

# THE REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA\*

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**I**N order to understand the significance of events in the revolution that is now going on in Russia, it is necessary to recall what you learned in your school days, that it has the largest area of any nation and a population of one hundred and forty million souls, including eighty million peasants. The illiterate classes constitute at least three-fourths of the population—one hundred and twelve millions who cannot read or write. During the last few years there has been a very rapid improvement in this respect by reason of the establishment of village schools, but a wise man once said that "a little learning is a dangerous thing," and his wisdom has been demonstrated in Russia.

The introduction of a school system accounts for the remarkable spread of socialistic ideas among the working classes of that Empire. Kipling once said that as long as a Russian muzhik wore his shirt outside his trousers he was a safe citizen; when he tucked it in, he became dangerous to the state. The truth of that quaint remark has been forcibly demonstrated within the last eighteen months. The Russian workmen, in the cities and factory towns and the peasants in the fields, who constitute four-fifths of the vast population, have vague and fantastic ideas of government and of the meaning of the word "liberty." They will follow anybody who promises to improve their condition, and are merciless and vindictive toward every one they distrust. For that reason they are more dangerous and destructive than the corresponding class in France.

## THE PEASANT'S NEED OF LAND

The peasants were formerly serfs, and were emancipated by the grandfather of the present Czar, who is known as Alexander the Good. When they were given

their freedom the government applied the socialistic principle that the soil belongs to the men who till it, and each family was given an average of six and a quarter acres of cultivated land, which was then sufficient to supply their wants. The increase of population has cut down this average to three and a half acres, which is not sufficient to support a family. According to experts, at least seven acres is necessary to sustain an average family; so that the peasant has only about half the land he needs. The remainder of the Empire is held in vast estates belonging to the government, the crown, the monasteries, the grand dukes, the nobility, and the boyars or gentry, and only part of it is under cultivation. The peasants need the idle land and they demand it. They have emphasized their demands with the torch and the bludgeon, and during the last eighteen months have destroyed several hundred million dollars' worth of property, including some of the finest estates in the Empire, under the leadership of demagogues, who have aroused their passions and have made them insane with drink. In his natural state the Russian peasant is honest, stupid, superstitious, and stubborn; when he is excited he becomes a savage. He has no ideals; he has no comprehension of politics; he does not comprehend the word "constitution," but he knows that he needs more land. There is not enough vodka in all the Empire to quench his thirst, and his vision is limited to his own local interests.

The greater part of the peasants' land is held in common and the fields are allotted by the village elders, who are elected by the heads of families and exercise a tyrannical authority over the communities. No peasant can sell his land or borrow money upon it; he cannot leave his native place without the consent of the elders. His condition of serfdom has been

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