

CHAPTER XIV

SEVEN PERILS OF HUMANITY—NUMBER THREE. THE RUSSIAN PERIL

“**S**CRATCH a Russian,” says an old adage,
“and you find a Tartar.”

This is true in many senses. The Russian is more Asiatic than European. Russian writers—among them Tolstoy—were until recently in the habit of speaking of Russia as non-European. And though the Slavic race seems to have been in Europe as long as has the German, it has always been in close contact with Asia. It was overrun by the Mongols and Tartars. Its princes once were khans. And when the Russian czardom was built up by the Ivans and Bazil, beginning about four hundred years ago, the princes of Muscovy saddled on the humble and docile Slav peasantry, a tyranny with the unbridled power and barbaric splendor of the Tartar court they had

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displaced, combined with the pomp and display of the Eastern Roman Empire, then recently overthrown by the Turks.

I put down Russia as the third of the Seven Perils of Humanity. As a passenger on the good ship *Earth*, whose posterity must inhabit the same whirling ball with the Slavs, I am not sure that it should not be ranked as the hugest peril of all.

And yet, the Russian people have the qualities that may make of them our greatest blessing instead of our greatest curse. Seven-eighths of them are farmers—no crowded slums and fevered city-plague here.

Eighty-five per cent. are of the peasant class. And the question of their part in the future of the good ship *Earth* lies in the uncertainty as to whether they will be allowed to develop their virtues, or be utterly debauched by their vices—for which they are not at all to blame. For the Russian aristocracy has long since adopted a systematic and diabolical policy of both blinding and debauching the masses.

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The Slav peasant is democratic. He has village communities in which he governs himself in peasant matters, a good deal as the New Englanders do in their town meetings. There was a republic in Novgorod which the Muscovite czars destroyed in the building up of their Tartar tyranny. The peasants have a love for village life, and will not separate into lonely farms as we do. They have long known how to associate into cooperative bodies so as to hire out, buy and sell and the like to better advantage. On these foundations there is every reason to hope that a great and beneficent democracy might be built up, were it not for the curse of the czardom.

The Russians are increasing faster than any other race and they have more open ground over which to spread.

That is what makes them a world peril.

Fifty years ago there were 75,000,000 of them. In 1897 they had increased to 129,000,000. In 1904 their numbers had swarmed to 143,000,000. In 1906 the central statistical committee counted up 149,000,000. In 1910

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the Russian Year Book sets down their numbers at 160,748,400!

This is an awful, a portentous showing. It includes, of course, all the classes and all the races of the Russian empire, but the Slav and the fine Finnish races make up nearly nine out of every ten of them. At this rate,—and there seems to be no reason to doubt their increase, unless their birth-rate is checked by enlightenment and prosperity, or their death-rate increased by war, pestilence and famine—there will be 260,000,000 Russians in 1950; 520,000,000 in the year 2000; 1,020,000,000 in 2050; and in the year 2100—with your children and mine, dear reader, on this great air-ship *Earth* to voyage along with them, there will be 2,020,000,000 Russians or twenty per cent. more than all the world now contains in population.

If they were always a peaceful people, willing to stay in one place and breed and starve, as the Hindus, the Chinese and Koreans do, it would be a different matter. They would then increase to the limit of subsistence, as the Chi-

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nese have done ; and be swept off by infant mortality and famine, so that the swarms would remain always at about the same numbers. But the Russians will not be apt to do this. They have under their sway one-sixth of the land surface of the decks of our great air-ship. More unoccupied land is in their name than any other people owns. If the scientists are correct, who say that for a thousand years or more the carbonic acid gas, accumulating in the air through the burning of coal, will make the climates of this world warmer and warmer, the thawing of the frigid north in Russia and Siberia will make their lands the most desirable from the standpoint of producing a virile race, in all the world. To me it seems reasonable to suppose that this will come to pass. But no change in climate is required. The lands now open to reclamation and occupancy for the Slavs are almost illimitable.

What kind of people are they? They are naturally a good people. They have wonderful musical ability, their novelists are the greatest, perhaps, the world has produced, and

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they are painters, poets and reformers—when given a chance.

But their future will be a struggle between the good Slav nature and the Asiatic, the Tartar influences that govern them. The peasants are starving—and, of course, multiplying. People as poor as they never are guilty of “race suicide.” They live “the simple life.”

The emancipation of the serfs only plunged them into deeper bondage to the landlord through interest on their allotments of lands. This so-called emancipation was the most awful piece of robbery ever committed. Half the land “belongs” to the royal family. The peasants have not one-tenth as much as they need for their support. They are leaving their villages by millions to wander about as tramps in search of work and food. They are denied education. Good men and women who try to teach them are sent to Siberia or scourged by the police. They are systematically debauched by drink. The government, not so civilized as that of China, which is putting down the opium trade, is glad to have the

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peasants' brains benumbed with vodka, lest they think.

If these peasants, rising from this awful tyranny, can yet summon up the resolution to die by millions, if necessary, in order to throw off the czardom, to take from the privileged classes the lands and distribute them to the people, to make the state the universal landlord, as Tolstoy seems to suggest, paying the rent to the people themselves in the form of a land-value tax, and using it for schools and roads—if they can do this, they will grow in intellect, their birth-rate will fall off, they will spread more slowly over their wide domains, and they may lead the world in civilization, in virtue and in unselfishness. But Russia is like a huge boy who is wavering between genius and the deepest degradation—with the chances in favor of the latter.

If prayers can avail, prayers should be offered up for the redemption of Russia. For unless these swarming millions are redeemed the world may have an awful reckoning with

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them one of these days when tyranny shall marshal them in arms and drive them to battle under the slogan—"The World for Holy Russia!"