

**KING STORK AND KING
LOG. A STUDY OF
MODERN RUSSIA, IN
TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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VOL. II.

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KING STORK AND KING LOG:

A STUDY OF MODERN RUSSIA.

EDUCATED RUSSIA UNDER ALEXANDER III.

I.

THE opposition in Russia has always been chiefly stimulated by sympathy for the down-trodden masses. If autocracy could make the peasants prosperous and contented, this would be an infallible means for preventing revolution. The feeling of personal independence is weak in Russia, compared with that engrossing pity and love for the masses into which all our social instincts seem absorbed.

But the bureaucratic despotism cannot benefit the masses. Despotism implies suppression of individual initiative, educational restrictions, obstacles to any concerted action, and general lawlessness, which must all prove most baleful

to the class that has no means of self-defence. The peasants have fared very badly under Alexander III., as we have just seen ; and the worse their position, the more favourable the soil for revolutionary agitation. .

Judging by the evidence of facts, we must admit that the Government was conscious of this close relation between its sins against the masses and the danger of retribution.

Although there were no terrorist attempts to provoke reprisals, we notice through all the reign of Alexander III. a constant increase of precaution against his enemies. The system of administrative punishments, directed, as it is well known, against those who are merely suspected of being likely some day to become political offenders — this iniquitous system received a new development. Until then, exile to distant provinces, including the inhabitable part of Siberia, had been considered sufficient to protect the throne from the attacks of young people—students of both sexes who were only just legally of age. Alexander III. did not feel secure on these terms. An important aggravation was introduced in the form of *imprisonment by administrative order*, i.e. without any form of trial, without any proper examination

of the accused, who often do not know either the names of their accusers, nor the exact nature of the charges which have been brought against them.

In the Wyborg district of St. Petersburg there is a prison, which is called colloquially "The Cross," on account of its shape. But it is not by the shape alone that it deserves to be named after the emblem of suffering. There is no worse prison in the Empire. The isolation is complete, the confinement strictly solitary, with hard labour, and prohibition of books, except those which the Government lends the prisoners. There is no communication with the outer world.

In the autumn of 1887 "The Cross" began to be populated with administrative prisoners. In the beginning of 1888 "The Cross" had already twenty-five inmates; soon it vied with the House of Preventative Detention, of Shpalerny Street, the number of administrative prisoners immured there being already over a hundred, and now the prison is filled to its full capacity.

This is an altogether new departure in the efforts of the Government to stamp out opposition. The terms of imprisonment which may

be thus inflicted arbitrarily are fixed at three years, a terribly long term, for Russians in particular, who, with their nervous organization, cannot support, as Galkin Vrassky admits, more than six months of solitary confinement.

The experiment is new, and up to the present the terms of imprisonment inflicted by the administration are in most cases short—varying from six months to sixteen. It is rarely over two years. But *l'appétit vient en mangeant!* In less than five years this first hesitation has been got over, and the term of imprisonment by administrative order has been increased to ten years.

In the meantime, let me tell the reader the story of one of its first inmates, a girl condemned to what was then the longest term—two and a half years—whose case will serve as a sample for the rest, and will throw some light upon certain practices of the Russian police.

In 1888, a certain Bychkov, a Siberian exile, escaped from his place of banishment and arrived at Moscow in the autumn of the same year. He had little money, no passport, and no acquaintances in the town. In this extremity he went into a small coffee-room near

the University, and, after having observed for some time the people who were there, he fixed upon a girl, a perfect stranger to him, whom he followed in the street when she left the coffee-room. Here he approached her, and told her who he was and what was his position. The girl proved to be Alexandra Kopylova, a student of liberal views. She believed Bychkov's story, and promised to do what she could for him. But she could not do much. In October Bychkov was re-arrested by the police, who made a domiciliary visit at the rooms of Kopylova as well. Nothing compromising was discovered, except one copy of a Geneva revolutionary (Radical) paper, called *Self-Government*. She was, as a matter of course, imprisoned. But the police had nothing particular to be proud of. Bychkov himself was not a very great prize, for he was a simple exile, who had nothing more important against him than a slight connection with peaceful propaganda among the St. Petersburg workmen. The police resolved to utilize him in another way. After a long interrogation, Bychkov was taken to the district prison (*chast*); but here it somehow occurred that all the cells were full, and there was no room for the new

inmate. The officer of gendarmerie declared himself much displeased, but agreed to the director's proposal to lock up the prisoner for the night in a room in the fire tower. It thus happened that Bychkov was confined in an ordinary room with a window looking upon the street. It was rather high, but it was near the water-pipe running along the wall outside, and there was a slanting roof of the lower storey which could be utilized for the descent. The prisoner could not lose such an opportunity, and in the dead of the night, when he thought the house plunged in sleep, he opened the window and descended into the street, congratulating himself upon a happy escape.

But his position was still a very precarious one, for he had to find a hiding-place at once, and that was not easy at such a time. He thought of a man of good position, a Liberal, a Professor of the Moscow University, whom he had met once at Kopylova's room, and he went to knock at his door. He was recognized, told his story, and was admitted into the house.

This is precisely what the police expected, for the whole affair was arranged on purpose, and Bychkov was followed from the prison to the house where he found refuge. But he could