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They approve it as a thesis meeting the require-
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Some Aspects of Russian Nihilism.

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by
Marion Edith Robbins
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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CONTENTS

	page
Chapter I The Academic Period.	
1. Introduction.	1
2. Herzen.	5
3. The Emancipation.	10
4. The Character and Meaning of Early Nihilism.	11
5. Historical Development.	30
6. The Status of Nihilism in the Late Sixties.	40
Chapter II The Period of Propaganda.	
1. More of the Character of the Nihilists.	45
2. The Inspiration and Theory of Propagandism.	49
3. Beginning of Propagandism.	57
4. "To the People."	62
5. The Populists.	72
6. The Police System.	75
Chapter III Revolutionary Terrorism.	
1. The First Terrorist Acts.	78
2. Recasting the Old Theories.	82

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3. The Executive Committee.	92
4. The End of Terrorism.	97
5. Conclusion.	100
6. Bibliography.	104

SOME ASPECTS OF RUSSIAN NIHILISM.

CHAPTER I.

The "Academic" period.

Introduction.

It is difficult in describing any movement to point to a particular time or place and say, "here it began." Although the movement generally spoken of as "Nihilism"¹ did not have a name or a definite expression until in the sixties, nevertheless, it had an inspiration and a tradition from earlier days. The first martyrs to political liberty in Modern Russia were the famous Decembrists, those young aristocrats, brilliant officers in the army, determined to attempt

¹ I am perfectly aware that objection is made to the use of the term "nihilism," and that it is in fact only a taking nickname. Nevertheless it is a very convenient name to use, for it is always associated with this period of Russian history, and there is no other

a revolution to gain a constitution and freedom from despotism; this they expected to accomplish by means of an insurrection led by their regiments, who- not understanding what was taking place- would obey them implicitly. The attempt was made on the coronation of Nicholas I in 1825, but the rebellion was put down with much bloodshed, five of the leaders were hanged and many others were sent into exile.

Repression lay heavily on the people of Russia during all of the reign of Nicholas I. The Press was muzzled. Police spies were everywhere; many years of exile might be the punishment for an unguarded word. After the French Revolution, of 1848 the reactionary repression was even more bitter and severe

¹ term that seems quite to take its place. The term "socialism" is objectionable, for this movement was very different from socialism as it is understood today. The term "Revolutionary Movement" it is con-

Nevertheless, during all this time the story of the Decembrists was remembered; it was told and retold among students and friends until it became almost a legend. As martyrs to liberty, the Decembrists became the inspiration and ideal of the growing generation in Russia. P. Kropotkin records in his memoirs how, when a lad, he used to look, with a feeling near to worship, on the medallion which was printed on the paper cover of "The Polar Star" (a clandestine Review by Herzen) and which represented the noble heads of the five Decembrists whom Nicholas I had hanged after the rebellion of December 14, 1825.

Ideas are of all things one of the most difficult to stop at National boundary lines or to intercept by the police. It was during the reign of Nicholas that Russian journalists first learned the art of writing in veiled language to escape the censor and the police and that the Russian public learned the art of reading between the lines. What could not be said openly was intimated by the use of symbolic language, thru novels, parables or what not. The spirit of opposition existed in Russia and only waited an impetus to bring it to the explosion point.

¹ venient to save for a quite different movement in more recent times. Consequently I take the liberty of applying the term "nihilism" to the radical movement of from approximately 1860 to 1862 altho in strictness it could be applied to only the early part of this period.

This impetus came from the defeat of the Russian arms in the Crimean War. Since the outburst of patriotism at the time of Napoleon's defeat and expulsion from Russia, the Russians had felt that- whatever else might be rotten in the state of Russia- the army, the pride of Nicholas I, was impregnable. Now the inefficiency and corruption in the army was made glaringly manifest.

"Discontent became all at once as general and bitter as the previous resignation had been profound and sincere. Even this discontent neither could nor dare express itself publicly; but in every house and family, affairs of state were discussed in a manner and in a language which a few months back would have led to many years imprisonment and exile. Respect for autocracy disappeared hand in hand with the terror of the autocrat. Scornful sallies, in prose and verse, against the Government and its officials, against the army and its officers, against the commander-in-chief and the Tsar himself, were written wholesale and circulated in thousands of copies."¹ Thruout Russian educated society, one idea

¹ 7 p. 32.

was dominant, reform of some sort was absolutely necessary.

2. Herzen

The great leader of this early movement was Alexander Herzen, a man with ideas, a forceful style and tremendously in earnest. Of him Turgeneff said that he wrote in blood and tears as no other Russian had ever written. He established in London a monthly review, the Kolokol (the Bell), which was regularly smuggled into Russia by the thousands of copies and gained an immense influence among all classes of society. "Herzen relentlessly exposed abuses of all kinds, pointed out the worst cases of peculation of public funds, threw a light on the scandalous system of bribery which flourished in all departments of the administration, and never ceased to recommend, with a variety of arguments and from different standpoints, the emancipation of the peasant as the first and most important of the social reforms to be carried out in Russia."¹ Herzen was as much Liberal as a

¹ 7 p. 29

socialist; before all things he was a great moral force."¹

Curiously enough, the Socialist movement and the Slavophil movement- which later came into such bitter opposition- were in their beginnings very closely akin. They both owed their theory, in part at least, to the influence of Hegel. The Russian Nationalists felt that Russia too must have an "Idea",- to use the Hegelian terminology-, which she was standing for in the development of history. They exalted everything that seemed characteristic of Russia and in the "Holy Mir" or village commune they found that institution which was most distinctively Russian. The Socialists or revolutionaries also found in the Mir the essentially valuable thing in Russian life; they regarded it as the germ of the future Socialist state. Herzen himself says in his memoirs, "We and the Slavophiles represented a kind of two faced Janus: only they looked backward and we looked forward. At heart we were one; and our heart throbbed equally for our minor brother the peasant- with whom our mother-country was pregnant."

¹ 16 p. 296

But what for them was a recollection of the past was taken by us as a prophecy for the future."¹

"The Slavophiles appreciated the commune chiefly as a national expression of the Christian spirit, the spirit of love and of humility. Herzen, however, by his university studies in the natural sciences, and by his later readings of Feuerbach and the younger Hegelians, had been brought to disbelieve in Christianity and religion in general. Soon the idea dawned on him- particularly during his subsequent travels in Europe- that the Russian Commune was destined for quite another role in the future; namely, that it represented in germ the socialistic society."²

Herzen had followed developments in Western Europe with great interest; he was keenly disappointed at the failure of the revolutions of 1848. He came to the conclusion that a political revolution can never be of any real value; it merely changes one power for another. The only important change is a social and economic change.

1 4 p. 366

2 4 p. 367

He felt that western Europe was decadent, that it had already worked out its "Idea" and could accomplish nothing more. Just as Christianity came to the decaying society of ancient Rome and thru the medium of the Barbarians- the German tribes- had built up a new society; so socialism- the new Christianity- as applied in the commune would regenerate modern society, thru the agency of the Russian "Barbarians." Herzen disliked the term "revolution;" no revolution is necessary, he thought, except that in individual minds; the political form of the state is of no consequence since it is to be supplanted by a free federation of communes.

Herzen also sounded the note of revolt, of rebellion against all conventions and traditions which later became so characteristic of the so-called "nihilists." In one of his pamphlets he said, "A thinking Russian is the most independent being in the world. What, indeed, could stop him? Consideration for the past? But what is the starting point of modern Russian history other than an entire negation of nationalism and tradition? ~~xxxx~~ On the other hand the past of the western nations

may well serve us as a lesson- but that is all; we do not think ourselves to be the executors of their historic will. We share in your doubts, but your beliefs leave us cold. We share in your hatred, but we do not understand your attachments for the legacies of your ancestors. You are constrained by scruples, held back by lateral considerations. we have none. x x x x We are independent because we start a new life. x x x x we are independent because we do not possess anything- nothing to be loved. All our recollections are full of rancor and bitterness. x x x We wear too many fetters already to be willing to put on new chains. x x x What matter for us, disinherited juniors that we are, your inherited duties? Can we, in conscience, be satisfied with your worn-out morality, which is non-Christian and non-human, which is invoked only in rhetorical exercises and in judicial sentences? What respect can we cherish for your Roman-Gothic law; that huge building, lacking light and fresh air, a building repaired in the Middle Ages and painted over by a manumitted bourgeoisie? x x x Do not accuse us of immorality, on the ground that we do not respect what

is respected by you. May be we ask too much- and we shall not get anything. x x x Maybe so, but still we do not despair of attaining what we are striving for."¹

Herzen's powerful influence, which he owed largely to his moral force and literary ability, was not very lasting. The very generality and indefiniteness of his proposals, which had at first given him a wide hearing and immense popularity led in the end to dissatisfaction. "The positive program formulated by Herzen consisted of only three points: freedom of the peasants from servitude, freedom of the press from censorship, and freedom of the individual from corporal punishment."² The young generation had many other things under consideration.

3. The Emancipation.

As we have already seen, after the Crimean War, when Nicholas I died in 1855 and Alexander II came to the throne the tide of reform was at its full strength. As Professor Pares says, "The Crimean War had so thoroughly discredited the reactionary system of Nicholas I that for a time even the officials seemed to be Liberal."³ The

¹ 4 pp. 363-4

² 4 p. 372

³ 16 p. 294

demand everywhere, except from the landowners themselves, was for the emancipation of the serfs, and when in 1857 the Emperor issued his famous rescript announcing his intention of liberating the serfs, popular enthusiasm was unbounded and Herzen wrote a touching article entitled, "Thou hast conquered, Galilean." After that there came a period of doubt and anxiety; it was rumored that a peasant insurrection was feared and that the Tzar had changed his mind. Moreover, the plans for the emancipation as they were being worked out were very unsatisfactory to the Liberals. At last, when the proclamation of Emancipation was issued (March 3, 1861) it was received with immense enthusiasm; Prince Kropotkin records in his memoirs how the theatre and streets were filled with cheering crowds. Two years later when Alexander was drowning the Polish insurrection in blood, Herzen wrote, "Alexander Nikolaevich, why did you not die on that day? Your name would have been transmitted in history as that of a hero."

4. The Character and Meaning of Early Nihilism.

We must pause here, before following the course

of events any further, to gain a clearer idea of what the "nihilists"- these young men of the sixties- really were and really stood for. What is- or rather was- nihilism in theory and meaning? In Western Europe and America the term "nihilist" is often applied quite indiscriminately to any Russian who opposes the present Russian Government, be he a Liberal, Revolutionary or Terrorist. In the popular mind the terms "nihilist" and "terrorist" are quite synonymous. This is a mistake. As Kropotkin says: "To confuse nihilism with terrorism is as wrong as to confuse a philosophical movement like stoicism or positivism with a political movement such as, for example, republicanism. Terrorism was called into existence by certain special conditions of the political struggle at a given historical moment. It has lived, and has died. It may revive and die out again. But nihilism has impressed its stamp upon the whole of the life of the educated classes of Russia, and that stamp will be retained for many years to come. It is nihilism, divested of some of its rougher aspects,- which were unavoidable in a young movement of that sort,- which gives now to the life of a great portion of the ed-

ucated classes of Russia a certain peculiar character which we Russians regret not to find in the life of Western Europe. It is nihilism again in its various manifestations, which gives to many of our writers that remarkable sincerity, that habit of thinking aloud, which astounds Western European readers."¹

The term "nihilist" was invented by Turguéneff in his novel "Fathers and sons." His hero Basarov says, "The nihilist is a man who bows to no authority, who accepts no principle on hearsay, however generally it may be received." This was most characteristic of early nihilism,- the repudiation of all authority, of all convention and tradition; but we must remember that even here it was not destruction for the sake of destruction but for the sake of clearing the ground for something better. Basarov said that denial was the thing most needed in his time and in that there was a certain amount of truth.

To truly understand this we must understand something of the conditions existing in Russia at the time. Serfdom had but recently been abolished and it had left

behind it a whole train of ideas, traditions and customs suited to serfdom but not to freedom. These things could not be changed by rules or legislation, a moral and social movement within society itself was the only thing that could change them. Of this social and moral and intellectual movement, nihilism was one manifestation and in its turn a cause. It was a protest against the servile subjection of wife and children to the husband, of serf to the master and noble, of man to tradition and authority. The nihilists found no institution in society worthy of their respect. The State? It was an autocracy that oppressed them, having no care for individual rights or liberties. The Law? There was nothing worthy of the name; everything depended on the will of the autocrat, the beaurocracy or the police. Religion? The Orthodox Church was permeated with the grossest superstition, and no other religion was tolerated. The family? Alexinsky says, "The young girl is not allowed to marry for love. Material conditions are the basis of every marriage. Among the clergy, it is usual, in some cases, to place the son-in-law of the former

priest in charge of the parish. The Seminarist, having completed his training proceeds to look for a "fiancee with a parish." A marriage is often concluded between absolute strangers."¹

The nihilists were all imbued, to a greater or less degree, with the ideals of positivism. They led Russian youth to the study of Karl Vogt, Büchner, Moleschott, Comte, Mill etc.

This was the age of the scientific revival in Europe; the famous Hegelian "Left" in Germany, Comte in France and Mill, Spencer, Darwin and others in England. With a receptivity to new ideas characteristically Russian, the young generation seized upon the idea of positivism, and developed it to the extreme. "Only the material and mathematical sciences have the right to be called sciences. x x x Only the natural sciences can develop the understanding," says Pissarev. Then, generalizing these ideas he continues, "Words and illusions perish, but facts remain."² Having repudiated authority and tradition, they needed a new basis for social organization and they found it in Comte's idea of a society organized

¹ 3 p. 159

² 3 p. 163

according to the principles of science. Moreover, they had youthful optimism enough to believe that this could be brought to pass,- in the near future! They felt that Russia,- following the development outlined by Comte,- should be hurried through the Theological and Metaphysical stages as rapidly as possible, in order to come to the Positivistic stage. Nevertheless, they had not the true spirit of positivism themselves. "While denouncing metaphysics, they were themselves metaphysicians in so far as they were constantly juggling with abstract conceptions and letting themselves be guided in their walk and conversation by à priori deductions; while ridiculing romanticism, they had romantic sentiment enough to make them sacrifice their time, their property, and sometimes even their lives to the attainment of an unrealizable ideal; and while congratulating themselves on having passed from the religious to the positivistic stage of intellectual development, they frequently showed themselves animated with the spirit of the early martyrs!"¹ Tikhomirov remarks, "The Russians are, it seems to me, still too young, too full of a deep-rooted historical

¹ 1 p. 539

force to be able to be positivists. Involuntarily, they make a religion of every theory that appears to be really positive. Hence their movement of civilization is actually capable of producing on society the deep, far-reaching effects of religious movements."¹

"In its first inception "nihilism" was untinged with politics, it was little more than a certain way of bearing oneself,- thinking, talking,- a mannerism, a fashion, one might say a pretense and attitude, that came into favor among the young people of 1860 to 1870, among the students at the Universities, and the girl students with cropped hair residing abroad or in the provinces. This designation was pointed at a spirit of revolt against received ideas and social conventionalities, against all traditional authorities and antiquated religious or political dogmas, a spirit of negation stamped with an intolerant materialism and näive radicalism; nothing more at bottom than a violent reaction of the Russian soul against the system of government and intellectual yoke under which it had long been bent."²

¹ 6 p. 26

² 2 Part I p. 197

This, however, does not give us the real significance of the movement which was something more than a spirit of negation. Allow me to quote somewhat at length from Prince Peter Kropotkin who was among these people and knew them well.

"First of all the nihilist declared war upon what may be described as 'The conventional lies of civilized mankind.' Absolute sincerity was his distinctive feature, and in the name of that sincerity, he gave up, and asked others to give up, those superstitions, prejudices, habits, and customs which their own reason could not justify. x x x All those forms of outward politeness which are mere hypocrisy were equally repugnant to him, and he assumed a certain external roughness as a protest against the smooth amiability of his fathers. He saw them wildly talking as idealist sentimentalists, and at the same time acting as real barbarians toward their wives, their children, and their serfs; and he rose in revolt against that sort of sentimentalism which, after all, so nicely accommodated itself to the anything but ideal conditions of Russian life. Art was involved

in the same sweeping negation. Continual talk about beauty, the ideal, art for art's sake, aesthetics, and the like, so willingly indulged in,- while every object of art was bought with money exacted from starving peasants or from underpaid workers, and the so-called 'worship of the beautiful 'was but a mask to cover the most commonplace dissoluteness,- inspired him with disgust. x x x Marriage without love, and familiarity without friendship, were equally repudiated. The nihilist girl, compelled by her parents to be a doll in a Doll's House, and to marry for property's sake, preferred to abandon her house and her silk dresses. She put on a black woolen dress of the plainest description, cut off her hair, and went to a high school, in order to win there her personal independence. x x x with the same frankness the nihilist spoke to his acquaintances, telling them that all their talk about 'this poor people' was sheer hypocrisy so long as they lived upon the underpaid work of these people whom they commiserated at their ease as they chatted together in richly decorated rooms; and with the the same frankness a nihilist would declare to a high

functionary that the latter cared not a straw for the welfare of those he ruled, but was simply a thief, and so on. With a certain austerity the nihilist would rebuke the woman who indulged in small talk and prided herself on her 'womanly' manners and elaborate toilette. He would bluntly say to a pretty young person: "How is it that you are not ashamed to talk this nonsense and to wear this chignon of false hair?"¹

We smile a little at this for it seems rather absurd to us- and no doubt the nihilist was not always a pleasant person to meet- nevertheless I think we must recognize it as the outward manifestation of an essentially moral movement. It was indeed, as Wallace says, a movement opposed, "not only to accepted conventionalities in the manner of dress, but to all manner of shams, hypocrisy and cant in the broad Carlylean sense of these terms."² Early nihilism had some grotesque outward manifestations, just as early Puritanism had, but it also was standing for a moral ideal. The poet Nekrásoff wrote, "It is bitter, the bread that has been made by slaves," and in increasing numbers the young generation refused to

¹ 10 p. 297-300

² 1 p. 538

eat that bread. They saw that their riches and education and culture had all been purchased with the blood and labor of the serfs and they turned their backs on "culture" and refinement in disgust. However, as we shall see, they did not maintain this purely negative attitude long but soon determined that they must do something to repay their debt to "the people." I believe it was Tolstoy who said that the masters would do anything for the people except get off from their backs; here we have the unusual spectacle of a group of people who, feeling that they were on the backs of the people, refused to stay there.

The "Nihilists" are commonly charged with all sorts of moral perversities, and no doubt in casting aside all conventions as they did, there were some who lost themselves, but in general the nihilists were not open to any such accusation. We do not realize the condition of Russian society at that time. Since Kropotkin, who was a page to the Emperor, remarks, quite incidentally, in his memoirs; "Such was the influence of the court upon St. Petersburg society that if one of the grand dukes cast

his eyes upon a girl, her parents would do all in their power to make their child fall madly in love with the great personage, even though they well knew that no marriage could result from it,- the Russian grand dukes not being allowed to marry 'subjects' of the Tzar. The conversations which I once heard in a 'respectable' family connected with the court, after the heir apparent had danced twice or thrice with a girl of seventeen, and the hopes which were expressed by her parents surpassed all that I could possibly have imagined."¹ Against such ideas as this nihilism was a protest and such moral rottenness as this was altogether foreign to the nihilist movement. Altho the nihilists were influenced somewhat by Saint Simon's "rehabilitation of the flesh," they were neither, "free lovers" nor voluptuous but inclined rather to a spirit of asceticism. "A depraved imagination has never in the least been a fault of the Russian youth. While repudiating Christian asceticism, they introduced a new form of voluntary asceticism and self-sacrifice which did not lose anything by being qualified in their writings under the name of "utilitarian morals."

x x x It is sufficient to read its bible- the novel What to Do, by Mr. Cherneeshevsky- or the Memoirs of Sophie Kovalevsky, in order to know what sort of thing Russian "free love" was, and with what chaste and touching feeling it was really associated."¹

Indeed it is a matter of astonishment to many people, to note the truly religious spirit manifested by many of these people, who were followers of Comte and the scientific school, and many of whom boasted of being materialists. Some authors seem to feel that this union of Romanticism, or of the religious spirit, and materialism was a monstrous or abnormal thing only to be found among the nihilists or perhaps also among the socialists. This however is not true, for such manifestations of human nature are everywhere. Professor James gives an instance which will illustrate what I mean. "'He believes in no-God and worships him' said a colleague of mine of a student who was manifesting a fine atheistic ardor; and the more fervent opponents of Christian doctrine have often enough shown a temper which psychologically considered, is indistinguishable from religious zeal."²

¹ 4 p. 365

² 18 p. 35

To most people, nihilism is known only by its extremes and absurdities. In their reaction against indolent aestheticism the nihilists went to the other extreme. They delighted in shocking the sensitive feelings of aristocratic gentlemen; they took pleasure in being rude and sincerity itself became a pose. They boasted of being realists and materialists and became famous for a number of "short formulae" such as "Man is an animal," "the belly is the centre of the world," "love is simply a sexual attraction", "Photography is higher than art,"¹ In some cases the women put on blue spectacles and cut their hair short, but as Tikomerov says, "The behavior of the masculine sex, during the earlier time of its taking on European habits, abounds with stupidities just as ridiculous. They rigged themselves out in the dress of marquises of the eighteenth century, shaved their beards and wore a queue."²

Woman had been liberated from a truly Asiatic subjection not so very long since and now she was just beginning to make a struggle for a western type of education and independence, and she wanted an outward sign of it.

¹ 16 p. 297

² 6 p. 41

These absurd manifestations, of course, did not last long. I may say here that it is said that nowhere else in the world is woman received on a basis of simple comradeship and equality, as she is in Russian revolutionary circles.

Nihilist theory was not in any way original but was imported from the West. The influence of Saint Simon and Fourier, the "utopian socialists" was large and with this was combined, in rather haphazard fashion, ideas of Comte, Mill, Spencer and others. Wallace testifies that the knowledge most of the young nihilists had of the sciences and of these authors was very superficial and vague.¹ Nihilist theory was a sort of reverberation of earlier western European theory but what seems most curious to us is that it was also a revolt against western ideas.

It seems to me that the attitude of the nihilists was, from a psychological angle, exactly similar to a phenomenon not infrequently noted among us. Most of us, with any considerable university experience, have known of cases where young people, trained at home in the strict doctrines of a narrow and dogmatic religious sect,

¹ 1 p. 535

have, after studying at a university, cast aside their religious belief entirely. The contrast between the old and the new ideas was too great; they know no middle ground and so instead of modifying and recasting the old faith they threw it away in toto. The case with the nihilists was very similar; most of them were students, many were attending school away from home,- or if they were at home it made no real difference for the moral and intellectual chasm between the two generations was immense. The old generation was steeped in century-old beliefs and traditions and trained in the social ideas of serfdom. The young generation was studying western beliefs, western history, western science and western ideals of democracy. The gap between the two was unbridged. The result was that the young generation not only cast aside the beliefs and traditions of their native land but they resolved to go the full length as the western nations had not and they revolted against western conventions, western morality, western political revolutions and western bourgeois society.

The most fundamental meaning of nihilism was,

as Turguéneff admitted, "The triumph of democracy over aristocracy." Although there were a number of the aristocracy among the nihilists, the movement was chiefly developed by the so-called "men of mixed class." Chernyshevsky, often spoken of as the father of Russian socialism, was the son of a priest. The advanced nobleman grew ashamed of being a nobleman and was classed among those known under the nickname of "repentant noblemen."

The radical leaders of the older generation were estranged and offended by this new movement. Herzen wrote bitterly against them. "At every word and every move we recognize in them the servants chamber, the barracks, the scribe's office, the clerical seminary. x x x Their systematic uncourtliness, their cross and insolent way of speaking, have nothing in common with the inoffensive and single-minded plainness of a peasant, while it has very much in common with the ways of a clerk or a "counter-jumper" or a footman."¹ Herzen's observation was no doubt excellent; what he did not recognize was the fact that these people represented democracy, although it is true, of course, that they were not of "the people,"

¹ 4 p. 378

that is to say of the peasant class. Bakunin alone, of the older generation, kept in sympathy with the new movement.

Writing of this period, Alexinsky says: "At this moment the feudal system was beginning to crumble; new middle class elements were replacing the old aristocracy; the type of educated noble, an aesthete and philosopher, had to make way for the intellectual bourgeois who protested against the ancient doctrines. This phenomenon is analogous to that which was observed in France before the Revolution, when the new bourgeois ideas overthrew the ancient régime and delivered humanity from its age long yoke. Russian nihilism was the declaration of war of the middle-class individual against all that fettered individual liberty. It was also the ideological reflection of the new system of free competition, which victoriously entered into Russian life under the influence of capitalistic development. x x x During the second half of the nineteenth century the social composition of the intellectual youth of Russia underwent a change. The development of capitalism opposed to the

noble element a new social class and led to the break down of castes. The families of priests, bureaucrats, small merchants, even of peasants, provided 'intellectuals.' Thousands of these young people flocked to the cities to attend the universities or the secondary colleges."¹

Moreover the Nihilists emphasis upon practical usefulness and work encouraged economic development. Pissarev said, "A good chemist is twenty times more useful than a poet." "The productive worker was the type to which the nihilists called the attention of their contemporaries, and in so doing they betrayed the most urgent needs of the country. The Crimean War opened the eyes of the people to their backward state and their poverty and the period of the 'great reform' called for abundant hard work so that men had no leisure to consider aesthetics."²

This early period of Nihilism is usually spoken of as the "academic" period. There was no organized movement of any sort, or at least only a few sporadic organizations and efforts. As Wallace describes it: "At

¹ 3 pp. 164 and 165

² 3 pp. 164-5

first there was no conspiracy or regularly organized secret society and nothing of which the criminal law in Western Europe could have taken cognizance. Students met in each others rooms to discuss prohibited books on political and social science, and occasionally short essays on the subjects discussed were written in a revolutionary spirit by members of the coterie. This was called mutual instruction. Between the various coteries or groups there were private personal relations, not only in the capitol, but also in the provinces, so that manuscripts and printed papers could be transmitted from one group to another. From time to time the police captured these academic disquisitions and made raids on the meetings of students who had come together merely for conversation and discussion; and the fresh arrests caused by these incidents increased the hostility to the government."¹

5. Historical Developments.

It was not until after 1870 that any large or concerted movement took place; nevertheless, between the time of the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the new period of the seventies, several important and interest-

¹ 1 p. 543

ing events are to be noted.

The emancipation of the serfs was instituted and carried out in a bureaucratic manner, from above, but the nobles exerted their influence to have the peasants given as little land as possible, and charged as much for it as possible.¹ The result was that the law was regarded by many as of very doubtful value. Chernyshevsky preferred to have the emancipation postponed entirely, rather than to have it carried out in the proposed form. By a special provision of the law, the serfs were to remain in their old status for two years- until 1863- and then they were to be legally free. Chernyshevsky and many of the radicals believed the peasants would ~~not~~ accept the proposed terms of emancipation and looked forward to a revolution. As a matter of fact there were peasant revolts in a number of places but nothing amounting to an agrarian revolution and the revolting peasants were beaten into submission. Indeed the peasants everywhere felt that this was not the "true" freedom, that the Tzar would soon grant them the true freedom which the nobles were withholding. "The serf held the simple opinion that the land which they and

¹ 16 p. 301

their fathers had cultivated, really belonged to them, and that only part of their labor had been the property of the landowners, not the land, which, consequently, should be transferred to them then and there."¹

The radicals explained the delay in the general rising of the people- the wish being father to the thought- by saying that they were waiting until the end of the two years, and the revolution would come in 1863. Two aggressive and revolutionary "proclamations" appeared in the years 1861 and 1862 respectively, but they were the work of individuals or of very small groups. "The far more moderate manifestos of the secret societies, 'The Great Russian' 1861 and "Land and Liberty" 1863, were more serious; several officers took part in the first; the second was an attempt to unite all the revolutionary groups."²

The reactionaries were struggling to gain control and in May 1862 an untoward incident occurred which aided them materially. This was a considerable fire in St. Petersburg, evidently of incendiary origin, and the opinion became widespread that the revolutionaries were

1 7 p. 45

2 16 p. 308

responsible for it. Whether or not they actually did set the fire is not known, but in all the numerous arrests that immediately followed in Russia and Poland no evidence whatever was found to show that they did. "On the contrary when similar conflagrations broke out in several towns on the Volga, and especially at Sarátoff, and when Zhdanoff a member of the Senate, was sent by the Tzar to make a searching inquiry, he returned with the firm conviction that the conflagration at Sarátoff was the work of the reactionary party."¹ At any rate, whoever was responsible for the fires, the reactionaries proceeded to make capital out of them. They urged the Tzar to postpone, or to revise the plans for the emancipation. Worse still, - under the influence of this event and of the proclamation of 1862- which Professor Pares characterizes as "blood-thirsty," the public opinion which had inclined toward Liberalism became reactionary. Secular Sunday schools for the workingmen, reading rooms and students clubs were closed. Large numbers of arrests were made. The Contemporary, the leading and most popular reform periodical was suspended and its editor, Chernyshevsky arrested.

¹ 10 p. 164

"There was nothing to show that Tchernichevsky¹ was implicated in any treasonable designs, but he was undoubtedly the leader of a group of youthful writers whose aspirations went far beyond the intentions of the government, and it was thought desirable to counteract his influence by shutting him up in prison. Here he wrote and published, with the permission of the authorities and the imprimatur of the Press Censure, a novel called "Shto delat?" (What is to be Done?). x x x When the authorities discovered the mistake they had committed in allowing the book to be published, it was at once confiscated and withdrawn from circulation, whilst the author, after being tried by the Senate, was exiled to Northeastern Siberia and kept there for nearly twenty years."¹ Chernyshevsky's book "What is to be Done" became a sort of bible for the young generation; his work was continued by Dobrolyúboff and Pissarev.

One other unfortunate occurrence added immensely to the impetus of the reaction; I refer to the ill-advised Polish revolution of 1863. The Russian radicals and the "Land and Liberty" society were in sympathy with

¹ Owing to the difference between the Russian Alphabet and the English alphabet, many Russian names are spelled differently by different authors. If the reader will bear this in mind I think he will have no trouble.

~~this in mind I think he will have no trouble.~~

² 1 pp. 536-7

the Poles, but Herzen urged the Poles to wait until the expected Russian revolution should come, while Bakunin stood for immediate action. The Poles refused to wait and the revolution in Russia, which several officers of the army attempted to foment by means of a forged manifesto, came to naught. Even some of the Liberals sympathized with the Poles and the students of St. Petersburg University scandalized their patriotic fellow-countrymen by a pro-Polish demonstration.¹ "But underneath these beautiful artificial clouds of cosmopolitan Liberal sentiment lay the volcano of national patriotism, dormant for the moment, but by no means extinct."² Herzen in his paper the Kolokol supported the Polish revolutionists but by so doing he lost, almost instantly, his popularity and influence and the circulation of the Kolokol fell from 2,500 to 500 copies. Katkoff, editor of the Moscow Gazette and leader of the serfdom party, 'thundered' against this Liberal sentimentatism, and, in the outburst of national patriotism that followed, became the most influential man of the hour. The Polish revolution was suppressed with a terrible amount of bloodshed and

¹ 1 footnote p. 544

² 1 p. 545

Count Muravieff- known in western Europe as "the hangman"- became a national hero. This Polish revolution marks definitely the end of the "era of reform" in Russia.

The government had apparently somewhat abated its interest in reform even before the emancipation proclamation was signed, and from 1862 on we can see a steady increase in reactionary tendencies. The Polish revolution gave a definite impulse to this reaction, as we have seen. "At home the silence of Liberal opinion was seldom broken after 1864. Several attempts had been made by the gentry to persuade the Emperor to 'crown his edifice' by summoning representatives of the people, and, in 1865, the Moscow gentry repeated the request: 'truth' they pleaded, 'will reach your throne without hindrance.' Alexander, in replying, claimed 'the exclusive right to initiate in the chief sections of this gradual work of completion,' and hoped to meet with no more embarrassments of this kind from the gentry of Russia."¹ It is true that Alexander had not yet given up his plan of reforms from above and the year 1864 witnessed the institution of the *Zemstvos* or County Councils and the judicial

¹ 16 p. 298

reform but these reforms were conceived in a less liberal spirit and they were soon limited in many ways. The fact that we must recognize is that Alexander was not, as some people suppose, a liberal gentleman willing to grant all reasonable reforms but who was prevented and made hostile by terrorists attacks. We see the repressive policy inaugurated at this time when there had been no attempts on the Emperor's life and years before there was any organized terrorist movement.

In the spring of 1866 a young man by the name of Karakózzoff, a member of the "Organization" formed in 1865- also spoken of as the "Ishutin Circle," after one of the student members- fired at the Emperor without effect. Karakózzoff is said by some to have been a neurotic and he certainly acted without the consent and even against the will of his associates.¹ This deed was committed because of the impression- prevalent in higher circles in St. Petersburg as well- that Alexander had become thoroly reactionary and that the heir to the throne was more liberal. Herzen lost the support of the extreme radicals by his censure of Karakózzoff as he had lost the sympathy of the

¹ 16 p. 363

moderates and patriots before by his sympathy with the Poles.

The repression which set in at this time marks a definite turning point in the movement. The two most advanced periodicals, the Contemporary and the Russian Word, were permanently suppressed. Count Dimitri Tolstoy was appointed Minister of Public Instruction. Katkóff accused all the Liberals and radicals of being implicated in the plot, a charge which was, of course, entirely without foundation. Muravieff- "the hangman" investigated the matter and arrests were made everywhere; it was generally believed in St. Petersburg, - not without some evidence¹- that Karakózzoff was tortured to obtain avowals but made none. Thirty-four members of the society were tried and the majority of them were sent to Siberia.

"The first organized conspiracy was the work of the Jacobin Nechájeff, and it was neither general nor popular. There were riots at St. Petersburg University in 1869 and Nechájeff tried to make the students bring forward political claims. He acted as secretary of an imaginary committee, and planned a vague system of whole-

¹ 10 pp. 255 and 256

sale murder; he ordered and carried through the murder of a rebellious associate, but he could not collect more than 30 in Moscow, and the whole scheme was discovered. The Government gave the case full publicity, and eighty-seven persons were brought to trial in 1871. Nechayeff had escaped, but was handed over by the Swiss Government and sent to penal servitude."¹ The Conspiracy of Nechayeff had little influence on Russian nihilism except as a model of what not to do. As Mr. Tchaykovsky, leader and founder of the famous "Tchaykovsky circle", says: "We were not satisfied with his methods and ideas, however, they seemed to us coercive and Jesuitical. In our further efforts we always kept Netchayev's example before us as the opposite of what we ought to do. Above all, we thought we must base our organization on a full understanding and on absolute freedom to take part with full knowledge of the possible consequences."² Indeed we find among the revolutionary organizations an attempt to maintain an extreme democracy, even in some cases, providing for a rotation of office so that no officer should hold his position for more than one month.

¹ 16 p. 303

² 5 p. 199

6. The Status of Nihilism in the Late Sixties.

At this period- the late sixties- the young generation seemed to have spent its energies and it was felt by many that nihilism was a thing of the past. Chernyshevsky was in exile; Dobrolyúboff and Pissarev were dead, Count Tolstoy did his best to drive out the new generation- the men of "mixed rank"- from the schools and universities; he substituted the study of Greek and Latin classics in place of the natural sciences,- much to the anger and disgust of the Russian youth. Students who were able went abroad to study. Liberty of the press was extremely restricted- even the Slavophil organ Moscow was suppressed; the Zemstvos were shorn of practically all of their power. It seemed as if the Liberal and radical movements were at an end; in fact the radical movement was in a transition stage and it was soon to change its academic character for a more aggressive and practical development.

The most tragic circumstance was the fact that the youthful and radical element was left to stand alone without a mediating or moderating influence from the Lib-

erals. As we have already noted, professor Pares says that the silence of Liberal opinion was seldom broken after 1864. Peter Kropotkin who returned to St. Petersburg in the autumn of 1867 gives, in his Memoirs, an interesting account of conditions as he found them at that time.

"At the height of the reform period nearly every one in the advanced literary circles had had some relations either with Herzen or with Turguénéff and his friends, or with the Great Russian or Land and Freedom secret societies which had had at that period an ephemeral existence. Now, these same men were only the more anxious to bury their former sympathies as deep as possible so as to appear above political suspicion.

"One or two of the liberal reviews which were tolerated at that time, owing chiefly to the superior diplomatic talents of their editors, contained excellent material, showing the every growing misery and the desperate conditions of the great mass of the peasants, and making clear enough the obstacles that were put in the way of every progressive worker. The amount of such facts

was enough to drive one to despair. But no one dared to suggest any remedy or to hint at any field of action, at any outcome from a position which was represented as hopeless. Some writers still cherished the hope that Alexander II would once more assume the character of reformer; but with the majority the fear of seeing their reviews suppressed, and both editors and contributors marched to some more or less remote part of the Empire dominated all other feelings. Fear and hope equally paralyzed them.

"The more radical they had been ten years before, the greater were their fears. My brother and I were very well received in one or two literary circles, and we went occasionally to their friendly gatherings; but the moment the conversation began to lose its frivolous character or my brother, who had a great talent for raising serious questions, directed it toward home affairs, or toward the state of France, where Napoleon III was hastening to his fall in 1870, some sort of interruption was sure to occur. 'What do you think, gentlemen of the latest performance of 'La Belle Helène?' or 'What is your opinion of that cured fish?' was loudly asked by one of the

elder guests,- and the conversation was brought to an end.

"Outside the literary circles, things were even worse, In the sixties, Russia, and especially St. Petersburg was full of men of advanced opinions, who seemed ready at that time to make any sacrifices for their ideas. I looked up some of them, but 'Prudence, young man!' was all they had to say. 'Iron is stronger than straw' or 'One cannot break a stone wall with his forehead,' and similar proverbs, unfortunately too numerous in the Russian language, constituted now their code of practical philosophy."¹ "Russian youth stood consequently in the position not only of having to fight in their fathers the defenders of serfdom, but of being left entirely to themselves by their elder brothers who were unwilling to join them in their leanings toward Socialism, and were afraid to give them support even in their struggle for more political freedom."²

Mr. Milyoukov, speaking of the same period says: "Presently every scheme of further reform was gradually eliminated from the field of action, and their promoters were exterminated. This extermination of the intermed-

¹ 10 pp. 249 and 250

² 10 pp. 256-257

iate shades of public opinion resulted in a terrible shock between the old and the new, between a dying tradition and a buoyant ideal of the future. They met face to face, the old and the new, and the shock was indeed terrible, because there was nothing left between to soften the blow; no engine at hand peacefully to convert the latent heat into useful action, the potential energy into useful work."¹

CHAPTER II

The Period of Propoganda.

1. More of the Character of the Nihilists.

With the foregoing facts in mind we will be better prepared to understand the character of the nihilists as manifested in the next great period,- the period of "Propoganda" or going "to the people."

The youth of the nihilists has often been remarked upon. "The greater part of the nihilists, of those at least who figure in the trials, are very young-mere boys and girls. It is among such that the revolutionary faith enrolls almost all its neophytes. Among sentenced or arrested conspirators, men of thirty are rare, few are over twenty-five, many are not of age."¹ Youth, of course, is naturally the most radical element and more than that they are the ones most free to undertake a dangerous enterprise. Those older, with families dependent upon them, were likely to be more cautious, altho it is true that many a man with his wife

¹ 2 Part II p. 215

and children, went the long road to Siberia.

The great mass of the nihilists were of the higher classes,- certainly not of the peasants. "A statistical list of 1880 shows four fifths of the agitators arrested by the police to have been noble, sons of priests, of functionaries and officers, of merchants or city 'notables',- only 20 per cent were small employees, working people and peasants."¹ "There is perhaps no country where the spirit of opposition is so widely spread. Those classes which in other countries are known as the conservative or ruling classes are all more or less imbued with it. The high nobility and the high functionaries, as a rule, keep within the safe bounds of light banter, but the lesser nobility and the rising bourgeoisie, the lower ranks of tshindvnism, and the children of the clergy, are to the agitators an inexhaustible nursery."²

The very large part that women played in the movement should be especially noted. The arrests in some places showed that as many as one-fifth of those implicated were women.³ A very large percent of the women first

¹ 2. Part II footnote p. 485

² 2. Part II . p. 486

³ p. p. 560

came into conflict with the police thru their efforts at primary education. They formed classes where they taught peasants or working women to read and write; perhaps they also taught some Russian history, Economics etc. Sometimes, no doubt, they also attempted to instill revolutionary ideas; sometimes they did not, but in any case they were arrested if discovered. Many of the "propagandists" were women. In all the trying years that followed they risked imprisonment, exile, or death with unshaken devotion. Sophia Perovsky- a one time favorite at the court and a woman of charming personality who had given up everything and lived as a peasant girl to aid the revolutionaries-, gave the signal for the throwing of the bomb that killed Alexander II.

The nihilists were of "the intelligence"- the "intellectuals" as we would call them. Most of them either were or had been university students; so much so that to be a university student became equivalent to being a "suspect." "While the immense majority of the nation is unlettered, we find scarcely one man who cannot read in a hundred avowed revolutionists. Of the con-

spirators, four-fifths had received superior or secondary education, most of them in government schools. The same applies to the women."¹

Alexinsky gives some interesting comments as to the cause of this radicalism of the "intellectuals." "In the first place, by their composition and their material circumstances, the greater number of the young Russians frequenting the Universities belong to the intellectual proletariat. I imagine one could nowhere in the world find a poorer and hungrier body than the Russian student. Fifty shillings a month is above their average income. The inquiry into the conditions of the life of the students of Kiev (in the year 1872) established the fact that many students try to do without the indispensable."² Alexinsky then goes on to explain the point made by Kautsky that the capitalist philosophy is not dominant in Russia because it is chiefly foreign capital invested there. The profits made from investments in Russia—chiefly by the French—are not spent in Russia but in France; they go to support French art, French periodicals, French schools and monasteries, French theatres

¹ 2 Part II footnote p. 486

² 3 p. 168

and amusements; consequently the Russian intellectuals are left rather hungry but entirely free and unsubsidized in thought.

2. The Inspiration and Theory of Propogandism.

The end of the sixties was, as we have seen, a time of profound discouragement to the young radicals. Alexander II not only refused to grant any further reforms, but he reduced and limited those already granted. The expected agrarian revolution of 1863 had not materialized. Any kind of educational work for the peasants or workmen was under the suspicion of the police. Some had aspired to work with the Zemstvos, but despaired when they saw them shorn of all real power.

Yet the whole tradition and feeling of Nihilism was against passive inaction; they must do something. Had they not scoffed at the indolence and hypocrisy of the gentlemen of the older generation who uttered sentimental platitudes about the "poor people" while they continued to live in luxury on the proceeds of the people's labor? Were they now to do the same thing; should they express sympathy for the people and do nothing?

The very "out and outness" of the nihilist movement, the whole tenor of their philosophy was against such a thing.

They discarded the "literary nihilism" of Pissarev and decided to devote themselves to the needs of the people. The first to recall the Russian youth from the attitude of mere negation and revolt was Professor Lavróff. "Lavróff aimed at the creation of a moral system for the Russian revolutionary Intelligence; returning to the school of Herzen, he placed supreme emphasis on the sacred value of character, and he urged on young Russia the duty of devoting itself to the people from which it had sprung. The young student was able to study because the peasant tilled and the artisan worked; and he owed such light as he could give in return to the struggling and ignorant masses."¹ The teaching of Lavróff was greatly deepened by another thinker, Mikhailovsky. "Like Chernyshevsky, he believed that Russia could escape the period of capitalism, and he wished therefore to strengthen the village commune, while aiming at the formation of character in its individual members. Mikhailovsky's teaching was intensely moral, but it was quite unre-

¹ 16 p. 302

strained by consideration for established civil or religious systems; and his influence largely helped to develop the strong rationalism of present-day Russian society."¹

Thus we see they were still following the ideas of Herzen, in a slightly modified form. The old theory—the theory of Bakunin^{had been} that the Russian peasant— inasmuch as he had been born and brought up for generations in the village commune— was a socialist, or as we use the term, a "communist," by birth. Since the peasants constituted the bulk of the nation, all that was needed was a peasant uprising which would destroy the existing government, and then this "free federation of communes" could be at once established. Herzen disagreed with this merely in that he did not consider a political overthrow necessary. As the result of the bitter experience of the sixties Lavróff and others concluded that the peasant was not quite so much of a "born communist" as they had thought, and that a long period of preparation was necessary. "'Social revolution is impossible,' Lavróv says; 'let us then make a social propaganda.'" 'No,' Tkachov retorts,

¹ 16 p. 302

'social revolution is impossible; let us then make a political revolution.'¹ This latter idea, however, had very little influence at the time, for the young nihilists were still thoroly imbued with Proudhon's anarchist theory that no political revolution was necessary; a social or economic revolution alone was the important thing. In fact they felt that to urge a political revolution was a sheer betrayal of the cause of the people, since a political revolution could never gain them anything.

We can see, even at this time, the influence of the great German socialist leader Marx. The fundamental ideas of Marx were, "That the new order of things is to evolve from far more powerful springs than any secret conspiracy can control, being rooted deeply in the very development of the present capitalistic order;and, that the overthrow is to be accomplished by means of political power previously appropriated by the workingman; and thus political reform is to precede economical and social."² The first of these ideas was too new to be fully comprehended and the second had long been considered a dangerous heresy. Tkachov adopted the idea of a

¹ 4 p. 398

² 4 p. 399

political revolution but thought of a political overthrow by means of a conspiracy and in this way social reforms were to be introduced from above. Lavróff accepted the first idea, in a measure, when he advocated a period of propaganda and preparation. The teachings of Lavróff were, in fact, a sort of compromise between the anarchism of Bakunin and the newer ideas of Tkachov.

Early nihilism was a movement for personal liberty and democracy and the nihilists seemed to have inherited a horror of anything in the least tending toward "centralism." Their ideal was that of a loose federation of "free communes." However, with increasing experience, they were compelled more and more to admit the value of a closer organization. Lavróff finally, even admitted that, so far from destroying the state, it would be necessary to preserve it, even the other day of the revolution; and he postponed indefinitely the anarchist reduction of the state to naught."¹ All these concessions to "centralism," however, were so many heresies which could only be justified on the basis of necessity.

¹ 4 p. 402

The whole doctrine of the nihilists centered about the village commune, the Mir. They regarded it as the unit structure of the future communist federation; their whole concept of the commune was an idealized one but in this they were by no means alone. The Slavophiles sang the praises of the Mir as the typically Russian institution. The government valued the commune because it was, "first and foremost a weapon in the hands of the government for assessing and levying taxes, and for getting every kind of local duties performed,"¹ and because they depended on it to prevent the formation of a proletariat and the danger of a Western revolution.² Thus people of all shades of political opinion were united in the desire to preserve the commune.

The nihilist conception of the Mir as the type and ideal of communism was entirely erroneous. The peasants in the commune do not work the land in common; neither do they share the products of the land in common. The nihilists, however, assumed that since the peasants owned the land in common, they were essentially communists; such minor details as the working of the land in

¹ 4 p. 343

² 3 p. 150

common and the division of the product could be arranged later.¹ In fact the Propagandists sometimes tried to persuade the peasants to adopt this plan but to no effect. It was only after bitter experience that they realized that the average peasant was seeking his own individual prosperity and welfare in just about the same spirit that the petty bourgeois seeks his.

Our understanding of this early communist dream is not as complete or sympathetic as it should be. It meant tremendously much to those who believed it. Hegel in his Philosophy of History declared that the German state represented the absolute end and goal of history; the critics of western civilization saw a far different goal towards which history was tending. The leaders of Nihilism from Chernyshevsky down had the greatest apprehension of the growth of capitalism in Russia. The great critics of the capitalist system in western Europe painted a very black picture, and, in truth, the facts- during this time of the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution- were quite bad enough. The

¹ 4 p. 385

Nihilists felt that the people of the west had gone off on an entirely wrong track. Russia alone, of all the nations of Europe, had actually existing an institution which would serve as a basis for the future organization of society,- the commune. They believed this the more readily in that it flattered their natural national pride to feel that Russia- the despised, the backward- should be the nation to bring actual salvation to the world. Such being the case, it was very important that the revolution should come in Russia soon, ere the capitalist system should become dominant there also.

The nihilists, however, criticized the socialism of the former generation on the ground that it was utopian;- much as it is criticized today. "Social revolution was to be accomplished, not by philanthropy, but by the actual force of such social strata as were personally interested in it. This new turn, which the accession of the 'proletariat' had given to European socialism, was in Russia caused by the emancipation of the peasants."¹ Thus it was that the young radicals came to realize more and more that mere academic discussions or

¹ 4 pp. 384-5

organizations of student circles could never bring a new social order; they must carry the propaganda to the people themselves.

3. Beginnings of Propagandism.

When we divide the nihilist movement into periods we must of necessity do so in a rather arbitrary fashion. The movement itself was a growing, developing thing, always changing yet never undergoing any such thing as a sudden transformation. There had been a movement toward propaganda among the people as early as 1866. This fact was brought out during the trial of Karakózzoff and his friends in which thirty-four members of the "Circle of Ishutin" were tried and the majority of them sent to Siberia altho it was clear that they were not implicated in Karakózzoff's attempt on the Tsar's life. "All Russia read with astonishment, in the indictment which was produced at the court against Karakózzoff and his friends, that these young men, owners of considerable fortunes, used to live three or four in the same room, never spending more than five dollars

apiece a month for all their needs, and giving at the same time their fortunes for starting cooperative associations, cooperative workshops (where they themselves worked), and the like."¹ This phenomenon must have been inexplicable to the older generation, but to the young generation it was an inspiration. Human nature is much the same the world over; do we not read of St. Francis of Assisi that it was only when he stripped himself naked that he gained a secret sympathy in the hearts of men?

After the Karakózzoff incident, Count Dimitry Tolstóy was made Minister of Public Instruction. "Tolstóy frankly aimed at a diminution in the number of students and a monopoly for those whose means enabled them to prepare for the school entrance examinations in the dead languages. Transition from one grade of school to another was also made as difficult as possible- and all this at a time when the results of the Emancipation were carrying young Russia irresistibly forward in pursuit of instruction."² As a result of the ordinance of 1871, which established the Tolstoy system, many young men and

¹ 10 p. 301

² 16 p. 299

women went abroad to study in Germany and France but especially in Zurich. It was impossible for women to obtain a higher education in Russia,¹ and they went in large numbers to Zurich, many of them to study medicine. No woman could obtain a passport to leave Russia without the consent of her parents or husband; as a result she sometimes resorted to a "fictitious" or purely nominal marriage with a man who might be almost a stranger to her in order that she might be allowed to cross the frontier with her "husband."

Zurich was the great center of revolutionary thought. One section of the "International" had its headquarters there. Lavróff and Bakunin both came to Zurich and animated and lengthy discussions occurred, - discussions which were carried to the Russian universities by publications of various sorts. Stepniak says that Zurich became a kind of gigantic club. Lavróff defended his thesis that a period of preparation and social propaganda was necessary while Bakunin urged the fomenting of riots and uprisings as one of the best means of propaganda if nothing more. One thing was clear, whether

¹ 4 p. 402

the revolutionaries intended to organize "riots" or to make a peaceful propaganda, they must go "to the people."¹

Although the great movement of "propagandism" was not organized to any extent, there were already existing several organizations which aided very materially in starting the movement. "The Moscow Circle of Dolgooshin attempted to found a secret press and to distribute leaflets among occasional acquaintances from the people. The southern circles of Odessa and Keeyev were from the beginning more radical, and they were the first (1871) to try direct agitation among the workmen in the factories."² Probably the most important and certainly the best known of the student organizations was the "Circle of Tchaykóvsky" in St. Petersburg. This Circle was founded in the spring of 1869 and had for its purpose the uniting of "the advanced elements among the students, first at St. Petersburg and afterwards all over Russia."³ Their method was to found small "Circles" in various parts of the country, and to supply these circles with books and information from the central circle at St. Petersburg. At first they distributed only books

1 4 p. 403
 2 4 p. 404
 3 5 p. 200

allowed by the censor but soon found them insufficient and arranged to smuggle in books by Lassalle, Lavróff, Robert Owen, Darwin, Herbert Spencer and others, as well as histories of the Labour movement in England and other countries and various pamphlets. They also arranged for secret "student congresses," all students assemblies being strictly forbidden by the police. The Tchaykovsky central circle was always small and consisted of people closely bound together by ties of mutual friendship and trust; its membership included a number that later became widely known as leaders in the movement. Among those best known were Sophia Perovsky, Sergius Kravchinsky (Stepniak), Felix Volkhovsky and Prince Peter Kropotkin.

Says Kropotkin, "When I joined the Circle of Tchaykovsky, (the spring of 1872) I found its members hotly discussing the direction to be given to their activity. Some were in favor of continuing to carry on radical and socialistic propaganda among the educated youth; but others thought that the sole aim of this work should be to prepare men who would be capable of

arousing the great inert laboring masses, and that their chief activity ought to be among the peasants and workers in the towns. In all the circles and groups which were formed at that time by the hundred, at St. Petersburg and in the provinces, the same discussions went on; and everywhere the second programme prevailed over the first."¹ The Tchaykóvsky circle started evening classes where workmen were taught to read and write and so, when the cry "to the people" arose, they had connections already established with the workmen of St. Petersburg.

4. "To the People."

The years 1873 and 1874 are usually given as the great years of the movement "to the people." Hundreds of people- mostly students- went to live the life of the people among the people. They desired not only to teach the people, but also to learn from the people. They sought to obtain positions in the villages as school-teachers, midwives, medical practitioners, or as common workers in the factories.² Kravchinsky and Rogatschoff wandered about the country, working as sawyers and spreading socialist doctrines.³ Young girls, of wealthy

1 10 p. 307
 2 1 p. 553
 3 7 p. 69

families, who had studied in the Univeristy of Zurich, went to work in cotton factories where they labored from fourteen to sixteen hours a day and lived as the factory girls lived.¹ Almost innumerable instances of this sort might be related. We see Sophia Perovsky as a peasant girl, carrying two pails of water from the Nevá on her shoulders, and Prince Peter Kropotkin, in peasant sheepskins lecturing to meetings of the weavers. Leroy-Beaulieu exclaims: "What other country has seen young men of good family, university students, cast off the garb and habits of their class, put away books and pen, to labor like workmen in factories, so as to be in a position enabling them better to understand "the people" and initiate them to their own doctrines? In what other country do we see ladies, well bred and well-informed, on their return from foreign countries, rejoice at having obtained the position of cook in the family of a superintendant so as to get nearer to 'the people' and personally study the labor question?"²

With regard to the number who took part in this movement Kropotkin says; "at the lowest estimate, from

1 10 p. 324

2 2 p. 213

two to three thousand persons took an active part, while twice or thrice as many sympathizers and supporters helped the active vanguard in various ways. With a good half of that army our St. Petersburg circle was in regular correspondence."¹ In 1873 the Russian students at Zurich, over a hundred in number, were recalled by order of the Tsar in order to save them from the pernicious influence of Socialistic doctrines. Most of them joined the propagandists.² Stepniak gives an interesting account of the movement in 1874:

"I will not speak of the many young men and young women of the highest aristocratic families who labored fifteen hours a day in the factories, in the workshops, in the fields. Youth is proverbially generous and ready for sacrifice. The most characteristic feature of the movement was that the contagion spread even to the people, advanced in years, who had already a future clearly worked out and a position won by the sweat of their brows- judges, physicians, officers, officials- and these were not among the least zealous.

Yet it was not a political movement. It

¹ 10 p. 324

² 1 p. 553

rather resembled a religious movement, and had all the contagious and absorbing elements of such a one. People not only sought to obtain a distinct practical object, but also to satisfy an inward sentiment of duty, an inspiration, so to speak, leading them toward their own moral perfection.

"With the spring of 1874 all discussion abruptly ceased among the circles of the revolutionary youth. The time for talking was over: actual "work" was in contemplation. The working-people's gear- boots, shirts, etc.- were hurriedly being prepared. Short greetings and laconic answers were heard: "Whither?"- "To the Urals." "To the Volga," "To the South," "To the river of Don," and so on. . . . There were warm wishes for success, and robust squeezings of hands. . . . "The spring is ending; it is high time." . . . And so, like an electric spark, that cry, "to the people" ran through the youth; sure of themselves, daring and wide awake, though unarmed and unorganized, they dashed in full sight of the enemy, into the storm."¹

Kropotkin remarks that the nihilists acted

with regard to capitalism just as Tolstoy urged should be done with regard to war. They "refused to take any personal advantage of the revenues of their fathers;" they preferred to "identify themselves with the people."¹

We have seen something of the great sacrifices made by those who joined the movement "to the people," and the splendid devotion they showed. The Nihilists were not of the blood of the Laodiceans and their beliefs were not merely repeated by the lips, they were something that gripped the whole life,- something to live and die for. When they went "to the people" what then were they to do for them, what were they to teach them?

We must realize that this movement, altho a great concerted mass movement, was not to any extent an organized movement. There could be no great unanimity of opinion- except in a very general way. The followers of Lavróff were probably many more in number than the followers of Bakunin,² but each propagandist was free to follow his own ideas. However, although opinions might differ, there was a very substantial unanimity of feeling. Kropotkin writes: "These people went without any

¹ 10 p. 308

² 1 p. 553

ideal of social reconstruction in their mind, or any thought of revolution. They simply wanted to teach the mass of the peasants to read, to instruct them in other things, to give them medical help and in any way to aid in raising them from their darkness and misery."¹ Kropotkin was writing of the years 1871 and 1872 and the propagandist movement was in general more revolutionary than that; nevertheless it is quite possible, even probable, that the great mass of the propagandists were influenced primarily by the tremendous democratic impulse of nihilism and by a passionate longing to do something for "the people" to repay them for their labor and sufferings. The movement was in its psychological character a religious one; the young enthusiasts made "the people" an idealized concept of the people-assert of God whom they desired to serve, with whom they longed to "melt into one." They had no definite plans or aim; they knew their ignorance of the peasant and approached him with humility, expecting to learn of his wisdom.²

In practice, the propagandists were bitterly disappointed. Most of them made no permanent settlement

¹ 10 p. 302

² 4 p. 407

but lived in idleness in the villages or wandered from place to place. They found no "wisdom of the people" lying around on the surface which they could appropriate; indeed the wisdom of the people was not of the sort they were looking for or could have accepted. They tried to teach the peasants and in this they showed much more zeal than common sense. They did all sorts of things. They distributed pamphlets to peasants, the great mass of whom could not read. They attempted to instill socialistic ideal by formal conversations and discussions. They encouraged the peasants' discontent with existing conditions. They tried to persuade the peasants that they should share the products of the land in common, but the peasants could see no justice in that. If they ventured to "blaspheme" against religion or the Tsar, as following the thesis of Buckle that a people progresses just in proportion as they get rid of theological conceptions- they sometimes did, they were liable to summary punishment by the peasants.¹

The attitude of the peasant is well described by Wallace, "The muzhik is a very matter of fact, prac-

¹ 1 p. 560

tical person, totally incapable of understanding what Americans call 'hifalutin' tendencies in speech and conduct, and as he listened to the preaching of the new Gospel doubts and questionings spontaneously rose in his mind: 'What do these young people, who betray their gentlefolk origin by their delicate white hands, their foreign phrases, their ignorance of the common things of everyday peasant life, really want? Why are they bearing hardships and taking so much trouble? They tell us it is for our good, but we are not such fools and simpletons as they take us for. They are not doing it all for nothing. What do they expect from us in return? Whatever it is, they are evidently evil-doers, and perhaps moshenniki (swindlers). Devil take them!' and thereupon the cautious muzhik turns his back upon his disinterested self-sacrificing teachers, or goes quietly and denounces them to the police! It is not only in Spain that we encounter Don Quixotes and Sancho Panzas!"¹

There was just one vulnerable point in the peasants' philosophy, their ideas regarding the land.

¹ 1 p. 559

When the propagandists urged that the peasants should have all the land to hold in common, they quite agreed but they had no notion of fighting for it. They were willing to wait patiently until someday the Tsar should find out "the truth" about how the nobles were concealing the "true Freedom" from them and should give them the land. "Both 'propagandists' and 'rioters', therefore, were disappointed: the former to find the real people so ignorant; the latter to find them so unwilling to adopt the road of action."¹ Aside from the "division of the land" the socialistic or communistic theories were of no interest whatever to the peasant. In spite of their very real desire to aid the people there could be no true "consciousness of kind" between the propagandists and the peasants; they lived in entirely different worlds. "After three years of arduous labour the hundreds of apostles could not boast of more than a score or two converts among the genuine working classes."² Professor Pares sums the matter up in this way. "In the end, confounded by the police system, by the distrust and hostility of the peasants, and by the sense of

1 4 p. 408

2 1 p. 560

their own ignorance and failure, they drifted back to the towns. Here they lived without passports- that is, in a permanent state of conspiracy. Countless arrests were made by the Government, and each trace of a propagandist visitor was taken to imply the existence of a powerful local organization. Many persons, such as the future regicide Kibálchich, were arrested for trivial offences, were kept in prison for years without trial, and became confirmed revolutionaries."¹

The police had indeed been very busy. Toward the end of 1873 the arrests became more and more numerous. By the spring of 1874 the St. Petersburg circle were nearly all arrested. Kropotkin spent two years in solitary confinement in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, and many others spent an even longer time in prison without any kind of a trial. The propaganda in the summer of 1874- "the mad summer"- was carried on so openly that arrests were made almost wholesale. Nothing impresses one more when reading accounts of the lives of nihilist leaders than the fact- noted by professor Pares- that nearly all of those who later joined in violent revolutionary

¹ 16 p. 304

activity had been arrested and suffered much for very trivial offenses or for nothing at all, or had seen those nearest and dearest to them suffer in the same way.

5. The Populists.

The activity of the police and the indifference or hostility of the peasants made further propaganda in the old way not only useless but impossible. Owing to the passport system, those who had been compelled to obtain forged passports in order to take part in the propaganda could not go back to their ordinary occupations if they wished. They lived without passports or with forged passports, - a permanent class of "Illegals" liable to arrest at any time. A great deal of discussion took place in the revolutionary ranks as to what they should do. A small group calling themselves "Lavrists" declared that so long as communal property existed there could be no chance of a revolutionary movement among the peasants; their only hope lay with the proletariat, "the workmen of the towns."¹ The great mass of the revolutionists, however, could not give up their ideal of the commune. They found several ways in which

¹ 4 p. 409

the old system of propaganda was at fault.

In the first place, too many of the propagandists had been merely "flying thru the country," taking democratic "outing." Such methods could accomplish nothing. They must take up definite professional work among the people; permanent settlements must be formed in the villages.

Then, too, it was obvious that greater efficiency and secrecy must be secured. The propagandists of 1874 were nearly all arrested; working as they did in the summer of that year they could hardly expect a career of more than a few weeks. For greater safety they needed a new organization. "This organization was started in the autumn of 1876, under the characteristic name of the "Land and Liberty" party- a popular formula already used by the Russian revolutionists some fifteen years before."¹ Only people known to be reliable were taken into the new movement and often their colonies were able to continue their work for some time.

The fundamental axiom of populism was that, "the foundation of every really revolutionary program

must be in the ideals of the people, as they are formed in a certain time and in a certain place.' 'We do not believe,' the program of the new party emphatically stated, 'that it is possible by means of any propaganda to form in the people's minds ideals different from those developed by the whole previous history of the people.'¹ As a consequence of this stand the "populists" gave up- at least temporarily- their doctrinaire theories and accepted only the ideas of "the people." Those ideas the populists interpreted to be: "(1) 'the appropriation of the land by those who till it'- an idea which corresponds more or less to the real historical tradition of the Russian agriculturists; and (2) 'Liberty for everybody to dispose his own affairs'- an ambiguous formula which transformed the former popular wish for 'freedom' (as opposed to 'serfdom') into a principle of Proudhon and Bakounin."²

An agrarian revolution was the only thing possible under this theory. Stenka Razin and Pugatcheff- leaders of popular insurrections in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries- were their heroes. They attempted

¹ 4 p. 411

² 4 pp. 411-412

to organize riots and armed resistance among the peasants but had very little success. In Tchigirin in Southern Russia an attempt was made to rouse the people by a forged manifesto but the mass of the party rejected charlatanism as a means of winning the support of the peasants.

6. The Police System.

During all of this period the police had been doing everything in their power to break up the movement. Arrests were made on the merest suspicion and the punishments were extremely severe. Sentences of ten, twelve, and fifteen years of penal servitude were inflicted for a couple of speeches to workmen or for possessing or lending a prohibited book.¹ Alexander Krpotkin- brother of Peter Kropotkin- who had never had any part in the revolutionary movement, was arrested and sent to Siberia, the only evidence against him being a friendly letter to the exile Lavröff. Alexander Kropotkin was kept in Siberia twelve years and finally committed suicide there. Many similar cases might be cited. The Government seemed to have adopted the principle that it was better to punish ten innocent persons, than to let one guilty man go.

¹ 7 p. 73

Leroy-Beaulieu, who cannot be accused of pro-nihilist sympathies, in speaking of the notorious "Third Section" or State police, says: "Being a controlling apparatus itself not liable to control, this political inquisition was fatally doomed to become, in the hands of hatred, ambition or fear, a weapon of domination, of persecution, of extermination. From Peter the Great to the last days of Alexander II no engine of despotism and oppression, scarcely even the Spanish Inquisition in its time, has mowed down so many human lives, broken up so many careers, all the more that none ever worked more smoothly and noiselessly."¹ "The late Third Section and the police, by the rancor they have excited, by the habitual dissimulation and secretiveness which they bred, are more than anybody answerable for the nihilist propaganda. It is impossible to realize the degree of irritation, of exasperation, into which such treatment can goad generous natures." "You find it easy," a young Russian once said to me, 'to counsel us patience and moderation; but if you had been, like us, subjected for years to this system of terror and delation, if you

¹ 2 Part II p. 132

felt forever suspended over your head the Damocles-sword of arbitrary banishment, all your blood would be at the boiling point, and you too, it may be, would consider all things lawful against those who act as though all things were lawful to them."¹

Under the influence of police persecution the nihilists passed more and more into an attitude of hostility to the government. "Beginning with prison escapes and rescues, they passed without plan and almost unconsciously to armed resistance against arrest, and to murder of traitors, spies, and lower police officials. From this it was an easy step to the murder of a Governor, or even to plots against the life of the Emperor."²

¹ 2 Part II p. 146
² 16 p. 305

Chapter 111

Revolutionary Terrorism.

First Terrorist Acts.

As we have seen, the attitude of terrorism appeared, gradually, almost unconsciously. Besides the necessity of self defense, the revolutionaries felt more and more the desire to avenge the death and exile of their friends and comrades. As for the resistance to arrests, that was the natural result of the extreme penalties inflicted. In short the first acts of violence were due to personal and psychological motives, not to any political designs whatever.

One incident marks rather definitely the beginning of terrorism. Professor Pares gives the following account of it. "The student Bogolyúboff, imprisoned for his share in a notable demonstration before the Kazán Cathedral, refused to uncover before General Trépoff, who, as head of the police, was visiting the prison. In defiance of law, Trépoff ordered him to be flogged. A young girl, Vera Zasulich, who did not know Bogolyúboff, sought an interview with Trépoff, fired at him, threw her revolver on the ground and surrendered herself. (Feb. 5, 1878). The Minister of Justice recommended a trial with a jury, (the ordinary criminal court); the defense disclosed other

arbitrary proceedings of the police, and the jury acquitted the prisoner. The police attempted to rearrest her, but she was rescued by the crowd outside the court, and passed over the frontier. (Acquittal either by a jury or a special court was no protection to political offenders; they were oftentimes immediately rearrested and exiled by administrative process). The censorship allowed full discussion of the trial, and after it even some men of moderate opinions altered their view of terrorism. The terrorists gained confidence, and the effective work of the revived society, 'Land and Liberty', which aimed specially at 'disorganizing' the government dates from this time".¹

Vera Zasúlich was not within the revolutionary ranks, but the flogging of Bogolyúboff raised a storm of protest throughout the Empire and when she heard of the incident she journeyed to St. Petersburg from her distant home in one of the Volga provinces with the deliberate purpose of shooting Trépoff. According to her own statement, she did this in order to force the government to pause and consider the inhuman atrocities that were being daily committed and since she had accomplished her purpose, she was glad to know that Trépoff was recovering. The incident caused a tremendous sen-

(1) 16, page 305.

sation throughout educated Russian society, and there was general rejoicing over the verdict which they felt was a sort of vindication of the Russian conscience. Trépoff, thinking he was about to die, drew up a will which showed that he was extremely rich, whereas he had entered office a poor man. The method by which he had gained his riches was so patent to everyone that on his recovery he was compelled to retire from public life.¹

Several huge and long delayed trials of the propagandists— notably that of 'the 193' in January 1878, gained the revolutionists much sympathy. After imprisonment of from one to four years, and after very many had been released for want of evidence and 75 or more had died or gone insane in prison, 193 persons were brought to trial before a special court. All but 40 were acquitted for lack of evidence but about one half of those acquitted were immediately rearrested and exiled "administratively". "Almost every one of the persons punished and found not guilty", says Mr. Kennan, ultimately became a revolutionist, and before 1885, more than one third of them were in Siberia and two of them, Zheliabov and Sophia Perovsky, had perished on the scaffold with the blood of Alexander II on their hands"².

In the summer of 1878, occurred the trial of one Kowalsky,

(1) 7. pages 80-81

(2) 5. page 209

who, with his friends, had been arrested at a meeting in Odessa and had resisted arrest. At the instance of Mézentseff, chief of the third section, the case was tried before a court martial and Kowalsky was sentenced to death. The revolutionaries felt that a sentence of death for resistance to arrest, when no one was killed, was an act of vengeance, not of justice, and they sent notice to Mézentseff that he would repay with his life, if Kowalsky was executed. On the 14th of August Kowalsky was shot in Odessa and just two days later Mézentseff was struck down with a dagger in broad daylight on one of the principal streets of St. Petersburg, and the assassin, Kravchinsky, escaped. As a result all political cases were turned over to courts-martial and the Tsar issued an appeal to the people for support. Professor Pares gives a concise account of the events that followed. The Zemstvo Liberals "held a conference at Kieff, to which they invited several prominent revolutionaries. These they urged to desist from terrorism; meanwhile the Zemstva would ask the Emperor to restore local government, the law courts and the Press, to the same condition as before the reaction, and also to summon representatives from every Zemstvo, to St. Petersburg. No promise was given, but terrorism did in fact cease, and some revolutionaries joined the Liberals in a

"League of Oppositional Elements". Some ten Zemstva sent answers to the Emperors appeal. The most notable address was that submitted to the Zemstva of Chernígov. It threw a searching light on the evils that were sapping Russian loyalty. 'The struggle with destructive ideas', it said, 'would be possible only if the public possessed its own weapons, freedom of speech and of the Press, of opinions, and of instruction'. Its author, Petrunkevich, was exiled to Kostrama (1879), and afterwards was allowed to buy an estate in Tver. A similar address was drawn up at Tver. Liberal demonstrations in St. Petersburg called forth a strong expression of displeasure from the Emperor. The wholesale arrests continued: there were strikes and street conflicts in St. Petersburg. In February, 1879, Prince Kropotkin (a cousin of the revolutionist Kropotkin) Governor of Kharkoff, was shot down by the hysterical Goldenberg, who afterwards betrayed his colleagues. In March, Mirsky fired at general Drenteln, the successor of Mézentseff. In April Solovyéff fired five shots at the Emperor, without effect. To meet the emergency, the government divided Russia into six districts, each under a governor general with full powers. Gurko in St. Petersburg, Totleben in Odessa, and Chertkoff in Kieff, arrested and exiled wholesale; passports were rigorously examined, and the whole population of

the Capital was subjected to the espionage of the concierges. The government had been very slow to apply the death penalty, but armed resistance to arrest was now punished by death".¹

2. Recasting the Old Theories.

During all this time, what had become of the old ideas of a peaceful propaganda, of work among the peasants, of avoidance of a political revolution? For once the logic of events had carried the nihilists quite beyond their theories and now a new theory had gradually to be built up.

When the 'Land and Liberty' society, organized in 1876, it was found necessary—besides the settlements in the villages—to establish settlements in the towns and cities. These settlements were to coordinate the workings of the village settlements, to procure forged passports, collect money, obtain new recruits from the students or working men, and so on. The genuine "populists" looked down upon the activities of the city centers. However, when the agrarian revolution proved impossible, the workers in the cities gradually took the lead in the whole movement.² The working men proved very susceptible to propaganda, and a strike often came before the propagandists were prepared to take full advantage of it. The workingmen

(1) 16. pages 306-307.

(2) 4. page 413

resented the childish and elementary character of the propaganda among them. "We are not plain peasants", they asserted, to the utter horror of their populist leaders, in whose eyes a workman was merely a bad sort of peasant".¹ In 1879, the "Northern Alliance of Workmen", was organized, and intellectuals were formally excluded from the organization. This in a way, may be taken to mark the beginning of modern social democracy in Russia. Marxian socialism has always insisted upon the necessity of "Class consciousness", whereas the nihilist movement sought to abolish all class distinctions. The workmen were strongly in favor of political reforms, which they felt were as necessary and valuable to them as to the Liberals. The periodical of the "Land and Liberty" society, protested against this attitude, but it soon became evident that there were similar opinions within the "Land and Liberty" party itself. The city members of the party adopted a new policy of action entirely contrary to the tradition of populism.²

The great early leaders of nihilism—Herzen and Bakunin—had demanded no revolution; they had announced their readiness to support the Tsar if he would grant the social and economic reforms they desired. So also those who now adopted violent measures had at first no

(1) 4. page 414.

(2) 4. page 415.

definite political program. After the assassination of Mézentseff in 1878, they issued a demand for, (1) "liberty of speech and of the press; (2) trial by jury for political offenses; (3) amnesty for all past political crimes;"¹ thus leaving completely on one side the question of limiting the absolute power of the Tsar.

The attitude of the government rapidly forced the revolutionists into a more definite attitude. As Mr. Pares says, arrests were "wholesale", and administrative exile became the general rule. Says Mr. Kennan, "It was not terrorism that necessitated administrative exile in Russia; it was merciless severity and banishment without due process of law that provoked terrorism".² In 1878, the Tsar actually used his power to increase the penalties of some of the condemned.³ The application of the death penalty, something entirely contrary to Russian custom and tradition, was especially hateful not only to the revolutionists, but to the Liberal public in general.

In the summer of 1879, a meeting- a "congress", so called- was held at Lipetsk and here was formed the beginning of a new party, terrorist and political. Many members of the "Land and Liberty" society however, did not wish to enter a political struggle; this led to a

(1) 6. page 177.

(2) 11. vol. 1 page 258.

(3) 6. page 176.

split in the party. In the autumn of 1879 the "Politicals" declared their independence, and the "Land and Liberty" society was disbanded. Each group adopted the name of its clandestine periodical; the "politicals^{or terrorists}" became known as the Narodnaya Vólia or Narodovoltsi, (The Peoples Will) and the "moderates" or populists as the Tchorny Perediél, (a term which means a universal division of lands and is usually rendered into English as the "Black Partition"). The separation, however, was a friendly one, and for a time the organ of the "Black Partition", was published on the secret press of the "Peoples Will".

In 1879 the Narodnaya Vólia published the following program:

- (1) "Popular representation, elected by universal suffrage, and with supreme authority in all questions of the general interest.
- (2) A large local autonomy, and elective nomination to all offices.
- (3) Independence of the mir as an economic and administrative unity.
- (4) Nationalization of the land.
- (5) A series of measures tending to bring all the factories into the hands of the workers.
- (6) Liberty of conscience, of speech, of the press, of meeting, of associations, and of electoral agitation.

(7) Universal suffrage, without any restriction whatever.

(8) The replacing of the standing army by a territorial army".¹

This represents rather an advanced socialistic program, but not more advanced than many of the Liberals themselves were willing to accept. This could not, of course, be accomplished all at once; the "Peoples' Will-ists", themselves recognized that, and declared that they only desired to lay this program before the people. The one thing that they did demand was some sort of a representative assembly.

Leroy-Beaulieu, in commenting upon this says: "During the sanguinary ~~struggle~~ with the authorities on which the revolutionists had entered they changed not only their tactics and plan of campaign, but also their standpoint. At one time they had valued very lightly the middle class freedom of Europe and looked down upon it with haughty superiority; but now they discovered that the political freedom which they so much despised, was of immense value as a bulwark against administrative arbitrariness, and the means of securing the right of free propagandism.

"This conception of things was something new to Nihilism, and transformed its character radically. The struggle against administrative violence had passed from the obscure, nebulous domain of

(1)6. page 145.

Utopia, to the firm ground of practical politics. The aim of the revolutionists was now the overthrow of the autocracy. Their desperate campaign against the sovereign and his government had now a clear and definite purpose: the abolition of absolutism. And so it happened that while they aroused society by the terrible nature of their deeds, they kept approaching the standpoint of Liberalism, and the generality of the people. In their manifests they declared themselves ready to lay down their arms on the condition that the sovereign give his assent to the convocation of a national assembly. By this remarkable volte face nihilism has been transformed into that constitutionalism which it formerly treated with so much contempt".¹

A certain passive support and sympathy was given to the terrorists throughout educated Russian society. Zilliacus says, "If the innermost history of this period ever comes to be written, it will undoubtedly astound most people by showing how universal was the support which the terrorists received, and which emanated partly from quarters where the very least sympathy of any kind might be expected for their cause".² They certainly received much more sympathy than the propagandists had. The reason for this is two-fold. In the first place the work of the propagandists was obscure and

(1) 7. pages 86-87

(2) 7. page 87.

little known; they might be imprisoned and exiled by the score and few would know or care. On the other hand the work of the terrorists was spectacular; every attempt of importance caused a thrill throughout the Empire. But by far the most fundamental reason for the Liberal sympathy with the terrorists, was that now they were both working for the same end. The Liberals had been little interested in projects for the "free federation of communes", and so forth, but they were profoundly interested in the limitation of the power of the autocrat, in the securing of freedom from the arbitrary arrest and exile from which they had suffered almost as much as had the nihilists. The Liberals, of course, regretted the use of violence but where the heart sympathizes with the end to be attained, it is easy to justify, or at least to excuse, the method employed in gaining the desired end. Of this fact the present conflict in Europe has given us plentiful evidence.

It is easily seen what a long way the terrorists had gone from the early speculative anarchism of the nihilists. This offers a curious inversion of the popular notions on the subject. The early nihilists- who were anarchists of a sort- were peaceful and desired no political revolution; on the other hand the terrorists, who adopted

violence as their only means at hand in a political struggle, were not anarchists at all, but constitutionalists. Zheliabov, one of the regicides, said during his trial, "We are for the state, not for anarchism. We recognize that the government will always exist, and that the state must necessarily remain so long as there are any public interests to be served".¹ That they were not advocates of any willful or anarchistic theory of violence is clearly shown by their declaration at the time of the ^{ass}assassination of President Garfield. The Executive committee of the "Peoples Will", expressed sympathy with the American people and also "protested in the name of all Russian revolutionaries against such violent acts as the assault of Guiteau. In a country where the liberty of the individual makes an honest struggle of opinions possible, and where the free will of the people determines not only the law, but even the personality of the rulers, political assassination as a weapon, is only an expression of the same spirit of despotism, the destruction of which in Russia we consider to be our task. Despotism of an individual is equally as despicable, as despotism of a party; violence can be justified only when it is directed against violence".²

The party of the "Black Partition", was quite thrown into

(1) 4. page 421

(2) 4 page 421

the background by the activity of the "Peoples Will" party. True to populist theory the former opposed any attempt at a political revolution; propaganda was now impossible and the "Black Partitionists", were forced to remain inactive. They accused the terrorists of having gone over to the bourgeois Liberals, but in spite of their theory, their hearts were with the active strugglers. On the other hand the Narydovoltsi-although they felt compelled by circumstances to take up a political struggle- were at heart still with the old theory. They justified a political revolution only on the grounds that it was absolutely indispensable to make possible the preparations of an agrarian revolution. Ordinarily, they declared, it would be the business of the Liberals or bourgeoisie to secure this political revolution, but in Russia the Liberals had been too weak to accomplish their part, so the radicals would have to secure the political revolution also. Gradually, however, a political revolution came to be looked upon as a good in itself. During 1879 and 1880, most of the leaders of the "Black Partition", fled abroad, and here, through the medium of much discussion, they passed rapidly over to the standpoint of modern social democracy or Marxian socialism.

3. The Executive Committee.

The Party of the "Peoples Will", appointed an "Executive Committee", and this committee began at once to plan for work. They centralized the organization and introduced almost military discipline with a view of securing greater efficiency and secrecy. Their numbers were never large, and every arrest made a perceptible gap. The feeling was general that they should no longer stop at mere officials, but that they should go to the root of the matter at once and assassinate the Tsar.

Professor Pares gives the following account of the succeeding events. "The conspirators at once organized a hunt after the life of the Emperor. They had their own mining experts; Kibálchich possessed an unusual knowledge of explosives. In the summer of 1879, fifty persons worked at the construction of three mines at Odessa, Alexandrovsk, and Moscow. The Emperor's train was to be destroyed on the road from Livadia; but the mine at Alexandrovsk failed to explode, and that at Moscow destroyed the wrong train. In January the societies press was tracked down, but those in charge defended it long enough to enable them to destroy all compromising papers. Khal'türin next obtained work as an ename^ler at the Winter Palace,

mapped out the rooms, and with remarkable patience and boldness, worked daily at a mine two stories below the Emperor's dining room. A plan of the palace was found an accomplice, and stricter guard was kept within the walls; but the dynamite hidden under Khaltúrin's pillow was not discovered. On February 17, 1880, he fired his mine. Ten soldiers were killed, and fifty three wounded, but owing to a fortunate delay, the Emperor was not in the dining room. Khalturin escaped, to suffer for another crime, under another name, in 1882".¹

The explosion in the Winter Palace made an especial impression on the Tsar. He established a "Supreme Disposing Commission", to deal with the revolution, and appointed as its head a Liberal official General, Loris-Melikoff, with virtually the powers of a dictator. Melikoff had been a commander in the Russian army, and as Governor-General of Kharkoff he had won the respect of the city. The Tsar had sent out an appeal to the people for aid and support, but "the greater number of the Zemstvos responded merely by commonplace addresses, expressive of barren devotion, which could not materially strengthen the government. Two or three assemblies only ventured in their reply, a discreet hint at the reforms which they thought might help to lay the spirit of rebellion. The Zemstvo of Kharkoff alone had

(1) 16. page 308.

the pluck to declare that, the law forbidding them all discussion on general affairs, the Zemstva could not possibly offer their support in the struggle against the revolution, unless their rights and competence were legally extended".¹

Loris-Melikoff gave the press a measure of freedom and appointed a commission to revise the press law. Count Dimitry Tolstoy was dismissed amid general rejoicings and several more Liberal ministers took the place of the conservative ones.² Melikoff also appointed a revisory commission under the presidency of Cherévin, to investigate the cases of persons exiled by administrative process. We may see something of the terrible abuse ~~of~~ administrative exile from the fact that, up to the 23d of January, 1881, General Cherévin's commission had examined the cases of 650 such persons, and had recommended that 328, or more than one half of them, be immediately released and return^{ed} to their homes".³ The notorious "Third Section", was "abolished", by making it a branch of the police department of the Ministry of the Interior. As Beaulieu says, "this really served to mask a ~~fusion~~ fusion of forces",⁴ and the political police lost nothing of their power.

The revolutionaries distrusted Melikoff; they were too

(1) Part 2. page 200.

(4) 2. Part 11 page 135

(2) 16. page 309.

(3) 11. Vol. 1, page 272.

embittered to be easily reconciled. They felt that these measures were mere outward hypocritical liberalism, as in truth the abolition of the "Third Section", was, though probably not through any fault of Melikoff's. However, the revolutionists did wait for more than a year before they made any other attempt on the Tsar's life.

Meanwhile Melikoff was quietly working on a project which should give the people some slight representation in the government. "The projected reforms were to be prepared for the government from materials collected by it and submitted to drafting commissions in the autumn. Their conclusions should then be debated by a General Commission, consisting of members and a president nominated by the Emperor, with elected delegates from the Zemstva and chief towns. The powers of this Commission were to be strictly consultative; and its conclusions with the comment of the Minister concerned, would come before the Council of State for further discussion".¹

This very modest proposal is what is very often referred to as Melikoff's "constitution". We can readily imagine that it would not have caused very great enthusiasm, either among the revolutionists or the liberals; nevertheless it is one of the tragic circumstances of history that it was fated never to be given a trial,

(1) 16. page 310

for no one can say with assurance that it might not have developed into something much greater. Alexander II, himself, felt that it was going to be an "assembly of notables". After much hesitation, the Tsar signed Melikoff's proposal and returned it to him on March 13.

In the meantime the terrorists in complete ignorance of this new proposal of a "constitution", had completed their plans for the assassination of the Tsar. The party of the "Peoples Will", now had ^{twelve} ~~12~~ local branches and had ~~enrolled~~ ^{enrolled} about five hundred members.

On March 13, 1881, six bomb throwers were at their posts awaiting the signal from Sophia Perovsky. The Emperor, after visiting the Michael Riding School, was driving down the deserted Catherine Canal when a boy of ^{nineteen} ~~19~~, Rysakoff, threw a bomb which killed many of his escorts. Alexander dismounted to attend to the wounded, and walked fearlessly down the street towards the assassin. "What, that one?" he asked, "why he's nice looking". He had ~~had~~ hardly turned back when another conspirator, Grinevetsky, threw a second bomb, which tore all the lower part of his body to pieces; he was able to whisper "Home quick, take me to the palace to die there"! He reached the palace unconscious, and died the same afternoon¹ The terrorists had at last accomplished their immediate end; they had played their

(1) 16. pages 310-311

last card, and the bomb which killed Alexander II, also gave the death blow to their movement.

4. The End of Terrorism.

The police immediately recovered their oldtime zeal, and hundreds of arrests were made. Six of the regicides were tried and condemned to death and five of them publicly executed. The terrorists by their crowning act had really very greatly lessened the greatest danger to the government, the very general sympathy with the terrorists on the part of the public. Many people with liberal tendencies who did not condemn very strongly the attacks on officials, were shocked to find that the revolutionaries spared not even the sacred person of the Tsar. As for the peasants, they thought they knew now who the nihilists were; the nihilists they said, were their enemies the nobles, who had killed the "Tsar Emancipator" because he was going to give them the land. It is perfectly plain that the terrorists had made no plans for seizing the power of government for themselves. That a group of people should have deliberately provoked a crisis by assassinating the Tsar, without having made any practical plans for taking advantage of the situation, seems incredible, but it is true.

It has been suggested that they expected the Liberals to seize the government, but they had long been accusing the Liberals of cowardice, and well knew that the Liberals were totally unprepared. They may have vaguely looked for a popular insurrection; if so, their hopes were disappointed. The heir to the throne, the future Alexander III, was supposed to be liberal, and this fact, together with their intense bitterness toward Alexander II, is the only explanation offered for their deed. The murder of Alexander II, was a grave tactical error, to say the least; indeed at no time did the nihilists give evidence of much political sagacity or shrewdness of a ^{practical} political sort.

The hope that Alexander III, would adopt a liberal policy was sadly disappointed. "It is believed that he at first intended to issue Boris-Melikoff's project, as the last testament of his father; anyhow the minister made an announcement to this effect on March 17. Three days later the Emperor called together a special conference; nine ministers were for publishing the project; and five members, specially invited, were against it. While the ministers were still discussing, an imperial manifesto had already been drafted by Alexander's former tutor, Pobedonostseff. It appeared on March 23.

"The Voice of God", it said, "orders us to stand firm at the helm of government..... with faith in the strength and truth of the autocratic power, which we are called to strengthen and preserve, for the good of the people, from every kind of encroachment".¹

At this declaration of allegiance to the reactionary party, Melikoff and the liberal ministers resigned. Reaction gradually became more and more pronounced. Administrative exile became even more common than before, and this reign is especially noted for its terrible religious persecutions.

Gradually utter discouragement settled down upon the nihilist ranks. They kept their secret press running for some time under the very eyes of the police and a few sporadic terrorists attempts were made, but all to no purpose. In the bitterness of failure, dissensions broke out within the nihilist camp itself. The Executive Committee was charged with attempting to despotically control the whole revolutionary movement. A number of nihilists, in prison and elsewhere, formally recanted, and made their peace with the government. Leo Deutsch, one of the members of the revolutionary party, in his memoirs, "relates how the tide of revolution ebbed rapidly at this time". "Both in Russia and abroad",

(1) 16. page 312.

he says, "I had seen how the earlier enthusiasm had given way to scepticism; men had lost faith, though many of them would not allow that it was so. It was clear to me that a reaction had set in for many years".¹ In 1884, Tikhomirov, wrote to one of his friends in Russia(Lopátiw): "If you do not want to satisfy yourself with trifles, come away and await better times".² Nihilism, as a movement, was at an end in Russia; the intellectuals had exhausted their energy.

5. Conclusion.

The Nihilist movement is an interesting and in some respects a unique thing in the history of the world. In the first place the situation was unique. In most of our western countries, a greater or less degree of political freedom had been won long before the question of socialism arose. On the other hand, in Russia, a country with hardly the beginnings of political liberty, a country just emerging from the feudal system, there arose this group of radicals, these young dreamers of dreams, who hoped to transform the nation at one step into the ideal communistic state of the future. The idea of democracy came to Russia, not before nihilism but with the nihilist movement.

(1) 1. page 572.

(2) 1. page 573.

The spectacle of some thousands of young people of education and culture, even a number of the nobility, struggling to bring about an agrarian revolution, is certainly an unusual one. One is reminded of a remark that someone made, that he could understand the "Notables" of Louis XVI, making a revolution to gain their privileges, but he could not understand the Decembrists making a revolution to lose theirs. We should understand, however, that the nobles who took part in the nihilist movement were acting, not as members of the nobility, but as individuals who had gone over to the "intellectuals", viewpoint. Nihilism was primarily a movement of the "intellectuals", who were struggling not alone for the economic freedom of the peasant, but also for their own intellectual and moral freedom.

The revolutionary movement was not at an end in Russia, with the failure of Nihilism. A movement began again in the next decade, - particularly after the famine of 1891, - but this was primarily a movement of organized workmen, of the proletariat, making use of strikes, organized protests and so on, after the fashion of modern social democracy the world over. One of their first aims, is the attainment of political reforms.

Nihilism, as a movement of the "Intellectuals", had a peculiar character all its own. Alexinsky says, "This is visible more especially in revolutionary tactics and in the form of terrorism. The individual policy of terror, as a system of political action, has been in Russia the product of the ideology of the "Intellectuals". The latter, who do not participate directly in production, being independent of the economic mechanism and unconscious of any bond between themselves and the social mass, are inclined to oppose their personality to society, to consider the phenomena of social life, less as a result of the material forces of nature than as manifestations of personality. On this account, it seems to the "Intellectuals", possible to transform a social or political system, by causing a personage, or series of personages, to disappear. In such a system they do not see the reflection of the grouping of the social classes, but a combination of individuals and persons. Hence "individual terror", as a method of political action. Another source of this policy may sometimes be found in the desire of self-sacrifice, a desire almost mystical. As to the Russian workers, their sympathies are all for the organized action of the masses"¹.

(1) 3. pages 169-170.

The tradition of Nihilism is still preserved to some extent among the Revolutionary Socialists today, and the Russian intellectuals are still in closer touch and sympathy with the workers than is the case with most countries, but Nihilism as a distinctive movement of the "Intellectuals" has ended.

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