

## **An Exiled Russian Noble in Christchurch.**

Bournemouth Graphic 1902



THE HOME OF THE COLONISTS, SHOWING TCHERTKOFF AND FAMILY IN FRONT.

I have had the pleasure of meeting Vladimir Tchertkoff, an exiled Russian nobleman, upon several occasions, and he has always impressed me as being a great man.

### WHO IS HE?

He is a member of an ancient family, which, for many generations, has been distinguished for brave soldiers and great men. He was himself an officer of the Imperial Guard, and a brilliant member of the Imperial Court. With the late Emperor he was on intimate terms, being one of the favourite companions of his leisure hours. His is one of those intense natures to whom a middle course is impossible, and thus he entered with all his energy into the gay life of the Russian aristocracy.

### THE DAWN OF A NEW LIFE.

Amid the distractions of the Court the condition of the Russian poor appealed to him, and he conceived the ideal of human brotherhood, which caused him to give up his position in the army and sever his connection with the Court. Soon he was living a life of simplicity. He translated into Russian the works of the greatest thinkers in the world. The writings of Buddha, of Socrates and Plato, of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, were thus introduced, and twenty million copies of these editions have been put into the hands of the peasants.

### EXILE!

He then collected information about the conditions and sufferings of the various persecuted religious sects. The Government was afraid of his giving publicity to its atrocious deeds in relation to its victims, so he became a marked man, and was followed by spies. Finally, his house was invaded and his papers seized. As his family occupied a high position at Court, when he was arrested his mother was asked if she preferred that he should be exiled in Courland, under strict police surveillance, or that he should be banished from Russia altogether. She referred the matter to him, and he chose the latter, in order that he might be able to communicate with the Russian people.

### RUSSIAN CHURCH.

He was brought up in the conventional orthodox creed of his country, and says: "I felt the imperative necessity of carefully testing the authority upon which were based the beliefs inculcated into me from infancy. This, naturally, very soon elicited misgivings as to the reliableness of the miraculous and dogmatic element, until then inseparably interwoven in my mind with the true religious spirit. It appeared to me that mankind, although outwardly so ostentatiously exalting Christ's teaching, not only refrained from practically realising it, but did not even theoretically recognise its true meaning." Speaking of the

## RUSSIAN PEASANTS.

he avowed that "the average Russian peasant, owing to the Government's compulsory demands of conformity to the Church and to the hypnotic influence of Church ceremonies, has a kind of idolatrous awe of those rites, images, relics, etc., which form the essential part of public worship in the Established Church, although he is becoming much more indifferent to this formal, conventional, and grossly superstitious mode of worship. The moment the Russian peasant has the leisure and opportunity to think for himself, he inevitably assumes a critical attitude towards the stale dogmas and senseless ritual of the official Church."

## HIS HOME.

He is living, at Tuckton House, near Christchurch, a private independent life. The house has been purchased by his mother, and she supplies him with the necessary funds to live there. All his father's property consisted in landed estates, and his father, knowing that if he left any of these landed properties to his son, he would give the land to the peasants who farm it, therefore left it to his mother, and she allows him all she considers necessary for his private needs.

## HIS WORK.

He is occupied in publishing in Russian and introducing into his country books printed irrespective of the Governmental censorship. He also translates Leo Tolstoy, his most intimate friend's writings, into English, being the honorary literary representative of that writer outside of Russia. He is the editor, and his wife the trustee of this publishing concern, which is supported by them as well as by voluntary contributions of Russian sympathisers, and at present widely known under the title of "The Free Age Press."

## HIS FAMILY.

His own family consists of a delicate wife and son. Two maids have come with them from Russia, preferring not to leave them in their exile. They are not treated as servants, but as members of the family.

## HIS HELPERS.

He has a staff of helpers, which consists of secretaries, clerks, composers, machinists, etc. These are largely paid out of what should be spent on himself. He asserts, "The influence for good of our lives ultimately depends not so much on what we *preach*, as on what we *are*." He believes in the universal brotherhood of the human race, and treats his assistants and friends as brothers.

## HIS MEETINGS.

He has helped to organise and participates in meetings every Sunday evening in the Wilberforce Hall, at seven o'clock. There he likes to associate with others for mutual improvement towards the attainment of a higher life. He is a Christian Radical, and believes that the existing economical conditions are contrary to the teaching of Jesus. At these meetings anyone is allowed to speak or say just what he or she pleases.

## HIS BOOKS.

He presented me with a set of his books. On reaching home I opened one, entitled, "What is Religion?" and read part of page 73, as follows: "As the religious belief of the people, so is

the social organisation. This the Governments and ruling classes know, and therefore they always support that religious teaching which corresponds with their advantageous position. The Governments and ruling classes know that all the true Christian religion repudiates power founded on violence, as well as the distinction of classes, the accumulation of riches, executions, wars."

H. E.