

WHEN THE RUSSIANS WERE ON OUR DOORSTEP!

An Account Of Tolstoy's Tuckton Colony

By CHRIS MUNNION

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THE sensational launching of the space satellite by the Soviet Union has earned new respect for the Russians in the eyes of the world. This awe-inspiring scientific achievement is a far cry from the paradoxical pomp and poverty of early Russia.

The incredible development of the Soviet Union began with the uprising of the peasants supported by a few sympathetic aristocrats who were exiled for their trouble but continued strongly opposed to the Czarist dynasty.

One such exile outpost was situated at Tuckton, where Russian revolutionaries published and printed literature, including a newspaper, which reached the suppressed Russian peasants in the farthest corners of that continent, revealing the true picture of the oppression and despotism of the Government at that time.

The colony at Tuckton House (which is now Tuckton Nursing Home) was closely connected with the great Russian novelist and reformer Tolstoy, for the leader at Tuckton was Count Vladimir Tchertkoff, who was the literary agent and representative in England of the great writer.

In 1905 a journalist from the old "Bournemouth Graphic" visited Tuckton House to interview Count Tchertkoff. The resultant article was published as a pamphlet, a surviving copy of which is the property of Mr. Donovan Lane, an authority on local history.

"TOLSTOY COLONY."

The journalist describes the settlement as he saw it. "This tiny colony, known to people in the neighbourhood as the 'Tolstoy Colony' has for some years past been engaged in the work of emancipating the Russian peasantry.

"I was shown, into a plainly furnished living room. There were no signs of luxury there; a table strewn with papers stood in the centre of the room; one or two Windsor chairs stood against the wall and pictures of reformers, including Tolstoy, adorned the walls."

Tchertkoff told the journalist something of his life and how he had become an exile. Vladimir Tchertkoff was at one time a wealthy landowner and an officer in the Imperial Guard. As a young man in the Court of the Czar he tasted the full pleasures and dissipations of the wealthy.

But it was not very long before his thoughts took a more serious turn and he became a social reformer and an intimate friend and helper of Tolstoy. He became an exile after he drew public attention to the secret attempt of the Russian Government to exterminate many peasants who refused military service.

"We call ourselves the 'Free Age Press,'" continued the Count. "Here we have a complete outfit of printing machinery for producing in Russian type prohibited pamphlets of an advanced and revolutionary character including Tolstoy's vetoed works. Our books and papers are sent to London. Paris. Berlin, Geneva and they find their way into Russia itself,"

RICE PAPER.

Tchertkoff then showed the journalist around the printing works, where many men were working as compositors, binders, photographers and printers. The paper was printed on

a German machine and to enable the copies to be folded very small, thin rice paper was used for the Russian edition.

After watching women and children of the colony working in the garden, where the Russians grew and cultivated their own food, the journalist was shown Tchertkoff's private room on the first floor where thousands of pamphlets lined the walls. "Here locked away in boxes are quantities of literature and correspondence which Tolstoy entrusted in the Count's care." wrote the reporter.

There were sometimes as many as thirty inmates in the colony coming from many different countries. Countess Tchertkoff lived in a house near the settlement called "Slavanka."

"I REMEMBER . . ."

One old Christchurch resident who remembers the Russians very well is 72-year-old Mrs. A. M. Brown, of 17, Stour Road, who 54 years ago was postmistress at Southbourne.

The Russians came to my Post Office frequently," Mrs. Brown told me. "They posted masses of revolutionary literature which they printed at their house. I especially remember Count Tchertkoff—he was a fine upstanding character with bright red hair and a red beard, but he spoke very gently and was very kind.

"There was one of the group, however, that used to frighten me," continued Mrs. Brown. "He was a large fellow named Jago, who always boasted of his anarchist achievements."

Miss A. Summers, of 86, Stour Road, also remembers the Russians very well, for she worked with them once or twice a week making dresses for the children.

MEMORIES.

"I have very pleasant memories of those days," said Miss Summers, "Madame Tolstoy (Tchertkoff's sister-in-law, who was married to one of Tolstoy's sons) and Countess Tchertkoff were very kind. We used to sit altogether at a large table for our meals."

Miss Summers also remembers the Russians visiting a house in Bridge Street (now the Art Studio) to have their photographs taken by a Christchurch man, a Mr. Tom Tapsell, who returned to Russia with the others in 1908.

FOOTNOTE.—A recently published book on Rheumatism, a copy of which is in the Druitt Library, has a preface written by a Marusia Tolstoy and signed London, 1955.

TOLSTOY'S TUCKTON COLONY

Sir,—Please kindly allow me to correct an error which appeared in the account of "Tolstoy's Tuckton Colony".

When I was at the Southbourne Post Office 54 years ago, I was the clerk in charge and telegraphist, not the postmistress. Southbourne at that time was in the Christchurch postal area and Miss Fuller was the Head Postmistress. All literature, etc., posted at Southbourne from the Tuckton Printing Works of Count Tchertkoff, was despatched by me to Christchurch where it was dealt with.

Yours, etc.,

A. M. BROWN.

(nee Guppy.) 17, Stour Road, Christchurch.