

EASTERN EUROPE.

This region, which comprises Russia and the greater part of the basin of the Danube, is nearly equal to two-thirds of the total area of Europe, but its importance is not proportionate to its size. Compared with the rest of the continent, the prevailing flatness of the surface is monotonous, and this lack of physical obstacles has had much to do in enabling the greater part of the region to be acquired by one Power.

In spite, however, of this uniformity of relief, there is a great contrast in scenery between the forests of Russia, which resemble those of Scandinavia, and lie north-west of a line drawn from about Warsaw to Perm, and the characteristic grasslands of Southern Russia and the Danubian plains. As has been already pointed out, the continuity of these grasslands with those of Siberia has tempted invasion (see p. 5), and partly explains the variety of races—many having strong Asiatic characteristics—which now exist there, as well as the recent political settlement of these districts. Russia, in fact, only rose to importance when, in the fifteenth and succeeding centuries, the Slavs of the forest-lands, under a dynasty originally founded by Swedes, were gradually able to conquer the Tartars, who had occupied the southern grass-lands. By degrees this political Power expanded to the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, and Baltic; but it was only in the early part of the eighteenth century that the capital was transferred by Peter the Great from Moscow to St. Petersburg, in order to place the Government in better communication with other Powers.

The recent substitution of cereals for grass in the South-West of Russia and in parts of the Danubian plains, where climate and soil are eminently suitable, is leading to an increase of population in those parts, and to a less nomadic mode of life than was formerly prevalent. The commercial development of these districts is favoured by the ease with which railways can be constructed, and by the presence of long rivers, though the fact that these flow into inland seas detracts from their value.

The greater part of the Danube was for nearly 400 years the frontier of the Roman Empire, but the chief historical importance of the river is due to the natural link it forms between Central Europe and the Nearer East. Its basin falls into three well-defined regions—*i.e.*, (1) Eastern Alpineland and the Alpine foreland, which are politically equivalent to most of Austria proper, minus Bohemia and Galicia, and to South Bavaria; (2) the middle plain of the river, which constitutes Hungary; (3) the lower plain, which corresponds to Roumania and Bulgaria.