

*The South-Eastern Steppes.*—Lack of rain in the south-east and the saline nature of the soil cause the low-lying districts here to be only fit for grass, and even this is covered with snow in winter and burnt up in summer. These grass-lands, which are often called steppes, are still capable of supporting a large number of horses and cattle, while the Volga, which traverses the district, is noted for sturgeon. This fish also frequents the Caspian, and Astrakhan, at the mouth of the Volga, is a busy fishing centre, though it is frozen for three months of the year.

*The Southern Regions.*—Along the south-east coast of the Crimea and in parts of Caucasia the vine flourishes, and olives and other Mediterranean fruits ripen; while even cotton can be grown in the valley of the Kura around Tiflis—the town that commands the famous Dariel Pass over the Caucasus. The chief port of the Crimea was Sebastopol, which is now solely a naval station. The ports of Baku on the Caspian and Batum and Poti on the Black Sea are mainly associated with the export of the vast supplies of petroleum found in the region.

Russia is rich in minerals, especially in the Ural region, where gold, copper, and platinum are mined round Ekaterinburg in the east, and coal and iron in the west round Perm. The largest coalfield is, however, in the valley of the Donetz, and the richest iron supplies are at Krivoi Rog, north of Kherson; but these minerals are also found south of Moscow and in Poland, where they have favoured the rise of manufacturing industries. Bog-iron occurs in many places in Finland.

Lodz, Warsaw, and Moscow are important for textile industries, mainly cotton; and Tula, south of Moscow, for iron goods and leather. Warsaw, the capital of Poland, stands at the head of steam navigation on the Vistula, while Moscow benefits by its central position in a great plain, and has become the chief railway centre of the country. One railway leads from it to Samara, and then bifurcates; one branch runs to Orenburg on the Ural, while the other crosses the Ural Mountains south of Ekaterinburg, and traverses Siberia to the Pacific.

On account of the relatively sparse population in Russia (see p. 25) and the great distances between large towns, a good deal of trade is still carried on by means of yearly fairs—notably at that held at Nijni Novgorod on the Volga, where a great interchange of European and Asiatic commodities takes place. Smaller fairs are held periodically at Kharkov, near the Donetz, and at Kiev on the Dnieper. (For commercial statistics on Russia, see p. 125.)