

Annie Gwen Jones

Life on the Steppes of Russia  
1889 to 1892



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Impressions of Life on the Steppes of Russia  
Between 1889 to 1892

**By Mrs Edgar Jones**

**Neé Annie Gwen Jones**

**Recollections written about 1900**

Transcribed from her notes by Siriol Colley



## ***John Hughes***

In 1889 my grandmother, Mrs Edgar Jones (née Annie Gwen Jones) with the family of Arthur Hughes went to Russia as tutor to his two daughters. Arthur Hughes was the second son of John Hughes, who established the New Russian Company to develop coal

mining and the production of iron and rails for the expanding railroad system in Russia at the behest of the Czar in 1869. When John Hughes exploited the area it is said that there was only a shepherd and his dog in the area. Now the town is known as the flourishing city of Donetsk.

In 1892, because of the cholera riots, Nain, my grandmother had to flee from the town of Hughesoffka. This account of her experiences was found written in an exercise book in a damp cellar and in a very poor state. I consider myself most fortunate to have made the discovery

## Impressions of Life on the Steppes of Russia

By Mrs Edgar Jones

Neé Annie Gwen Jones (date circa 1900)

Transcribed from her notes by Siriol Colley



Тегерсоффа  
С. Россия

*Annie Gwen Jones*

Many years ago I left Wales burning with a strong desire to see green fields and pastures new and especially to see Russia, that land of oppression and misery that country one hears so much about, but really about which one knows so little. The fields were decidedly new, but the fields by no stretch of the imagination could be called

green, for no barer, no more the dreary spot on earth exists than those Steppes but more of them anon. The much expected excitement of new scenes I had not long to wait for after 6 days of travelling over the continent with a short stay at Berlin we entered Polish Russia and stopped at Warsaw, the Capital. Here I had my first experience.

I had gone for a walk in the afternoon to get my first idea of the city, the novelty of the countryside, the strangeness of the inhabitants, the beauty of the buildings and of the park, the wide fine peculiarly paved streets lead me to prolong my walk somewhat beyond what was prudent. I kept, as I had imagined, a sharp lookout at the way I went thinking of returning along the same route. I retraced my steps, but after trudging for what appeared to me to be an age, I did not seem to be getting any nearer to the Hotel we were staying at. I did not know Polish; I had not a single coin in my pocket except English money that was of no use to me. I met Jews on all hands and Polish Jews of all Jews are the most unprepossessing in appearance. I stopped one said "Hotel Europeski". He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. I asked several including a gendarme but with no good result. I went to a troika driver and said "Hotel Europeski" and he shook his head. Night was drawing on and I was getting desperate. It was getting dark and I knew moreover that my friends at the "Hotel Europeski" who had tried to dissuade me from going out on my own and were too tired to accompany me were feeling anxious about me. The outlook was gloomy when suddenly in front of me I heard two gentlemen speaking English. I rushed up and begged them to show me the way to the Hotel. In the long run I gained knowledge from my escape, for on the way back these gentlemen pointed to me a house, an unpretentious one, where the great Napoleon stayed on his way to Russia in 1812.

It was an uncanny feeling being stranded in a strange city, but it taught me not to wander forth again alone in an unknown country with out efficient escort. I stayed at Warsaw on three occasions after that and got to know the place fairly well.



*Arthur Hughes with his daughters Lisa and Ida and Annie Gwen Jones. This photo was given by my aunt Miss Gwyneth Vaughan Jones to the South Glamorgan Archives..*

It would not be amiss here perhaps if I made a few remarks about Warsaw and the Poles and the Jews who form the bulk of the population and whose occupation is the manufacture of boots and gloves.

The left bank of the river Vistula on which Warsaw is chiefly built is high and the pretty, gay, animated city with its stately lines of trees, wide squares and spacious gardens and parks is picturesquely situated along the brow of the cliffs and the plains above. Perhaps one of greatest interests to me (one who sympathies with races that have struggled for independent existence) was the fine old castle whose Royal apartments are now occupied by a Russian Governor General - a grand remnant of the days when Poland was not oppressed by the tyrannical sway of Russia. The square in front of the castle was the scene of the last Polish demonstration rebellion, her last struggle for independence in 1867 when it was stained with blood. Another remnant of Polish Independence is the fine old Palace of the Polish Kings surrounded by one of the most beautiful parks I have ever seen - now the residence of the Emperor of Russia in which he might live if he ever deemed it wise to visit Warsaw, but in which he never would, for he knows that the odds would be against his returning to Petersburg. An Emperor's blood, as too often Polish blood, would stain the square of Warsaw.

How terrible is the depth and breadth of hate for Russia compared to Ireland's hostility to England it is nothing. They have good reason to do so. You know that Poland has been gradually absorbed by Russia towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century but it was not fully subjected until after the Polish Insurrection of 1830. The Polish language was not allowed to be used in Public Offices. Indeed the Poles are most harshly and unjustly treated especially after the rebellion of 1862. It is forbidden to teach Polish in the schools. Their beautiful anthem is not to be sung. Imagine the feeling of Welshmen if we were not allowed to sing "Hen Wlad fy Nhadau" and if forbidden to talk freely in our mother tongue. Would we submit patiently?

Even more the Russians go out of their way to publicly insult the Poles. I remember observing a monument opposite our Hotel actually by the Russians to a Pole who had treacherously betrayed his country to them and whose memory is naturally loathed. The presence of the monument is constant reminder of their degradation. Were Poles numerous and had a spirited leader, the natural spirit which is burning for revenge would soon burst in to open revolt. I shall leave the question of the Jews a little longer

From Warsaw we traversed a level and monotonous country until we came to Kief, which is one of the most interesting and historic towns in Russia. It is the Rome of Russia, the Jerusalem, but I shall have occasion to speak of it at greater length when speaking of Russian Religion the Greek Orthodox Church. After two to three days continual travelling we reached Charkoff, one of the most important towns in South Russia, we reached our journeys end and found ourselves planted one memorable Sunday morning at an early hour in October on a lonely dreary station called Charsisky on the Steppes. Here there were conveyances awaiting us. A drive of 15 versts, about 17 miles, brought me to the spot that was to be my home for some years, Hughesovska, that was if I could endure such a long period

Charkoff, about the size of Cardiff, is the principal seat of trade in South Russia, being the centre from which products and manufactures of North and Central Russia are opened throughout the provinces to the South and to the Caucasus. Beetroot, sugar, corn, brandy, wool and hides are largely sold at five fairs held each year. There is also a

university at Charkoff with several hundred students. It was at Charkoff I saw my first piano, arranged like a washstand with pedals and also saw guests arriving with their own bedding.

By the way, Russian distance is measured by versts, one verst being equal to  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a mile. To correspond to our milestones long wooden posts like telegraph poles are used in preference to stones on account of the snow. Bleak, barren woodless miles of endless plains stretched out on all sides, not a house or hut in sight anywhere so that at the end of the drive my heart sank within me and an intense Hiraeth for the hills and vales of Wales came upon me. No escape however was possible, but even the Steppes, parched, cracked and dusty one day and presenting the next a surface of mud, monotonous, lonely and uninviting have their charm and when the time came to leave a strange unaccountable sadness possessed me, for they, too, in their monotony have their variety. Occasionally (for a fortnight or so in the spring) some parts are literally covered over with sweet smelling violets which are renowned for their perfume as Parma violets and other beautiful flowers which delighted us, crocuses, for-get-me-nots, buttercups and daffodils were in great abundance, but of my home favourites, daisy, cowslip, bluebell and primrose I saw none. Even the ivy, which grows at home in such abundance, is very rare. Sometimes, but very seldom, it was our good fortune to come across a perfect Oasis in the desert; a very small, beautifully wooded and well-watered spot would meet our gaze. Lilies of the Valley even nestled there and grew wild in abundance and we often drove a distance of 20 to 30 versts to obtain them.

There are only cart tracks across wide stretches of uninteresting Steppes spreading like billows for weary miles and seeming to have no end, tracks indeed with nothing definite about them, fifty yards wide with every driver selecting his own course. It was a great weariness riding across the gaunt Steppes with hardly anything to gaze upon for days together with undulating parched land, baked, and caked with heat.

In springtime, which is exceedingly short, the Steppes are infested with a rat known as the Steppe rat, which is considered a terrible plague, quite as much as the rabbit plague of Australia. They create great havoc and are an endless source of destruction to the crops. All landed proprietors and even peasants are compelled by the Russian Government to send to the nearest headquarters an enormous number of their feet annually or pay a heavy fine. This is the way to decrease their numbers. They adopt a most peculiar way of killing these creatures whose burrows remind you of rabbit burrows. Peasants are hired, they light a fire here and there, heat the water that they have conveyed in flasks, then pour the boiling water into the rat holes. The rats come to the surface and are caught. They then have their feet cut off; these are carefully guarded and then sent off when the prescribed numbers have been got together.

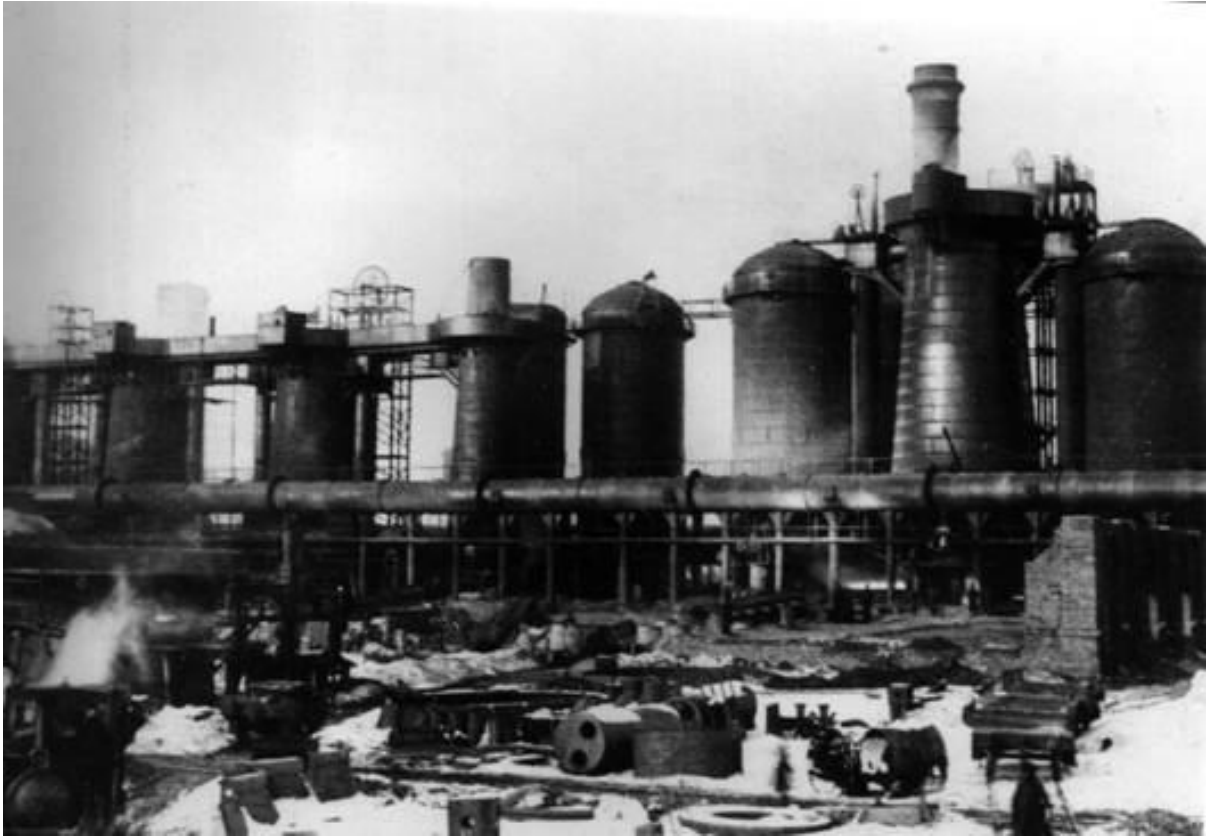


*Arthur Hughes*

Arthur Hughes, who had a large estate, was obliged to send thousands of feet to the Government annually, this was a form of taxation.

Foxes and hares are abundant, and many an exciting hunt did we have in the cool and pleasant autumn. The hounds were bought from the Court Estate, Merthyr Tydfil and had been brought to Russia by steamer via Odessa. Occasionally a polecat would pay us a visit, a very unwelcome one, judging by the number of things, which disappeared from the yard after the visit. Wolves were now and then seen, driven in search of food not far from our place, though I never happened to see any on the Steppes. Peasants would often bring us young ones, which we kept for the purpose of hunting.

I should have said that Hughesoffka the place in which we lived was situated in the Government of Ekaterinislav about 80 to 100 versts north of the sea of Azof about six hours journey from the Taganrog Port and from Marcople. It bordered also on Don Cossack country. The Russian Government in honour of the late John Hughes named Hughesoffka, the father of the gentleman in whose house I lived and whose granddaughters I taught. When he went out to Russia first at the invitation of the Russian Government (for whom he had already made some patent iron plates for the Russian Navy) he searched the Steppes for a suitable place wherein to start an Ironworks. The Steppes as far as is known is especially rich in minerals. At last he fixed on a spot that is now called Hughesoffka with a population of 25-30,000 but then was inhabited only by shepherd and dog. The ironworks is called the New Russian Company. All this was due to the Indomitable pluck and perseverance of John Hughes, a Welshman born near Ynysgan, Merthyr Tydfil. In Hughesoffka we were a small band of Welsh and English in the midst of a mixed population of Russians, Poles, Jews, Tartars, French and Germans. The Russians of course predominating. An Armenian doctor saved my life when I developed typhoid Fever.



*Blast Furnace 1892.*

(It is said that John Hughes had a dream. On the night before he was expecting the Russian Emissaries from the Czar at Mill wall Docks, London, he dreamt that a workman with a grievance, threw had thrown a spanner into the machinery at the works of the Millwall and Engineering Company. He rose in the night, took his carriage and drove to the works to find that his dream was true. Had the machinery been damaged, the Czar might never have commanded him to build the great steel factory at Hughesoffka.)

Just a few words about the climate. Winter and summer are just sudden incidents in Russia, one day the land is snow bound and the next there is a great thaw; the next is the beginning of summer. Briefly we can say that there are only two seasons, summer and winter. In winter the cold is intense, the thermometer falling to several degrees below zero. Still it was very dry, brisk and invigorating and far more endurable than the damp winter climate, the snow was of great depth indeed. We had to be very warm clad to withstand the severity of the cold. We were muffled to the tips of our noses with heavily and warmly lined fur cloaks, a fur cap of Astrakhan-skin, over this again a shawl of camels hair so that often when out driving we had our faces covered except for our eyes, fur lined boots and over these fur lined goloshes completed our costume. We had no pretensions to fashion; we looked more like Eskimaux than anything else; it was bitterly cold.



Members of the Hughes family on a horse drawn sleigh, 1890's

One winter was exceptionally severe, so severe and so deep was the snow that for two to three weeks we were imprisoned in the house, all communications with the outside world completely broken and the works stopped. Fortunately we had stocked ourselves with provisions in early winter, a wise precaution in such a country. We had visitors staying with us at the time and they were totally unable to leave until the snow was cleared. It was even higher than our windows so that for sometime we saw nothing of the outside world. Still indoor life was not too bad, reading kept us going, cards always for money.

What we had to guard against was sudden snowstorms. They were of frequent occurrence and we had to take great precautions that we should not be caught in them while sledging. It was not at all a rare thing to find peasants who had been overtaken by storms in the Steppes. Several times we returned with some members of our party suffering from frostbite of the nose or cheek. We had to be very cautious indeed. We were one afternoon on the point, of going out for a sledge drive when we were persuaded not to go as the weather was threatening so we reluctantly stayed at home and it was very fortunate that we did for a severe snowstorm came on mere like a whirlwind in nature.

Early next morning 11 bodies were found frozen to death in the Steppes quite close to Hughesovska, including a boy whose mother hailed from Rhymney.

My favourite outdoor pleasure and exercise in winter was skating, but this we could only indulge in the early months before the very cold weather set in. It was a fine

scene to see the hundreds of people flitting like swallows over the large frozen reservoir dam (constructed by the company), nor was this exercise confined to weekdays only, Sunday after service in Church was the most popular day for this, indeed for every other form of enjoyment, card playing, circuses, dances, balls, parties of all kinds, riding, boating and hunting. It was on Sunday that the markets and the Bazaar was a scene of great bustle and excitement. Sledging was however as popular and enjoyable outdoor recreation as skating, we often formed parties of 6 or 7 sledges and away we would dash over the Steppes at breakneck pace drawn by Troikas. The Russian Troika consists of 3 horses abreast adorned with bells, the centre horse trots the outsiders gallop, followed almost always by a crowd of the most unsightly wolfish dogs one could ever see. In Russia as in Turkey where dogs act as scavengers it is considered a great crime to kill a dog. They are very numerous indeed, they often seem in a half starved condition and indeed we often thought we were being followed by a pack of wolves.

As the sledge is the conveyance in winter so is the torsi in summer. It more resembles a square plank on wheels than a carriage. It was by no means comfortable on long journeys, or cosy, as there was no support for the back, sitting on his heels was a favourite position with Russian drivers. The severe winter lasts for about 6 or 7 months and often into April and May when an extremely sudden change follows. The antic of snow disappears and the sun bursts out in all its glory, all is covered with an inconceivable thickness of mud, then it is impossible to walk or drive anywhere. Conveyances cling to the mud, people get stuck and only with great difficulty are they extricated.

Suddenly all nature revives, the trees bud and bloom with the most marvellous rapidity and we could almost detect the processes of change. A beautiful eye-soothing greenness covers the plain and then it is that the violets and other flowers spring forth. Indeed it is to me a perfect transformation scene, and all takes place within a few days. But the delight of spring is of far too short a duration, generally a fortnight, it was a cause of congratulation if spring lasted 3 weeks. Summer follows with a heat as intense as the winter was cold.

The winter was the pleasantest season despite the cold; the heat of the summer was simply unbearable. The double padded windows of winter are now reduced to one; the dark blinds are down all day until evening. Flies, mosquitoes, locusts and other unmentionable little brutes abound in thousands; we felt sometimes too languid for anything and would have given much for a whiff of air. Our summer garments were as light as the winter ones were heavy and warm. We kept indoors all day unless it was absolutely necessary to go out, when evening came we went out a little, only then could we endure it. This great heat coupled with the total want of drainage, great dearth of rain, prevalence of dry sand dust gave rise to fevers of all sorts, which greatly damaged our health. The mortality from dysentery especially among little children was simply appalling from 40 - 50. Mothers returned to work in the fields within days after the advent of their little ones.

Sometimes we had no rain for months with the consequence that the works had to close. To amend this state of things a dam was constructed by the company, which supplied the works with water as well as supplying us with a splendid skating and boating

ground. The autumn, which is as short as the spring is most cool and pleasant. Then riding was the order of the day and hunting.

I must tell you something about the people. What strikes me immensely is the wide, enormous, unbridged gulf between the upper and lower classes of Russia. Unfortunately there are only two real classes; there is no real middle class, the chief mainstay and backbone of a country. The wellborn Russian despises and spurns the lowborn moujek or peasant and treats him on most occasions more like a dog than a human being. To this day the poor moujek bears the impress of serfdom or slavery in every action and in every word.

It was in 1861 that Alexander II, who was afterwards most foully murdered in 1881, granted emancipation to the serfs who had previous to that been like slaves.

The moujek is a miserable looking individual but well built and tall, he is utterly uneducated, his vocabulary consists of 2-300 words at the most. His arithmetic is extremely elementary, when transacting any business, over which he is very sharp, he reckons up his accounts on an abacus.

The peasant is a fine built man with lovely teeth, his wife is not at all a poor specimen and not bad looking, but all cleanliness is hidden under a most ungainly garb. In winter it is really difficult to distinguish the peasant from his wife, their outdoor garment is so alike. They wear high thick felt boots reaching up to their knees, then a sheepskin cloak the white skin showing with no pretensions to shape or form reaching to the top of the boots. On the head a sheepskin cap covered over with a kerchief or scarf of various or varied colours, this is the costume of both the male and female.

Their holiday and Sunday apparel is very smart, indeed, the women deck themselves in picturesque costumes of all colours imaginable red, yellow, green and blue prints being the material all mixed up in a most promiscuous manner, a skirt of one colour, a bodice of another bright colour, an apron of another beautifully embroidered as only Russians can embroider with all kinds of threads in all kinds of patterns, the neck adorned with glass beads of all sorts and colours, they wear no hats but tie a coloured kerchief round their heads. They plait their dark hair in many plaits and tie each one with a different coloured ribbon, a married woman with two plaits.

They have no boots on their feet, even pour servants when serving at table never wore boots or shoes and very often when a peasant happens to be the proud possessor of a pair of leather boots, which is very rare indeed, he prizes them so highly that he often walks barefooted and carries his boots on his arm. It is generally a sign that a peasant is better off than his neighbour when he can afford to buy a pair of boots. I liked the peasant moujek, they are very good natured, simple minded and childish.

Their homes are not comfortable, but hovels sometimes dug right down into the ground and built of mud with only a little smoke issuing from a chimney or stove visible. Some were made of wood, but all of one floor, no upstairs and only one or two rooms. Every Russian house whether rich or poor had an icon or an image of Christ or the Virgin Nary or a saint in a top corner of the room, it is before the image that they pray. It is a well-known fact that Russian peasants have no beds but sleep on top of the

large stoves, which occupy as a rule 1/3 or 1/4 of the room. In spite of all these drawbacks the Russian peasant has a resigned sort of nature and appears content with his lot.

The Russians are not 'total abstainers' nor do they believe in the moderation principle. I have thought it would not be a bad place for the British Temperance Association to start a branch, though from the onset I could promise them no hope of success. Vodka is the Russian drink par excellence, both rich and poor are addicted to the drinking of it, it is an extremely strong whitish intoxicating spirit distilled from rye containing a high percentage of alcohol. Kvas too is a favourite drink, a kind of light beer made of rye. They drink an enormous amount of tea, in some parts Kiomoso or fermented mare's milk is partaken especially by those who are afflicted with diseases of the chest. I can only say from personal experience what ever may be its alleged curative properties that mare's milk is a very refreshing and pleasant drink.

So far I have only told you about one section of the Russian community, now let us look at the other and compare the great difference. The wellborn Russian receives the very best education, at home first of all under the care of governesses and tutors and then at university, men as well as women go, they are well read, artistic and excellent linguists. It is nothing for them to know 4 or even 6 languages besides their own and converse in them fluently. They are lazy and indolent and consider it beneath them to do any manual work. In their fine country mansions their days and evenings are given up to amusement, dancing, cards and music. Still in some respects they are the most accomplished people that one could wish to meet, some of them are the most marvellous musicians. With all their faults, which are numerous and evident, they are most hospitable, lavishing much on their equals and foreigners but their treatment of the peasant was certainly unpardonable.

They are fond of jewellery wearing many rings on their fingers. Both men and women are inveterate smokers holding the cigarette in their much jewelled fingers, the men are most flattering in their attention to the ladies, they take pride in saying pleasant things utterly devoid of meaning, it is their way, extravagant in everything. There are not many rich Russians; most of the noblemen are in the hands of the usurers who have mortgaged their estates to the hilt. It is a shame that in a rich country like Russia that there are so many poor. The mineral wealth of the country is immense but they have neither the will nor the energy nor the money to found or start any new works or manufactures.

There are gangs of robbers and thieves stationed here and there, we had a night watchman whose sole duty, accompanied by his lantern, his dog and his whistle, was to parade around the house each night. The works also had to be guarded and so Mr Hughes obtained the Government's permission to have some Cossack soldiers at Hugheffka in case of rioting. Mr Hughes had barracks built for them, their pay was very little, practically nothing apart from their food; they were a body of about 100 men. The Cossacks had customs and actions that were marvellous and their wild charges accompanied by weird yells and howls struck terror into us onlookers and forced an impression upon us of a savage and uncivilised race of men.

The Russians have a peculiar mode of address. It is very rarely that you hear their surname. Take for instance John Jones, son of William Jones, the Russians would say Ivan Vasilovich, Anne Jones would Anna Vasilovna the feminine termination. Perhaps the three questions that will interest most people are religion, the Nihilists and the treatment of the Jews.

There is hardly any need for me to tell you who the Nihilists are. I may say that they are not the easy-going peasants but generally made up of students of the University who came from what they call the ranks. Their university training has raised them as they think above their former position and when their university course is over they do not feel inclined to return to their former position or tread their father's footsteps. The professions are not open to them nor can they ever obtain a high place in the army, all professions and position of high rank are kept exclusively to the upper ranks. We have a band of men and women (which is unjust) discontented with their lot, unable to attain the social position they desire and driven to secret revolt against the existing state of affairs. They form secret societies whose sole object is to rouse and educate the masses of their secret writings and their agents to revolt against the form of Government. They wish to instil into the people a desire for a new condition of things (and rightly so)

Many of the Nihilists are moved by a strong, burning, sincere love for their country and a keen desire to better its conditions. Some however stoop to ignoble and criminal means of carrying out their aims and intentions. Much as one sympathises with their ideals, one cannot sympathise with open assassination like that of Alexander II in 1881 of the dastardly attempt upon the life of the late Czar Alexander III by wrecking his train.

I remember passing over the spot many times, now a Church is built on the spot to commemorate the escape. At first it was thought to have been an accident, but was one of the cleverest plot imaginable. The servant, who in the act of handing him a cup of tea, was killed on the spot as well as the dog at his feet. The Czar himself was quite unhurt though the train was a complete wreck. Whenever the Emperor undertakes a railway Journey the whole route along, which he goes is lined with soldiers at a distance of a few yards. All telegraphic communication is stopped so that traffic is dislocated and the Nihilists cannot communicate to a band in the next town. Every care is taken to keep him and his family from danger.

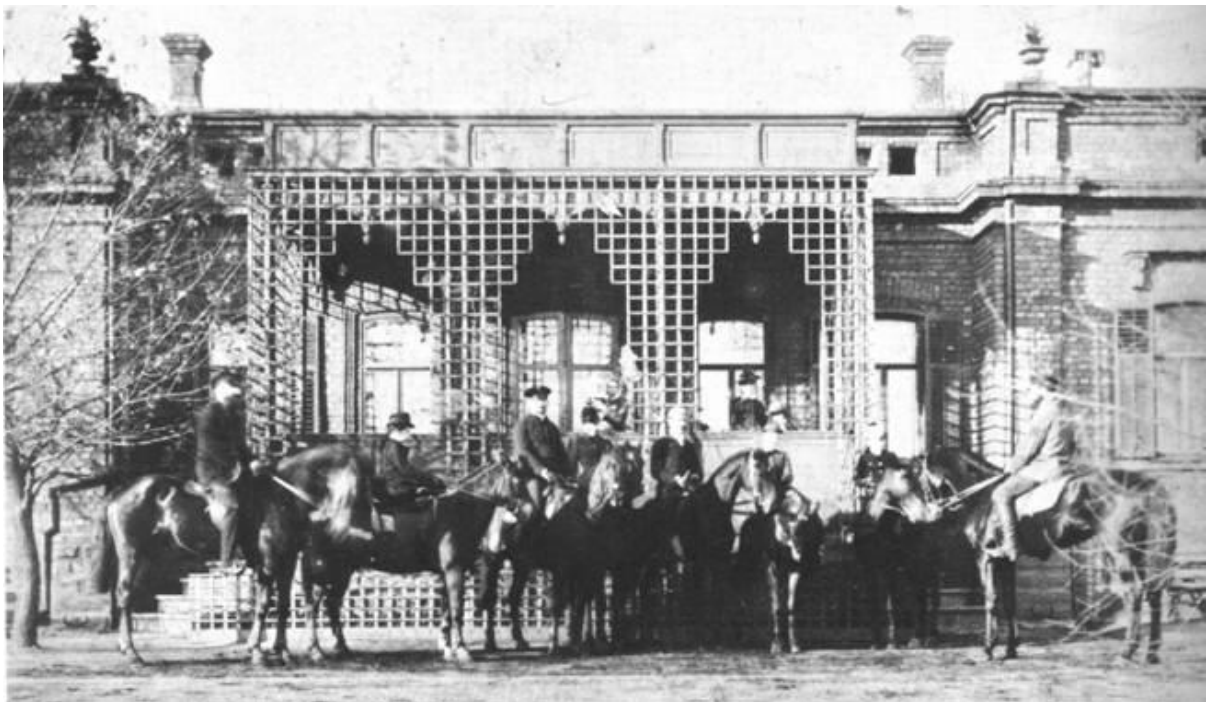
The peasants used to look on the Czar as a supernatural being, they used to call him "The Holy Father". Unhappily the head that wears the crown is especially true of the Russian Monarch; one hears of so many plots, so many attempts on his life. The Czar, we are told is not as black as he is painted. The Nihilist agitation is fast shaking the social order to its foundations.

I shall relate a tale I was told by a Russian Gentleman of a Nihilist who was caught red-handed trying to shoot the late Emperor when out driving, and though the man was caught in the act, declared that he was not guilty. He said that he belonged to a band of Nihilists who were bent on getting rid of the Emperor. Lots are usually drawn as to who shall carry out the work of the plotters and on this occasion it fell on the accused man, who happened to be the best and surest shot, to shoot the Emperor. He was compelled by orders of the Brotherhood, so set out and waited for his opportunity of firing at the Emperor. He said that he purposely missed his aim (he had never been known to miss

before) and so saved the Emperor's life. He could have shot him if he liked, but he confessed that he could not do it in cold blood. He knew that if he refused the orders of the band he himself would be shot and he knew that Siberia would await him had he perpetrated the deed so he begged for mercy from the court and strange to say obtained it.

Extreme care had to be taken by all of us as to our conversation about Nihilist matters. One day when entering a room where there were several Russian visitors and seeming all to be silent and absorbed I thoughtlessly made the remark: "You all look as if you were hatching a plot against the Emperor" whereupon I was seriously warned to be cautious of my remarks.

Now I come to the punishment of the Nihilists. I believe that Russia (I am not sure about Switzerland) is the only country where hanging has been abolished, but there are tortures worse than death and there are deaths from starvation and cruelty more numerous in Russian prisons than cases of hanging in England. Hanging is considered too mild and too speedy a form of punishment so other methods of torture were invented, the knout and mutilation and disfigurement of the face followed by a journey to one of the poisonous mines of Siberia never to return. In the entire language of civilisation there is no word that conveys an idea of more cruelty, more superhuman suffering than that conveyed by the word **Knout**. The knout has not been used for a hundred years, but three cases have been known in recent times, to hear the word in Russia is to shudder. When the prescribed number of cuts have been given the victims are taken to hospital where the wounds are dressed with salt and when recovered are taken to Siberia. They start on their awful journey, the prisoners, both men and women, are as a rule attired in a uniform kind of dress which is a long loose great coat of a rough grey cloth. Groups or bands of the convicts are fettered together by chains or rings so as to make it easier for the guards to watch them.



Family gathering outside the Dacha

Every English paper was read through in the head Post Office and then if there was any remark derogatory to the Russian Government the paper then was either confiscated or the paragraph blotted out. Certain books were not allowed into Russia. As an example of the extreme precaution not to allow dissenting bodies into Russia, the last time I crossed the frontier I was not allowed to have a passport without a declaration that I belonged to the State Church (Church of England) (not by me).

Ваше Высочество Императору  
Генерал-Консулу в Лондоне  
№ 2578

№ 110 de Kijaw 1891.  
John Norton



32051

We, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne Cecil,  
Marquess of Salisbury, Earl of Salisbury,  
Viscount Cranborne, Baron Cecil, a Peer of the  
United Kingdom of Great Britain & Ireland, a Member of  
Her Britannic Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council,  
Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, Her Majesty's  
Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, &c. &c.

Request and require in the Name of  
Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow  
Miss Annie G. Jones (British Subject) travelling  
on the Continent

to pass freely without let or hindrance, and to afford her  
assistance and protection of which she may stand in need.

Given at the Foreign Office London, the 26 day of April 1891.



Salisbury

Signature of the Bearer

Annie Gwen Jones

Miss Annie Gwen Jones' Passport.

On the reverse side is written: "It is essential to swear that we are all members of the English Protestant Church. Dissenters are not allowed to have passports for Russia. Mr

*Hughes had to state that I belonged to the English Church, which is not true you know. This is quite a new thing. Last time we had no nonsense of the kind."*

Much has been said about the treatment of the Jews, they are the true victims of harsh laws, have no freedom or justice and are compelled to swear allegiance to the hand that punishes them. They were very numerous in Hugheffka and possessed two very large synagogues; their connection with us was very great as they almost had all the business of the community. They were unjustly said to be the cause of riots, which were not of rare occurrence. Their usual call to prayer is the triple knock and then they all repair to the synagogue. Sometimes the knock acts as a warning. They are watched and suspected by the Russians, so much are they hated that in one Russian City, Odessa, I believe a notice to this effect was posted up at a bathing establishment, "No dogs or Jews are allowed to bathe here".

I have to make a few remarks about their language coinage customs and a few other things. I shall touch on them briefly. The coinage is simpler than our coinage, you have to remember only Kopek and Rouble, the Kopek is about  $\frac{1}{4}$ d and 100 kopeks are equal to one paper rouble, which is about 2/- 6d. Perhaps it would be interesting to know the various commodities, which were obtained from the large towns and brought to our place by means of a conveyance drawn by teams of oxen yoked together as in ancient times. Beef was very cheap, procured for 2d a pound, but the beef was so tough, 'Proverbial leather' was soft and sweet compared to it. Mutton was a trifle better. Turkeys and Geese could be had feathers and all for 1/-. Fowls for 6d, fish sold for 6 - 7 kopeks a pound, sturgeon, salmon, lampreys, eels, whitebait. Butter was fairly cheap, but rather scarce, the Russians do not care for butter. In several noblemen's houses we were offered tea with bread made of rye sweetened with tiny sweets and no butter at all. Russians generally drink their tea in glass tumblers with glass saucers. No household is without its Samovar. The tea is very pale, but highly and deliciously flavoured, the addition of a slice of lemon vastly improves it. Some like their tea sweetened with jam not sugar, it is well known that Russia pays the best price for China Tea and thus gets the pick of the market, it comes overland not by sea.

Our dainties were very expensive. Sardines were 2/- or so a tin which would cost 5 pence at home, caviar, if fresh is also rather dear, it consists of the roes of sturgeon, dried and salted, it is a favourite meal with the Russians. Caviar is spread on black bread with a glass or two of vodka. A little meal, called a Zakouska, is generally partaken of before dinner and never fails to give a good appetite. It is always spread on a side table before the usual dinner begins and is considered an indispensable thing as a preliminary to a feast of a great many courses. Wines of all sorts are found on the table of the upper classes. Another favourite dish is the suckling pig and you generally had one in every house at Easter time. Fruit is very cheap indeed, especially grapes, melons and peaches, game is plentiful, especially partridge and pheasant.

Dress material, when it was your good fortune to come across any, was exorbitant in price. Often would Tartars, Greeks, Jews and Russians travel from place to place with their stock of goods, silk, lace etc. Russian lace is very beautiful indeed, in some villages the peasants are all occupied in making lace by hand.

There is one most peculiar custom the Russians have and on a certain Saints day they all congregate at a cemetery, take their Samovars and cakes and have a meal on the gravestones of their departed friends and relatives, it is their kindness that prompts them to do that they think that the spirits come to join them in their feasting.

The dominant population of Russia is Slavonic, the Slays are divided into two branches, one branch in Poland, Bohemia and Moravia and the other composed of Bulgarians, Serbians and two or three small tribes known as Croatians and Slovaks. Even at present anyone more or less acquainted with modern Russian has no difficulty in understanding a Pole, Bulgarian or Serbian. The language used 1000 years ago is still used in the service of the Russo-Greek church, is of course as unintelligible to the Russians now as Anglo-Saxon would be to the English. I have said nothing about poetry and prose; the names of Tolstoy, Pushkin, Turgenieff, Lermostoff, Gogol, Gorky are of European fame.

I have touched on some points, which interested me during my stay in South Russia. I left Hughesovka just a week before the Cholera riot made its appearance there, taking as its victims several of my Russian friends, but a fortnight before the terrible Cholera riots at Hughesoffka reported in the London Papers during which a great part of the village was burnt, the most valuable machinery of the works destroyed and numerous lives lost. This riot was found to have been instigated by the Nihilists.

I have always advocated friendship with the Russians for in spite of their faults they have excellent possibilities and I have always felt that we Britishers could be the means of enlightening them and bringing happiness and prosperity to them.

There is a great want in rural Russia of doctors, hospitals and nurses; the death rate is very high. The poor quality and insufficient food prepared the way for disease which is further prompted by the want of cleanliness, lack of sanitation and medical help. At the best of times the peasant is poorly fed and liable to skin trouble, asthma, typhoid and smallpox. When scarcity prevails they die in their thousands of hunger and a special form of disease which follows in the wake of famine.

Because the houses were made of wood, fires were frequent in the summer, so a watchtower was built. A watchman was always on duty to report a fire, Mr Hughes organised a fire brigade, the majority of the members of which were English and Welsh.

### Treatment of the Jews

Unbelievable in the 20th Century, the persecution of the Jews was unusually active during the reign of Alexander III (1881-1894). In 1886/7 the Czar signed edicts which gave the Minister of Education the power of restricting the number of Jewish pupils in schools of all grades. Jews were at the same time forbidden to establish schools of their own. From 1887-1890 they were harried from their homes and in 1890 Grand Duke Serge was appointed Governor of Moscow and the expulsion of 700 Jews was thought necessary to purify the place for his arrival. Deprived of nearly every means of livelihood and crowded in the cities of the ?Pal many died of starvation.

Certain trades were permitted but these were never authoritatively defined and the limits of exemption were frequently and arbitrarily contracted. Those who were enrolled by artisans to pursue the vocation of watchmakers were expelled because they had sold watch keys. Tailors were expelled because they did not manufacture the buttons attached on the clothes sold. The Russian persecution of the Jews, stands apart from other anti-Semitic movements on account of its unparalleled magnitude and ferocity and also because it is the direct act of a Government deliberately and systematically, remorselessly seeking to reduce to utter misery about 4 and half million of its own subjects.

No Jew is allowed to hold any official office; he must serve in the army but can never rise from the ranks. He cannot be employed in the railways or work in their construction.



*Mrs Edgar Jones, in later years on the balcony at Eryl, Barry, South Wales.*