

EUROPEAN RUSSIA.

This consists of a great plain extending to the Arctic Ocean, Baltic, Black Sea, and Caspian, and includes the isthmuses between these seas—*i.e.*, Finland, the Ural region, Caucasia, and the greater part of the basins of the Vistula, the Dniester, and the Pripet, a tributary of the Dnieper. The basin of the Vistula corresponds to Poland, and that of the Pripet was a great swamp, which has only been partly drained in recent times.

The Valdai Hills, and various ridges running from this south-westwards and north-eastwards, form the sources of rivers which radiate to the four seas, the most important being the Volga, over 2,000 miles long, Don, Dnieper, Dniester, Western Dvina, Neva, and Northern Dvina. Many of these long, slow-flowing rivers form important waterways, since they are navigable nearly to their sources, and are easily connected by canals; but they suffer from various drawbacks. The Volga, for example, is shallow, and liable to be obstructed by sandbanks, while rapids occur on the Neva above St. Petersburg, on the Dnieper where it bends to the southwards, and on the Dniester. They flow, moreover, either into the Caspian, which is land-locked; or into the Black Sea and Baltic, which have only narrow entrances, and these guarded by foreign Powers; or into the White Sea, whose shores are frozen for more than half the year.

The rivers themselves, in fact, and all Russian ports are liable to be frozen for from two to seven months every year, owing to the severity of the winters. This severity is due to the easterly position of the country and the entire absence of protection from the north (see p. 16). Snow prevails everywhere in winter, and sledges take the place of carriages—a change in many places for the better, as few, if any, good carriage-roads exist throughout a large portion of the country. The rainfall, which occurs mainly in summer, is relatively slight, and is wholly inadequate in the south-east. The temperature naturally varies considerably with the latitude, and its effect is to produce a somewhat belt-like distribution of vegetation, so that it is possible to divide the country into the tundras of the Far North; the forests and regions of hardy crops lying south of the tundras; the rich agricultural area in the south-west and centre; the grass-lands of the south-east; and the extreme southern portion, where almost subtropical fruits are produced.

The Northern Regions.—The tundras around the White Sea are low marshes, frozen for much of the year, and yielding only mosses on which