The policy of the Russians was everywhere one of peaceful penetration.

Russians, Tartars and Finns lived side by side for months; their children played together; Tartars often became Russian servants, living in the same house with their masters and eating the same meals. Not infrequently marriages took place between Russians and Altai Tartars, and occasionally, although not in response to any organized propaganda, a Tartar became Christian, or nominally Christian, and married a Russian girl.

But, as is the case with every subject race, there

was an element which would not submit to absorption, and as the Russians dotted their villages along the plains of Western Siberia and began to break up the land and graze over the steppes, those Tartars who did not care to compromise with the new conditions broke away southward into the Kirghiz steppes, or south-eastward into the Altai plateaus, or north-west into the sub-Arctic forests. This process has been continuing gradually for centuries, and in the time of Catherine the Great large tracts of land were set apart as native reserves, where Russians might not colonize and where the natives could have their own land without fear of disturbance.

It is undeniable, however, that in the early days the natives were exposed to some tyranny in the shape of excessive taxation and tribute; but the responsibility for this rested upon the authorities in European Russia, who, ignorant of the local conditions, wished to utilize the natives as a means of obtaining by forced labour the treasures of the fur trade. Thus in 1753 a tribute of ten squirrels and two linxes was levied from each Samoyede hunter, and ten sables and five hundred fish from the Ostiaks. The tribute was arbitrary and unjust, and arrears accumulated annually. The tribal chiefs, moreover, were made responsible for the tribute of each member, just as the Mongol khans are made responsible for the tribute of their subjects in Mongolia to-day.

But in 1822 a commission was appointed by the Russian Government, and the Siberian natives were divided for the purpose of taxation into classes according to their mode of life and livelihood. The old tribal system as a basis of assessment for taxation

was done away with. The natives were then classified according to their economic position, and tributes were lowered and levied in kind on these different classes of natives according to their different mode of life and occupation. On those that settled and took to partial cultivation a tax of eleven roubles per family, equal to that of the Russian peasants, was levied. Each individual was now made responsible for his tax and the responsibility of the tribal chief was abolished. But although the tribal system was not recognized for purposes of taxation, it was retained, and was used and recognized by the Russian Government as an agent of local administration for all purely native affairs. As shown in a previous chapter, the native divisions are only the old tribal divisions, which are now incorporated into the volosts and administrative divisions of the Russian communal colonies in Siberia. These native communes indeed are placed on an equal footing along with their Russian neighbours. So the old tribal system in Siberia became modified to suit the new economic conditions of the country, the use of money and a rise in the standard of living being influential factors in the change.

But as time went on the Russians unwittingly exercised upon the natives another form of oppression.

During the nineteenth century there was much ruthless economic exploitation, as there is in every country (the British Empire not excepted) where the natives are the smaller and weaker fraction. Ignorant and unsophisticated, they were ruthlessly swindled; their furs were extracted from them for nothing, or were given in exchange for a brick of inferior tea. The spirit curse began to appear and

to sap the vitality of the natives, and drastic action on the part of the Government could not stop it. Of recent years the efforts of the Russian Government have been more successful, and the Siberian traders themselves have taken action to prevent the selling of liquors to the natives. On the other hand, it must be remembered that the Siberian traders have saved the natives in many places from actual starvation, for in the old days in severe seasons famine and pestilence decimated their ranks. Now, however, such occurrences are rare, since full opportunity is given for the natives to exchange their wares for flour and tea.

The Russian influence on the native Siberian has therefore had both its sunny and its dark side, and in the present intermediate phase it is difficult to forecast the future accurately. Those natives, who do not become absorbed, will probably die out in time, because of their natural unfitness, while those, who do become absorbed, will probably add a new and valuable element to the Slav race. The enormous preponderance of the Slavs everywhere, together with the assimilating power of the Russian colonist, simplifies the native problem very considerably, and in fact no such problem can really be said to exist in Siberia as it does in other parts of the Eastern Empire of Russia.

In the population of Siberia at the present day the Great and Little Russians constitute ninety-two per cent. and the remaining eight per cent. make up the native tribes. These are divided into three main groups—Turko-Tartar, Finn, and Tartarized Finn.[1] Taking the first group, four and a half per cent. of the

[1] See Ethnographical Diagram of Western and Central Siberia.

total eight per cent. of native population are Tobolsk and Tomsk Tartars, one per cent. are Kirghiz from the steppes of Western Siberia; the Finnish group is represented by the Samoyedes, Ostiaks and Voguls, who comprise one and a half per cent. of the total population; and the third group of Tartarized Finns is represented by the Altaians, who comprise one per cent. of the total.

The Tobolsk and Tomsk Tartars, who are the direct descendants of the Tartars of the Sibir Khanate overthrown by Yermak, are, along with the Kirghiz, the purest relics of the Turkish stock in Siberia. When the Russians conquered Siberia they found these Tartars a comparatively highly cultivated people living in settlements and even in small towns, cultivating and irrigating the land, and understanding the use of metals. In course of time the Cossacks and Russian immigrants settled and intermarried with them, and the type has become further modified by admixture with the natives of the Altai. These Tartars, representing the relics of the old Siberian Turkish stock, correspond to the Kazan Tartars in European Russia. Their present distribution is in the southern forest belt of the Tobolsk and Tomsk governments. They are found also in colonies along the Ishim and Tobol rivers, and in considerable numbers on the so-called Vasyugan steppe between the rivers Irtish and Obi. They engage in agriculture, fishing and trading—in fact they pursue the same occupations as the Russians round them. Like all Tartars, however, they show considerable talent for commercial bargaining. Their houses are of one or two storeys with log walls and a turfed roof, but they differ from the Russian houses

in the absence of furniture. Strict Mohammedans though they are, they have largely, through Russian influence, and the cold climate, discarded the habit of secluding and veiling their women.

The other Siberian-Turkish element is found in the Kirghiz, who form the principal native population on the steppes of the Ishim in the south-west Tobolsk province. Here they live a nomadic, semi-settled life, just as they do in other parts of Central Asia.

The two chief Finnish races of North-West Siberia are the Samoyedes, who live in the far north on the toundras, and the Ostiaks, who live in the forest zone a few degrees farther to the south. These people are probably the oldest inhabitants of the continent, and are the relics of the ancient civilization which once covered all Siberia, having retreated north-west from the pressure of Turk, Mongol and Russian. They have a distinct physical type and language; their nomad habits, their birch-bark habitation, their reindeer culture and their skill in hunting and fishing are also characteristic. Their ancient and primitive civilization, moreover, is shown in their adherence to the old shamman rites and the worship of the spirits of nature. Natural religion was probably once universal among mankind, and its appearance among these people at the present day is an indication of their ancient origin. In the summer the Samoyedes roam with their reindeer over the toundras to the Arctic Sea, where they engage in fishing, returning in winter to the lower latitudes on the edge of the forest zone. The Ostiaks, who in other respects are similar to the Samoyedes, keep more in the southern forests during the summer, specializing more particularly in fur

hunting. In the tract of country east of the Urals on the Konda and Sosva rivers there is also another tribe of people called the Voguls, very similar in type to the two former and living under much the same conditions.

The third group of Tartarized Finns present with certain modifications features and habits similar to those of the Northern Siberian Finns. As I have indicated elsewhere, along the Mongolian frontier, especially in the Altai plateaus, there are natives comprehensively known as the Altai Tartars or the Altaians. They are probably the relics of the oldest Finnish races, which have retreated hither from the lower forest and the black earth steppes for centuries past, taking refuge from the invasion of Cossack and Turk. In comparatively recent times, however, they have become mixed, and they now present certain linguistic and physical characteristics which show distinct traces of Turkish influence. In the Yenisei Government of Central Siberia these Tartarized Finns are represented by the Chulim and Abakansk Tartars, inhabiting the country south of the railway and along the banks of the rivers of those names. The Soiots of the Upper Yenisei along the Mongolian frontier are also closely related to them. Similar tribes are also found in the Tomsk Government in the northern Altai district. In the high plateaus of the Central and Southern Altai, where the Obi River takes its rise, the true Altaian type is seen, containing several subdivisions, of which the principal are the Telengets and the Teluts. They are semi-nomadic, living with their flocks in felt tents during the summer and in hexagonal wooden huts in the winter. They are becoming

much affected by Russian influences and are even intermarrying with the Russian peasants. But their shamman nature-worship survives, modified, as I show elsewhere, by admixture of Christianity introduced by the Russian.

## CHAPTER VIII

# PRESENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WESTERN AND CENTRAL SIBERIA

### I. GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS

THE writer hopes in the following chapter to convey some impressions of the present economic state of that part of Siberia which is most closely in touch with European commercial influences, and to indicate the probable lines along which its economic development will proceed. He hopes that the following review will be of some academic interest to the economic student of these districts, as well as of some practical use to any readers who may purpose to engage in the commercial enterprises for which Western and Central Siberia offer in the near future so remunerative a field.

It is often said that geography is the basis of history, but it is not less true to say that the geographical conditions of a country form the framework, upon which the economic life of its inhabitants is built. Siberia, which forms but part of the great inheritance of the Russian people of to-day, is a vast territory, bounded on the north by the Arctic Ocean, on the south by the outposts of the Chinese Empire along the Mongolian frontier, and stretching from west to east 6000 miles from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Within its borders the most

diverse physical conditions are found—fertile plains of black earth, boundless grazing steppes, rolling downs, rugged plateaus, gloomy forests and frozen toundras. Here it is proposed to give an account, from an economic standpoint, of only one-third of this great territory, which includes the four main provinces of Western and Central Siberia. These districts, which, as has been said, comprise the parts of Siberia nearest to Europe, are of chief importance from the economic point of view, for here the wave of Slavonic immigration in its eastward course first impinged, and here European commercial influence is most widespread and most deeply rooted.

Geographically, the Ural Mountains, which are a range of rocky downs averaging about 1500 feet in altitude, are the natural barriers between the low plains of East European Russia and those of Western Siberia. The plains of Western Siberia stretch across the continent for nearly 1200 miles, without a break to the Altai Mountains, in the plateaus of which the great rivers of Western and Central Siberia take their rise. The Altai system itself consists of a complex mass of mountains, snowy ridges and plateau valleys which together form the north-west edge of the great Central Asiatic tableland. The edge of this tableland crosses Siberia from south-west to north-east, and presents its most rugged aspects in its south-western extremity, where, in the Siberian Altai system, mountains of 15,000 feet are met with. But as this tableland crosses the continent in a north-easterly direction the mountain masses become less complex and lower in altitude, till they finally sink in rolling downs to the sea-level in the north-eastern territories of Siberia. The provinces of

Western and Central Siberia, with which I am dealing here, comprise the great plains, of over 1000 miles in length from east to west, which are watered by the Obi, Irtish and Yenisei rivers, and also include a part of the north-west edge of the Central Asiatic plateau, in what is generally known as the Siberian Altai system. Western and Central Siberia, therefore, contains both plains and plateaus, and the physical features of the country are affected by two factors—namely, the latitude and altitude; for the same physical conditions are found in northern latitudes at low altitudes as are found in the southern latitudes at higher altitudes. In other words, climatic zones of considerable regularity occur all over Western and Central Siberia and are directly dependent upon two factors, latitude and altitude.

## 2. WESTERN SIBERIA AND THE ALTAI

### *Physical Zones, Administrative Areas, Population and Immigration*

This great stretch of country lying nearest to European Russia contains the drainage area of the Irtish and Obi rivers, which take their rise in the Altai Mountains and flow north-west across the great plain of Western Siberia. The physical and climatic zones in this region are as follows[1]:—

In the far north, bordering the Arctic Sea down to latitude 62 degrees, there is an immense area of level mossy waste called toundras. Farther south, between latitude 57 and 62, comes a great forest belt and fur-bearing zones, inhabited chiefly by a few Siberian fur traders and by the native Finnish tribes.

[1] See Diagram of Physical and Vegetation Zones of Western and Central Siberia.

This forest is very rich in unexploited timber, but much of it is covered by impassable swamp, of which the " vasyugan " area is typical, and extensive communication is only possible along the natural waterways. In the southern part of this forest area there is a certain amount of cultivation along the banks of the rivers, and rye crops can be profitably grown. South of this forest zone, between latitudes 55 and 57, comes the black earth zone, or so-called "lyeso-steppe." This zone, where the forest gradually merges into the steppe, is the most favourable for agricultural colonization, and it is here that the emigration from European Russia is rapidly extending. South of this zone and below latitude 55 come the dry steppes, inhabited largely by nomad Kirghiz Tartars with large herds of live stock. The country here borders on the province of Akmolinsk and the great Kirghiz steppes, which merge imperceptibly into Turkestan.

This great plain of Western Siberia terminates in the foothills of the Altai uplift, and here, between the altitudes of 500 and 1400 feet, and between the latitudes of 51 and 54, there is another area of black earth belt, which is probably the richest in all Siberia and possibly in the world. Here also at 8000 feet a large area of Alpine meadow is found, providing rich summer grazing for the nomad Altai Tartars, who inhabit these plateaus in a state of semi-Russification.

The administrative provinces of Western Siberia are four in number. The Tobolsk Government lies in the north-west, just east of the Urals and in the low plains of the Obi and Irtish. South of this come the governorships of Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk, comprising the dry steppe areas of the Upper Irtish

watershed. To the east of these two provinces, in the watershed of the Obi, comes the Government of Tomsk, which includes also the whole of the Siberian Altai.

As stated above, the best agricultural land is found in a belt between the sub-Arctic forest and the dry steppes between latitudes 55 and 57. It is not improbable that the sub-Arctic forests and swamps once extended farther south than they do now. There are, moreover, indications that the dry steppes have encroached upon the southern fringe of the forest zone, forming a belt, the so-called "lyeso-steppe" or "woodland steppe." This belt, which is about 100 miles wide from north to south, and 1000 miles long from east to west, and is partly traversed by the Siberian railway, consists of scattered birch scrub interspersed with open grassy areas. Here the soil is covered several inches deep with a layer of peaty mould, desiccated remains of what probably were once sub-Arctic mossy wastes. It is to this belt that Russian agricultural colonization has been directed within the last half-century, introducing itself as a wedge between the forest zone on the north and the Tartar steppes on the south. In the two provinces of Tobolsk and Tomsk it is estimated that there are 190,000 square miles of this type of country suitable for agriculture; and of this 80,000 square miles lie in the southern and western parts of the Tobolsk Government in the watershed of the Ishim and Tobol. Here lies the district of Kurgan which, in spite of its fertility, has an average population of no more than thirty persons to the square mile, while the rest of this zone in the Tobolsk Government has less than ten persons per square

mile upon it. In the south of the Tomsk Government and along the north-west foothills of the Altai there are roughly 60,000 square miles of this black earth zone. Here, in spite of the attraction of fertile land, in close proximity to the mountains with their Alpine meadows, the greatest density of population is not more than twenty per square mile. In the central parts of the Tomsk Government and on the middle reaches of the Obi there is another area of 50,000 square miles of land, known as the Baraba steppe, fit for colonization and agriculture. Here again the population is probably below ten persons per square mile.

The present undeveloped state of the country can well be imagined when it is remembered that of the whole of this 190,000 square miles only three per cent., or under 6000 square miles, is at present settled with colonists engaged in agriculture. But emigration from European Russia has proceeded rapidly during the last twenty years. Between 1894 and 1903, 590,000 immigrants, or on an average about 60,000 a year, settled in Western Siberia, three-quarters of whom went to the Altai district. Between 1905 and 1908 the rate of immigration increased to about 300,000 a year and during these four years over 1,000,000 immigrants came into Western Siberia. In 1909, 500,000 immigrants came in one year, and even this figure was exceeded in 1910. In 1911, owing to bad harvests and famine, the number decreased to 189,000. The black earth zone of the Western Siberian plains, between latitudes 55 and 57, and the foothills of the Altai farther east, are the principal outlets for the population of European Russia. It is estimated that if these

districts were thoroughly colonized, and properly cultivated, they could support five times the present population of European Russia—*i.e.* 500,000,000 people. At present the population of the whole Siberian continent is only 8,000,000 people.

### *Wheat Cultivation*

Since nearly three-quarters of the population of Western Siberia are peasants, agriculture is by far the greatest industry. The possibilities of wheat growing in the Kurgan and Ishim steppes are now being realized, for this is the only agricultural district in Siberia near enough to Europe to make the export of wheat profitable. The railway freights from Chelyabinsk to the Baltic ports at present just admit of the export of wheat to Western Europe, and when the Omsk-Tiumen railway is completed a considerable growth in the wheat export from Siberia can be expected. Export of wheat from Siberia to European Russia began in 1899 and has continued with interruptions, owing to bad harvests, ever since. The wheat produced in Western Siberia has, however, in spite of its great increase in quantity, been largely absorbed by the increased demands of the growing urban population of European Russia and of Siberia itself, and unless the cultivated wheat area extends at a much greater rate than hitherto, the balance of wheat available for export from Siberia to Western Europe is not likely greatly to increase.

### *The Dairy Industry, its Growth and Importance*

One of the most important products of Western Siberian agriculture is butter. Being small in bulk,

and proportionately of higher value per unit weight than cereals, it can be profitably exported to Europe and England from the principal districts in the agricultural zones of Western Siberia. As stated above, wheat is not a very profitable crop for export, since the price must be so low, to bear the high transport rate from these districts, that the profit on export is practically absorbed. Everything therefore favours high-priced articles of small bulk, which can bear the cost of transport to the industrial centres of Western Europe. Butter and eggs are the principal articles of this kind produced in these districts. The Government has taken much interest in developing the dairy industry of the country. It grants loans and subsidies to peasant communities for the institution of dairies and creameries, it has established technical dairy institutes at Kurgan, Omsk, Kainsk and Barnaul, and it has set up refrigerating stores along the railway to facilitate successful transport.

The dairy industry in Siberia began in 1894, and the export of dairy produce to European Russia and Western Europe began in 1897. By the year 1904 exports had risen to 681,000 hundredweights. About this time a great boom in dairying and the butter export trade flourished. It was found that 32 pouds (792 lbs.) of milk, then selling at 18 kopeks per vedro (about 2d per gallon) at the creameries, produced one poud (36 lbs.) of butter, which could be sold in European Russia for six roubles per poud (4½d. per lb.). A large number of German and Danish firms rushed in and profitable business was done for a time. The price of milk was then forced up by excessive competition to 45 kopeks per vedro (5d. per gallon), and soon it became impossible to

produce butter to compete in Western Europe on account of the inflated value of the raw material. Much money was lost and stagnation set in. Since then, however, the industry has revived on a much sounder footing.

The export trade in butter from Western Siberia to England used to be largely monopolized by Danes and Germans, but English firms have of late years been taking considerable interest in this business.

All successful firms have their representatives stationed in the principal butter-producing districts of Western Siberia and the Altai, and the first condition of success is that these representatives should have a good knowledge of the Russian language and the character of the peasants. Butter is bought direct from the peasants, or from the private and communal creameries, and sent to the refrigerating stores on the railways. Successful butter export firms also do considerable business in dairy and agricultural machinery by opening credit and debit accounts with the peasants. As the peasants are without capital they can never pay cash, and it is therefore customary to debit them with machinery and stores sold to them, and to credit them with butter and eggs bought from them. On the whole, the peasants are honest, and, if properly treated and understood by tactful representatives, can be successfully dealt with. On the other hand, it is almost useless to use the law to get judgment against a debtor. Although it is possible in theory to obtain judgment in a Russian law court, in practice the delays are so interminable that this course is never worth pursuing.

### *The Live-Stock Industry*

South of the black earth agricultural zone comes the dry steppe, which stretches uninterruptedly from Siberia southwards across Russian Central Asia to the mountains of Turkestan. A large area of this southern zone of Western Siberia is inhabited by Kirghiz Tartars and a few scattered colonies of Siberian peasants. The chief products of this district are wool, hides, cattle and horses, for live stock forms the principal wealth of the inhabitants. The commercial centres for the products of this district are at Petropavlovsk and Omsk, which are situated at the points where the Siberian railway crosses the rivers Ishim and Irtish respectively. Meat is now being exported to European Russia from Petropavlovsk at the rate of 30,000 tons a year, but the lack of cold storage prevents export to Western Europe and England. Some firms are, however, establishing cold-storage plants along the railway, and this is the most necessary step to take before the industry can develop.

The live-stock trade has, of course, been greatly influenced by the growth of the dairy industry, and in recent years the value of live stock has greatly increased. Cattle formerly worth 10 roubles each (£1, 1s.) can now command from 20 to 40 roubles (£2 to £4, 10s.) for dairy herds. This naturally affects the value of the second quality cattle which are used for meat. The price of meat in Siberian towns is rarely more than fourpence to fivepence per pound, and in the villages is cheaper still. In view, therefore, of the low price of meat and its poor quality, it

is generally more profitable to utilize live stock for dairy purposes wherever possible. The live stock now sent up from the Kirghiz steppes to Petropavlovsk and Omsk provides fresh blood for the dairy stock of the Siberian peasants. The increase of dairying and cereal cultivation in Western Siberia has thus, by breaking up the large grazing ranches, caused a decline in the meat and hide trade, and this process is likely to continue as the country gradually develops.

Pig breeding has, however, developed greatly, more especially as an adjunct of dairying. In the Kurgan district, for instance, where buttermilk is plentiful, the raw material for fattening pigs is cheap, and it is probable that the export of bacon from this district to Western Europe and England will be on a large scale. Already, enterprising capitalists are establishing bacon-curing factories in Kurgan and other similar centres, and it is not improbable that within a few years Siberian bacon will have considerable effect in cheapening the price of bacon on the European markets.

### *Forests and the Possibilities of the Timber Industry*

The enormous supplies of timber in the Western Siberian forest zone have hitherto been practically untouched, because of the absence of means of transport. In the north of Tobolsk alone there is a huge forest zone covering 200,000 square miles, which stretches north and south from Tobolsk to Obdorsk and east and west from Tiumen to North Tomsk. It consists chiefly of red wood (*pinus Sylvestris*), white wood (*picea Obovata*) and some Siberian pine

(*pinus Sibirica*). There are, however, in this forest large areas of swamp where only stunted growth is found, while isolation makes all systematic working impracticable except along the banks of the principal rivers.

Extensive export to Europe, therefore, is impossible from the greater part of these forests, on account of the distances and the impossibility of profitably carrying heavy but cheap material on long rail journeys from Siberia to the Finnish Gulf. The proposed extensions of the railway in the north of the Tobolsk Government would, of course, do much to obviate this difficulty by connecting the forests of these districts by a short rail journey to the White Sea in North European Russia. Even now forests are beginning to be exploited, and timber mills have actually been erected on the Tura, Tavda and Sosva rivers in the Obi watershed with a view to timber export via Archangel.

There is, however, one particular kind of timber, called Siberian pine (*pinus Sibirica*), which is found in the north of Siberia and possesses valuable qualities on account of its soft nature and adaptability to certain kinds of pattern work. There is a strong probability that a demand for its consumption will grow up in Western Europe to replace the dwindling stocks of Canadian yellow pine. Already it has acquired a value sufficiently high to counterbalance a journey of 2000 miles along the Siberian railway to the Baltic ports, and a development in the export of this timber is not improbable even with the present imperfect railway system in Western Siberia.

With the exception of Siberian pines, however,

local timber prices are very low. Large boards of red and white wood are often sold for no more than twopence per cubic foot in the principal towns. The peasants obtain large areas of forests adjoining their communes, for which they pay the nominal sum of a few roubles a year to the Government, and cut as much timber as they want without restriction. As in all young countries there is, of course, considerable waste of timber resources, but the supply is so enormous and the demand so negligible that this hardly needs consideration. The forests of Western Siberia could supply European markets for many decades to come, but they have hitherto scarcely been touched. They are only waiting for improved communication to Western Europe via the White Sea.

### *The Fur Trade*

The fur trade was the earliest industry in Siberia. It was the richness of the country in furs that first attracted the attention of the Russians to the land east of the Urals, and the northern forest zones, between latitude 55 and 66, have been the hunting-ground for the best furs since the sixteenth century. To the markets of Tiumen, Tobolsk and Irbit are brought, each autumn, the products of the fur hunters. Sable ground is still found up to latitude 62, chiefly on the southern Sosva River and in the districts of Surgut, Beryoza and Ugan. The fur zone, although not so rich as formerly in the best qualities, is still very productive and shows no sign of exhaustion. The growing demand has caused prices to rise, and the cornering of fur stocks by Jewish dealers in Siberia is also an important factor

to be reckoned with. Average sable at Irbit now fetch from 30 to 60 roubles (£3 to £6) each ; squirrels 1s. to 2s. each ; red fox 8 to 9 roubles (£1) each.

### *Mining*

Next to the fur trade mining is the oldest industry in Western Siberia. Although the amount of labour employed is comparatively small, the value of the annual output is greater than that of any other industry in the country. Mining has undergone great fluctuations in fortune and changes in method since the early days. The industry began in the early part of the nineteenth century, when it was utilized and exploited by means of convict labour, which played such a prominent part in Siberian economic history during that time. All mineral rights were then monopolized by the Government, who found in the convicts a useful medium for working the mines. Many peasants also, who were tied to the Crown Estates, were forced to work in the mines, and in this way the mining industry was built up on the unsound economic principle of forced labour. After the emancipation of the serfs and the decrease in the transportation of convicts to Siberia, the labour market was freed from the blighting hand of the Government, and the first result of this economic emancipation was temporarily to ruin the mining industry of Western Siberia, which had lived upon forced labour for so long. The condition of mining labour is at the present time normal and satisfactory, and is, moreover, carefully regulated by the Government. Private mining enterprise has overtaken State enterprise within the last fifty

years, and now State mines are few and insignificant compared with the private mining concessions granted by the Government on long leases.

The mineral areas of Western Siberia are found chiefly in the Palæozoic formations of the Altai system. The richest areas are those situated at the headwaters of the Obi and Irtish, where these rivers flow off the Altai plateaus, while in the lower reaches also of these rivers, as they wander northward across the steppes, there are rich deposits of auriferous silt. Here, where the current is slack, dredging is chiefly resorted to, while on the upland plateaus gold is won by washing the sand and gravel. The working of reefs only began in 1897, and the output by this method has been comparatively small hitherto, although there is every reason to believe that in the mountainous districts of the Altai this method will become the principal one. A great hindrance to the successful working of reef gold in Western Siberia has hitherto been the difficulty in obtaining efficient mining machinery. Of late years, however, English firms have sent out some up-to-date machinery which is stimulating this branch of the mining industry. Although not so plentiful as in the Baikal district, North-Eastern Siberia and the Far East, gold is nevertheless found all over the Altai Mountains, and is especially rich in the Zeminogorsk and Salayersk districts. A number of syndicates, most of which have foreign capital at their backs, are working successfully here.

The Altai district is also very rich in silver. In the early days this was the chief mineral that was worked, and for a long time proved a profitable industry. But as the nineteenth century advanced, the increased

cost of labour, the difficulty of obtaining fuel in many places, and the fall in the price of the metal, made silver mining an unprofitable enterprise.

Recently, however, the improved method of extracing silver from lead by chemical process has been introduced into the Altai, and the result has been to cheapen the cost of production, thus renewing the possibility of again developing the silver mining industry of Western Siberia. Silver is as usual found in company with lead in these districts. A very rich silver area is to be found north of Semipalatinsk in the South-West Altai, and is being worked successfully at the present time.

Of all minerals coal has probably the most important prospect of development in Western Siberia. It is found in very large quantities in a certain basin in the north-east of the main Altai system. Stretching from the town of Tomsk southward to Kuznetsk in the upper waters of the Tom River, this coalfield covers an area of about 280 miles in length and 120 miles in breadth. The coal is of carboniferous age, and the lower seams of the basin are very good in quality, having good heating properties and about 80 per cent. of carbon. It is estimated that there are in the Beryosof district alone over 250,000,000 pouds—4,000,000 tons—of untouched coal. This coalfield is thus one of the greatest in the Russian Empire, and will in time provide the fuel for all future industries that may develop in Siberia. The demand for coal is even now brisk, and will undoubtedly largely increase in future both for the Siberian railway and for local industries.

At present the principal capital working the

Kuznetsk coalfield is Swedish and Russian, and in one place the Government is working a coal mine to provide the Siberian railway with fuel other than wood, which is now generally burnt. The possibilities of coal mining in this district are very great, but the Siberian railway only skirts the basin at present, and until the branch Altai railway is built, tapping this coalfield at the centre, its development will be hindered.

In addition to the above minerals the Altai is also rich in copper and lead, the former being especially found in the north of the Semipalatinsk province. Lead is universal, but at present there is little activity in its production, except as a by-product of silver.

But as in the case of coal, so as regards the whole mining industry of Western Siberia, there will not be any great development until the branch railway to the Altai from the main Siberian railway is built. Only then will it be possible to compete with the mining industries of the Ural Mountains, from which there is at present good rail communication with Europe.

### *The Commercial and Industrial Centres of Western Siberia*

In north-west Siberia the principal towns were formerly Tiumen and Tobolsk. Through them all the trade between European Russia and Siberia passed. In those days trade crossed the Urals by pack horses to certain points on the Obi River system and was conveyed thence by water route to all parts of Western and even to Central Siberia. The building of the railway, however, along the great

wheat belt to the south, between latitudes 55 and 57, had the effect of diverting much of the traffic from the old waterways, and at the present time only bulky articles like grain and timber go by the Obi water route to Tiumen and thence by rail to European Russia. All small and more valuable traffic, such as butter, minerals and furs, go now by the Siberian railway, which has not only captured most of the traffic of Western Siberia, but has stimulated great economic activity all along its route. Wherever it crosses the principal rivers flourishing towns are springing up. Thus Petropavlovsk on the Ishim, and Novo-nikolaevsk on the Obi River have within the last ten years grown from mere collections of huts to busy transport centres, through which commerce between Europe and the producing centres of Siberia passes. The most important towns, therefore, from an economic point of view, in Western Siberia are those where the great railway crosses the principal waterways, and those points which have been selected as the junctions for the new branch lines to the Altai and other districts.

These towns of quite recent growth have already seriously affected many of the old towns as, for instance, Tobolsk and Tomsk, which lie off the main railway, and many of the principal merchants and transport firms now have their head offices at such places as Novo-nikolaevsk. The towns of Tomsk and Tobolsk are still, however, the principal seats of Siberian local industry and of the small manufactures which have grown up within the last fifty years. Moreover, the importance of Tobolsk and Tiumen will probably revive when the north-west Siberian railway from Omsk to Tiumen, with its

branches to Tobolsk, has been built, thereby providing the shortest railway route from Western Siberia to the White Sea. In spite of the injury done to it by towns of newer growth, the annual trade of Tomsk is larger than that of any other commercial centre in Siberia, and is estimated at about 13,000,000 roubles (£1,500,000) a year.

The chief industries of Tomsk are spirit distilling, flour milling, skin curing, leather making and the manufacture of matches and glass. The first two comprise seventy per cent. of the total, showing clearly that the industrial development of Siberia is still in its infancy. In fact the country is still under the economic domination of the Moscow manufacturers, who have not yet established their cotton factories, ironworks, and other specialized industries on the east of the Urals. The only industries of any consequence, therefore, in Western Siberia are those of spirit distilling and flour milling, which can depend upon abundant supply of cheap raw material like wheat and rye.

The population of the principal towns of Western Siberia is steadily increasing, especially, as explained above, in those situated along the railway. Tomsk has at present over 50,000 inhabitants, Tiumen about 30,000, and Tobolsk, Kurgan Barnaul, and Blisk about 20,000 each.

### 3. CENTRAL SIBERIA (YENISEI GOVERNMENT)

#### *Physical Conditions*[1]

East of the Government of Tomsk in Western Siberia lies the most central province in the con-

[1] See Diagram of Physical and Vegetation Zones of Western and Central Siberia.

tinent—viz. the Yenisei Government, which, 982,908 square miles in area, comprises the vast country drained by the Yenisei and the Upper Chulim, a tributary of the Obi. The largest town and also the trading and administrative centre for this province is Krasnoyarsk, situated at a point where the railway crosses the Yenisei River. The districts into which the province is subdivided are the Krasnoyarsk and Achinsk districts in the west, the Minusinsk district in the south, the Kansk district in the east, the Yeniseisk district, and lastly the Turukhansk district in the far north. This Turukhansk district comprises two-thirds of the total area of the province, and consists of an immense stretch of 708,000 square miles of stunted forest and toundra, extending to the Arctic Sea, and inhabited by a few hundred native hunters and fishermen. South of these toundras or mossy wastes, between latitudes 54 and 64, there is a forest zone which covers the districts of Yeniseisk, Kansk, Krasnoyarsk and Achinsk. The population of these four districts numbers about 320,000, the greater part of whom are engaged in agriculture. South of the railway, between latitudes 53 and 54, in the Minusinsk district, there is an area of dry steppe surrounded by a zone of black earth which forms a ring between the dry steppe and the forest zones on the Mongolian frontier. In this black earth belt lies the most fertile land in all Central Siberia. Although the area is comparatively small it has a population of more than 200,000, with an average density of about twenty to thirty persons per square mile, which is high for Siberia; and yet large parts of it are quite uninhabited. In 1907 the Government

Survey Staff for the province surveyed and prepared for incoming colonists unoccupied areas to the extent of 102,600 square desyatines (256,500 acres). The total population of the Yenisei Government in 1909 was 787,778, and the administrative area is 982,000 square miles. The average density of the population at that date was therefore ·8 per square mile. Excluding the vast and almost uninhabited toundras in the north, the average density of population in the rest of the Government averages 2·9 per square mile, which differs very little from the density of the same zones in the governments of Western Siberia. Five-sevenths of the total population consist of peasants who are living on the land, the remaining two-sevenths consisting of urban population, numbering less than 100,000,000; in addition there were 52,000 native and Finnish Tartars and 50,000 political exiles.

The whole economic development of the Yenisei Government is proceeding along the same lines as that of the western governments. In the absence of further railway development it must for some years be economically self-supporting, and independent of an export and import trade.

The immigrants to the Yenisei Government in 1907 amounted to 79,000, in 1908 to 72,400, in 1910 to 33,000. These have been mostly settled in the Achinsk district on the west, while the rich Minusinsk area has been in the past left more to local development. In view of the fact that in the last two years immigration to the whole of Siberia has nearly reached the enormous figure of 1,000,000 persons per annum, the immigration to Central Siberia has so far been very small in comparison with that to the

western provinces of Tobolsk and Tomsk. As, however, these provinces become more settled, the wave of immigration will extend to Central Siberia.

### *Agriculture*

The chief industries in Central Siberia are agriculture and stock rearing. Practically all the 560,000 peasants of the provinces are directly engaged in one or other of these pursuits. The rearing of live stock as a sole occupation on a large scale is dying out, as the Tartars on the Minusinsk and Abakansk steppes become more and more settled in habits. It is, in fact, only on the Tartar reserves in these steppes that live stock is the principal industry and the sole means of subsistence for the flock owners. Elsewhere settled agriculture is the order of the day, and the agricultural system, which is breaking up the Tartar ranches, utilizes live stock as an adjunct to cereal cultivation. It must not, however, be supposed that the head of stock in Central Siberia is decreasing, but rather that agriculture is greatly on the increase.

The richest agricultural areas are to be found in the Achinsk and Minusinsk districts. The former district is suited for rye and winter wheat on account of the early winter and the comparatively deep snow, while in the Minusinsk district spring wheat is the principal crop, for the warm dry summers enable the crop to mature before the autumn frosts. On the other hand, winter wheat fails to survive here on account of the cold winds and the absence of snow on the steppes. Occasional droughts in June or July stand in the way of good crops of spring wheat, although the average rainfall at Minusinsk is 285 mm.

The spring and winter crops for the whole of the Yenisei Government in 1909 yielded 3,328,992 quarters; of this amount 2,640,000 quarters consisted of spring wheat. The actual yields of the cereals per acre are not known, but, comparing the quantity harvested and the quantity sown during 1910, the yield of the spring wheat varied from fourfold in the Minusinsk district to over sevenfold in the Achinsk and Kansk districts. Considering the immense undeveloped areas in the southern part of the Yenisei Government, and the present low yield through primitive agricultural methods, it can readily be seen what a granary this southern part of the Yenisei Government will become in time. It is doubtful, however, whether cereals can be profitably transported from these districts to Europe at present prices and with the present railway freights.

The local prices of cereals are ruled by the distance of the agricultural districts from the consuming centres. At Minusinsk the cheapest autumn prices are usually 1s. 6d. to 2s. per bushel for wheat, and the dearest spring prices 2s. 6d. per bushel. In the north of Yeniseisk wheat prices vary from 4s. to 4s. 3d. per bushel, while the price of rye is everywhere generally 1s. a bushel below wheat prices. Much of the wheat from the Minusinsk, Achinsk and Kansk districts is sent by water to Krasnoyarsk. When prices are sufficiently attractive it may be sent even as far as Irkutsk and the Far East.

### *Live-Stock Industry*

The live stock in the Yenisei Government consists chiefly of horses, cattle, sheep and pigs. Reindeer

are used in the far north by the natives, where conditions are favourable. The total head of live stock numbers 1,967,393, of which nearly 1,000,000 is situated in the Minusinsk and the Abakansk steppes. There are nearly 500,000 sheep in this one district alone, and the native Abakansk Tartars make stock rearing on the steppe their sole occupation. There are excellent summer-grazing areas all over the open steppe, and the winter is so mild that there is no necessity for artificial feeding or haymaking. Most of the surplus stock from these steppes goes to the urban markets as meat supply, and some of the skins find their way to European Russia.

### *Fishing Industry*

The output of the fishing industry is of the annual value of about 130,000 roubles (£14,444). More than three-quarters of this comes from the northern district of Turukhansk, bordering the Arctic. Practically the whole of the fish output is locally consumed.

### *Fur Industry*

The fur industry is valued at 445,000 roubles per annum. Three-quarters of the output comes from the Turukhansk district in the north, where the native Samoyedes trap and hunt in the winter, exchanging furs for the bare necessaries of life with the Russian traders. A limited amount of black sable comes from this district and also from the Upper Yenisei on the Mongolian frontier. The fur dealers, many of whom are Jews, reside at Minusinsk, Krasnoyarsk and Yeniseisk, and buy the furs from the Russian fur

traders, selling them again at the autumn fairs at Irbit and other parts of Western Siberia.

### *Mining*

Gold mining has greatly developed of late years in the Yenisei Government, both as regards the number of concessions granted and the amount of gold produced. The output for 1910 amounted to 112 pouds (12 Russian lbs.), and 97 zolotniks (4044 lbs. avoirdupois), which was equivalent to five per cent. increase on that of the previous year. In the same year the number of dredging and reef working concessions amounted to 163—the richest dredging area is in the southern forest zone north of the railway. Here the sands in the bed of the Yenisei and tributary rivers are very rich. Syndicates with foreign capital have been working these sands in several places with satisfactory results.

### *The Prospects of Industrial Development*

Manufacture is at present but very slightly developed in Central Siberia owing to the small population, primitive culture and lack of skilled workmen and capital. There are thus only 830 registered industrial enterprises in the Yenisei Government and the number of hands employed in them is only 34,694. The industrial proletariat is therefore a little over five per cent. of the total population. The output of industrial wares in the Yenisei Government is of the value of 6,000,000 roubles (£666,000) a year, over 4,500,000 (£500,000) of which consisted of the products of the State vodka and spirit distillers.

The other items, such as skin curing, glass work, flour milling, tallow and soap, are comparatively insignificant. The consumption of vodka, upon which the distilling industry so largely depends, amounts to 3,750,000 gallons per annum.

The town of Krasnoyarsk is the central point on which all trade in Central Siberia converges. It is a growing town of over 50,000 inhabitants, and owes its growth and importance to its position on the railway at the point where it crosses the Yenisei River. It is through Krasnoyarsk that the economic influences of Europe are penetrating into Central Siberia, and it is here that the higher industrial system from the West will in time have its centre. This development, however, is dependent upon two principal factors—viz. the rate of immigration into the country, and the growth of transport facilities.

## CHAPTER IX

# THE ECONOMIC FUTURE OF SIBERIA

### GENERAL PROSPECTS FOR FOREIGN CAPITAL IN SIBERIAN COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND FINANCE

IT is most essential for the foreign trader and investor in Siberia to bear in mind that the success of his undertakings depends upon the degree with which he adapts himself to the social and political conditions prevalent in the country. Siberia and Canada, which in their physical aspects so closely resemble one another, exhibit, nevertheless, considerable differences in the peoples by whom they are inhabited. This divergence in the social atmosphere of the two continents is accompanied by a corresponding divergence in economic progress, and it is natural, therefore, to assume that the methods pursued by foreign capitalists and commercial pioneers in the Canada of Asia must differ from those pursued in the Canada of North America.

A short survey of the economic status of the Siberian peasants, who comprise all but a small fraction of the population of Siberia, cannot then be out of place in this chapter.[1] Speaking generally, their condition is very satisfactory, and in this respect they enjoy no inconsiderable advantages over their fellow-citizens in European Russia. As one would expect, the basis of all the Siberian peasant's wealth is his land, and

[1] See also Chapter V., p. 132.

even most of those peasants who hunt for furs, prospect for gold, or trade with the native Finns, only use these occupations to supplement the returns from their land. The usual allotment for a peasant living in a village commune is forty acres, with additional allotments for each adult son who remains with the head of the family. The system of continual wheat cropping is generally in vogue, whereby the land after exhaustion is fallowed while fresh is being broken up.

Some of the peasants have adopted a rough rotation system, whereby out of these forty acres about eighteen are sown with oats, rye, and sometimes wheat, ten are laid fallow, and twelve kept under grass. Manure is never used, and is generally piled up outside the village to be swept away by the spring floods. The land, however, is so rich that it yields in favourable places an average of thirty bushels of cereals to the acre without any manure. Villages near the forest zone grow less wheat and more rye and oats than those nearer to the steppes. In the former case the severe climate causes the wheat yields to average no more than twenty bushels to the acre and sometimes to fail altogether in the autumn frost.[1] In the Southern Yenisei Government the writer found that the live stock kept by a peasant householder usually amounted to about two horses, five cattle and ten sheep. The peasants here generally utilized the products of their fields as follows. All the hay and oats were kept for the winter use of the stock, while the product of the wheat and rye was used in part for household consumption, and in part for sale at the annual fair

[1] This occurred in 1911, and a famine resulted in some parts, as a consequence.

at the nearest town. A portion of the live stock, corresponding roughly with the average rate of increase of the herd during the year, was sold annually. The combined sales of cereals and live stock for a peasant with a forty-acre holding amounted in a case under the writer's notice to a sum of 170 roubles (£19) gross annual return. Out of this the peasant had to pay his direct taxes, which seemed extraordinarily low, amounting to no more than 15 roubles (30s.) a year. The direct taxes are 10s. a year house tax, 5d. per head for each horse and cow, from 2d. to 1s. per acre for tillage land, according to quality, and 1s. per annum for the right to cut timber. The total contribution for 1907 in direct taxation paid by the peasants of the Yenisei Government amounted to 900,000 roubles per annum, which is equivalent to a tax of only 3s. per head of the population. There are, of course, indirect taxes on tobacco, tea and matches, which are not inconsiderable. I estimated that each family in a certain village in the Southern Yenisei Government spent about 50 roubles (over £5) annually for the purchase of household necessaries and small luxuries. The chief articles of food—bread, meat and cabbage—cost the peasant nothing more than the tax for the ground on which they have grown, while his sheepskin coats, felt boots, and rough flax clothes were all made by the women. The Central Siberian peasant is therefore more than self-supporting, and his principal outside purchases consist of tea, sugar, tobacco and small hardware, which he can easily obtain with his balance of 155 roubles after paying his taxes. He is also assisted by co-operative societies, which exist in many villages for the supply of household neces-

saries, and in some places, chiefly in Altai and Western Siberia, for the disposal of butter and dairy produce. These societies are generally worked and owned by the commune—*i.e.* the village authority elected by popular vote. Besides this in many districts the Government has started an agricultural supply store, for selling seed corn and implements to the peasants at reduced prices.

The above is typical of the economic conditions under which the Siberian peasants live in the more favourable districts of Western and Central Siberia, particularly in such places as the Kurgan steppes, the Altai foothills and the southern parts of the Yenisei Government. The condition of the peasant under these circumstances, where the land is rich and practically unpopulated, is everywhere very satisfactory, and this condition is aided by the fact that the standard of living among the peasants is simple, although by no means low. In fact the enormous latent energy which lies in Siberian peasant life awaiting development strikes the traveller very forcibly in these remote parts of Eastern Russia.[1]

On the next page is seen a table published in Tyan Shansky's book on Western Siberia (in Russian), giving figures as to the economic conditions of the immigrants in certain parts of Siberia after a few years' settlement in the country.

Turning now to the openings for private enterprise in this land of peasant communes, it must first be remembered that the raw material of all industry is in Siberia owned by the State, and the only private property in any appreciable quantity is that belonging to the Tsar and Cabinet Ministers in the Altai

[1] For an account of the Siberian peasant commune see Chapter V.

district. While the Government does not in theory object to the recognition of private property in Siberia, its administrative policy, unlike that in European Russia, is aimed at retaining the ground value of the land as a State property. A foreigner, however, can acquire property in Siberia, except in

| Provinces | | Average head of live stock per family | | Area of land sown per annum by each family | Percentage of families owning live stock | Percentage of families cultivating land under the commune |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Horses | Cattle | | | |
| Tomsk Government | State land | 2·5 | 2·5 | 11½ acres | 93% | 90% |
| | Cabinet | 3·7 | 3·9 | 13½ acres | 94·5% | 87% |
| Tobolsk Government | | 2·8 | 3·3 | 12½ acres | 91·5% | 90% |
| Semipalatinsk and Yenisei Governments | | 2·8 | 3·3 | 12½ acres | 91·5% | 90% |

the Far East, and along the Manchurian frontier, but can hold it for the purpose of residence or for carrying on business only. Thus foreign companies can acquire real estate only if they prove to the local officials that they are acquiring such property for the purpose of carrying on some particular enterprise, for which permission must previously have been obtained from the Central Government authorities.

Thus in practice the only landed properties held by foreigners or foreign companies in Siberia are those on which minerals are worked or houses built for residence in towns. All the agricultural land is let out in large tracts to the Siberian peasants. Even the peasants only rent the land from the State on a perpetual lease, and the policy of the Government, if

not actually opposed, is at all events indifferent to the creation of peasant proprietorship in Siberia at present. In this respect its policy differs from that pursued in European Russia. Siberia thus exhibits perhaps the most extensive scheme of land nationalization in the world. In a young country this is not hard to accomplish, and it has, moreover, many points in its favour, since it effectively blocks land speculation and prevents the amassing of large fortunes by private individuals at the expense of the public. Well had it been if the Canadian Government had learnt a lesson from the Russian Government in this respect, before it was too late. On the other hand, it encourages the communal system of agriculture among the peasants, which in turn is not conducive to industry and thrift. At present, however, the disadvantages of the commune are not felt in a young growing country of which the wealth has hardly begun to be exploited. When the country becomes more densely populated the importance of higher cultivation will be more felt, and the State will probably begin to create peasant proprietorship by administrative means. Foreign investors must therefore realize that there is no opening at present for investment in real estate in Siberia.

But if the foreign investor has no outlet in land exploitation, he has an ample field in other directions, such as public works, both of a national and local character. Thus the construction of the proposed branch lines of the Siberian railway system will from time to time call for foreign capital from the European money markets. The richness of the areas which will be tapped by the proposed branches is in itself a good guarantee of the financial success of these railways,

especially if the interest on the loans is backed by the security of the Imperial Government. On the other hand, the corruption of the local officials, which still exists, especially in the remoter parts of the empire, militates against the proper expenditure of capital loaned for public works, and St Petersburg has no little difficulty in exercising effective control over such large areas. The security for loans for public works in Siberia must, therefore, even if guaranteed by the Imperial Government, depend very much upon the political conditions of the empire, and may be generally regarded as about equal to that of the Russian Government bonds already on the market.

As regards public works of a local nature, in the growing Siberian towns there will in time be great opportunities for profitable concessions. As yet, however, few of these urban centres have reached the stage at which their local authorities are prepared to enter upon public water schemes, electric light or tramways. These will appear in due course.

Perhaps the largest amount of foreign capital invested in Siberian industrial undertakings is locked up in the mining industry. Considerable foreign capital is indirectly invested in Siberia in this industry, and the growth of foreign mining capital is encouraged by the Government. But it should be borne in mind by prospective investors that the best of the mining concessions have already been taken up, and, until further developments in railway communication are made in the mineral-producing area, profitable mining concessions are likely to be few and far between. Foreign investors must especially guard against mining concessions which have been tried before and have failed. In most cases

failure has been due to some natural cause, which will probably never be remedied. As explained later, foreign companies, including mining companies, are not legally recognized in Russia unless they are represented by a responsible agent.

The easier and the safer field for foreign capital lies more in commercial than industrial enterprises. The exploitation of the import and export trade to and from Siberia is now attracting much foreign capital, and the only limit to this development is that imposed by the lack of communications and the as yet sparsely inhabited country. Commercial enterprise in Siberia has a much freer hand than industrial enterprise. Since 1888 Russian law has allowed foreign companies which are engaged in buying Russian goods or selling foreign manufactures to do so without special permission from the Government. Danish, German and English syndicates and firms now export butter and eggs to Western Europe from the steppes of Western Siberia, and have depots with storage plants in such places as Kurgan, Biisk and Barnaul. Other firms are beginning to export meat by rail from Omsk and Petropavlovsk, where they have refrigerating plants. Dairy and meat produce are, however, the only agricultural products the export of which is likely at present to require the assistance of foreign capital. Wheat, timber and other produce will follow in due course, but their time is not just yet, on account of high rail freights.

As regards the import trade, the first condition of success for foreign capital is a proper knowledge of the conditions under which trade is carried on in Siberia. The bulk of the import trade is already in the hands of Russian firms which, sheltered under

tariff walls, have acquired a monopoly and can undersell foreign goods. Thus the provision trade, the cotton piece-goods trade, the iron hardware and earthenware trade and the manufactured leather trade are all in the hands of small Siberian firms, which act as agents for the big manufacturers in European Russia. The manufacture of these articles in Russia is highly protected against foreign competition, and thus Siberia is kept as a closed preserve for the agents of these manufacturing Russian firms. The field for foreign imports in Siberia is therefore restricted to the products of those industries which are as yet poorly developed in European Russia. Here the possibilities are by no means inconsiderable. The fundamental industry of the country is agriculture, and although the organization of this industry is still primitive, nevertheless, as the country develops, agriculture will be better organized, and the demand for machinery, binders, separators, etc., will steadily grow. At present the trade in reapers and binders is largely held by the American Trust, which is firmly established and which employs Russian, German and Danish agents. Ploughs are chiefly supplied by certain Russian firms, which are favoured by protective duties and consequently succeed in extorting high prices for comparatively inferior articles from the Siberian peasants. The best field for British enterprise can be found in the importation of dairy and thrashing machines. Already a considerable trade in these articles has been developed between England and the steppes of Southern European Russia, whence they are now beginning to penetrate into Western Siberia. There is an enormous field for the disposal

of dairy machinery also, especially separators, in the districts of Western Siberia and the Altai. Already competition is keen between English, Swedish and German firms for the introduction of this class of goods on the Siberian markets.

In addition to the above, mining machinery is now being imported into Siberia in considerable quantities. The mining industry in the past has been considerably handicapped by inferior machinery, but as improved methods become general in the country, so will the demand for the latest gold-dredging and ore-crushing apparatus increase also. In this branch of trade British firms are well to the fore.

The above are the principal articles of foreign import which are most in demand in Siberia at the present time. The amount of capital required for the placing of these goods on the Siberian markets is of far less moment than efficient management and administration. Commercial success in Siberia is above all else dependent upon the selection of the representatives who buy and sell the goods on the spot. In fact the foreign export trade to Siberia can be developed and retained only by the possession of "representatives." English firms trying to do business in Siberia through "agents" are far less likely to succeed than if they possess their own "representatives." The latter, moreover, must live on the spot and know the Russian language and deal direct with the Siberian peasant, for it is useless to try to carry on business without being personally in touch with the Siberians. Newly settled immigrants without capital cannot easily be persuaded to try expensive machinery, and it is thus essential that the representatives of foreign agricul-

tural machinery firms should watch the more prosperous, and induce them by degrees to take their goods. An English traveller in Siberia frequently hears complaints about his country's business men. It is said that although their goods are the very best on the market, the most efficient, and in the long run the cheapest, nevertheless English firms lose business through not endeavouring to suit their customers, and through their refusal to deal on anything but a cash basis. It is obviously useless to offer these terms to the Russian peasant, who has no capital; indeed an agent must also be prepared to finance the peasants on a small scale. Many German representatives combine their sales of machinery with the purchase of such articles as butter for export, and are opening credit and debit accounts with the peasants. The conditions of payment usually in vogue in Siberia are twenty per cent. cash on delivery; forty per cent. after twelve months; and the balance in two years. Merchants and manufacturers must therefore make good allowance for these conditions. Also the heavy import duties on machinery, although they are now somewhat lighter on certain classes of machinery, tend to make prices high for the consumer, and high prices are not attractive to the peasant without capital. Under such circumstances the manufacturer should aim at the cheapest article that it is possible to produce.

### *Legal Rights of Foreign Companies in Siberia*

The legal position of foreign companies in Siberia is in all respects similar to that in European Russia, and has caused no few difficulties and incon-

veniences in the past. While this legal position requires reform, if foreign capital is to be further attracted, it is nevertheless quite possible to carry on business in Siberia under existing conditions with reasonable security. Briefly stated, the position is as follows. Foreign commercial enterprises, having for their object the buying and selling of goods in Russia, can operate without permission from the Government, on condition that they sell only foreign goods. Foreign industrial undertakings, on the other hand, having for their object the working of such enterprises as mines and factories, must obtain special permission through the Minister of Commerce and Industry. A foreign industrial company, before it can operate, must apply for permission, stating the amount of its capital, and submitting its Articles of Association, and must appoint a responsible agent with power of attorney to act on its behalf in Russia. Permission may be taken away at any time, and the responsible agent must have full powers of attorney. Foreign capital invested in industrial undertaking in Russia is therefore much at the mercy of the local and central officials, and also of the responsible agent who represents it. As a rule the latter is required by Russian law to be a Russian subject and not of Jewish religion. He has large powers and may act independently of his principals abroad, because the Russian Government recognizes him alone as representing the company. There are thus, as it were, two authorities controlling foreign companies in Russia—the principals in the foreign country, representing the interests which supply the capital and receive the profits, and the responsible agent in Russia, who in the eyes of the Russian Government

is responsible for the management and administration of the undertaking. It is not always easy for a foreign board of directors to control the Russian responsible agent, and this is one of the most unsatisfactory features of the legal position of British companies in Russia.

So far has this system of representation through "responsible agents" developed that there are now Russians who make it their sole business to represent foreign firms in Russia. This method is clumsy and inconvenient, but at present all foreign firms holding a concession in Russia must conform to these conditions before they can work in safety.

As regards taxation, foreign companies are treated in exactly the same manner as Russian companies. There is first the State Guild Tax, paid by all companies before they obtain their certificates of right to work. Subsequently there is an annual tax, levied upon the paid-up capital of the company, irrespective of profits. When a company is working, all accounts must be published, and shown to the Government official in charge of the district where the company is operating. A third tax is then levied on the profits of the company according to the rate of profit.

The position of debenture holders is one to be considered in reviewing the rights of foreign companies in Russia. They are not placed in a very favourable position as regards the priority of their claims over the assets of a company, since debentures issued abroad by a foreign company trading in Russia have no legal recognition in that country, and a holder of such debentures has therefore no priority over any other debtor. In order that debentures may receive official recognition in a

Russian Bankruptcy Court they must be issued in Russia and entered in the books kept by the responsible agent of the company.

In general, it may be said that the existing law has been held by eminent Russians to be unsatisfactory, and reform has been urged for many years past. One of the worst features of the system is the absence of definite and universal regulations, and the dependance of the foreign trader or investor on the attitude of local officials, which is always an unknown factor, and difficult to estimate. Moreover, the "responsible agents" or local boards may become the media through which British capital is unwittingly made responsible for acts over which it has no control. It will doubtless be remembered by the reader how, in the spring of 1912, a riot and massacre took place in the Lena goldfields, as the result of certain grave abuses which had been perpetrated by the mining company's officials. Contrary to the Russian law, these officials had systematically underpaid and ill-housed their employees, bribing the local police authorities to keep quiet. At last a strike took place, and the company's officials succeeded in commanding the local military forces to crush the revolt against their own cruel and illegal actions. Everyone who knows Siberia is aware that such a case as this is rare at the present day, but the fact that it has occurred in spite of all Government regulations to the contrary in some of the remoter parts of the country, where local officials are almost uncontrolled, is a reminder to the foreign investor of the need of extreme caution. It is most essential that the British public should be aware of these facts and recognize its responsibility in financing

enterprises in Siberia, over which its control is limited. The system is so arranged that it works well whenever the interests of the Russian authorities, as reflected through the responsible agent, coincide with the views of the foreign board of directors. When, however, there is disagreement, the foreign board has little real control over the responsible agent, who may become the tool of questionable and even illegal influences. This was certainly the case in the Lena goldfields. Here there were two boards of directors, one in England and one in Russia, the latter being in place of the "responsible agent," who is usually appointed by the foreign board. While the English board supplied the capital, the Russian board only was legally recognized by the Russian authorities, and was thus actually responsible for the management; moral responsibility for that management, however, rested with the English board as well, which supplied the capital and took the profit, although in Russia it had no legal status. By ambiguous laws that are capable of various interpretations, foreign capital is often placed at the mercy of local officials and managers; and it is to the interest of unscrupulous officials that the system should continue. London city financiers may perhaps be able through political influence to protect their own interests, when the necessity arises, but the investing public has no such power, and, as far as investments in Siberian mining enterprises are concerned, are absolutely at the mercy of conditions over which they exercise no control. Moreover, the moral responsibility, although it may not appeal to Lombard Street, probably appeals to British public opinion. In a word,

Anglo-Russian friendship is not fostered by an unholy alliance between the British private investor on the one hand, and local or central officials in Russia on the other. Only by bringing the former into contact directly with the Russian people themselves, can the interests of both be mutually served. One of the best means of bringing this about is by a reform of the Russian company laws which has been urged by enlightened Russian officials for many years past. Such reform would sweep away the clumsy barriers against commercial and financial enterprise, which are now only the harbouring-places of abuse, and thus would create free intercourse between European capital and the Siberian industries in need of it.

### *Mining Rights in Siberia*

In spite of the above system of company formation, a wide field is open for the foreign mining prospector in Siberia, if he cares to risk capital in these undertakings, and realizes that situations may arise over which he has no control.

Prospectors having found a likely spot are entitled to peg out a claim which may extend for 5 versts (3⅓ miles) up the main valley and 2 versts (1⅓ mile) up any side valley. A mining prospector must first register his claim with the Government mining official in the nearest town.

The mining laws of 1902 marked a great advance in this industry throughout the empire. Gold production, which had hitherto been a monopoly of the Government smelting depots, was opened in that year to free competition. Moreover, regulations were issued by the Government providing for the

proper remuneration and treatment of mining labour, and employers are now bound to find on the mining premises food and clothing, which must be sold to the workmen at a specified Government tariff, varying according to districts. This is an item of expense which must be borne in mind by all mining syndicates.

Mining wages vary according to the distance from the urban centres. Thus in some of the mines in the north-eastern territories labour cannot be obtained under 170 roubles a month, or 10s. per day, while in certain Altai districts near the railway, or on the northern side of the Mongolian frontier, peasant labour can be obtained at only 17 roubles a month or 1s. per day. In some districts the tribute system of working is still in vogue, whereby the workman is bound to sell to the mine-owner at a fixed price all the ore and minerals that he wins, but otherwise is free to work as he pleases.

Thus mining labour is carefully protected by the State in Siberia, and the troubles which have occasionally arisen with labour, such as those on the Lena mines in the north-east, are due to infringement of these laws by Russian managers, who have succeeded in enlisting the aid of the local officials, and under the cloak of the responsible agents have committed acts unknown to the foreign board of directors. As far as the mining laws themselves in Russia and Siberia are concerned, there is in fairness nothing to be said against them. Indeed they are in many ways advanced and even enlightened.

### *British Consular Representation*

The inadequacy of British consular representation in Russia is a matter of common knowledge to all

and of no small inconvenience to the British trader who is endeavouring to establish businesses in Russia. Not least is this inconvenience felt in Siberia, where young commercial enterprises, breaking the ground for the first time, stand in special need of assistance from their national consular representatives. Up to the present time the Russian Government has not permitted consular representation in the eastern parts of the empire, and Siberia has been included in this regulation. Now, however, it has been notified that by special permission the right of consular representation will be granted in those parts of Siberia where political and strategical circumstances will permit.

It is a matter of very great importance to British trade not only that consular representation in Russia should be improved, but that its scope should be extended into Siberia and other eastern parts of the empire, wherever economic conditions are suitable. Moreover, the farther east one goes the more important becomes the value of prestige, and the closer becomes the connexion between political influence and commercial interests. The necessity for consular representation in Siberia is greater in the western than in the central part of the continent, since the proximity to the markets of Europe affords to the former the greatest immediate possibilities for the development of the import and export trade. The towns on the Siberian railway at the points where it crosses the principal waterways are the chief centres for collecting exports and distributing imports. Thus at Petropavlovsk, Omsk, Novonikolaevsk and Krasnoyarsk growing towns have sprung up, through which the products of the Altai

region and the south-western steppes pass on their way to European Russia. In return there also pass from Europe through these points numerous manufactured articles and other imports into Siberia. These are the points where foreign trade is likely to develop in the near future, and where agricultural implement manufacturers, dairy produce importers, and mining syndicates are now stationing their agents and representatives. Until recently English firms had no one to refer to at these places. Now, however, there is a British vice-consul (unpaid) at Omsk and recently one has been appointed at Krasnoyarsk, the only two in the whole of the vast territories of Western and Central Siberia. If anything is done to improve British consular representation in Russia, it is advisable that attention should be turned to Western Siberia especially, and it is indispensable that there should be at least one paid consul, who should also be in touch with two or three subordinate vice-consuls in the more outlying centres.

As a central spot, Omsk would be a suitable place where a paid consul for Western Siberia might reside, while Kurgan, Novo-nikolaevsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk and Petropavlovsk would be suitable places for the subordinate unpaid vice-consuls. The towns of Tiumen, Tobolsk and Tomsk, although they are the seats of considerable local industry, besides being centres of administrative areas, are not likely to develop with such rapidity as the towns mentioned above along the main Siberian railway. The economic importance of Tiumen and Tobolsk, however, will probably be increased when the Omsk-Tiumen railway is completed, but for the present it will probably remain secondary to that of those growing

centres where the Siberian railway crosses the principal waterways.

The future success of British trade in Siberia must in no small measure depend upon consular facilities for British trade in these regions. The activity of the German Government in this direction shows that it is keenly alive to the fact that in young developing countries such as Siberia, assistance by the consular representatives must be afforded to all pioneers.

### *Railways and Communications in Siberia*

(1) *History of the Great Siberian Railway.*—By far the most important factor on which the development of Siberia depends is the improvement of transport facilities. At present the vastness of the country and the inaccessibility of large tracts of it to a great extent neutralize its richness and fertility and prevent speedy development. On the other hand, nature has given to Siberia a great system of waterways, which, although they all flow northward to the frozen sea, nevertheless are all navigable and are admirably adapted to act as feeders to the railway system, as the latter grows. Formerly the communication between European Russia and Western Siberia was effected by pack horses from the headwaters of the Kama River in European Russia across the Urals to the tributaries of the Obi and Irtish rivers, whence traffic went by boat along the river systems of Western and Central Siberia. This costly and clumsy system of transport was, of course, done away with when the railway was brought from Ekaterinburg in the Urals to Tiumen in the Obi watershed. This line enabled goods from Western

Siberia to tranship from water to rail at Tiumen, and to go from there direct to European Russia. Early in the last half of the nineteenth century the great trans-continental line began to be talked about. The earlier projects aimed at the extension of the then existing line from Tiumen eastward across the continent. This route would have traversed mainly forested lands, and would have left the fertile black earth zone far to the south. It was then proposed to carry the line from Orenburg across the Kirghiz steppes and the Akmolinsk province to the Altai foothills, and thence across the southern part of the Yenisei Government near Minusinsk. Although this route would have tapped the most fertile tracks in the whole of Siberia, there would have been considerable difficulty in taking the line across certain outlying ridges of the Altai system. Nor would its strategical value have been as great as that of a direct line to the far eastern territories, where Russia's political prestige was known at the time to be in danger. The last project, which was ultimately adopted, proposed to take the railway from Ufa in European Russia across the Urals, through Chelyabinsk and Kurgan across the rich steppe of south-western Siberia into the pastoral zone of Omsk and the Baraba steppe. From the Irtish and Obi watershed it was proposed to carry the line north-westward, skirting the foothills of the Altai, and so make a direct course across the Yenisei Government eastward to Lake Baikal.

While this plan obviated construction through difficult country by keeping the line on level or undulating ground, it had no inconsiderable disadvantage in the fact that it left a large tract of fertile

land in the foothills of the Altai far to the south. As a result, therefore, this district in the neighbourhood of Biisk and Barnaul, which is one of the most fertile tracts in all Siberia, has been hindered in its development by lack of rail communication.

The section of the railway from Chelyabinsk to Krasnoyarsk in Central Siberia was begun in 1892 and finished in 1897, but it was not until some five years later that it was carried to the east of Lake Baikal, while communication with the Far East was established only just before the Russo-Japanese War. That part of the line which crosses Western and Central Siberia, although it fails to tap the fertile districts of the Altai, is nevertheless of the utmost value for developing the steppes of Western Siberia. The eastern section of the line, on the other hand, cannot at present be said to have more than a military and strategical value and a certain utility for passenger and mail communication by rail to the Far East.

The line cost 200,000,000 roubles (£22,200,000), or nearly double what was estimated, and was marked by much wasteful expenditure and no little corruption among the engineers and officials engaged in its construction. Since those days, it has been found necessary to relay the whole line with heavier rails, and much of the line has recently been double-tracked.

The completion of the trans-Siberian railway scheme is nevertheless one of the marvels of the last century—more wonderful in many respects than the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway—and to the Russian Government belongs the credit of carrying out one of the most daring railway

projects of history. It is a monument of what autocracy can perform in spite of public apathy and natural obstacles. By it the Russian Government anticipated the economic development of its eastern empire, and also strengthened its strategical position in the Far East.

(2) *Projected Railways in Western Siberia.*—The great trunk railway having been built across the continent, the next problem lies in the construction of branch railways to tap the most fertile districts, which the trunk line failed to reach. At present the waterways of the Obi, Irtish and Yenisei perform the functions of branch feeders. Steamship communication has developed of late years, especially on the two former rivers, along which all traffic to and from the Altai is now borne to the railway. But while the waterways are valuable for heavy traffic, such as grain and timber, they are nevertheless unsatisfactory as a means of communication for light perishable articles, such as butter, eggs and meat, and on the export of these three products the economic activity of Western Siberia and the Altai very largely depends for the present. The construction of branch railways, as feeders to the trunk line, is therefore indispensable to the development of Western and Central Siberia. It is most important for the Altai region, that the Biisk, Barnaul and Semipalatinsk districts should in the near future be linked up with the Siberian trunk line. With this object in view, therefore, a railway has been sucveyed which will probably leave the trunk line at Novo-nikolaevsk, and traverse the fertile black earth belt along the north-west foothills of the Altai. Touching the towns of Barnaul and Semipalatinsk,

it will probably have branch lines to Biisk and Kuznetsk. Besides crossing the most fertile agricultural zone in Siberia, this railway will also pass through the richest mineral area in the empire, for immediately to the south of Sudjensk on the Siberian railway, and extending southward and eastward as far as Kuznetsk and Barnaul respectively, lie the great coal and iron and copper deposits of the Altai. The development of this area is only awaiting railway construction, and it is no exaggeration to say that this projected Altai railway will traverse one of the richest regions in the world. Its importance, moreover, will be enhanced by the fact that it will link up at Semipalatinsk with the projected Turkestan railway from Tashkent to Vierny across the Semiretchensk steppes. It will thus have strategical importance in connecting Turkestan with Siberia ; and economic importance in connecting the undeveloped districts of Western Siberia with Europe. Construction will probably begin simultaneously from the Siberian railway at Novo-nikolaevsk and from the Central Asian railway near Tashkent, and extend respectively southward and northward till the lines meet eventually at Semipalatinsk.[1]

The second important railway project, which will have much effect on the development of Western Siberia, is the extension of the North Siberian line. This line runs at present from Perm, the last provincial town in European Russia, across the Urals,

[1] Recent developments have led to the actual commencement of the Novikolaefsk-Barnaul line, while the Omsk-Semipalatinsk section has been abandoned. Instead, a survey has been started for a South-Siberian trunk line connecting Oralsk, Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk across the Kirghig steppes.

to its terminus at Tiumen. It offers by far the shortest route from Western Siberia to the White Sea, and now that there is direct rail communication between Perm and Archangel, via Kotlass, this line will before long recapture some of the traffic, which at present goes along the Siberian line via Chelyabinsk. This tendency will be still more assisted if the North Siberian line is extended beyond Tiumen to Omsk, thereby providing the districts of Yalutorofsk, Ishim and Tyukalinsk with a short route to the sea at Archangel. This North Siberian line will therefore in the future carry most of the heavy traffic, such as wheat and timber, from Western Siberia across the Urals to the nearest seaport at Archangel, leaving the present Siberian trunk railway to provide the quickest communication to the Baltic ports and to transport such articles as butter, meat and other perishables from the Western Siberian steppes and Altai foothills. Thus the extended North Siberian line from Tiumen to Omsk will, when completed, have the effect not only of opening up a good region in the southern part of the Tobolsk Government, hitherto untouched, but will provide also a shorter route to the White Sea for timber and grain form Western Siberia.

A third railway scheme which had been discussed for some years past has actually materialized, and the railway is now in course of construction. The contract was given in 1911 for the building of a branch line from the existing North Siberian railway in the Urals across the rivers Nitsa, Tura and Tavda. The line will ultimately be carried to Tobolsk, and will traverse some great forest tracks hitherto untouched in the north-west of the Tobolsk

Government. The railway, when completed, will provide the forested areas in this district with cheap transport to the White Sea ports, and thus make the export of timber possible from these regions. It will also open up further possibilities of mining development on the east of the Urals, and thus give additional impetus to the development of this region of the province of Perm.

(3) *Central Siberia and its Communications.*—The Siberian railway crosses the south of the Yenisei Government, the most central province of Siberia, by way of the towns of Achinsk, Krasnoyarsk and Kansk. It is by far the most important means of communication between Central Siberia and Europe. Navigation on the Yenisei River provides communication between Krasnoyarsk on the railway, the Minusinsk steppes on the south, and the Yeniseisk region in the north. At present no schemes for branch railways have been projected in Central Siberia, for public attention must be absorbed by the development of Western Siberia for some time to come. Moreover, the great distance of the Yenisei Government from Europe must cause its growth to be much slower than that of Western Siberia.

In addition to the railway, however, there is the Obi-Yenisei Canal, connecting the two rivers of those names, and running from a point north of Yeniseisk to the Ket River, a tributary of the Obi. This water route only effects communication between the northern part of the Yenisei Government and the Tomsk Government, and is not of much importance in the economic development of Central Siberia, for it leads to no point where there is direct communication with Europe.

(4) *The All-Sea Yenisei Route: its Possibilities and its Difficulties.*—There is yet another project which aims at opening up communication between the outside world and Siberia, and is well deserving attention at this time. It is generally admitted that the establishment of the so-called "All-Sea Yenisei Route" would have great effect in stimulating the commerce between Central Siberia and Western Europe by the Arctic Sea. The possibility of navigating the estuary was proved by Captain Wiggin some years ago and by Captain Webster in 1911. The latter succeeded in bringing a ship with a general cargo round the Kara Sea to Krasnoyarsk on the Yenisei, landing there in the summer of 1911. The obstacles in the way of the establishment of this route are, of course, the ice difficulties in the Kara Sea, which greatly increase the risks of navigation, and the shortness of the open water season in the estuary of the Yenisei. This estuary is generally open for about two and a half to three months in the summer, but the Kara Sea, through which a ship must pass on its way from the north-east coast to European Russia, is only free from ice floes for a few weeks. A ship, therefore, which would have to unload and reload at Krasnoyarsk in the centre of Siberia, although it may be able on its return successfully to navigate the Yenisei estuary, may be too late to cross the Kara Sea before the winter ice sets in. To remedy this, Captain Webster has proposed to establish a port of transhipment at Novo Zemlya, just outside the so-called Iron Gates of the Kara Sea, where incoming ships from Europe can discharge, pick up freights and depart again without delay, leaving the farther journey of the Yenisei

estuary to be accomplished by Siberian ships during the three months that the water is open.

More important perhaps than the navigation problem is the special attention which must be given to the kind of cargo for import into Central Siberia, so as to secure the readiest sale without difficulties with the customs authorities. All projected attempts have failed hitherto to take sufficient precautions on this point, and often trouble with the customs authorities on the Yenisei estuary and at Krasnoyarsk has ensued. At present the customs duties levied on the mouth of the Yenisei in accordance with the Imperial Tariff, added to the freight charges, would make the goods which are sent by the All-Sea Route so expensive on the Siberian markets, that they would not be able to compete with those sent by the direct route from Moscow by the Siberian railway. If, however, some of these duties were remitted or abated, a handsome profit on the transport of certain goods by this route would result. Sugar, for example, costing in European Russia 14 kopeks per lb. wholesale, of which 9 kopeks per lb. is excise tax, could, if the duty were remitted, be sold at such a price as to leave a profit after paying 9 kopeks for freight. Profits could also be made on tea transported from European Russia or Western Europe to Siberia by this route, if excise and customs duties were remitted. But the opening of the markets of Central Siberia to free importation from Western Europe, would be opposed to the interests of certain great manufacturing trusts in Moscow and St Petersburg, which fear the extension of this principle to other parts of the empire. The Russian sugar refiners and cotton printers of Moscow and the Polish towns would not

endure the importation of competitive goods from Western Europe into markets where they at present enjoy undisputed monopoly.

These powerful interests, which the Russian Government is afraid to ignore, are opposed to lowering the customs duties at any Siberian port, or of admitting anything like the principle of Free Trade in the relations of Siberia with the outer world. The Siberians, on the other hand, are anxious to develop the new route, which would open up trade with some of their most fertile districts in the interior, and also relieve them from the domination of Moscow monopolists, who force them to pay high prices for inferior manufactures and goods. As, however, they have only eight members in the Duma, they have little influence at St Petersburg. This, then, is the political situation which dominates the economic relationship between Siberia and European Russia, and any large trade in general goods from Western Europe to the Yenisei can only be encouraged by the lowering of the Siberian customs duties. The obstacles, therefore, in the way of bringing about rebates on these duties are considerable under present political conditions in Siberia, and unless English shipowners and capitalists realize the position, they will meet with failure when they attempt expeditions to the Yenisei.

Certain goods, however, might be profitably imported by this route. Such articles are iron rails for the railway, mining machinery, certain classes of agricultural machinery on which the tariff is low, such as thrashing machines, reapers, binders, dairy implements, and in fact all classes of machinery which are not manufactured at present in Russia,

and which do not therefore compete with any vested interests. All these would make profitable cargoes to Krasnoyarsk. The return cargo would be grain, which in the autumn is phenomenally cheap (1s. 6d. per bushel), timber, of which there is an endless field for export at cheap prices, and hides.

An expedition with such a cargo as this in a 1500-ton vessel drawing fifteen feet of water ought to be successful financially on this Yenisei route. But any idea of a successful voyage with an import cargo of general goods from Western Europe, in competition with the manufacturers of European Russia, should be discarded as altogether impracticable under the conditions, which at present control the economic relations between Siberia and European Russia.

## CHAPTER X

# MONGOLIA, IN ITS PRESENT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATION TO THE RUSSIAN AND CHINESE EMPIRES

IT is my object in the following chapter to indicate in a general way the economic and political condition of the great tract of North-West Outer China which immediately borders on Siberia, and to show the relationships and intercourse existing between the two countries at the present time. In 1910, in company with Mr Douglas Carruthers and Mr J. H. Miller, I crossed the part of the North-West Mongolian plateau bordering Southern Siberia. We were almost the last Europeans to see that part of Mongolia as it was before the revolution of 1911. Since then I have been able to collect information from Russian traders and officials in various parts of Siberia which throws further light on the economic problems. I have also had the privilege of consulting Professor Michael Soboleff, the Professor of Political Economy at Tomsk University, whose extended travels and studies in Mongolia have been of great assistance to me. Some of the statistical information contained in his book, "Russo-Mongolian Trade" (in Russian), I have set forth in the following chapter. The kindness and help of Professor Soboleff I herewith most gratefully acknowledge.

## I. PHYSICAL CHARACTERS OF MONGOLIA

The southern border of Western and Central Siberia marches with that of the Outer Chinese Empire along the north-west edge of the Central Asiatic plateau. South of the Siberian-Mongolian frontier with its fur-bearing forests, Alpine meadows and open steppes, lies a stony desert tableland, studded with irregular chains of snowy mountains, the moisture from which drains away into plateau lakes and saline evaporating basins. These physical features stretch far away south-eastward across the Gobi, a stony plateau desert, beyond which lies the Great Wall and Inner China.

All this country is the north-western part of Outer China, sometimes called Outer Mongolia, against which Russia's Empire in Northern Asia abuts. Some idea of its vastness may be gathered from the reflection that the territory outside the Chinese Wall, excluding Manchuria, Tibet and the new province of Sing Kiang, but including Mongolia and the mountainous plateaus between the Siberian and Chinese Altai together with the Gobi desert, covers an area roughly of 1,200,000 square miles. The population, which is very difficult to estimate, is believed by certain Russian authorities to be no more than 2,500,000.

The character of this vast country is uniform and over large areas featureless. Below 7000 feet it is a stony wilderness covered with scanty grass and desert bush, and between this altitude and the snow-line Alpine meadows or patches of larch forest can be found. The whole country is sparsely inhabited

ALPINE MEADOWS AND LARCH FOREST ON THE PLATEAUX OF NORTH-WEST MONGOLIA

MONGOL WOMEN MAKING FELT OUT OF WOOL AND HORSE-HAIR

by primitive tribes of Mongols, who represent socially and politically the ruins of the old Mongol Empire now crushed under the heel of China.

### 2. EARLY RUSSO-CHINESE RELATIONS

Theoretically, the geographical frontiers and the economic relations between Siberia and Mongolia have been settled by a series of treaties, of which the oldest dates back to 1689, when Russia in her eastward advance received her first check at the hands of China. For, strange as it may seem from the standpoint of modern international politics, it was the power of China which first called a halt upon the Russian advance in Asia. The process of subjugating the Tartars on the Southern Siberian steppes was swift and sure.[1] Less than half-a-century after Yermak had crossed the Urals, the Russians had swept across Northern Asia to the Pacific. In the Far East, however, the advance of the Russian arms was very different, and, on coming face to face with the outposts of the Chinese Empire on the Amur River, the Cossack suddenly met his match.

The early relations between these two great political powers in Asia I must here briefly describe. By the overthrow of the khanate of Sibir in the sixteenth century the Cossacks subdued the Turkish races of that country, and by the conquest of the Buriats round Lake Baikal in the seventeenth century overcame their Mongol kinsmen farther to the east. But as they advanced eastward yet a third race remained to be subdued. On both banks of the Amur River, and in the country now known as Manchuria, lived a race physically related to their Mongol

[1] See p. 177.

and Turkish kinsmen on the west, but politically separate from them. Collectively they were known as the "Tunguse," and covered a widespread area, varying much in habits and culture. Their northern branches lived a wild nomad life in the forests north of the Amur River, while those in the fertile plains of Southern Manchuria, who were known as "Manchus," were more civilized and cultured. About the beginning of the seventeenth century this Manchu tribe of Tunguses began to rise from obscurity. By agriculture they had become wealthy; they possessed a literature influenced by Chinese culture from the south; and, being a northern race, they were skilled in the art of war. It was not long before they made themselves masters of what is now Manchuria, thus laying the seeds of the Manchu race, or, as it was soon to be, the Manchu dynasty of China. In 1644, chafing under Chinese misrule, their ruler, Thai tsu, by a remarkable train of events, overthrew the tottering Ming dynasty at Peking and made himself ruler of the great Chinese Empire with its teeming millions and its highly developed civilization. Thai tsu was succeeded in 1662 by the Emperor Kang-hi; and shortly after his ascent to the Dragon Throne there was a revolt of some of the Tunguse tribes on the Amur River against their own kinsmen who were ruling at Peking. An expedition was accordingly sent to reduce them, and a dramatic incident in the history of North-East Asia now took place.

The Cossacks were at this moment pushing their forces into the Amur country, and they too began operations against these same Tunguse tribes of North Manchuria. The two expeditions joined hands,

and so there was the curious spectacle of the Russian Cossacks co-operating with the Chinese forces of the Manchu dynasty at Peking, in subduing the unruly elements of its own tribe. But this co-operation was short-lived, and when it had accomplished its object, the Chinese troops and the Cossack bands stood facing each other in the land which both coveted. Amicable relations between the Emperor Kang-hi and the Cossack Ataman were not likely to continue in such circumstances, and it is not surprising that in 1680 we hear of Chinese attacks upon Cossack forts on the Amur, and of desultory fighting between the two powers during the remaining years of the seventeenth century.

Meanwhile the Tsar of Moscow, seeing that the Chinese power was one to be reckoned with, sent Golovin as ambassador to Manchuria with a force, and in 1689 the two representatives met at Nerchinsk on the Upper Amur River. But the Chinese ambassador had a large military force at his command, while Govolin had but a comparatively small band of Cossacks. He was therefore compelled to agree quickly with his adversary, and the resulting Treaty of Nerchinsk, contracted in fear of the Chinese power, marked the first serious check that the Russians received on their eastward march across Siberia. By Articles 1 and 2 of the treaty a large tract of country lying to the north of the Amur River, which had been won by the Cossacks, was given back to China, and the frontiers of the two countries were delimited by a line running from Kamschatka over the barren plateaus of North-Eastern Siberia to the upper waters of the Amur. This was a serious blow to the Russian advance. The hopes of the Cossacks

in establishing relations with Kamschatka and the dreams of a warm-water port on the Pacific were rudely nipped in the bud, for, without the right of navigating the Amur River, communication with the Pacific was well-nigh impossible. On the other hand, the treaty allowed for the first time complete freedom of trade between Russians and Chinese, and the Cossacks were from henceforth permitted to send caravans of furs and other Siberian merchandise to Peking for barter. This is the first recognition of Russo-Chinese trade, which is such an important factor in the economic history of Asia to-day.

For some thirty years the relations between the Russians and the Chinese continued upon the basis of this treaty. Merchants who had during the previous fifty years set up businesses in Western Siberia sent caravans to Peking, and emigrated over into Eastern Mongolia to barter with the Mongol tribes. A sort of annual fair took place on the Orkhon River, where Mongol, Siberian and Chinese merchants met each year to exchange their wares, but it soon became a seat of disorder and riot; and a dispute between the Russians and the Chinese about the suzerainty of a Mongol tribe near the frontier ended in 1822 in the expulsion of all Russian traders from Chinese territories by order of the Emperor.

In 1727 embassies were again exchanged between the courts of Moscow and Peking. The two ambassadors met on the Bura, a small river on the East Mongolian frontier not far from Khiakta, which was a Cossack town, separated by a little brook from the Chinese town of Maimatsin, and the Treaty of Khiakta was made, and signed in the following year. By this treaty the previous frontiers on the Amur,

as settled by the Nerchinsk Treaty, were maintained, and the frontier westwards from the sources of the Amur River to the Shabin-daba Mountain in the Upper Yenisei basin, just north of the junction of the Kemchik and the Ulukem, was established. The country south of this natural line was placed under Chinese influence, and the country to the north of it under Russian. Trade was allowed under restriction and supervision, and all promiscuous trading in Mongolia was stopped. Caravans sent to Peking were limited in number and provided with escorts, and Khiakta was assigned as a special place on the frontier, where Russians and Chinese merchants could meet and carry on their barter trade without restriction.

These last two treaties established the relations between Russia and China firmly for the rest of the eighteenth century, and were not seriously modified till the middle of the nineteenth century, when the relative weakening of Chinese influence in the Far East, and the consequent strengthening of Russian influence, enabled the latter to enlarge its privileges by a further series of treaties.

The treaties of 1851 and 1860 established the right of free interchange of commercial wares between Russian and Chinese subjects at specified posts along the frontier and at certain places in Outer China, including Urga, Uliassutai, Kobdo, Tarbagatai, Kuldja and Urumtsi. In 1881, by the "Ili" treaty, Russia secured further economic concessions and privileges in the provinces of China bordering Siberia and Turkestan. The provisions of this treaty are very complicated, obscure, and even contradictory, but in the main they admit certain general principles which can be set forth as follows :—

(1) No tariff is to be imposed by either Russia or China, unless trade attains "such development as to necessitate its establishment."

(2) Free Trade to be maintained between all Chinese and Russian subjects in the principal towns and "trading areas" of Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan.

(3) An old custom that Russian and Chinese subjects can settle permanently, trade, and acquire land and houses within fifty versts on either side of the Russo-Chinese frontier, is confirmed.

(4) Russian subjects have the right to settle and acquire houses, for the purpose of carrying on trade in all "trading places" on either side of the Tian-Shan ranges and in the country outside the Great Wall.

It can be seen without further comment that the ambiguity and confusion of ideas in these provisions have been profitable to the interests of those who do not desire to see Chinese political influence firmly established over the Tartar tribes outside the Great Wall. The ambiguity, moreover, of the clause relating to the future imposition of customs leaves a wide field for speculation as to the limit which commercial development should reach before necessitating customs!

In practice, therefore, the treaty of 1881 has proved useful as a diplomatic lever, which Russia can apply to China whenever occasion requires it. Moreover, the isolation and complicated geographical features which prevail over a large area of the Siberian-Mongolian borderland has rendered the provision for a fifty-verst neutral zone very elastic, and in the past the zone has been extended far beyond its

legal limit, especially in Manchuria and the Upper Yenisei plateau.

To sum up, therefore, it can be concluded that although mountain ranges, plateaus and uninhabited areas have created a fairly well-defined geographical and political frontier between Southern Siberia and North-West Outer China, nevertheless no real economic or fiscal barrier exists between the people inhabiting either side of the borders.

### 3. ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITIES IN MONGOLIA

Chinese authority in Mongolia has up to the time of the recent revolution been represented by two military governors, known to the world as Tartar generals, and to the Chinese themselves as "Dzan Dzuns." One of them ruled Eastern or Inner Mongolia, residing at Koko-Hotu, and the other ruled Western or Outer Mongolia residing at Uliassutai. Up to the present time these Tartar generals have all been Manchus, for the highest military posts outside the Great Wall have always in the past been monopolized by the ruling caste in China. Since the revolution many of these Manchus have been forcibly replaced by Republican leaders who have assumed powers as arbitrary as those of their predecessors. On the other hand, such is the vastness of Outer China that certain areas seem as yet to have been unaffected by the revolution, and the Manchu generals are still in possession of a few posts outside the Great Wall. The two military governor-generals of Outer China devolve their administration upon five so-called "Hebee Ambans" residing at Kalgan, Senin, Koko-Hotu, Uliassutai and Kobdo. Beneath

them come smaller Ambans, generally Chinamen, but sometimes Mongol khans or princes, who are allowed to rise to this rank through influence. Thus a so-called Amban-Naion, who is a Mongol khan with suzerainty over most of the Urian Hai tribes north of the Tannu-Ola Mountains, resides on the Tess River south of those mountains in North-West Mongolia. Again at Urga, both a Mongol and a Chinese Amban reside, for the special purpose of watching the great ecclesiastical dignitary, or Hutuchtu Lama, who is the chief of the Buddhist religion in Mongolia, and who resides there. Although nominally a spiritual ruler, in January 1912, with the connivance of the Mongol khans and in defiance of Chinese authority, he declared himself the Great Khan of Mongolia, and has been duly crowned, after having expelled the Chinese Amban.

The Chinese administrative divisions of Mongolia follow in the main the old tribal divisions of the Mongols, and the two have been skilfully interwoven with one another. When Chinese authority became established in Mongolia after the fall of the Mongol dynasty at Peking, the independence of the khans was abolished, and the whole country was divided into administrative divisions called "Aeemaks." These were further subdivided into Hoshuns, or smaller administrative and military divisions, which roughly follow the old tribal boundaries of the Mongols. At the head of each Hoshun is a khan, generally hereditary, more rarely elected, and every year the khans of the Aeemak meet in conclave to consider matters affecting their common welfare. But the Hoshuns are still further subdivided into smaller military communes or banner corps with 150

A TYPICAL MONGOL ENCAMPMENT SHOWING "YURT" OR ROUND FELT TENT

A MONGOL "CARUOLE" OR FIXED ENCAMPMENT TO DEFINE THE BOUNDARIES OF THE TRIBES IN MONGOLIA

tribesmen in each. Each family in the Hoshun is bound by the Chinese authorities to provide one recruit and four horses to these banner corps, and the khans are responsible to the Chinese Tartar generals for the formation of these corps, which are then placed under the command of Chinese bannersmen, and are used as frontier guards and urban police in the Chinese towns outside the Great Wall. Thus a feudal system of tribute by service was in operation in Mongolia till the recent revolution, and the future of the system is undetermined at the moment of writing.

### 4. THE NATIVES OF MONGOLIA

The Mongols are a branch of an Asiatic race which presents many ethnological features common also to the Turks and Tartars farther to the west, and the Manchus and Tunguses farther to the east. Once politically united in a great Mongol Empire, they have been scattered and crushed under the domination of China, and their princes reduced to tributary vassals of Peking. Society is feudal and very similar to what it must once have been in the Middle Ages in England. The hereditary khans in Mongolia, descended from the sons and generals of the great Mongol emperor of the thirteenth century, have absolute power of life and death over their subjects, whom they hold down in a condition of feudal serfdom. Besides being bound to recruit the Chinese banner corps, the khans are responsible for yearly tribute to the Chinese Tartar generals. This tribute is arbitrary and oppressive and is levied both in silver and in kind. Professor Soboleff mentions instances from personal observation of tribute levied by the khans on their

serfs amounting in silver to fourteen per cent. of the capital value of their stock per annum, and instances are given below by the writer where a ten-per-cent. tribute was levied in kind on the capital stock of the "Dorbot" Mongols by their hereditary khan. But, in addition to the levy of tribute, the khans compel their subjects to work for them whenever their service is required as personal attendants or as custodians of their numerous flocks and herds. Besides being thus bound down as serfs under the khans, a certain number of the Mongol kinsmen in each Hoshun are held under the feudal authority of the Buddhist Lamas, who co-operate with the khans. The Lamas, who are said by some to number one-third of the whole population of Mongolia, and by others five-eighths of the male population, have by ancient custom a right to acquire feudal power over one male member of every Mongol family, who thereby becomes bound to a monastery. Moreover, the Lamas can exact from each Mongol flock-owner tribute, which often amounts to fifteen per cent. of the capital value of their live stock per annum. They also receive large silver grants from the khans, as offerings to the deities. Grants formerly made voluntarily are now extracted forcibly by the Lamas from the tribesmen. Thus in Mongolia, as in Europe during past centuries, voluntary contributions to religious bodies have become under feudal social conditions legal exactions.

Moreover, the Mongols have been ear-marked by the Chinese for particularly oppressive treatment, and this is no doubt due to old standing jealousies and revenge for the former suzerainty of the Mongols over the Chinese. The authorities at Peking have

had the acuteness to utilize the Mongol khans as their chief instruments of oppression, by making them responsible for tribute and conscripts, and by allowing them to retain absolute power over their subjects. The livelihood of the Mongols depends upon the natural growth of their stock and its products, which of recent years have commanded a value upon the Siberian and Chinese markets. Being typical Asiatic nomads, they live in portable felt tents, and their sole capital consists of horses, cattle and camels. They subsist upon mutton and mare's milk, and the wool and hair of their flocks provide them with the felt necessary for the coverings of their tents. Their only requirements, therefore, consist of cotton cloth for their clothes, tea and small ironware, and the means of obtaining these is found by the sale or barter of the surplus produce, consisting mainly of wool, horse hair, hides and skins.

But the purchasing power of the Mongols has become impaired by the tyrannous rapacity of the authorities both temporal and spiritual who exploit them. Indeed, signs of economic exhaustion are not wanting, for in bad seasons summer droughts and bitter winters curtail the natural growth of their flocks, while in good seasons the whole of that increase is absorbed by high tribute. They are thus reduced to a condition of social and economic serfdom.

The recent revolution, although it has made the Mongol khans practically independent, has created no guarantee that the Mongol tribesmen will receive less oppressive and differential treatment than in the past. The struggle has been that of Chinese tyrant versus Mongol tyrant rather than that of Mongol tyrant versus Mongol tribesman. In some respects

the present position may be worse, for, unless the Republic is able to regain its prestige over the khans, the tribesmen will not receive the benefit of any financial and fiscal reforms which the new regime in China may introduce.

### 5. MONGOLIA AS AN ASIATIC MARKET

(1) *Its External Trade.*—Like all primitive countries Mongolia exports large quantities of raw material, which is exchanged for cheap manufactures from the industrial centres both of the East and of the West. Economic relations are thus maintained with Inner China on the south-east and Siberia on the north, and the main routes along which this commerce flows are three in number.

There is first the south-eastern caravan route from Eastern or Inner Mongolia into Inner China, which runs from Urga across the Gobi desert to Kalgan and Peking. Secondly, there are the north-eastern caravan routes running across Outer Mongolia from Uliassutai and Urga and converging on the Siberian frontier town of Khiakta, through which commerce passes into Eastern Siberia. Thirdly, there is the north-western caravan route which runs from Uliassutai and Kobdo across the north-west plateau of Mongolia to Biisk in Western Siberia.

The raw export trade in Mongolia is influenced by two factors—namely, the markets of Siberia and European Russia on the one hand, and those of Inner China on the other. The trade figures for 1908 are as follows :—

Imports from Mongolia to China, 35,000,000 roubles (£3,888,888).

Imports from China to Mongolia, 15,000,000 roubles (£1,666,666).

Imports from Mongolia to Siberia, 8,500,000 roubles (£944,444).

Imports from Siberia to Mongolia, 1,800,000 roubles (£200,000).

The China-Mongolian trade, therefore, is by far the greatest of the two, amounting as it does to 50,000,000 roubles a year in imports and exports, and this shows that the main natural trend of Mongolian trade, especially in the east and south-east, is directed towards Inner China. In this connexion it is interesting to note what the probable effect of a proposed railway from Khiakta to Peking via Urga and Kalgan would be upon the economic status of this part of Outer China. The cheapening of the cost of transport from Mongolia, both towards the north and towards the south, would probably stimulate the southern traffic towards Inner China, at the expense of the northern trade to Siberia. It has even been rumoured that foreign wool agents in China have recently begun to discover that the export of Mongolian wool to Europe via Urga and Kalgan is 70 kopeks per poud (½d. per lb. approx.) cheaper than if it were sent via Khiakta and the Siberian railway. While, however, the railway would probably stimulate the China-Mongolian raw material trade at the expense of the Russo-Mongolian, in other respects it would bring Russian and Inner Chinese markets nearer together, and would probably facilitate the import of more Chinese wares, especially tea, into the markets of Siberia and Western Russia.

It has become of recent years apparent that Russian and Chinese economic influence have been drawn

more and more into conflict with one another in Mongolia, and figures will show that the influence of the Chinese markets has been making itself felt at the expense of the Siberian markets, more particularly in regard to cheap manufactured goods sold in Mongolia. Thus, while the imports of raw material into Siberia along the north-western trade route via Koshagatch have increased from 552,263 roubles in 1900 to 4,021,906 roubles in 1910, the exports of Russian manufactures into Mongolia along the same route have increased from 373,408 roubles in 1900 to only 775,962 roubles in 1910. The north-eastern trade route also via Khiakta shows signs of decline over the same period both for Russian imports and exports. According to Professor Soboleff, between 1901 and 1906 Russia's manufactured exports from Siberia to Mongolia increased by twenty-two per cent. only, while Mongolian raw material imports into Siberia over the same period increased by 566 per cent.

Everywhere it is apparent that there has been greater activity among the Chinese traders in Mongolia since 1900. Chinese firms from Koho-Hotu and Kalgan have now got branches in every important trading station in Mongolia, and by their political influence with the Mongol khans, and their better organization, have succeeded in underselling and partially ousting Russian manufactures from the Mongolian markets. In former days Russian economic influences predominated in Mongolia. There was then little or no demand for Mongolian raw material in Siberia, and consequently, the exports from Russia to Mongolia being in excess of the imports from Mongolia to Russia, a silver balance

was paid to the Siberian merchants by the Mongols. Within the last five years, however, Mongolian raw material has come into greater demand on the Siberian markets, while the sale of Russian manufactures has suffered severely from Chinese competition. Silver, therefore, has begun to flow the reverse way—namely, from Siberia into Mongolia—in payment of the balance of Mongolian raw material in excess of the exported Russian manufactures. Russian firms have their agents in the Siberian frontier towns of Biisk, Minusinsk and Irkutsk. These agents despatch their previous season's wool and skins by the first steamer after the ice on the Siberian rivers has melted to the markets of European Russia via the Siberian railway, and during May and June they set out in carts or with pack-horse caravans for Mongolia, where they remain all the summer trading with the Mongols. They bring with them consignments of Russian manufactured goods which they have bought from the wholesale firms, and lump silver which they have borrowed from the Siberian banks to enable them to carry out the next season's purchases. But the Siberian wool merchant, who formerly obtained Mongolian wool in exchange for tea and cotton manufactures, is now more and more forced to buy his wool for silver, and to see the Chinaman undersell his Russian manufactures at his very door. Thus on the Kemchik steppes of the Upper Yenisei plateau Siberian wool merchants, who formerly obtained wool and skins from the Mongols by giving them tea and cotton manufactures in exchange, now have to buy their wool from the Chinese traders, paying cash in lump silver. In Ulankhom, a trading station in North-West Mongolia, the Siberian wool

traders in 1905 bartered 50,000 roubles' worth of wool for Russian manufactures, but in 1910 only 8000 roubles' worth. It is estimated by the Siberian traders that the Mongols now exchange by barter only one-fifth of their raw material for Russian wares, the remaining four-fifths being bartered to the Chinese merchants or given in lieu of tribute to the khans, who in return sell this raw material for lump silver to the Russians. Professor Soboleff, writing on Russia's Mongolian trade, says: "Our trade with Mongolia is becoming passive in character. We are compelled to cover the value of our imports by ready money or cash, and only if we resell any part of this raw material beyond our frontiers does this money return to us. Thus we export silver to Mongolia which we buy in Hamburg, and pay for it by raw material imports to Germany. This Russian silver exported to the East goes partly to the Chinese traders, and partly to the Mongol khans, as tribute for their subjects, and much of it also finds its way into the hands of Chinese officials. The Lamas also hold silver in the monasteries, which they have squeezed out of the tribesmen."

The only comment necessary on this excellent summary of the present economic position is that, while it is true that silver may now find its way into China in payment of Mongolian raw material, it should be remembered that this metal balance, as is so often the case, may be made good in many ways. For instance it is known that China imports manufactured goods from countries in Western Europe, to which Russia sends annually large quantities of timber and grain from the large reserves of her natural resources. These combined transactions

might quite conceivably therefore complete the economic circle, which is invisible on the surface, thereby cancelling the so-called adverse balance.

(2) *Currency.* — Where goods are not directly bartered the following media of exchange are generally in use throughout Mongolia :—

*a.* Lump or shoe silver, which is provided by the Siberian banks and is based upon the one-ounce unit of weight.

*b.* The Chinese silver lian, which is divided into ten units and varies much in value according to the supply of silver in Central China. Its equivalent in Russian money varies from 1 rouble 20 kopeks to 1 rouble 30 kopeks. Ten years ago it was equivalent to 1 rouble 70 kopeks, and it has been decreasing in value slowly ever since.

*c.* The Chinese silver dollar which, according to Soboleff, is at present current in the town of Urga only, and in 1910 was equivalent to 85 Russian kopeks.

*d.* The Russian silver and paper rouble. This currency is everywhere very popular and much confidence is placed in it, especially by the Mongols, because it is the purest of all the currencies. It is not usually accepted by the Chinese traders, however, who generally require lump silver in settlement of balances. The rouble is therefore chiefly in use between the Russians and the Mongols.

*e.* Chinese brick tea. This is a very important article of domestic economy among the Mongols, and, being fairly free from fluctuating value, is capable of use as a medium of exchange. It is the monopoly of certain Chinese firms from Inner China, who retail it in Siberia and Mongolia in return for lump silver.

In this connexion it may be interesting to note

that such is the commercial integrity of both Russian and Chinese merchants in Mongolia, that although racial and religious antagonisms are strongly developed between them, they nevertheless often leave their balances outstanding for twelve months. Thus, when I was on the North-West Mongolian plateaus in 1910, I frequently found Russian and Chinese traders who meet perhaps once a year in some wild spot in Mongolia, and exchange wool for silver or brick tea. If the accounts did not quite balance, they were left over for settlement till next year, and meanwhile there was nothing except mutual honour to ensure the fulfilment of obligations. The Russian traders who had also been in Manchuria told me that they could do this with a Chinaman but never with a Japanese.

(3) *Russian and Chinese Systems of Credit.*

*a. Chinese Hoshun Credit.*—Transactions in cash, credit, and barter are carried on in Mongolia by the Russian and Chinese merchants in their dealings with the Mongol flock-owners and with each other. Of recent years credit terms have been largely induced by the heavy silver tribute levied on the Mongol khans by the Chinese officials through the medium of their Hoshuns. A system has therefore come into existence known as the Hoshun Credit System. The khan of the Hoshun, who is responsible for the tribute to the Chinese authorities, frequently obtains from the Chinese merchants an advance of silver with which he pays his tribute. In return for this he gives them the right to exploit his subjects, and to recoup their loaned capital with whatever interest they can get during that period. The debt is therefore paid off by the Mongols in the produce

of their flocks, generally at most exorbitant rates of interest, and thus the Chinese traders take the place of the khan as feudal lords and slave-drivers. Instances have come to light in which a loan to a Mongol khan of six lian per head of each of his subjects has only been satisfied by the payment of 100 lbs. of wool by each flock-owner to the Chinese merchant. This is equivalent to sixty-six per cent. interest. In fact all credit transactions with the Chinese merchants are transacted under very harsh conditions. Thus one brick of tea on loan for one year is frequently repaid by a one-year-old ram the next year, and by a two-year-old ram the following year. This is equivalent to one hundred per cent. interest. The sale of a brick of tea on credit in exchange for wool is carried on at rates varying from forty to one hundred per cent. interest. Therefore, since the advent of the Chinese traders, whole tribes of Mongols have sunk more and more into the condition of economic serfdom. The loans of the Chinese traders are backed by the feudal authority of the khans, the Lamas and the Chinese authorities, all of whom are interested in oppressing the tribesmen. Russian traders, who have not the same political prestige with the Chinese officials and the Mongol khans as the Chinese traders, are by this system of Hoshun credit utterly debarred from direct dealings with the Mongols. But in the forested regions of the Siberian-Mongolian frontier, where this oppressive system of Hoshun credit does not exist, the influence of the Russian traders is decidedly beneficial for the Mongols, since the legal rate of interest chargeable through the Russian Empire is never more than twelve per cent., and this holds good over Russian subjects in Mongolia.

*b. Russian Banking Facilities.* — In spite of Hoshun Credit there is no inconsiderable field for banking facilities in Mongolia, and the Russians, by dint of their commercial treaties with China, might profitably develop sound banking business in the principal Mongolian commercial centres. There were formerly banks at Urga, Uliassutai, and Kalgan, but of late years these have been unable to face the competition of the Chinese merchants and moneylenders, and so they have been closed. It is probable that their failure has largely been due to their lack of study of the economic conditions under which the Russian traders have to carry on their business. Most Russian traders now borrow lump silver from the bank in the spring of each year, and with this silver they trade in Mongolia during the summer, and return in the late autumn or early winter with the produce they have bought. The Siberian banks only allow nine months before the silver loan is to be discharged, and thus they often cause the values of Mongolian raw material to be depreciated by forcing them on to the Siberian markets in the autumn, when better prices might be realized later. If, for instance, the terms of credit were extended to twelve months, much greater facilities would be afforded to the Russian traders in Mongolia. The chief difficulty lying in the way of Russian banking enterprise is, of course, the Hoshun credit system, and in such countries as Mongolia, where racial antagonisms are strong, the Russians, in spite of the privileges obtained by their special treaties with China, are immensely hampered by lack of political influence with the Mongol khans. The revolution may assist the Russian traders in

Mongolia by drawing the sympathies of the Mongol khans towards them, for the khans realize that in them they have a guarantee against the arbitrary economic exploitation of the Chinese.

(4) *Mongolian Exports and Imports.*

*a. Cotton Manufactured Goods.*—Cotton goods are among the most important domestic articles used by the Mongols. It is estimated by Siberian traders that each Mongol requires for his rough cloth tunic and linen underwear from four to five roubles' worth of cheap cotton manufactures a year. Until recent years Russian goods have had almost complete predominance. Thus the imports of Russian cotton prints and textiles into North-West Mongolia by the route from Biisk to Kobdo steadily increased after 1892, till in the year 1902 they rose to a maximum of 688,000 pouds, about 11,000 tons; from 1903 to 1910, however, there has been a steady decline, until now Russian cotton exports in Mongolia along this route are in the same position as they were in 1892. Along the north-eastern route via Khiakta, a similar increase and decrease can be observed in Russian cotton exports, which reached a maximum of 14,863 pouds in 1906, and have fallen rapidly since. Besides the competition of the Chinese cotton goods of recent years, the fall in the value of silver has hit the Russian trader in Mongolia very hard. According to Professor Soboleff, in 1890 silver was worth 1200 roubles (£310) per poud (36 lbs.) and the Chinese lian was equivalent to 1 rouble 90 kopeks (4s. 1½d.). A piece of cotton textile, however, which was formerly worth 1 lian 2 tsen in Mongolia, and 2 roubles 25 kopeks in Siberia, is now only worth 1 lian in Mongolia and

1 rouble 20 kopeks in Siberia. Russian traders have raised their prices lately to recoup themselves, but they have to meet the heavy competition of the Chinese. The Chinese cloths and cotton prints are of great interest, because many of them are simply cheap English cotton goods that have travelled all the way from Manchester to Mongolia. During 1910, the writer found in several places along the north-west plateaus Manchester cotton goods and prints which had been imported by sea to Eastern China, where they had been dyed and coloured to suit the Mongolian market and had then travelled all across the Gobi to Mongolia. These cheap cotton goods have been exported for years from England to China, but have apparently only recently found their way into the Western and North-Western parts of China, through the medium of enterprising merchants. Besides being cheaper than the same class of goods imported from Moscow, which the Russian traders sell, they are of better quality. On the testimony of the Mongols themselves, Chinese linen of English manufacture lasts twice as long as a similar piece of Moscow linen. In addition to English and Russian cotton goods, there are also linens of a somewhat inferior quality and some thin American cloth.

In 1910 I found that the cash price of Chinese (that is English) cotton prints in North-West Mongolia was 16 to 20 kopeks per archine, or 7d. to 9½d. per square yard, while that of Russian (Moscow) cotton prints was 21 to 28 kopeks per archine, or 9½d. to 1s. per square yard. Professor Soboleff speaks of Russian linen being sold in Kobdo at 18 to 20 kopeks per archine and English and American linen at 16 to 20 kopeks per archine.

It is interesting to observe how the Chinese merchants can sell Manchester cotton goods, which have travelled at least 18,000 miles by sea and land, cheaper than the Russian merchant can sell his Moscow tariff-protected wares only 3000 miles from the industrial seat of Empire.

*b. Miscellaneous Manufactures.*—The chief item under this heading is hardware and crockery, and up to now the market has been largely monopolized by cheap Moscow and German goods. These, moreover, seem to be holding their own against similar articles from Western China. The principal articles required by the Mongols under this heading are iron bars for horses' shoes, nails, spades, axes, spring traps, tea cans and China cups.

*c. Tea.*—As explained above in dealing with currency, tea, in the form of bricks, is an important article of consumption among the Mongols. These bricks are made by compressing tea dust, and are the monopoly of certain Chinese firms in central provinces. The green article, being cheapest, is consumed largely by the Mongols, and costs roughly 50 kopeks (1s. 1d.) per brick in North-West Mongolia.

*d. Wool.*—This is the principal article of export from Mongolia, and a considerable and increasing demand has developed of late years in European Russia. The best quality is found in the Uliassutai district, where the wool is less hairy than in most other parts. It appears that good summer pasturage constitutes the condition most favourable for the growth of good hairless wool, and this is found at an altitude of from 5000 to 8000 feet on the plateaus. In the main, however, Mongolian wool is hairy in quality, and is fit only for the manufacture of the

cheaper classes of woollen goods, which are chiefly made in European Russia.

The Mongols bestow no care on the improvement of the wool from their flocks. They keep the best wool for themselves, and, mixing it with horsehair, manufacture it into felt for their tents, while they sell only the dirtiest and hairiest qualities. The Russian and Chinese wool merchants in Mongolia, therefore, are compelled to wash all the wool they purchase, and this wool-washing is the only industry which the Mongolian plateau produces.

The price of wool in Mongolia has risen steadily for many years past, and the amount exported has more than doubled since 1900. In 1910, 97,142 pouds (1561 tons), valued by the customs at 8¾ roubles a poud (8½d. per lb.), passed the Koshogatch post by the north-western caravan route. Professor Soboleff states that prices in Uliassutai have risen from 1 rouble 70 kopeks per poud (½d. per lb.) in 1908 to 5 roubles per poud (3¾d. per lb.) in 1910. In the same year the writer saw wool in North-West Mongolia offered by Mongolian flock-owners in exchange for manufactured goods and silver advances at the rate of from 2 to 4 roubles per poud (1½d. to 2½d. per lb.). The price of Mongolian wool in Biisk during 1910 ranged from 8 roubles 57 kopeks to 9 roubles 10 kopeks per poud (5¾d. to 6½d. per lb.), including the cost of transport from Mongolia.

The development of the Australian wool trade, which has so long affected the European wool markets, and has kept down wool prices throughout the world, seems to have had no adverse effect on Mongolian wool. On the contrary, it appears that the cheap-

ness of wool throughout the world has only increased the demand for it in Russia, and, by bringing more wool-producing districts into activity, has actually increased prices in Russia and Western Europe.

In addition to the export of North-West Mongolian wool to Siberia, the wool trade from Eastern and South-Eastern Mongolia to Central China is of even greater importance. The wool trade in China has increased steadily of late years, and from Urga twelve times as much wool now goes via Kalgan to China than via Khiakta to Siberia. As was pointed out above, the proposed Chinese railway from Urga to Kalgan would probably cheapen the cost of transport from Mongolia to Central China and stimulate this wool trade at the expense of the export of Siberia.

Meanwhile the Russian wool merchants in Mongolia have found it more and more difficult to compete with the Chinese wool merchants, who get between them and the Mongols through political influence and their intimacy with the Mongol khans. But although the prosperity of the Russian wool traders in Mongolia has suffered severely of late, still the wool trade itself shows every sign of successful development. The decline of sheep culture in European Russia and in the immigrant parts of Siberia, owing to the gradual change from nomad life to settled agriculture, will be more than compensated for by its development in Mongolia, since nomadic stock-raising is the only industry that can ever exist on a large scale over the greater part of those desert plateaus.

*e. Live Stock.*—Besides wool Mongolia also exports live stock. The principal markets for this industry are in Siberia, where the Mongolian horned

cattle and horses are used to replenish the Siberian herds. The former also are killed for meat in the principal Siberian towns. The Russian traders, who come especially for this purpose, collect large herds of cattle, horses and sheep, during the summer in Mongolia, and drive them into Siberia in the autumn along the chief trade routes. Here they are sold at the principal Siberian autumn fairs. Many are slaughtered at places such as Biisk or Novo-nikolaevsk, and the skins forwarded to European Russia for tanning, while tallow is made in Siberia from the Mongolian fat-tailed sheep. The export of live stock from Mongolia shows a steady increase. Thus in 1905, 1298 cattle and 4350 sheep, and in 1910, 20,729 sheep and 1678 cattle were exported by the north-western route. Mongolian cattle are larger and hardier than the Siberian type. The former give from 11 to 21 pouds (396 to 432 lbs.) and the latter only 7 to 8 pouds (252 to 288 lbs.) of meat per carcass. Mature cattle in North-West Mongolia cost from 20 to 40 roubles, according to age, while sheep can be exchanged for Russian silver at from 2 to 4 roubles a head. As with the wool trade, the development of the live-stock trade must depend largely upon the condition of the Siberian markets, and as Siberia is colonized with agriculturists, the demand for Mongolian live stock is certain to increase.

*f. Furs.*—The chief fur produced in Mongolia is marmot, and to a smaller extent fox, squirrel and sable. The two latter being denizens of the sub-Arctic forests, it is only in a few spots, where sub-Arctic conditions exist along the Siberian-Mongolian frontier, that they are obtainable in any large quantities. Here on the Amur and the Upper Yenisei

plateau both black and brown sable is found. In 1911, 1000 Mongolian sables were sold in Siberia, their average value at Irbit being from 40 to 60 roubles each.

Marmots inhabit the high plateaus between 5000 and 8000 feet. The plateaus of the Chinese in Altai in North-West Mongolia are the principal marmot grounds. The price of marmot in Urga and Uliassutai varied in 1910 from 1 rouble 50 kopeks to 2 roubles each.

Fox is also found all over North-West Mongolia on the plateaus, but the fur is rather coarse and of a light yellow colour. Squirrels are found chiefly in the sub-Arctic forests on the Siberian-Mongolian frontier, and in 1909 the Upper Yenisei plateau produced 200,000 squirrel-skins, some of which went as tribute to Uliassutai and some to the Siberian fur markets. The Russian traders barter these squirrel-skins on the basis of 30 kopeks (7½d.) a piece.

(5) *The Future of Mongolia's Trade Relations.*—We have seen above that the north-western portion of the Chinese Empire, between the Great Wall and the Siberian frontier, is becoming the battle-ground where the industrial centres of Europe contend with those of Central China for the raw materials of that great region. Formerly the Western influence through Russia and Siberia predominated both in import and export to and from Mongolia. Latterly, however, the Eastern influence has made itself felt through the greater economic and political activity of the Chinese, who have been drawing Mongolian raw material more and more toward Central China in exchange for their manufactured wares. Thus,

although the North-West Mongolian trade still remains chiefly influenced by the Siberian markets, the whole of the East and South-East Mongolian trade, which is by far the most important, trends more and more towards Central China.

But not only is the economic influence of Inner China extending more outside the Great Wall than formerly, but the influence of the Siberian markets has correspondingly begun to decline within the last ten years. As I have shown above, the Mongolian raw material trade is gradually passing into the hands of the Chinese traders, and its exchange is effected almost entirely through the medium of silver, which passes from the Siberian wool trader into the hands of Chinese and Mongol officials, and the Lama monasteries. Cheap Chinese manufactures, moreover, are everywhere beginning to overrun the land and to undersell the goods which the Siberian wool traders have to offer in return for the raw material of the Mongol. The cause of this phenomenon is not far to seek.

The industrial system of the Russian Empire is still backward, and, although it is developing steadily, its imperfect condition can be judged by the fact that it only very partially supplies even its own home markets. Any export of manufacture, therefore, from Russia can only be carried on successfully, under present conditions, to those countries across her eastern frontiers, where an even lower standard of industrial development exists than within the Russian Empire itself. Mongolia and similar countries, such as Persia and Chinese Turkestan, have provided these markets in the past. Russia's export trade to these countries is, however, on an insecure basis, and the

political and industrial awakening of China and Japan has in the last ten years seriously affected her economic influence in the Far East. Moreover, Western European manufactures, notably English cotton goods, have recently, by reason of their low cost of production, been able to compete successfully with Russian manufactures right under the very frontiers of Eastern Russia. Thus, in spite of her political prestige, backed by a military force superior to that of China, Russia is squeezed economically between East and West. Much undoubtedly could be done to strengthen her economic position in these Eastern markets by better commercial organization, and especially by better banking facilities. At present, however, Russia's attention can well be concentrated upon the development of her own internal resources, where she has an unlimited field. Meanwhile she necessarily suffers from her backward industrial system, her high tariffs and high cost of production, whenever her manufactures meet the open markets beyond her political frontiers.

## 6. THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN MONGOLIA

The political horizon both in Inner and Outer China has undergone such rapid changes during the closing months of 1911 and the early days of 1912, and the future is still so obscure and problematical, that the task of reviewing the political situation is no easy one. Nor will the writer here attempt to present more than an indication of the political conditions governing the relations between Mongolia and Outer China.

The watchword of the Chinese colonial policy in

Mongolia has been "alien domination of a subject race." The ruling Manchu caste at Peking, which has in the past placed itself in privileged positions both socially and politically above the other races of the empire, has always, in spite of the fact that Manchu and Mongol originated once from a common nomad ancestor, adopted a particularly hostile attitude towards the non-Chinese population of North-West Outer China. Partly in revenge for their former conquest of China, and partly in fear of a national awakening, the Manchus imposed upon the Mongols special social and political disabilities, which within the last decade have been increased, till they have at last become intolerable. When the writer was in North-West Mongolia, in the summer of 1910, he was one of the last Europeans to see the country under its old Manchu domination. The most oppressive tribute was being levied from the Mongol tribes through the khans, amounting in many cases to more than the whole annual increase of the native flocks. Among the Dorbot Mongols several subtribal sections had been mortgaged by the khans to Chinese moneylenders as a return for advances of silver, with which to pay the Chinese tribute. In addition to this, the Mongols were subjected to military service for the formation of Chinese banner corps without remuneration. They had been dispossessed of considerable areas of their most fertile tracts by Chinese immigrant colonists. Although no large area of Mongolia is capable of cultivation, nevertheless what land of this description there was had been already mortgaged in great part to Chinese immigrants. The khans in the eastern "Kalkas" Hoshuns were compelled in 1910 by the Chinese

authorities to set apart for Chinese colonization 4,500,000 desyatines (11,250,000 acres) of land in their territories, and similar territorial concessions have been made by some of the smaller Hoshuns of the western tribes. The colonization of the low-lying lands, surrounding the rivers and evaporating basins in Mongolia, for the purpose of cultivation by irrigation has been having the effect of depriving the Mongols, the original inhabitants of the country, of their most fertile valleys, and of forcing them to remain on the high grazing land throughout the year.

Thus it is everywhere apparent that within recent years the Chinese authorities have been making great efforts to bring Mongolia more directly under Peking, and to stamp out all embers of Mongolian local autonomy and national life. The last effort of the tottering Manchu dynasty was an abortive attempt to consolidate the empire. Everywhere the Mongol khans and Chinese officials were in a sort of political union with one another, and the combined tyranny of both, assisted by that of the Buddhist Lamas, was crushing the Mongol tribes under a serfdom which recalled the days of mediæval Europe. But the Mongol khans themselves, although to some extent in league with the Chinese officials and dependent for their powers upon them, have been viewing with grave alarm the Chinese economic and military expansion in their territories and the colonization of their best lands. They regard these movements naturally as an attack upon their historical autonomous rights and a menace to the existence of the Mongols as a race. The situation is further complicated by the fact that many of the Mongol khans

have intermarried with the Manchu Imperial family. Since the outbreak of the recent revolution, however, ending in the downfall of the Manchu dynasty, the Mongol khans have taken the opportunity to regain that autonomy, which has been threatened during the last decade. The expulsion of the Chinese Amban and his followers from Urga and the coronation of the "Hutuchtu" Lama in that city as "Great Khan of Mongolia," was followed by an appeal to Russia to guarantee the Mongol rights of local autonomy.

And so Russia becomes a factor in the revolution of Outer China. She informed China by note, and by an official *communiqué* issued by the St Petersburg Foreign Office on 10th January 1912, that she would regard Mongolia as an autonomous province under Chinese suzerainty only. Moreover, she indicated her desire that China should control only the external relations of Mongolia, leaving all internal administration to the local khans; that Chinese military exactions on the Mongols should cease; and that Chinese immigrants should not deprive the tribesmen of their best land in future. The moral rôle which Russia, perhaps somewhat unwittingly, has played in this scene should arouse the sympathy, if not the approbation, of those who desire the protection of weak and struggling nationalities.

Russia has in fact undertaken to protect the Mongols against Chinese aggression, which, if continued in the recent manner, would eventually have threatened them with extinction.

The Russian Government's position was rendered all the more convincing in January 1912 by the comparison of the Russian policy in Mongolia with

that of the British in Tibet. These two provinces of Outer China, as was pointed out, are of special importance to British India on the one hand and to Siberia on the other, through the geographical position of each respectively. A condition of political stability in Mongolia is to the Siberians as much a matter of interest as a similar condition in Tibet is to British India. M. Sasonoff's speech in the Duma in May 1912 confirmed the popular belief in a pacific Russian policy in Mongolia. "We should not forget," he said, "that Russia is a European Power; that our State was put together not on the banks of the Black Irtish, but on the Dnieper and the Moskva. The expansion of Russia in Asia cannot constitute our aim and policy."

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to assume that Russia has no material object in view in her Mongolian policy. She saw clearly in 1911 that the continuance of Chinese arbitrary methods would sooner or later have caused social unrest among the Tartars in Mongolia, sufficient to threaten her commercial interests in that country.

The fear of Chinese competition, moreover, which, as we have seen, has caused such serious loss to Russian traders within the last decade, has also caused Russia to look with no favourable eye upon Chinese colonization in Mongolia.

Herein is the danger of Russia's action in Mongolia —a danger arising not from the policy of the Russian Government, but from the chauvinistic section of the Russian Nationalist Press. In the spring of 1911 their organs, apparently on their own responsibility, enunciated a policy of aggression in Mongolia and of sympathy with the supposed interests of the

Siberian traders, who have been suffering from Chinese competition there. Thus the *Novoye Vremya* declared in May 1912 that "Russia, in spite of her history of a thousand years, is still on the road to her geographical and political boundaries." And again: "The desert of Gobi is a better frontier for Russia than the present one." Coming down to practical considerations, the same paper, in discussing the effect of the Chinese revolution on the commercial treaty of 1881, intimated that it was of more importance to settle the trade relations along the Russo-Chinese frontier on a basis satisfactory to Russia than it was to insist on the freedom of trade and the open door in Outer China.

This significant remark illustrates the attitude of a certain body of Russian opinion on the question of the open door in Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan. Let us see what this would mean, if it were carried out. The imposition of customs dues preferential to Russian commerce in the provinces of Outer China would enable that commerce to regain artificially the ground which, by the inferiority of its industrial development, compared with that of the Chinese, it has lost in the last ten years. Moreover, this will be not without its effect on British trade. In 1910 the writer came upon many trading stations on the North-West Mongolian plateaus where British cotton goods were being sold by Chinese merchants. These goods had been brought by sea from England to the treaty ports, and from there had been taken over the Gobi desert to the Russo-Chinese frontier. Here they were underselling the Russian cotton goods from Moscow, which had not travelled half the distance. The margin of difference

by which the Chinese merchants in Mongolia undersell the Russian merchant in cotton goods might easily be covered by a preferential customs or excise due levied on all but Russian wares. This is an illustration of the extent to which British commercial interests will be affected in the Far East, if Russia forces China to violate the principle of the open door in Inner or Outer Mongolia or Eastern Turkestan.

If Russia only insists upon the recognition by Young China of Mongolia's autonomous rights, Great Britain, after sending an expedition to Tibet for a very similar purpose, cannot reasonably object, especially if such recognition will save the wretched Mongols from oppression. But if the Russian Government is going to be forced by the Russian Nationalist party into securing special privileges in Outer China, Great Britain and the other four powers will be justified in looking upon her as pursuing aims and methods wholly opposed to the principle of the open door.

It must not be forgotten, also, that Russia's policy, in the Far East, as elsewhere, always tends to be actuated by a desire to secure material advantages for her subjects. As I have shown above, her commercial interests in many parts of Outer China have suffered by Chinese economic expansion in recent years. Russia's economic policy in neutral markets is exclusive and protective and hostile to the open door. On the other hand, British trade has recently found a new market through the medium of enterprising Chinese merchants in Mongolia. However sympathetic, therefore, Russian and British high policies may be in Central Asia, the same cannot be said of the economic policies of the two

powers; and this fact must be borne in mind in reviewing the political situation.

Although the Russo-Japanese War is still recent, events have moved rapidly since then. In those days Japan purported to be fighting for the open door, and Russia was regarded as the aggressor against China's integrity. Recent events have clearly indicated that the two powers who fought over Manchuria have discovered that their aims and policies in the Far East may not, after all, be irreconcilable. It is significant that the Russo-Japanese agreement almost coincided with the rejection by those two powers of the American proposal to internationalize the Manchurian railways. In the summer of 1910 came the annexation of Korea by Japan, and in March 1911 the Russian ultimatum to China over the commercial treaty of 1881. Each event, taken separately, may be regarded as of little importance, but taken together they are a clear indication of the policy of the two powers in the Far East at the present time. Moreover, recent events in connexion with the Six Power Loan to the new Chinese Republic have confirmed the suspicion that Russia and Japan are attempting to utilize the financial straits of China in order to secure the recognition of their so-called rights in Mongolia and Manchuria respectively. The world may well be astonished at the spectacle of bankrupt Russia and Japan anxiously rushing to force money upon China at five or six per cent., which they would have borrowed at four per cent. from London and Paris, and then withdrawing their doubtful favours at the last minute, unless their obscure privileges in Outer China were recognized. Recent exchanges of views, moreover, said to have taken place between

the Russian and Japanese governments over the respective rights and reversionary interests in Outer and Inner Mongolia respectively, are not without significance. It cannot be too strongly emphasized therefore that the policy of the open door and the integrity of China is as important to-day for British commercial interests in neutral markets, and for our moral prestige in the East, as it was fifty years ago. It is not therefore wise for England to blind herself to the fact that there are two powers in the East, with whom she is on the friendliest terms, but who by economic necessity pursue objectives which are not altogether in keeping with her traditional ideas. To connive at a subtle infringement of the open door in any province of China is equivalent to assuming the responsibility of closing it, and unless extreme caution is exercised by British representatives at home and abroad, England may be unwittingly drawn in the Far East into the "orbit" of a certain diplomatic group, pursuing aims and policies at variance with her own. Once allow such an infringement over any part of Mongolia, Manchuria or Turkestan, and a precedent may be set up which will apply equally to other parts of those little-known mountainous regions of Far Western China.

It must be recognized that the economic policies of both Russia and Japan in the Far East are both fundamentally exclusive, and should be watched with considerable care. The price of British co-operation in China, as elsewhere, must always be the maintenance of the open door for foreign commerce; and the integrity of China, and the interpretation of the open door, must include no connivance at the closing of that door by any other power. But adherence to

these principles need not prevent Great Britain from co-operating with Russia, for the purpose of setting up in Mongolia and Outer China a stable regime based on Mongolian autonomy under Chinese suzerainty. As joint-guarantors with Japan of the integrity of China, England could not morally agree to any attack on the suzerain rights of Chinese authority in Outer China, whether in Tibet, Chinese Turkestan, or Mongolia. But events of recent years show that the Chinese have tried to consolidate their sovereign rights, and have made oppressive attacks upon the autonomy of the Mongol tribes. In fact since 1900 Chinese policy outside the Great Wall has been directed towards the forcible breaking down of all racial barriers, and the absorption of subject nationalities into the vortex of Chinese civilization. Broadly speaking, the same policy has been pursued by China in Mongolia as in Tibet, and its fruits have been seen in the revolt of the latter province during 1910 and the recent peaceful revolution in the former province during 1911. This was the situation, therefore, in Mongolia in January 1911, when Russia intervened in the political affairs of Outer China, and intimated her preference for a policy of creating Mongolia an autonomous province of China, whereby Mongolia would act as a buffer to prevent Russian and Chinese civilization from coming in contact with one another. It is not improbable, however, that the financial question is likely to prove the chief difficulty, and the solution of the problem of Outer China on an autonomous basis can, in my opinion, only be found in a scheme, whereby the revenues drawn from Outer China will be apportioned between a nominal Imperial tribute due to the

Chinese Government and local grants for expenditure on internal reforms and the development of Mongolia.

At present the revenues of Outer China are drawn partly from direct tribute levied on the Mongol princes, and partly from small customs duties levied on Russo-Chinese commerce along the Siberian-Mongolian frontier. The latter revenues are, however, insignificant, and are, moreover, controlled by the Russo-Chinese commercial treaties and cannot be modified without the consent of Russia. The matter, since March 1911, has been under consideration in connexion with the Russo-Chinese commercial treaty of 1881. It is to be hoped that some arrangement may be arrived at, whereby all the customs duties on Russo-Chinese commerce, and a proportion of the direct tribal taxation of the Mongols, may provide all the revenue needed by the Chinese Government for an equitable Imperial contribution from Mongolia, leaving the balance of the direct taxation in the hands of the local Mongol khans to dispose of as they think fit for their purely local needs. An agreement should also be made between the Chinese Government and the Mongol khans whereby the tribute is reassessed, and an equitable system of direct tribal taxation on the basis of the "Kibitka" or poll tax should be instituted by the Chinese in Mongolia. In this respect the Chinese might take a lesson from the Russian administration in Turkestan, and thereby do much to prevent arbitrary exploitation by corrupt Chinese officials. Some such arrangement as that outlined above would solve at once both the problem of Mongolian local autonomy, and the

problem of the revision of the Ili treaty on the existing Free Trade basis.

Bearing these factors in mind, there is no reason why British and Russian political interests in Outer China should not work sympathetically together. The writer is confident, from his experience, that no attempt is being made to extend the Siberian frontier southward by any really responsible Russian, either in Siberia or in St Petersburg. Nor does it appear reasonable to surmise that the annexation of any part of the inhospitable plateaus of Northern Outer China would ever pay Russia either directly or indirectly. In Southern Siberia, Russia has already found her geographical frontier. There is a danger, however, that she may acquire special economic privileges in Outer China, which, if once admitted, can be easily extended over that loosely governed and vast area of Outer China.

As to the future of the Mongols it would be futile to speculate. A race never very high in culture, even in the days of their imperial power, they have in the past century been crushed under the oppression of the Dragon Throne. By the geographical features of their country they naturally come under Chinese influence, but it is too early yet to say whether the gulf, which separates these primitive nomad tribes from the laborious cultured Chinaman, can ever be successfully bridged. The absorbing power of the "sons of Han" has always been a prominent feature in the history of the Middle Kingdom, and there is no reason why the two races should not ultimately merge.

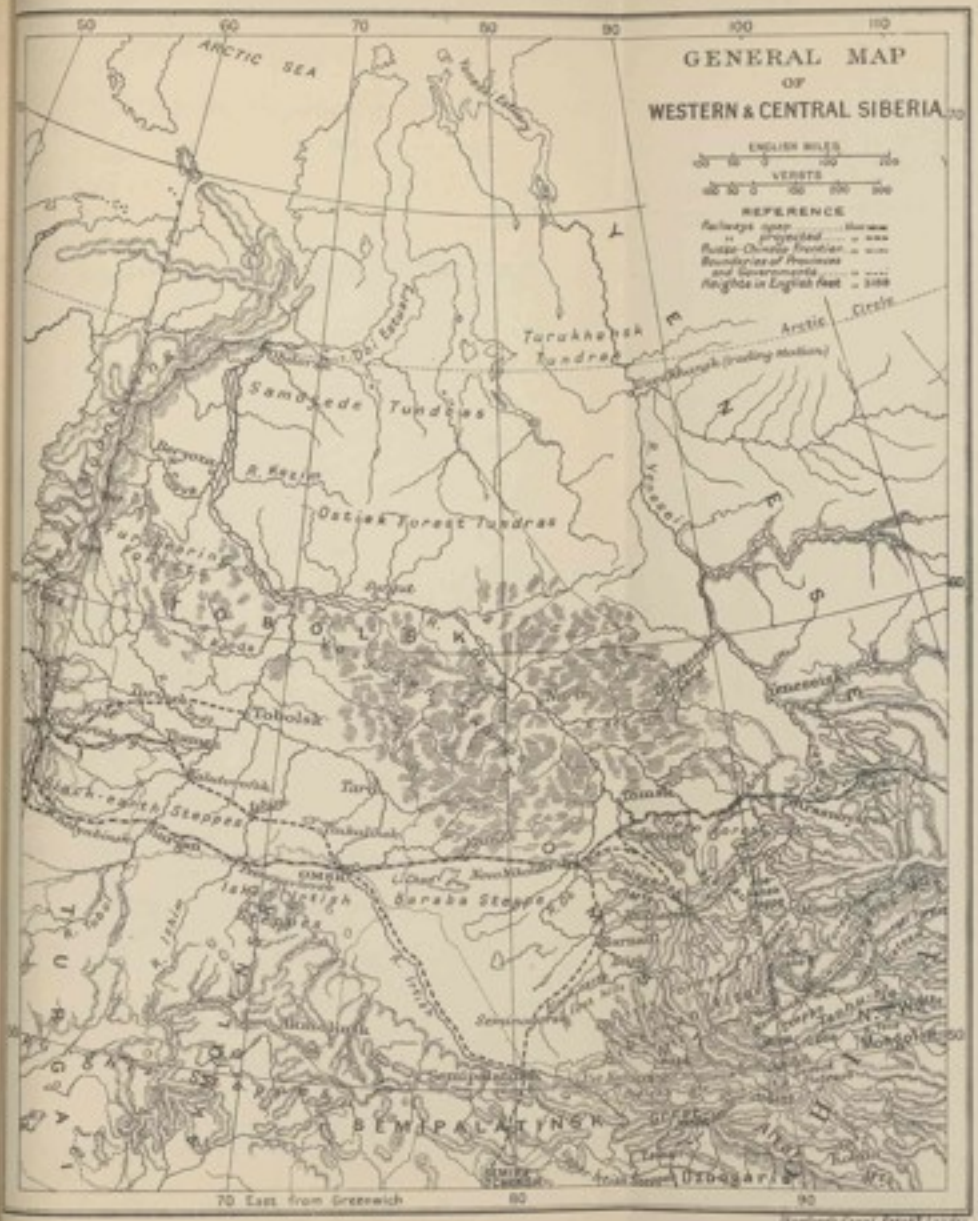
Meanwhile the policy of crushing the Tartar nomad races of Outer China by violence is a policy

fraught with grave danger to Chinese civilization and political influence. Although the Mongols are too weak to stand quite alone, there is nothing to prove that they are not capable of peaceful development if left to themselves, and meanwhile Chinese influence through the medium of commerce may gradually prepare the way for their ultimate absorption.

But now a new regime has arisen in China. The "Son of Heaven" and his "Dragon Throne" are no more, and a young republic guides the destinies of the four hundred millions of the Middle Kingdom. What effect will this change have on Chinese policy towards the smaller nationalities of its Outer Empire? The abdication edict declared the equality of Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, Turkis and Tibetans, and clearly indicated that the ideal before the eyes of Young China is that of freedom for all races and privileges for none. But the world must not be too sanguine. The subject races of Outer China are still very far removed in custom, race and religion from those of Inner China, and these differences have been accentuated by the oppression of the Manchu days. For while Young China, with its semi-European education, is thinking of phrases of Liberty and equality, the Mongol nomad in his tent beyond the Gobi dreams of the days of Dengiz Khan again, and the Turki cultivator on the plains of Eastern Turkestan sees visions of another Mahommedan empire of Timur or Yakab Beg.

What will Young China's answer be to those ideals? History has shown us more than once, of late, that the reforming elements in the State after their first flush of victory direct their energies along the paths

of national consolidation. Rigorous nationalism thus follows on the heels of social revolution. Whether Young China will follow the same policy as Young Persia and Young Turkey, or whether they will learn wisdom from the mistakes of their brothers in the Middle and Near East, it is impossible to say. Many grave problems confront the Chinese Republic, and not the least is that which relates to the tactful and sympathetic government of the non-Chinese races beyond the Great Wall.


GENERAL MAP
OF
WESTERN & CENTRAL SIBERIA
ENGLISH MILES
VERSTS
REFERENCE
Railways open
" projected
Russo-Chinese Frontier
Boundaries of Provinces and Governments
Heights in English feet
ARCTIC SEA
Arctic Circle
Turukhansk Tundras
Samoyede Tundras
Ostiak Forest Tundras
Tobolsk
Tomsk
Baraba Steppe
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# WESTERN AND CENTRAL SIBERIA

## PHYSICAL AND VEGETATION ZONES

# WESTERN AND CENTRAL SIBERIA

## ETHNOGRAPHICAL DIAGRAM

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