

+ LECTURE +

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

CHICAGO LIBERAL LEAGUE
— AND THE —
INDUSTRIAL REFORM CLUB

— ON —

Russia & Nihilism

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—A LECTURE—
ON
RUSSIA AND NIHILISM,
BY
WM. P. BLACK.

In 1862, Russia, by direction of her Czar, celebrated the one thousandth anniversary of the foundation of the empire.

The action was characteristic.

In the year 861, Rurik, Prince of the tribe of the Russians, responding to the invitation of the people of Novogorod, who were of Slavic descent, joined his forces with the Slavs and Finns in a successful warfare against the Northern Varangians, from whom these combined forces rescued the provinces of Novogorod and Kief. Dwelling thereafter as one people, the victors, speaking the Slavic tongue, but assuming the Russian name, became the nucleus of the power which stands incarnate in the Russian empire of to-day. It was a long and variant experience thereafter, through which this people passed, however, before the foundations of the empire were laid.

The many sections of Russia in Europe, which are parceled off into divers governments now, were then the possessions of independent tribes or peoples, sometimes dwelling together in peace, yet more often embroiled in predatory warfare. But slowly, through the vicissitudes of barbaric life and war, the Slavo-Russian combination gained in power and territory, always holding, with a measure of compactness, their own organization and their position of superiority over their neighbors, their rulers always cruel and hesitating at nothing that promised to advance their own greatness. Not in the institutions of this people, however—differing little from those of other European tribes—but in this character of the rulers was found the germ of autoeracy, which the peculiar circumstances of the people permitted to grow and enlarge into its present proportions. It was the misfortune of Russia, bordering upon Asia, to be subject to the attacks and oppressions of the Tartars, who, about 1223, under Genghis Kahn, conquered the land and reduced it to tribute.

The dissensions of the tribes, the lack of unity of interest and action, rendered them an easy prey to the great chieftain, and, for nearly three centuries, they were tributaries to this conquering power. The efforts to throw off this foreign yoke, although at times temporarily successful, were yet too spasmodic and too little concerted to result in permanent success, through these bloody centuries. Every revolt was terribly punished—but, under the hammer of a common adversity, the warring tribes were being slowly wrought

into unity and homogeneousness. Slowly the Russian power gained and grew, until it came to be regarded, by the tribes desiring a common deliverance from a common enemy as the only source from which that deliverance could be hoped for; and, when at last, under the leadership of the Grand Duke Ivan III. (surnamed the Great, and who first assumed the title of Tzar in 1482), they succeeded in throwing off finally this hated foreign dominion, about 1492, it is not wonderful that a grateful people should have interposed but a slight objection to that absolutism which alone had proved equal to this desired work of liberation. But, in truth, opposition would have availed little. We ignorant people, all whose able-bodied males were trained to arms, and reared to habits of military obedience; to whom cruelty had no horrors, save as it touched their own flesh, and who could only see their own prosperity in the elevation of their chief, could furnish but little material out of which to organize opposition to absolute power, even if there had been any among such a people with the spirit and disposition to undertake the organization of a revolt in the interest of liberty. Thus it fell out that absolutism became established in Russia; and, though from its beginning until this day it has borne with dread force upon the people, it has been endured with a patience which can only be understood when we take this retrospect of Russian history. It is true that Ivan IV. (surnamed the "The Terrible"), put to death in Novogorod, in a single year, [1570] 60,000 of its inhabitants by torture, only because of his hatred of their liberal views. But then, in the traditions of the people, the record was preserved of how Mongol conquerors had slain their tens and hundreds of thousands, had burned their cities and wasted the fields, had brought pestilence under their banners and left famine to follow their march; and so the patient people—the living grateful to be spared, and the dead having no power to work harm—bore still the dread inflictions of such power. At least it was *Russian* power, and that, to the Slav, seems cover for almost all offense.

Always the Russians have been a conquering people. Their wars, of conquest have been waged with sometimes varying success, but even when themselves tributary, they still strove to extend their borders and to absorb into themselves the surrounding tribes. Such is the traditional policy of this people, persevered in to this day, so that it may be safely asserted that in the more than one thousand years since Rurik came to the help of Novogorod, and united its people with his own, there has never been a decade of peace to Russia—never a generation in which she has not been watering many fields of conquest with her patient people's blood.

Sweden has surrendered much of her territory; the Baltic provinces have been absorbed; Poland has been partitioned through Russian diplomacy and by the aid of Russian arms; Turkey has been pillaged of her principalities; and Asia has yielded more than 6,000,000 square miles of territory, until now, at the end of this 1020 years since the Prince Rurik ruled his little principality from its inland capital, some 300 or 400 miles west from the shores of the Baltic—his whole territory hardly larger than an average American State—the Russian empire embraces over 8,361,000 square miles, being nearly one-sixth of the terrestrial surface of the world; and, within its dominion, it holds the destinies of about ninety million human beings. The extreme length of this empire, from east to west, is more than 4,500 miles, its extreme breadth over 2,500. Its northern boundary is the Arctic Ocean; its Eastern the Pacific

and Behring Sea; on its southern border lie the Chinese and Turkish empires, Persia, and the British Asiatic possessions; while, on the west, lies the rest of Europe, comprising what we regard as the Eastern civilized world. More than two-thirds of Europe, and more than two-fifths of Asia, combine to make the territory of this Colossus of the North, whose limits, in nearly all directions, save the southeast, are marked by the great waters, while around some of even these they seek to pass. And the Muscovite dreams of the day when the Baltic and Black Seas shall be Russian possessions, held in the embrace of the Slavic empire—which may become another name for Europe and Asia combined.

The present reigning family came to the throne in 1613, by election, in the person of Michael Feodorovitz, a descendant, by the female line, from Rurik; and it is since the accession of this family to power that the present form of government has become established.

To a proper understanding of our theme there must needs be some apprehension of the existing system of government, to the destruction of which the Nihilists have pledged themselves with an absolute devotion.

In Russia we find projected into modern days the absolute despotism characteristic of barbaric States and the early ages of society. The Czar rules by right, and is *supreme*. He is at once head of the State, and, since the days of Peter the Great, is also in all temporal matters, involving appointments, etc., the head of the Church. The doctrines of the Church are already declared, but the administration of church government in all its branches, that is, of the established, or orthodox Greek Church, while nominally vested in the Holy Synod, is really vested in the Czar, by whom the Synod is constituted, to whose approval all its actions are submitted, and upon whose will its very existence depends. For let us here note the fact, that Russia has no constitution—no fixed law. There is not a question of either public or private right which is not subject to the Czar's determination—not a paragraph in all the laws of Russia but by a ukase by this one man may be changed or abrogated. It is true that the Czar observes certain forms, and uses certain agencies, in the administration of his government, which counterfeit constitutional forms, or resemble representative administrations, but these are resemblances and counterfeits only. The Czar is *the* government.

His Council are appointed by him at his own will, and hold office only at his pleasure; his Senate sits only to consider what he submits, or to advise upon the questions he presents for their consideration. Of the Russian Senate, Count de Gurowski says:

“Thus, in all its attributes, the Senate is an administrative and executive body. It is not even a council. Its name occasions abroad many mistakes on account of its formation and political power, but, in its legal action, it has now no personal contact with the sovereign, but only submissively and humbly records his decisions. It has no initiative, is never consulted, has no voice, no power or right to deliberate, or even to make suggestions, objections or representations. The laws and ukases reach the Senate ready made; it simply publishes and brings them into operation. Thus, notwithstanding that it is nearly the highest civil dignity, the Senate exercises no influence, and even does not enjoy any very great consideration.” As to the Imperial Council the same writer says:

"The Council is sometimes presided over by the sovereign, who fills it with individuals according to his personal choice and will. It has a President and Vice President. It deliberates and decides in all matters, whether administrative, legislative or judicial, which are sent to it by the Emperor. The decisions are by vote. But the proceedings are submitted to the sovereign, who decides between the majority and minority, or substitutes for both his special personal decision. This becomes law."

The nearly sixty million members of the Greek Church are taught that it is their first duty to pray for the Czar, their Holy Father. The hundred tribes of the empire, speaking more than forty different languages, are all being constrained to come to one speech, only Russian being allowed to be used officially, or in church or school; but, in whatever tongue they speak, they must express submission to the one supreme ruler. The Russian code describes him as an "Autocrat whose power is limitless;" while, in a catechism prepared for use in the schools of Poland—that dismembered kingdom whose government was representative, with a limited monarchy, and whose people live for revenge, and die with gladness in service of what they deem their rights—the children are taught that every subject owes the Czar "adoration!" The rulers of Russia's more than four-score governments, are appointed by the Autocrat, and strive only to secure his favor. The Senate is the final court in civil matters, all whose members are his dependants, and all whose judgments are subject to be set aside by him. Nor has a subject any right to demand trial in court, since, at any moment, and in any case, the Czar can set aside civil procedure, and order the trial to be by military court, from whose decision there is no appeal. Law exists in Russia, not for the protection of the rights of the citizen, but only for the punishment of offences—and so absolute, arbitrary, and without rule is the administration of what is called justice in Russia, that there are no lawyers in the empire—as we use that term, no men in all the vast multitude who *dare* to assert the right of a subject as against the aggressions of the crown—to espouse the cause of the poor and the needy as against the powerful. Only a humble appeal is tolerated to him whose supremacy of power brooks no opposition.

Of course, under such a government, there are penal regulations affecting almost every department of life. To know some of the delights of private life in Russia, let us consider some of the regulations now in force.

The criminal code of Russia contains over 2,200 paragraphs; while, to the offenses specified therein, a large number of purely arbitrary penalties are attached. The highest crimes, comprising attacks upon the lives of the Emperor and all the members of the imperial family, criminal plots against them, all attempts and plots to dethrone the Emperor, to deprive him of his liberty, "to limit his sovereignty," or to do violence to his person, and all attempts "to commit crimes against the Emperor's honor," are punishable with the divestiture of all privileges of rank, and with death; while the same extreme penalty is visited on "those who know the intentions of the criminals to make such attempts, and fail to inform the authorities thereof." The penal penalties of the second class are divided into seven degrees, ranging from divestiture of privileges and rank, with transportation to Siberia, and imprisonment there for life at hard labor in the mines; to which is added—in the case of those not exempt from corporal punishment—a hundred lashes by the public execu-

tioner, and branding upon the cheeks and forehead, for the first degree of punishment; to transportation to Siberia with hard labor for from four to six years in a factory, followed by colonization for life, in addition to which the non-exempt receive from thirty to forty lashes and branding, for the seventh degree.

Penal penalties of the third class embrace, for the first degree, transportation to the eastern districts of Siberia and colonization for life, with twenty to thirty lashes for the non-exempt; while, for the second degree, the transportation is to the less remote districts of Siberia, with colonization for life, and ten to twenty lashes for the non-exempt.

The penal penalty of the fourth class consists of transportation beyond the Caucasus, and colonization there for life—a comparatively light punishment.

To these penal penalties are added some twenty-five correctional penalties, so arbitrary and illogical that it is said that the judges must consult printed tables before they can pronounce sentence; but these penalties it is not necessary to consider now.

Among the crimes visited by heavy penalties are: "Blasphemy and disparaging expressions about religious matters." Transportation to Siberia awaits those who make "blasphemous, heretical or schismatical remarks." He who induces one to leave the orthodox church is subject to exile to Siberia for life, while the convert is treated as a lunatic, a tutelary administration of his whole property is established, and he is forbidden to live on his estates, "lest the peasants and their servants should be exposed to temptation." "He who disseminates the heretical and schismatical teachings of those who have left the orthodox church, forfeits his rank, and will be transported and colonized for life;" while the same penalty is imposed on sectarians who venture to revile the orthodox church or its ministers. The man who repairs a building devoted to schismatic worship, or establishes a cottage prayer-meeting in a peasant's house, is to be imprisoned for from one to two years, and such building is to be destroyed. Such are some of the regulations for the preservation of the orthodox faith, and the strengthening of that church at whose head stands the "Holy Czar."

"He who gets up and circulates written or printed compositions or pictures for the purpose of reviling the government or the person of the Emperor," or who "assists in so doing, is subject to transportation to Siberia, hard labor for ten to twelve years in a fortress, and colonization for life, with sixty to seventy lashes and branding in addition for the non-exempt;" while "he who dares to utter impertinent and insulting words against the Emperor, even in his absence, or intentionally injures, disfigures or destroys his statues or pictures in official buildings or in public places," is sentenced to transportation to Siberia, hard labor for from eight to ten years in a factory, and colonization for life, with forty to fifty lashes and branding added to the non-exempt. "He who gets up and circulates written or printed proclamations, manifestoes, or pictures, for the purpose of exciting riots, sedition, or *resistance to the supreme powers of the government*," or who assists in such work, and delivers public speeches for the same purpose, is transported to Siberia, imprisoned at hard labor in a fortress for eight to ten years, and colonized for life. And even one who only denies or questions the authority of the government, or tries to contest the existing form of government, or circulates

writings to this end, or abets such efforts, is transported to Siberia. Emigration from Russia without special permission, entering a foreign service without such permission, failing to return to Russia when ordered—even these are treated as crimes, subjecting the party to forfeiture of rights and property, and perpetual banishment from the empire or exile in Siberia.

Such is a mere outline of the net whose meshes are spread over all the millions of Russia, till no man knows when, or under what circumstances, he may be charged with crime whose penalty will lie like a blight upon all his life. But this is only a fraction of the evil—ininitely worse is the secret snare in which the feet of the most wary may be taken, should he prove obnoxious for any cause to the police, who are the scourging arm of the autocracy. Not only may a Russian be sent to Siberia by sentence of the courts, civil or military, but by a special imperial decree issued through the police ministry, in which case there is not even the form of a trial, and the victim is unadvised of the charges against him until upon the very eve of his departure for Siberia. When thus transported under imperial decree, the exile is said to be "awaiting the Czar's pleasure," and no publicity is given to the proceedings against him or his fate. Friendly inquiry concerning him is unavailing, and oftentimes not even his nearest relatives know whether he is lying in some prison or already on his way to Siberia to be buried in its mines. Only in the remote contingency of some unwonted pity stirring a police official's heart, and prompting him to tell the distracted wife or trembling friends to hope in the Czar's clemency, is uncertainty supplanted by the less tormenting knowledge that the missing one has been added to the growing and countless list of the victims of imperialism.

Before we go farther, let us consider the significance of Siberian banishment, and confinement in its mines, or colonization in its wilds.

First we have the indescribable horrors of the march itself. The convicts, all chained, are made into gangs numbering hundreds, without discrimination of sex, or as to the character of the offense for which transportation has been decreed. The gentle maiden and the murderess, the educated patriot and the professional criminal, herded together like cattle, start on a journey lasting, according to the remoteness of the destination, from three to seven months, compelled to be made on foot, save as the exhausted are sometimes taken a little way in rude wagons. Fifteen miles must be marched each day, regardless of the weather. Their convict clothing is inadequate, and the food is the worst; furnished by contract and often withheld by fraud. They sleep at night in one great prison pen, with no partition walls, where chastity can only be preserved, as against the assaults of the vicious members of the gang, by the voluntary performance of guard-duty by the more humane men of the party. For this is a matter in which the military guards refuse to interfere—and often this defense is unavailing, the self-appointed guards being overpowered by the sensuous ruffians, who thus inflict upon the helpless women the crowning ill of life.

Such is the outline of the march to the place of punishment, in which it is said that, on the average, 20 per cent. of those who start meet welcome death before the journey's end, either from violence or the hardships and exposures of the trip. But, indeed, to all to whom he so comes, Death is most welcome, since he saves or delivers them from Siberia.

The entire northern boundary of Siberia is formed by the Arctic Ocean, whose waters are congealed upon its shores for six months out of every year, under a temperature that, in the northeastern portion of the province, freezes the mercury for two months of the twelve. Its plains, broken by mountains in many parts, stretch away 2,000 miles to the South; but, such is its general inhospitableness, that its 4,500,000 square miles of territory, although it has been receiving life colonies from Russia, under the transportation system, since the days of the Empress Ann, about 1730, now possess a population of only about 4,000,000, or less than one to the square mile. In all the horrible years since the system was inaugurated, that living stream, which knows no returning, has been pouring over the Ural Mountains ceaselessly, carrying uncounted numbers into the vast wildernesses, most of whom have disappeared in their dark mines as the waters of the desert river sink in its sands. But, to understand the full and dread significance of this thought, we must remember the fact, that in the less than thirty years of the reign of Nicholas—most cruel of all Russia's rulers since Ivan the "Terrible"—more than 2,000,000 were sent into this ceaseless exile; while, in the sixteen months of the last Polish struggle, from January, 1863, to April, 1864, according to Russian official statistics, in addition to the 30,000 Poles who were killed or severely wounded, and the 361 who were condemned to death by military tribunals, 85,000 were sent to the living death of Siberia.

The work has not ceased—the stream has not stopped its flow. Even now it is said there are 10,000 human beings lying in Russian prisons awaiting the summons to take their place in that dread caravan which makes its death march to the East. Most of the political prisoners are sent, with the worst class of criminals, into the quicksilver and silver mines of the north-eastern posts of the province. Would you like a glimpse of Siberian convict mine life? Let me give it you in the words of another:

"The exiles who live in the quicksilver mines of Siberia are convicts of the worst type, and political offenders of the best. The murderer for his villany, the intelligent and honest Polish rebel for his patriotism, are deemed equally worthy of the punishment of *slow death*. They never see the light of day, but work and sleep all the the year round in the depths of the earth, extracting quicksilver under the eyes of taskmasters, who have orders not to spare them. Iron gates, guarded by sentries, close the lodes, or streets, at the bottom of the shafts, and the miners are railed off from one another in gangs of twenty. They sleep in recesses hewn out of the rock—very kennels—into which they must creep on all fours. They have only two holidays a year, Christmas and Easter; and all other days, Sundays included, they must toil until exhausted nature robs them of the use of their limbs, when they are hauled up to die in the infirmary.

"Prince Joseph Labomirski, who was authorized to visit one of the mines of Ural, at a time when it was not suspected that he would ever publish an account of his exploration in French, has given an appalling picture of what he saw: Convicts racked with the joint-pains which quicksilver produces—men whose hair and eyebrows had dropped off, and who were as gaunt as skeletons, were kept to hard labor under the lash. Five years in the quicksilver pits, are enough to turn a man of 30 into an apparent sexagenarian, but some have been known to struggle for ten years.

"No man who has served in the mines is ever allowed to return home; the most he can obtain, in the way of grace, is leave to come up and work in the road-gangs, and it is the promise of this favor, as a reward for industry, which operates even more than the lash to maintain discipline.

"Women are employed in the mines as sifters, and get no better treatment than the men. Polish ladies by the dozen have been sent down to rot and die, while the St. Peters-

burgh journals were declaring that they were living as free colonists; and more recently ladies connected with Nihilist conspiracies have been consigned to the mines in pursuance of a sentence of hard labor. It must always be understood that a sentence of Siberian hard labor means DEATH."

Such is the picture, briefly drawn, by a competent writer, in the work entitled "Russians of To-day." It is not overdrawn; and such is the dread shadow which lies in the pathway of every Russian who dares to think that there is a possibility of the improvement of his government, and that it, perhaps, is not the best on earth, or to suggest that the citizen has rights which should be guaranteed to him by a constitution and laws to which even the supreme executive must yield obedience. He who so speaks will be charged by the police with attempting to "limit the sovereignty of the Czar," or with "resistance to the supreme power of the government," and, by an imperial decree, will be consigned to this living death. He will not be allowed a trial by his peers, for the jury cannot always be relied upon as the creatures of this despotism. And if, after his exile, one seeks to know his fate, he may, if the government graciously so choose, be advised that the crime was of such a nature that an open trial could not be accorded with due regard for the public welfare, or he may be confronted with a written confession of crime signed by the wretched victim. For to all this system of cruelty and despotism, the government has added this refinement of torture: That the convict about to depart for Siberia, whether under sentence of some court, or under the imperial decree, must sign a confession of crime, dictated by the police authorities, or abandon forever the one remote possibility of pardon, or the hope of communicating with friends, which are held out to him conditioned upon this act of self-crimination.

Such are some of the instrumentalities by which the ninety million of his people are held trembling and suppliant at the feet of the Czar. Such is the absolute power resting in the hands of one man to thwart and control the destinies of a great people. To enforce these regulations he has at his command a standing army of three-quarters of a million; a police force whose numbers are unknown; a pliant ministry, whose only thought seems to be to secure their own position by offering incense to autocracy; a great Church, trained, as a part of their religion, to revere him as their head; and a mighty people, the majority of whom have been taught in their ignorance to think him the source of all their temporal blessings, and to charge responsibility for all the burdens resting on them upon the agencies through which he administers his despotism. At his disposal are the resources of a mighty empire which he dispenses at his own will, and absolutely without check or control. Of his people, not over one in fifty is in school.

The mines and mineral resources are the property of government, and worked by convict labor. The production from these is prodigious, reaching, in 1868, the enormous aggregates of 68,420 pounds, avoirdupois, of gold, 4,480 pounds of platina, and over 114,000,000 pounds of silver ore, besides the ores not precious. The total ordinary revenue of Russia reaches over \$500,000,000 annually.

Such was the position to which Alexander II. was called, in 1855, upon the death of Nicholas; such the country whose destinies he controlled, and such the agencies through which he wrought, until his own execution in

the year 1881. Coming to the throne with multiplied promises of reform, those promises were kept for a season, and Russia rejoiced in the hope of a new life and a grand career. The emancipation of the serfs, commenced in 1861, although designed, as it now seems, rather as a blow at a powerful aristocracy, intended to bring them into more absolute subjection to the throne, and to strengthen that throne by the gratitude of the 16,000,000 to whom was thereby secured the possibility of liberty, than as a means of blessing to the serfs themselves, was yet a grand act—giving mighty promise for the future. This was followed by pledges of constitutional government, which seemed in slow process of realization until the year 1865, when, alas for Russia! her people made the sad mistake of supposing that they were free to ask for something more than the autocrat had theretofore chosen to bestow. In 1865, the Assembly of the Nobles of Moscow adopted, by a vote of 270 to 37, the following address to their Emperor:

"MOST GRACIOUS SIRE: The nobility of Moscow cannot, at their present meeting, refrain from expressing to your Majesty their feelings of deep devotion and gratitude for your Majesty's wise initiations, invariably directed toward the welfare of our country. We are ready, sire, to co-operate with you by word and by deed in the difficult but glorious path which you have chosen. We are convinced, Sire, that you will not halt in that path, and that you will proceed in it, leaning on your faithful nobility and on the whole Russian nation. The strength of our country lies in its friendly unity and integrity. By gathering your hitherto divided Russia into a single body, by welding it firmly together, and replacing the separate rights of some of its parts by general rights for all, you will eliminate forever all possibility of revolt and civil war. The new rural institutions which your Majesty has called into life are destined, when fully developed, to make durable the glory and strength of Russia. Complete, therefore, Sire, the edifice of the State of which you have laid the foundation, by convoking a General Assembly of men elected by the whole of Russia, for the discussion of requirements common to the empire. Command your faithful nobility with the same object to elect the best men from amidst their ranks. The nobility have always been firm supporters of the Russian throne, without being considered in the service of the State, without enjoying the rewards connected with it. Fulfilling their duty, without remuneration, to the advantage of the country and the general order, those men will by their position, be called upon to guard the moral and political principles on which the State reposes, and which are so inestimable to the people, and so indispensable to their real well being. By that means, Sire, you will restore confidence in the executive, you will attain a strict observance of the law by all and each, and its applicability to the requirements of the country. The truth will reach your throne unimpeded; enemies at home and abroad will be silenced, when the people, in the person of their representatives, shall with love surround the throne, and watch constantly that no treason approach it from any quarter.

Most Gracious Sire! The nobility of Moscow appear before your Majesty at the call of their sacred duty as faithful subjects, having only the advantage of the State in view. We speak, sire, in the full conviction that our words correspond with your own policy, and with the spirit of your great reforms."

Wise words these, spoken out of loyal hearts, desiring the recognition and guarantee of human rights, and the true welfare of the State. Brave words withal, when spoken by such men to such a man, by slaves to a master, by human chattels to their august owner, by subjects to an autocrat, by Russians to their Czar! But hateful to that Czar as they were brave! His answer to this grand address was in the following words:

"The reforms which have been proposed, and those already realized, sufficiently prove my solicitude for the improvement, as far as possible, of the political organization of the country. The past must be a guarantee for the future. No subject has a right

to anticipate my resolutions, nor is any class legally entitled to speak in the name of others. Such violations of the law can but retard my plans. I am fully convinced that I shall never again meet with such obstacles on the part of my faithful nobility."

This was the answer of Autocracy to those who had had the temerity to think, and the audacity, amounting in his eyes to crime, to submit their thoughts to him. And, by the order of the Czar, this answer was communicated to all the nobles of Russia, lest any others of them should commit a like offense. From that hour the whole current of the Czar's action changed. Count Davidoff, the head of the delegation that presented this address to the Czar, and the editor of the Moscow *Vezni*, which published it, were each sentenced to two months' imprisonment for their action; and when eighteen members of the Assembly of Nobles in the government of Pskoff joined the request of the Moscow nobility for a representative government for Russia, legal proceedings were instituted against them. In the same year a stringent press law was enacted, and, from that day to this, the process of preventing the expression of public opinion, or the educating of the people in the direction of reform, through the public press, has been steadily pushed by an unremitting censorship, destructive fines, and repeated suppressions of obnoxious sheets; while even the very assemblies of the nobles themselves have in some districts been suppressed.

The whole spirit of the Czar, in connection with this incident, recalls the poetic prophecy of Lermonteev, uttered shortly before his death, concerning Nicholas, but proved equally applicable to Alexander:

"He said to the Mind:
Go into darkness;
And signed it;
Be it so!"

And truly have the Czars sought to drive the mind into darkness, and keep it there. In all the vast empire of Russia there was, in 1868, but one newspaper of any kind to every 425,000 inhabitants. In St. Petersburg, a city of over 600,000 people, there were but seven daily papers, with an aggregate circulation of about 40,000 copies. In Kiev, a city of about 100,000 inhabitants, two daily papers were suppressed by order of the government in 1862, and, in 1867, only one small official weekly journal was issued in that city, one of the oldest in the empire. The government has proved itself alike the enemy of intelligence and liberty, of humanity and human rights.

Such is its policy to-day—for no longer ago than September, 1880, the editors of the chief St. Petersburg journals were officially notified that their continued discussion of the subject of a constitution for Russia, had highly displeased the Czar and his court, and that nothing more on that subject would be allowed to appear in print.

The Russian autocracy recognizes that its existence depends upon keeping the masses ignorant, and making the intelligent classes dependent. But there is always danger to such a power. Light cannot always be shut out from the people; the intelligent cannot always be enslaved. The dawn is now breaking in Russia—and Revolution is the result of the dawn. True, its colors are crimson, flung up against a background of clouds and darkness, the creatures of the long night which for centuries has spread its

starless folds over this land; but the day will follow the dawn! Charge the crimson rather against the darkness which resists the coming day, than upon the white light that will make it glorious in the brightness of justice and peace. For, as has been well said by De Custine, in speaking of this land:

"The power of an absolute master is a monster ever ready to give birth to a greater—the tyranny of the people. We must not forget that the more ignorant a people are, and the longer they have been patient, the more likely is their vengeance to be dreadful. A government which wields power by maintaining ignorance, is more terrible than stable; a feeling of uneasiness in the nation; a degraded brutality in the army; terror around the administration—a terror shared even by those who govern; servility in the church; hypocrisy in the nobility; ignorance and misery among the people, and *Siberia for them all*—such is the land."

Is it any wonder, then, that the advent of the revolution should be with violence? And, in view of this record, is it any wonder that, in 1866, the year after the reply of the Czar to the petition of the nobles of Moscow, evincing his determination to maintain his autoeracy inviolate, the first attempt to assassinate this enemy of his people was made? The Russian mind has been made familiar with the idea of assassination by its rulers, for thrice within less than a hundred years before the accession of the last Alexander to his throne, his ancestors stepped to that place of power over the prostrate bodies of their predecessors, slain to make room for them. Assassination has always been a favorite policy with tyrants seeking the place of highest power, and it has likewise been the last resort of the despairing seeking to rid themselves of the unbearable oppressions of absolute and irresponsible power!

The Russians are a people of passionate devotions, whether to loyalty or liberty—to a Czar beloved when believed in, or an idea adopted and worshipped. They are a people of intense love of country and pride of race. They believe in the true greatness of Russia and of Russians, and hate whatever or whoever stands in the way of that greatness. To sacrifice life to a grand devotion seems almost easy. It is not wonderful, therefore, that among such a people, and particularly the more intelligent classes of them, there should long have been, and should now be, large numbers who hate the government which oppresses them with a bitter hatred. Not because it touches themselves—for they could easily escape from it, or become a part of it in virtue of their intelligence and connections—but because that government stands in the way of the true progress of the nation, the welfare of their fellows. The very effort of the government to exclude foreign literature has made it eagerly sought after; and even in Russia there are many who have learned and adopted the democratic, the American, idea of Government—that governments among men should exist for the benefit of the governed and derive their powers from the people's consent. But this idea does not come to them alone from abroad, it is preserved in their own traditions. Ere Rurik came to the relief of Novogorod, both Novogorod and Kiev were essentially republics, choosing their rulers, and having a measure of representative government. This tradition has been like a leaven among the Russian people. They point to republics antedating the empire, whose principles made the people of

fated Novogorod the victims of Ivan the Terrible. With such 'traditions, what wonder that it was written, nearly thirty years ago, concerning the Czar and people: "Those who pronounce his name with a curse are numerous, and belong to all social classes—and more numerous are they who are choked by the words 'Czar' and 'Nicholas,' and never stain their lips with them!"

Denied the privilege of uttering their sentiments either in speech or in the press, watched by the countless police, encompassed by the myriads of the army and of the government employes, what is left to these men?

Starting with the principles which America has for now more than one hundred years been proclaiming to the world: That when a government becomes subversive of the true ends of government, and inimical to the weal of the people, "it is the right of the people to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness;" and that whenever in any case the people find that "a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security"—starting with these principles which our fathers proclaimed self-evidently true, a vast number in Russia have organized secretly for the purpose of forcing a change. They call themselves the "*Revolutionary Government*," while by the world at large they are known as Nihilists. But let us not fall into error here. There are a thousand revolutionists in Russia, pledged to agitate for reform, to disseminate Democratic doctrines, to labor ceaselessly for the establishment, even in Russia, of representative constitutional government, to where there is one real Nihilist. The Nihilist, in the strict sense of the term, is a simple destructive, pledged to the overthrow of the present order by any means, but leaving to the future the organization of the new and better state. The Revolutionist, on the other hand, is only devoted to securing rights to Russians by the establishment of a constitution and a representative government in lieu of autocracy. Yet, while these distinctions should be borne in mind, still we use the term Nihilism now in its popular and not in its technical sense.

But let me speak a word in extenuation of even advanced Nihilism. I do not wonder that some of these men, beholding their beloved country in the toils of this imperial power, seemingly forgotten of God, and abandoned by men, a very Laëcoön in mortal anguish, seeing every iniquity upheld by a claim of right and every injustice sanctioned by some form of established religion, should have taken up the wail of despair:

"Evil has won in the horrid fend
Of ages with the throne;
Evil stands on the neck of good,
And rules the world alone.

"There is no good—there is no God;
And Faith is a heartless cheat,
That bares the back for the Devil's rod,
And scatters thorns for the feet."

I do not wonder that, in the anguish of their bleak despair, they should have turned destructives, and set their hands in a blind anger against all that is, seeing no way to discern between the evil and the good! And for such I have not, when I look at Russia, so much words of denunciation as of pity. The mind has been stricken under the agony of generations. For its healing let us bring rather the chalice of a loving compassion than the dagger of an avenging judgment!

The revolutionary government, the society of the Nihilists, is prohibited in Russia, as is every other society. Even temperance societies were suppressed and prohibited a few years since, because their existence, by limiting the consumption of liquors, reduced the revenues of the government, under licenses from which all liquors are sold.

Could this revolutionary government throw off its veil of secrecy to-day, and wage open war, there is not a civilized nation on the globe whose people would not justify the struggle and give the revolutionists their utmost sympathy. And were the revolution crowned with success, its leaders would be lauded as patriots and heroes, though myriads of lives were sacrificed in the contest, and though the entire imperial family perished from the face of the earth. To this at last the struggle will come, if the agitation continue, unless the reforms demanded are accorded by the government. But the time has not yet come when such open effort is possible. Open discussion is prohibited and punished, secret organization is a crime! Yet the agitation must go on. The government, by declaring all agitators for a Constitution criminals, and making war on them as such, has forced upon them, as a measure of self-defense, the policy of violence. Let us remember, that before a blow was aimed at the Czar's life he had sent a *hundred thousand* of his subjects to the living death of Siberian exile and labor for political offenses! Before sentence was pronounced upon him, or its execution attempted, he was warned against his course. Their formal declaration of hostilities, published from their secret press, and scattered throughout the empire, and in the Emperor's very palaces, was in these words: "Death for death, execution for execution, terror for terror; this is our answer to the threats, the persecutions, and the oppressions of the government." But then as now, the Czar was assured that the Nihilists would disband and cease their work, if only the iniquitous government by the police should be brought to an end, political prisoners be pardoned, and a constitutional and representative government be granted to Russia.

The work of the Nihilists is not prompted by mere personal animosity or private revenge—nor was there in the execution of the Czar any of the elements of treachery and cowardice which mark a vulgar assassination. The man who cast the bomb at the Emperor's feet himself perished by its explosion, and knew that he must perish when he undertook his task. His co-conspirators, who paid the forfeit of their work, wrought with their lives in their hands, ready to pay that supreme penalty, not because of any personal malevolence or innate depravity, but because they could not wait the slow progress of the ages, with the groans of Russia's millions sounding in their ears. Whatever we may think as to the excusability of their course and actions, we cannot deny that from their own point of view, their conduct is heroic. They undertook a service, from no selfish motive but for

the welfare of their country, which imported deadly peril if not certain death to them. They persevered in this service, calmly facing the power of a relentless imperialism, until there came the hour of their triumph. Believing that so long as the Czar lived, he would continue to deny to his people their natural rights, and to murder his subjects through the agency of the established government, and powerless to organize and arm an open revolution for the deposition of their oppressor, they determined on his death as a means of removing out of the way the chief obstruction to the effort to secure the liberty and welfare of the land by a constitutional government. What other resource is left to the wronged subject as against the despot who sits above the law and denies all justice, but an appeal to the right of revolution? And what difference is there, as to the righteousness of the step, whether that appeal is by a majority or by a minority—whether the warfare is against an oppressing government, whose innocent citizens perish in its support, or against an Autocrat whose own life is destroyed because of the iniquities for the continuance of which he is personally responsible?

But are not the resources of such an empire sufficient for the guarding of one poor life? The means of defense are without limit, the defenders without number.

On the occasion of the Czar's trip from St. Petersburg to Livalia and return, in the fall of 1880, he was escorted by Gen. Melicoff, while the train in which he sat was unknown, servant trains being run on parallel lines. Forty thousand picked men, selected for the service from the peasantry, police, soldiers and gendarmes, were distributed along the route, furnishing a sentry at every thirty paces, and bodies of infantry at every important point. Every bridge and house on the line was carefully inspected, as was the train in which he rode. He traveled safely, the head of the State, yet imprisoned by an invisible force. Did the accusing conscience of the Autocrat fill every vacant spot with the avenging spirits of his doomed subjects? Was every whistle of the engine, every creak of the machinery, but a voice to him from those tortured at his will under the lash or in the mines? More than the living who guarded him were the avenging dead who rode about him, and whose memories stirred unknown numbers of his living subjects to undertake the ministry of justice in their names. The hosts who gathered about him could not continually withhold him from the wrath of his people. It was fitting that the city of his pride, that had been the scene of his power and the seat of his relentless despotism, should witness how impotent are human safeguards to deliver from a sleepless vengeance in the appointed hour. The Nihilists are everywhere—unseen, relentless, indestructible, and invincible—*because without fear*. They challenge the death they know must come, and so disarm him of his terrors. It is a warfare assured of success, since each agent appointed for this special service would be surprised did he escape alive, while each recruit of the invisible but augmenting army is ready to enter on this service if required.

Another thing which assures the movement of eventual and complete success, despite all the forces of organized despotism combining for the support of the existing order, is that that despotism is losing its hold upon the hearts of the people—not alone of the intelligent, who are aware of the full extent of the evils compassing them about, but also of the common people, whose tra-

ditional veneration of the Czar is being replaced by a detestation of the system whose oppressions they feel, and now begin to realize as wrongs. Everywhere the soldiers of the revolution are at work. In factories, the sons of merchants and nobles labor in disguise, that they may gain access to the ears of the common people and teach them of their rights as men, and of the wrongs they suffer. In the hamlets, women of high degree, who have cast their jewels into a common treasury; who have even sold their luxuriant hair for a few rubles to be added to the revolutionary fund, and who have bade good-bye forever to the luxuries to which they have been accustomed from childhood, go in and out among the villagers, teaching the children, nursing the sick, comforting the sorrowing, but always and everywhere dropping the seeds of the revolution, everywhere secretly promulgating the doctrines of human rights, and repeating the story of the wrongs of tyranny, the vices of despotism. And this they do, though they know that everywhere the police of the empire watch them with sleepless eyes, and that to-night they may disappear from friendly view, to take up the dread Siberian march, as yesterday some sister in service and patriotism did. Beside the peasant in the field will to-morrow appear a new form, pale-faced, white-handed, but serene, taking his part in the labors of the husbandry, until the bronze of sunshine and rain has disarmed antagonism, and the kindness of a self-sacrificing devotion has won confidence and love; and then the new friend becomes a teacher of democracy, and the hearts of the people thrill to the ever sweet lessons of *liberty, fraternity, equality*. Men learn such lessons quickly. From hidden presses come forbidden books and papers repeating these teachings, and chronicling the multiplying acts of oppression which are the signs of the madness of a tottering despotism seeking to perpetuate itself by crimes against human liberty and individual right. And when, upon another morrow, these peasants miss their teacher friend from his accustomed place, and learn that some of their neighbors, who, in their enthusiasm, had uttered aloud their acceptance of his views, have gone with him, while the police force has been increased, and they are warned of their duty to their Czar by these pliant tools of oppression, they ask no vain questions as to where these have gone. They know the shadow of Siberia has fallen upon their humble vicinage, and they are still and patient, this wonderful people; but they remember, and the veneration for the OLD is replaced by an aspiration for the NEW, which can never pass away; a NEW not far off, whose coming is assured by the bow of promise upon the present cloud—a bow whose richest colors come from the martyr blood of the myriads who have caught the sublime infatuation of self-sacrifice, and are ready to die, that the people may live. The Russian autoocracy waxes old; is no longer held sacred by the masses, and is ready to pass away.

As said by Gurowski, nearly thirty years ago: "The positions either usurped or formed by historical events and accidents, still prevail and fetter the people—but their hours are counted. Their existence is solely that of a barren fact, like a corpse without a soul; like a century oak, rotten and decayed, in the primitive forest—no more shooting out fresh leaves and buds—standing there until a tornado finally overthrows it. It no longer draws new, invigorating juices through the withered roots. In the same manner, the rulers, and the artificial superiorities of the European world, have no roots in the feelings or in the voluntary and spontaneous adhesion of the masses. Their existence has

no moral basis in national sentiments, nor does it derive any vitality therefrom. And through the whole of history, what has become extinct as an idea inspiring a nation or a people, has disappeared after a longer or shorter time, and disappeared finally from the world. The manifest destiny of all such excrescences is to perish."

Perhaps if this great people could only continue dumbly patient, their deliverance might at last come from above, without violence. But the first such case has yet to be recorded in the world's history; and now, as in the past, the human impulse is to resist outrageous wrong, and to make war against the agents of supreme oppression. So did our fathers; so would we, their sons, were there occasion. And so in Russia, those who feel they cannot tamely wait, but must work for liberty and justice, have taken arms for their rights.

Nor is this warfare upon the person of the Czar and his police officials, as the immediate and responsible representatives of the hated system of government against which this secret revolution is prosecuted, carried on upon individual judgment. It is a *concerted action*, each step in which is determined on due deliberation, and for what is believed to be sufficient cause. The death of the Czar was not the treacherous crime of a paid murderer, or one seeking private revenge, coming stealthily upon his victim, and fleeing from his crime into the darkness or solitude; but it was the deliberate and public execution of a sentence formally passed. True, the court which passed that sentence was not sitting by appointment of the Czar, nor under regulations of State,—it was not constituted by an imperial executive to accomplish his personal will through the mockery of legal forms,—but it *was* composed of representatives of a secret organization pledged to the correction of those abuses in the administration and forms of government which are at once the occasion and justification of its existence, and which organization spreads over the whole empire; permeates all society, official and private; embraces in its membership representatives from every class, but chiefly those of high intelligence; invades the army, turning its loyalty from Alexander to Russia; penetrates the navy, to gain recruits with the blessed picture of free men under free skies and serving a free land; opens its ranks to receive nobles who, for their devotion to its work, are ready to risk and abandon all; and exalts the humblest with the democratic prophecy of a near future in which he shall be a part of the government, and not its mere creature. Such is the organization styling itself the Revolutionary Government of Russia, by whose decree the Emperor met his death, and which to-day holds the new Autocrat a prisoner within his palace walls, or his cordon of guards—an organization made irresistible by the absolute devotion of its members to its work; made terrible by the coward consciences of Russia's rulers, and proved great by the enormity of the evils which it assails in the only ways open to its use, but at such deadly hazard, and by its readiness to dissolve upon the granting of its most reasonable demands.

Naturally we shrink from the thought of assassination—from the picture of one man taking the life of another deliberately, no matter upon what provocation. We think the victories of patient peace, however long and wearily delayed, better than the fruits of blood-stained violence; but if revolution was ever justifiable, it is justifiable against the government of Russia, and the question becomes one of methods only. Either the existing order in Russia must be overthrown or abandoned, or Russia must abandon herself to moral and intellectual

paralysis and death. Substantially, all Russia is, and for years has been, declared in a state of siege, to give a little color to the lawless and unrighteous oppressions of the existing despotism. Not only is the press muzzled, and the importation of foreign literature, save such as is approved by the Government, prohibited, but postoffice and telegraph alike surrender their contents to police scrutiny; and only a few days since we were advised by cable that the Government will only allow the telephone-service subject to control, each message to be received and repeated by a police official. Nor is there hope for the future. A few months since, the present Czar submitted to his council the question of the advisability of granting a constitution to Russia. After a stormy debate, the council, by a vote of 13 to 9, voted in favor of such grant. At first, the Czar acquiesced; but, within a week, he changed his mind, reorganized his council, sending its liberal leader into obscurity, and declared himself for the defense of his prerogatives, and for the crushing, by force, of all opposition to the established order—all aspirations after liberty. To-day, in all that empire, the free thought is an offense; to speak of liberty a crime. Siberia welcomes to a lingering death the unreturning patriot who has loved his people and his country better than his Czar, and the prison walls will hardly hold the men and women of refined and cultured natures who are the victims of the police conspiracy against liberty, and whose only crime is that they could not repress their longing to breathe securely free air in a free land!

In this sad struggle we can take no part beyond helping by sympathy and words of truth and cheer. The traditional friendship between Russia and America, the admiration for us as a people, expressed by Alexander, and his firm position as our friend in the days of our late struggle, predisposed us to sympathy with him, and horror at the assaults aimed at his life. But looking this whole field over, we are called upon to declare our position in this struggle between democracy and despotism, between the shadowed Yesterday and the dawning To-morrow. With whom shall we stand?

Only a few months ago, Wendell Phillips raised his voice to plead for the Nihilists. Till then little but execration for the execution of the Czar had been heard from rostrum and press; and when, shortly afterwards, in the same community in which Phillips had made his plea, Dr. Schaff denounced his utterances as infamous (I think that was the term), we are told this denunciation was greeted with cheers. Strange action for an American audience of intelligence! Is the life of a Czar, the representative of despotism and darkness, so much more valuable than the life of a simple citizen, a member of the one royalty of the world's to-morrow, that his death, decreed because of his murders manifold through forms of law, and executed because of his refusal to amend, should turn the currents of our sympathy from the oppressed to the oppressors?

Did Dr. Schaff and the cultured audience to which he spoke, remember that their action was a substantial indorsement of the policy of a man who brooked no interference, whether at home or from abroad, with the exercise of his despotism over the lives of his subjects and over their consciences as well? Had they so soon forgotten that it was this dead Alexander, whose conduct towards his German Lutheran subjects of the Baltic provinces, only so long ago as 1871, had been so severe and unjust that the Evangelical Alliance sent a deputation to present an address and petition to the Czar, after a petition of rights by those poor subjects had been declared by the Czar a "factious demonstration," and a severe

reproof had been administered to the bodies which had ventured thus to petition him? Was it forgotten that the Czar refused to see this deputation officially, and that Prince Gortschakoff notified them, with reference to some suggestion of a change of the laws in favor of religious toleration, that Russia "could not permit any foreign interference in such matters," nor even "the shadow of such an interference from any quarter;" and that finally the Prince declined to present the address to the Czar, or to give any statement in writing of the intentions of the Government upon the subject? And surely, when Dr. Schaff so spoke, to the applause of his cultured audience, both he and they must have forgotten, for the time, that in the scriptures of the Jews, which he accounts inspired, the sacred song of Deborah, the prophetess, praises the act of Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, who with hammer and nail did to death the sleeping oppressor of Israel; that Ehud cleared his way to Israel's rulership with an assassin's dagger in his hand, and was accounted a deliverer; that no reproach is uttered against those who cast the wicked queen forth from her upper chamber to the dogs; and that always among that people, of whose descendants multitudes are among the victims of Russian despotism, so that thousands annually perish unavenged, and with the connivance of the Czar, and many of whom are members of the Revolutionary Government, it has been accounted just that the oppressor should suffer rather than his people, and that one man should die that the whole nation perish not.

An Autocrat claiming limitless power over his domains—sending thousands of his innocent subjects annually into Siberian death; arbitrarily denying alike civil rights and religious toleration to his people; punishing as a crime the agitation for constitutional liberty; selfish, relentless, cruel, despotic—such was Alexander as a ruler; while, as a man, the picture is even more repulsive. To the duplicity of a Muscovite, he added the licentiousness of a profligate. Faithless to his marriage vows, he doomed his noble wife to death by his cruelty and neglect, and brought the blush of shame (if a Romanoff can blush) to the cheeks of his children by the openness of his amours. Sinning against light, offending against decency, defying the opinions of a world, he lived a life, tolerated to his absolutism, for which, as a citizen in any well-ordered government, he would have been consigned to prison walls. That the chalice, of which he compelled so many to drink, should at last have been forced to his own dissolute and perjured lips; that his faithlessness to his vows as a husband, his duties as a man, and his responsibilities as a ruler, should at last have been punished, is not so wonderful as that American religionists should be the first and loudest to condemn this retribution, and to declaim against those who have words of pity for the maddened victims of his oppressions who at last visited his iniquities upon him. I can feel no sympathy for the sentiment that prompts or applauds such utterance. The music of such applause may have been sweet to the ears of him who could so speak, and to the unthinking many who, in the boasted devotion of our people to law and order, could see in the death of the Czar only an act of inexcusable violence. Many in our great country may think that under all circumstances law should be respected and order maintained; but there are also those who hold only for laws that are just and for an order that is righteous, and who, even in the confusion and uproar of a great revolution, with its noise of the contest of the living, the outcries of the dying, and the lament over the dead, will yet catch

the sounds of that divine harmony which greets the coming of a new life—the anguish of the travail giving place to the sweet child-voice of a new-born liberty; and in the hope of realizing which, with souls that already catch the music of the herald song of the bright day, many are glad to die. And Nihilism in Russia has my sympathy, as the force that, in the furnace of untold affliction, is working out another link of that chain of republics which is yet to girdle the world; while for those who perish in the struggle, I have only words of tenderness. Why should I condemn even the o'erwrought violence of their tempestuous despair?

