

UNIVERSITIES OF THE WORLD

BY

CHARLES FRANKLIN THWING, LL.D.

PRESIDENT OF WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
AND ADELBERT COLLEGE



New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1911

All rights reserved

XIII

THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. PETERSBURG

AFTER a great war, a great educational revival! The University of Berlin was the child of Prussia humiliated by Napoleon, determined to become his conqueror. The great Civil War in the United States was followed by a mighty quickening of the higher education. The Crimean War laid low the Asiatic idols of Nicholas I., struck off the administrative fetters with which the Emperor had bound schools and universities, and breathed a noble spirit of educational reform into the Russian nation. From the crowning of Nicholas I. in 1825 down to the outbreak of the Crimean War the Asiatic type of civilization had been developed. Upon no form of the national life did the policy of repression fall with more crushing weight than upon the educational. Every form of education, and especially the higher, was oppressed, limited by law, and made the object of general ridicule and public contempt. Colonels and counts became professors of literature in the universities, and policemen lecturers on phi-

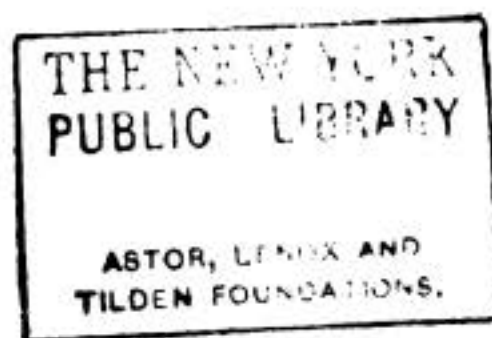
losophy. Worthiness in a teacher was no longer made a condition for becoming a teacher. Men entered the university, not to become scholars, but government servants. Places on faculties, as places in the army, were bought and sold; bribery became an organized system. The directions given regarding the conditions to be observed in the conveying of instruction were absurdly definite, and the provision made respecting the subjects to be taught was at once sad and ridiculous. In the year 1852 the study of Greek was abolished in the universities on the ground of being dangerous to the state. The number of students in each university was by law limited to three hundred.

From such a nadir of educational degradation the revelations of the Crimean War rudely and thoroughly awakened Russia. All Asiatic dreams had vanished. The Turks had *not* been driven from Europe; Jerusalem had *not* become a new Russian capital; the city of Constantine had *not* become the city of Nicholas; a new Panslavic empire had *not* been proclaimed.

When a nation has fallen into the condition in which Prussia lay in 1806 and Russia in 1856, the wise know that the chief, if not the only, method of recovery lies in educa-



UNIVERSITY OF ST. PETERSBURG.
Physical Institute.
Preparation Room of Institute.



tion. Recovery is not secured by spasms of reforms. Recovery is the result of causes which change fundamental conditions and work modifications of character. The successor of Nicholas, Alexander II., returned, therefore, to the policy of Peter the Great and of Alexander I. — the policy of education. Commissions on education were appointed; new university statutes were adopted; the universities were made independent in the management of their internal affairs; matters of instruction and administration were committed to those fit to consider such matters; revenues were increased; teaching staffs were enlarged; requirements for admission to the universities as well as the requirements for graduation were stiffened; the value of the new scientific studies was enhanced, and additional emphasis was laid on the general worth of the ancient classics.

The vast reënforcement given to higher education in all Russia by that great leader and great man, Alexander II., in the very first and all the years of his reign still remains. Many decades of imperial indifference will be required for the wiping out of the results of the reformation which he instituted, or for the repression of the forces of culture and scholarly fellowship which he created and



enlarged. No one of the five universities of the empire, or of the three universities of the provinces, holds these results more securely than the University of St. Petersburg.

The progress of the last half-century of the University of St. Petersburg and its present condition of power are fittingly suggested by its material environment. It looks out on the finest river which any university of the world commands. The Neva flows swiftly and strongly by between widely separated banks. These banks are themselves great houses and palaces. The river is spanned by the Dworzowy bridge. At the farther end rises the ecclesiastical golden spire of the Admiralty Building. Near by the Winter Palace shows forth its splendors and the Hermitage offers its priceless treasures of Greek and mediæval art. The Bourse, Greek in type, of many columns, stands close by, individual and calm, as are all Russian fiscal policies. Churches of golden dome or mosaic rise numberless and impressive. Such is the environment under which the professors of the University of St. Petersburg lecture and their students listen or study.

The chief building of the university is by far the largest university structure known to me. It lengthens itself

out to about one thousand feet. This length is divided into a dozen parts by simple architectural lines. The width is about fifty feet, and the height three stories. The roof is so broken that all feeling of sameness is avoided. What may be called the front is occupied by rooms used for lecture, library, or administrative purposes. The rear of the first story is used as an arcade, open on the side, but covered, and the rear of the second story is also used as an arcade, covered and enclosed, from which doors open to the many lecture rooms. These arcades have none of the architectural beauty of the cloisters of Magdalen of Oxford, but their length renders them impressive.

To the impressiveness of the great hall two or three elements are to be added. Among them is the library. The library as a collection of books lacks, of course, the completeness of the Bodleian, but next to the great Oxford collection it is among the most complete of university libraries. As I wandered from room to room and examined shelf after shelf I found material which represents research and the conditions for research in certain departments as full as I have found at any college. French, German, English, as well as Russian, periodical collections are here assembled. Here also I saw not a few

of the sacred books of China, awakening a feeling of curious reverence as one thinks of the possible relation of Russia and of China in the near or remote future. A card catalogue of both subjects and authors is used. As is usual in most European and some American universities, the library is designed rather for the teachers than for the students. I may add in passing that the great manuscript of Tischendorf (Codex Sinaiticus, the oldest Greek manuscript of the Bible) is treasured in the neighboring imperial library.

The library and the laboratory are sometimes supposed to be rivals. History and literature are too often joined together in a seeming antagonism to physics, chemistry, and biology. No such condition is apparent in St. Petersburg, as it is, for instance, at Oxford. Some of the greatest of Russian scholars are found in the field of chemistry. One of the best of physical laboratories in all Europe is that of the great Russian university. The building itself is a noble piece of architecture, both within and without. Its cost was a half-million rubles, or one-fourth million of dollars. It is equipped with all that the heart or mind of a professor of physics in an American college holds dear: rooms for the private work and research of teachers;

opportunities and means of experimentation; public rooms for the students for pursuing their own studies; all the conveniences of water and gas and electricity, of dark rooms and lanterns, of sliding and swinging blackboards, and of telephones are in evidence.

To one other somewhat uncommon element of the University of St. Petersburg I must refer. In most universities of the Continent no means are provided for physical exercise and development. Tennis is usually the most popular sport, but to get courts sufficient for four thousand or even a thousand students is somewhat difficult! In a few cases the men row, as at Upsala, or sail, as at Helsingfors. In most places the students "walk and walk and walk." Basket-ball and football are played a little. In St. Petersburg, however, I did see the signs of a gymnasium. These signs are found in the midst of the long corridors, where students most do congregate. They consist of a short and low pair of parallel bars, the standards for a horizontal bar but without the bar itself, and two short ropes fixed to the ceiling!

The university which is thus so nobly placed and housed — save its gymnasium — is not allowed to forget its imperial character. Founded in 1819 by the Czar, the only

picture I saw on its walls was a large portrait of the present Emperor. Russia is not an Oriental despotism, but it is an absolute monarchy, and one is constantly reminded in university hall and courts of justice that Nicholas II. is an absolute monarch.

The division into four faculties obtains usually in the Russian as in the German universities. But the theological faculty is to be excepted. Theology is under the special charge of the Church. At the church of Alexander Nevsky I saw the buildings, and a few of the men who are engaged in the work of theological and ecclesiastical education. The impression which I received was quite similar, I judge, to what one would have received at Oxford or Cambridge three hundred years ago. The walks beneath the overarching trees, the cloisters, the closes, the little stream, the academic costumes, and the secluded quietness represent what the English universities must have been in the time of Henry VIII. or Elizabeth.

Russia has five great universities, besides three provincial ones — St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kief, Warsaw, and Kharkof. The number of students in the five is some fifteen thousand. Russia represents one hundred and twenty-five millions of people. There is, therefore, one

student of all sorts, liberal and professional, to about eight thousand of the people. The number of students of the corresponding classes in the United States represents one to some six hundred of the people. It is, therefore, not too much to say that each of these students is a mighty force for the betterment of Russia. The students usually belong to the upper middle class or to the lower nobility. A military rather than a scholastic career seems to be more attractive to the fellows of the highest classes. Not a few of the men, be it said, are poor in purse, and for their use, in Russian as in American universities, scholarships and other financial aids are provided.

These students, gathered out from the great third estate, are in no small degree socialists. For the political and social unrest which pervades the middle and to an extent the lower classes in Russia seems to head up in the universities. The relatively few students of the five universities probably give the government quite as much concern as the one hundred millions and more of people outside the universities. A somewhat tumultuous body, on the whole, are those fellows, and not disinclined to promote rebellions and revolutions. College rebellions are not unknown in American academic institutions, but social

and political never. The rebellions of the universities of Russia go beyond the academic walls to the state. The late Sultan of Turkey suffered from a similar condition obtaining at Scutari. He began and half finished one of the great medical buildings of the whole world. It was situated near the British cemetery. It was pointed out to Abdul-Hamid II. that in case of disturbances among the students they could easily betake themselves to British soil and be free from his commands; whereupon all work on these great and noble structures ceased. But in Russia the government is inclined, on the whole, to deal lightly with such tempests, except as they may come to wreak serious damage. Yet the government does keep a constant eye and not remote hand on the student body. It knows what the men are saying. It is asserted, perhaps with good reason, that it has spies among the students. Arrests are sure to follow any political disturbance, and further penalties may and frequently do eventuate.

The Russian student is not so hard a worker as is his American brother. His appetites seem stronger. Drawn largely from the middle classes, the men do not give so favorable an impression to the eye as do the better men of the better American colleges. Scattered in their res-

idence through the apartment houses of the great cities, they take on the environment of their residence as well as the academic atmosphere. But both in Russia and in America college men train each other. As in every country, the students combine into small settlements. These unions are usually made on the basis of the province from which the men come. Men who have their homes in the same part of the great country or who have been fitted in the same schools naturally unite. Under this form are constituted the land groups, or *zemlyachestva*, which have in the past proved to be seats of Nihilistic or similar disturbances.

The professor of a Russian university is a gentleman of power and cultivation. His career is one to which the worthiest citizen may well look forward. Although the highest classes prefer the military service, yet to all except the nobles service in a university is most inviting. Under the general control of the Minister of Public Instruction, each university is for its more immediate government independent. Each professor, too, in his department usually finds himself his own master. In only one respect does the professorial career seem unworthy. The salary is even more inadequate than obtains in most American institu-

tions. The salary of the full professor is 3000 rubles, or about \$1500, and of an assistant professor only 2000 rubles.

In the immediate and remote future Russia has tremendous problems to solve. The most comprehensive of the problems relates to the conversion of a people or peoples of diverse origins and varying conditions, scattered over an immense territory, some civilized and more half civilized, into a united and homogeneous nation. In the solution of these problems education is to be a chief and permanent force; and though few in relation to the vast population, the men and women who are trained in the University of St. Petersburg and its companion schools are offering to the great movement cool heads, good hearts, and clean hands.