On the Strange Peculiarities Observed by a Religious Sect of Moscovites, Called Scoptsis

Author(s): Isidore Kopernicky and J. Barnard Davis

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MARCH 15TH, 1870.

DR. R. S. CHARNOCK, V.P., IN THE CHAIR.

The minutes were read and confirmed.

The following elections were announced :—*Fellows*—Wm. Stephens Hayward, Esq., Long Wittingham, Abingdon, Berks ; P. Henderson, Esq., M.A., Vice-Consul at Benghazi, N. Africa, 1, Stafford Place, Buckingham Gate. *Local Secretary*—Dr. David Earl Burdett, Belleville, Ontario, Canada.

The list of presents was read, and thanks were voted to the donors :

FOR THE LIBRARY.

From the SOCIETY.—Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, No. 53.

From the SOCIETY.—Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. iv, p. 12.

From the AUTHOR.—Ancient Battlefields in the southern portion of Northumberland, by Rev. Scott F. Surtees.

From the EDITOR.—The Food Journal, No. 2.

From the EDITOR.—Nature (to date).

From the SOCIETY.—Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. viii, part i.

From the SOCIETY.—Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Part II, No. 4.

From M. E. LARTET.—Reliquiæ Aquitanicæ, Part XI, by M. E. Lartet and H. Christy.

From Dr. E. S. RYAN TENISON.—The British Medical Journal, to date.

From the AUTHOR.—Comparative Longevity, by E. R. Lankester, Esq.

The following paper was read :—

On the Strange Peculiarities observed by a Religious Sect of Moscovites, called Scoptsis. By Dr. ISIDORE KOPERNICKY, Cor. Mem. A.S.L., and J. BARNARD DAVIS, M.D., F.R.S., V.P.A.S.L.

It was an opinion of the late Dr. Robert Knox that race had a determinate influence in religion. He said the Celtic race all over the world is, properly speaking, Catholic, when not Roman. The dominion of Catholicism among the Irish and French confirms this ; whilst in Wales and Cornwall, where religious enthusiasm is very prevalent, it is not episcopalianism which satisfies the desires of the population.

In a paper read by the Treasurer of this Society, the Rev. Dunbar Heath, in December 1866, something like the same idea appears to have been advocated ; but, unfortunately, the terms Aryan and Semite were introduced into it, or formed its substratum ; the former, especially, being a designation to which it is difficult to attach any definite and precise sense. It is used in connection with an hypothesis based upon philology, that, at a very remote epoch, a people who spoke a language cognate with Sanscrit invaded Europe from the east, and settled down in all parts of it, where their descendants still remain. The Rev. Dunbar Heath maintained in his memoir that Christianity, as a whole, is derived from this Aryan race, and not from a Semitic

race. It would be a very comforting doctrine if we could conclude that our religion had been derived from a race of people less superstitious, and endowed with higher powers of mind than the Hebrews. But there is probably no reason to doubt that Christianity had its foundations laid in Judea some 1900 years ago, among a Jewish people ; that it did not come into Europe at any very remote antiquity, when the Aryans are imagined to have made their appearance ; and as little reason is there to doubt that the wisdom of the *west* was conveyed to the east, many ages before the advent of Jesus Christ, as that Alexander had made his conquest in oriental countries and established the Bactrian kingdom. Mr. Heath's very learned arguments are of quite a different nature from those to which your attention will be invited this evening. They concern Christianity as a whole, and what it is now proposed to describe is a small sect of a particular, but well-defined race.

The name of this sect, which exists in Russia, is Scoptsis (mutilated), and in that country, and in some parts of Wallachia, where also its disciples are to be found, it is a secret sect. The reason of this will be apparent when it is known that the Scoptsis are distinguished for self-mutilation. These fanatical people base their peculiar notions upon the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and interpret the 12th verse as an injunction to this unnatural practice.

But it is time that it should be made known to you, that the information here given concerning this strange sect, the photographs of its professors, and the anatomical preparation which exhibits the radical excision of the sexual organs of a male Scoptsi, are wholly derived from my friend Dr. I. Kopernicky, a corresponding member of this Society, an able and zealous anthropologist.

The Scoptsis form a sect of the Moscovites, or Great Russians in particular. This is the important anthropological fact revealed by the sect. The Moscovites, or Great Russians, are about 30,000,000 in number, and extend from the White Sea in the north to Kursk and Saratov in the south ; from St. Petersburg in the west, to Viatka and Novgorod in the east ; in truth, over a very large portion of European Russia. De Pauly calls them the *proper* Russians, and in this differs materially from Dr. Kopernicky, who designates the Ruthenians and White Russians the *true* Russians.

In order to introduce Dr. Kopernicky's description, I will give a translation of what M. de Pauly says of the Scoptsis. It should be premised that the "Raskol" is the name by which the whole body of dissidents from the Greek Church, or, to speak more correctly, the Russian Church, which is the sister of the Greek Church, but still an independent sister, and differing mainly by some external ceremonies, are called. The Raskol, therefore, has a similar meaning to our word Dissenters. The Raskol is of considerable antiquity, and these are divisions of it. The first and principal division is named Bespopovchchina. "It is in the Bespopovchchina that is met with the remarkable sect of Scoptsy, who voluntarily mutilate themselves by cutting off their sexual organs. The Scoptsy, in justification of their system of mutilation, build upon certain passages of the New Testa-

ment, which, wrongly understood and falsely interpreted, may, in fact, serve as a pretext for this deplorable error. They believe that paradise will be manifested on earth when the whole human race shall be found in this state of mutilation ; that their apostle, under the name of Selivanov, continually wanders beyond Lake Baikal, in order one day to assemble together all the partisans of the sect, to reign upon earth, and to spread over it peace and eternal happiness. Pursued by Government as attached to an immoral sect, they seek to obtain by the influence of considerable riches of which they dispose—for in the great cities many jewellers, goldsmiths, and dealers in gold make part of this sect—a certain toleration which never extends to the new converts, who are rigorously persecuted. Although less numerous than the other sects, none is more greedy of proselytes than this, and the painful operation which formed the principal object of the doctrine is accomplished among them with remarkable expertness. At times the mutilation of the father-head of a family takes place only after the birth of a son, and this delay evidently has for its object the preservation of the property in the same family. But it often also happens that strangers fulfil the conjugal duties without the manifestation of any irritation on the part of the husband towards the wife. The belief and the divine worship of the Skoptsy breathe an ardent and exalted sentiment of hope and of resignation.”* De Pauly adds, that at the present day the Government has ceased to exercise against sectaries those repressions which strengthened their obstinacy and augmented their numbers. This is quite inconsistent with what Dr. Kopernicky relates.

The name *Moscovites* is the true and proper appellation of the Great Russians. Their neighbours, the Poles, Lithuanians, and the true Russians, or Ruthenians, *i.e.* the White Russians and Little Russians, or Ukrainians, never call them otherwise. The Great Russians as a nation and as a state (*Tsarat*) were not known till the eighteenth century, save under the name of *Moscovites*. It was Peter the Great and Catharine II, who, finding that this name was objectionable and of bad odour among the European family, usurped the designation of Russians and imposed it on the nation by the force of *Ukases*. This history is truly curious, not only in a political point of view, but also in an ethnological one.

The Skoptsi is a tolerably numerous religious sect. Its peculiarities are based on the literal interpretation of the words of the Evangelist : “ *Expedi enim tibi ut pereat unum membrorum tuorum, quam totum corpus tuum eat in gehennam.* ” It is better that one of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should go to hell. These miserable eunuchs, who are distinguished for much ardour in their proselytism, are severely pursued. Those among them who, especially in the reign of Nicholas I, had not succeeded in purchasing at great cost the right to practise in secret within their own country their abominable worship, were forced to emigrate into neighbouring provinces. But it was only in Wallachia and Moldavia that they were allowed to settle. They are very numerous at Jassy, at Galatz, and at Bucharest. In these cities they are nearly all coach-drivers and

* De Pauly, *Peuple de la Russie*, p. 44.

proprietors of voitures de place, or hackney carriages, and it is only at the price of fifty to one hundred ducats, with a carriage and a pair of horses, that they ordinarily gain their proselytes. They are in general very greedy, avaricious, but peaceful and sober. They dwell in communities, and inhabit distinct quarters of the towns in which they live, and practise their rites with such secrecy that it is impossible for a stranger to visit their assemblies. So secret are they that Dr. Kopernicky has found it impossible to learn where or how they inter their dead. They never even send their sick to the hospital, and it was only last year that he has had the sole occasion to dissect one of the Scoptsis, one who was found dead in the public highway, and consequently his body had to undergo a medico-legal examination. It is curious from what Dr. Kopernicky has confirmed upon this dead body, that in mutilating themselves they do not stop at the extirpation of the testicles *lege artis*, nor in their extirpation with the scrotum, but they also cut off the entire penis close to the pubes. It should be noted that the larynx of the old castrated men or eunuchs has the feminine form, as is well-known to be the case in emasculated persons in Turkey and Egypt.

(The anatomical preparation was exhibited.)

The photographs now presented to the Society are all of rich individual Scoptsis at Bucharest. They have their privileged photographer, who by chance was discovered by Dr. Kopernicky. Save the expression of their physiognomy—evidently derived from their mutilation—that peculiar mildness and want of force in their countenances, which is heightened by the particular manner in which most of them wear their hair—they are all true types of Moscovites; very different, Dr. Kopernicky adds, from the ideal ones which the Panslavic Congress of Moscow distributed in 1867. In some of them is plainly to be descried the large bony coarse skull of the Moscovite, with a long face, which has been described in the *Thesaurus Craniorum*, p. 120.

It is especially worthy of notice that the religious sects among the Moscovites seem to merit a particular attention anthropologically. First, the true Russians, *i.e.* the White Russians and the Little Russians are all orthodox of the United Greek Church, and there have never been any religious sects among them. Among the Moscovites, on the contrary, it is only the smallest party which is orthodox, and the major part is divided into different sects more or less numerous, of which there are many dozens.

From Dr. Kopernicky I have obtained much further information respecting the history of the Scoptsis. He says, this sect must have taken deep root in the manners and religious ideas of the Moscovites, since the energetic persecution of twenty years to which it was subjected in the time of Nicholas I, has not succeeded in destroying it. Even quite recently it has been said that an important focus of the sect has been discovered at Moscow. An event, which made much noise at the time in Russia, was the discovery at the commencement of last year of quite a centre of Scoptsis at Morshansk, a city of the district of the Government of Tambov.

A rich merchant of that city, named Maxime Plotitsine, being de-

nounced as chief of these sectaries, was arrested, and the domiciliary visit to his house brought to light five unsexed individuals, men and women. They found images of a certain Selivanov and of the Emperor Peter III, both of whom are adored by the Scoptsis as their *Christs*, and of a woman, Akoulina Ivanovna, still living, and honoured by them as *Notre Dame*, or the Virgin. Besides which there were discovered there enormous sums in gold and silver, which certainly constituted the central treasury of the sect. It was affirmed that the police seized 30,000,000 of roubles (£5,000,000 sterling!), which gradually, before it came into the hands of the Government, dwindled down, by means well-known in Russia, to half-a-million of roubles. These millions, accumulated and hidden in one city of the district, and confided without reserve to the discretion of a single private person, prove that the Scoptsis constitute a communist society very powerful and strong in its organisation. As to their proselytism, everything leads to the belief that they have considerable success. Thus in this affair of Morshansk there were fifty Scoptsis, men and women, arrested in the city, and an equal number in the district. Among the arrests there were *members of the Russian clergy*.

As, on the occasion of this affair, the public and the press were chiefly occupied with the treasures and their disappearance, and as the inquest into the affair was made in secret, there were few details of interest published about the Scoptsis of Morshansk, on the extent and the means of their propagandism, their manners and creed, or on the mysteries of their worship. Happily, however, Dr. Kopernicky says, in the *Moscow Gazette* (*Moskovskia Viedomosti*, which is a sort of Russian *Times*), there was a very valuable article, which was published on this occasion (Nos. 51, 52, and 54), under the title of "The Sects of the Scoptsis, in the Government of the Tauride in 1865," *i.e.* four years ago.

As this notice was entirely based upon the official documents of the inquest, it possesses all the merit of unquestionable authenticity. It unveils a series of details so curious and altogether so unknown that Dr. Kopernicky has had the kindness to furnish me with an extract from it.

It was taken on the Sea of Azov, in the Moscovite Colonies, on the two shores of the river Molotchna, in the districts of Berdiansk and Mililopol, which the proselytism of the Scoptsis had principally invaded.

In April, 1865, many rural communes of this last district addressed their complaints to the authorities against the growing phrensy of the Shaloputs, a sort of neophytes, or Scoptsis of the first degree, who are not yet castrated, who in open day had introduced mutilation into the bosom of their families. The most flagrant case was the complaint of a poor old man, whose young and beautiful daughter they had mutilated, without his having any suspicion of it.

It was proved at the inquest that the Shaloputs observed all the religious practices of the orthodox church, but it was only to mislead the surveillance of their neighbours, and to be able to observe their own nocturnal mysteries with more security. They reject all the

bonds of family relations and call their own fathers and mothers "fornicators." They require and receive from their proselytes an oath to keep absolute secrecy upon all that concerns their sect. During their nocturnal services, they cast at the feet of the new converts to be trodden on, the money of the country (the symbol of civil power), the written names of the father and mother of the convert, and the image of a saint (symbol of the official church). It is precisely in these nocturnal assemblies that they practise the sacrifice of castration in the midst of songs and dancing.

The Shaloputs and the Scoptsis are in the habit of establishing their dwellings in the neighbourhood of each other. It was thus, for example, that at Michailovka they occupied "the extremity of the Tim," the name of a district of the government of Kursk, in which village the first Scoptsis arrived in the eighteenth century. There were sixty-six Shaloputs in this village, among whom twelve were mutilated (three men and nine women), many of them recently.

In another village, in two Shaloput families, which contained nine persons, five were found to be castrated, among whom was a boy of 14. In another place likewise, among twenty-three Shaloputs there were eleven adults mutilated (three males and eight females), and three young boys of 15, 14, and 9 years of age. Upon this last, as well as upon two other children of the same age, the operation had been accomplished by "a special proceeding only possible in children" (!). Lastly, in another village there was found a woman of 35 years of age mutilated, who had been blind from birth. They also found Scoptsis who had undergone mutilation, of 60 and 70 years of age. In the whole, among 147 seized and examined in this district, 47 completed Scoptsis were imprisoned; among those there were many more females, 30, than males, 17. Many among the latter had received the *sigillum magnum*, that is to say, as is supposed, they had had their virile members amputated in the manner of the Bucharest Scoptsi, who would have been regarded undoubtedly as one of their saints. Among those arrested were two families of Scoptsis, of whom all were mutilated, both parents and children.

To escape the transportation to Siberia which awaited them, the Scoptsis interrogated ordinarily sought to justify themselves in different ways. Thus the married women either denied altogether their mutilation, or sought to make it believed that the cicatrices observed were the result of ulcerations, or of previous accouchements. The girls pretended that they were congenital vices of conformation, etc. As to the men, some avowed freely and naively that in accordance with the sixth chapter of Matthew they had mutilated themselves; others affirmed that it was an *unknown* person who had mutilated them after having stupefied them by means of a narcotic drink.

As, according to the penal code, Scoptsis who were castrated by violence or by artifice were acquitted, and even received *special* certificates by which they were enabled to dwell in safety, they did not fail to put forth this favourable circumstance, and often sought to give their odious practices all the appearance of an act of violence. As soon as they learned that one of their castrators in any part was

on the point of being seized by the police, they hastened to put themselves in his hands, they made it known to all the communes of the Scoptsis, and set to work with double energy to accomplish the greatest number of castrations possible; all at the expense of this operator. As soon as he is taken, complaints against him arrive from all parts. He does not deny them. And in this way the pretended victims of his barbarous violence get acquitted, and furnished with certificates which defend them from all persecution, and render them still more at liberty to continue their hateful proselytism.

To the exhortations which are made to them during the interrogatory of the inquest, the Shaloputs ordinarily reply in proverbs. "The edifice of the church does not consist of beams, but of ribs," they say, professing their dogma of the *invisible church*. "Do not incense the image, for you will smoke it." "The thieves have cut it, and the cattle are gone;" thus expressing themselves of the orthodox church. "He who has large sleeves has a wicked soul," etc.

The chief of the Militapolitani Scoptsis, a certain *Babanine*, escaped the pursuit. The Shaloputs represent her as an ardent fanatic, eloquent, and possessing the gift of prophesying. It was discovered that she entertained intimate relations with the Scoptsis of Bucharest and of Galatz, in Moldo-Wallachia. These having a great authority over the sectaries, encouraged and sent their benediction for the good work to the Scoptsis of Militapol. The inquest in the district of Berdiansk also showed that the sectaries of this country maintained a mysterious connection with a certain *Akouline Ivanouna*, who resided secretly at Bielgarad, in the Government of Kursk, and who is adored by the Scoptsis as the "Mother of God," the "Queen of Heaven." The Scoptsis and the Shaloputs make pilgrimages to this goddess, and address prayers to her in their religious services. They affirm that this *Akouline* dwells behind a *wall of gold*, and that she has never been able to be discovered. And, in fact, on the occasion of the different affairs of the Scoptsis, she was many times sought for by the police, but always in vain. The wall of gold dazzled in such a manner those who sought her.

It was the inquest at Berdiansk principally which brought to light many of the details concerning the dogmas and religious practices of the Scoptsis, of which these are the most prominent.

Babanine taught that to render oneself worthy of entering into the Kingdom of God, and of receiving the spirit of God, it is indispensable for a man to be castrated; for castration is the supreme good work, it is that "seal of God" which marks the elect of the Lord, and is spoken of in the sixth chapter of the Apocalypse. To live with a wife is to practise adultery, and draw down the punishment of God, similar to that which overtook David for having touched the wife of Uriah. *Babanine* ordered the adoration of Peter III as a second Christ, since Peter also was a eunuch and had his twelve disciples whom he sent out to preach the doctrine of the Scoptsis. The twelve apostles of Christ and the twelve disciples of Peter III, these are the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse, who are seated upon the twenty-four thrones, and

the souls of the massacred at their feet are all the *faithful* belonging to the sect of the Scoptsis.

They reckon among their saints, besides Peter III, the Empress Elizabeth Petrovina, Paul I, and Alexander I, who all protected their sect. Lastly, as has been already said, the same Akoulina Ivanavna, of Bielgarad, is adored by them as the "Queen of Heaven." It may be mentioned that Elizabeth was the daughter of Peter the Great, and reigned upwards of twenty years, was much regretted by her subjects, to whom she had endeared herself by the mildness of her administration. She was succeeded by Peter III, who only reigned six months, when he was dethroned and put into prison, where he died in a week, it is supposed by violence, in which his ambitious consort Catherine was concerned.

The Scoptsis reject the authority of the orthodox church, and call it Babylonian. They reject the eucharist, and hold baptism to be of no value when received from an orthodox priest. Babanine requires that they should be *rebaptised in spirit*. The ceremony of this baptism, practised upon every new convert, is accomplished in the following manner. In their nocturnal assemblies, in which this act ought to take place, they kindle a great number of candles. At the entrance of the neophyte the assembled Shaloputs salute him by saying: "You, who baptise yourself in the name of Christ, put on Christ!" The disciple repeats these words, and adds: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen! Lord! have pity on my soul, receive it among the number of the just, and write my soul in the book of life, in the book of the seventh heaven!" Afterwards Babanine and the baptised pronounce the "canon fidei"; lastly, the latter solemnly repeats the following oath: "Now, O Lord! having received thy law, I will never speak of it to my parents, nor to the world, nor to *the possessors of the darkness of this age* (i.e., to the clergy and the authorities who persecute their sect), and if I should ever speak of it O Lord! then never pardon me, O Lord! nor have pity on me, and may thy cross strike me down, O crucified. Amen."

The oath having been pronounced, they sing "Ave Maria." Afterwards, the newly baptised repeats after Babanine the prayer "Have pity on me!" Addressed successively to the "Lords of God," Peter III, Tiadorovites, Paul I, and Alexander I, and to the "Lady Mothers" Elizabeth Petrovina and Akoulina Ivanovna, "Queen of the Heavens." The ceremony is finished by the absurd question of Babanine, made of the new convert: "Does baptism please you?"

For their nocturnal meeting the Scoptsis have no days fixed beforehand. Each time a meeting ought to take place is arranged five or six days before; when they assemble at ten o'clock at night, and remain till the break of day. Those who become fatigued ascend into the garret of the house to lie down, and are replaced by others who arrive later in the night. In order not to attract the indiscreet attention of the neighbours, in quitting the assembly, they take care to go out in small groups, and many remain till the following night. Their chief especially arrives only in the night, and departs before the day. In these assemblies the sitting is opened by chanting hymns composed

by one of their inspired psalmists, as Babanine. First, it is the men who chant, striking each measure upon their knees. "Omnes gentes plaudite manibus," Ps. The women dance round, stepping in measures—some among them turn themselves round. This dance continues till the complete exhaustion of the dancers, which is often followed by convulsions and vomiting. Then, a change takes place; the women begin to chant, to beat the measure, to jump and turn. This is called "working for God," and constitutes, after mutilation, the work most agreeable to the Lord. Babanine assured her disciples that it was in the same way that our Saviour Himself prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and that it was the same dance which the angels of heaven dance round the throne of God, after having expelled Satan. Lastly, that the Lord Himself taught us to *turn* upon Mount Tabor, where He showed His glory, and ascended to heaven *turning*.

The commission of the inquest succeeded in obtaining many of the hymns of the Scoptsis chanted in their assemblies. They are for the most part the most foolish and barbarous absurdities put into bad rhymes and intermixed with flattering allusions to their sect. It is nearly impossible to translate these absurdities into a human language. Dr. Kopernicky has, however, attempted to translate one as a specimen.

"Bless, O secret synod! thy faithful orphans to render glory to the Lord by means of the Divine round"—the dance of the Scoptsis—"it invokes the spirit that he may smile upon us—our Lord and our Life! descend from the seventh heaven. He marches through all the villages; light dwells in Him. The Word is gone forth, the Word delivered by the prophets that we should not do evil." "And again, my dears, I go to tell you a serious saying: *that the treasure may be prepared*" (?) The secret and invisible manna descends to us from heaven, and the living water flows to us also." "Do not delay the moments, for I go to collect the seed."

"All the archbishops and senators will admire his great suffering.

"Our Father the Emperor (Peter III) suffers his last suffering, and inclines himself in prayer before Sabaoth.

"O my heavenly Father! I do Thy will, I do Thy will, and I teach my little children and order them to keep the law.

"Do thou carry the heavenly word, and do thou implore Sabaoth for us all, O our dear Bird!

"Our light, O Lord! will reign shortly both in heaven and on earth. The glory of God, honour and power for ever. Amen!"

After the chants and the exhausting dances, the prophesies follow. The prophet Babanine, in white stockings, the Bible open in her hands, places herself upon a cloth stretched out in the middle of the chamber. The sectaries all on their knees, surround her. Babanine begins:—

"Let us pray rightly, that the second Christ may be brought to life again? He is present among us. Open your ears, for I am going to do miracles! Behold the book of generation (?), the theologian (*sic*) goes to read it to you." And afterwards she begins to prophesy, in absurd and badly rhyming verses, at first, for all in general, and then

for certain Shaloputs in particular. Thus, to one of them she predicts: "Thou, like to the prophet Abbakhum, thou shalt be host in all the cities; and thyself white as a pigeon, thou shalt feed the white pigeons."

To another, who is preparing himself to be castrated, Babanina exclaims:—"O, thou soul well-beloved! thou shalt receive from heaven signs which will astonish the whole family of Israel. . . . And the Father will not fail to give thee the heptagon (?) crown. It is alone necessary that thou shalt decide to pour out thy blood for Christ!" All the auditory weep aloud, moved by these sublime words.

It is with particular vehemence that this Babanine preaches against the sin of the violation of the secret, as of Judas selling Christ. She also interprets with ardour the Apocalypse, and principally the sixth chapter. The second verse of this chapter is referred to Peter III, who, being castrated, vanquished the enemy; the fourth verse is supposed to relate to Alexander I; the fifth and sixth verses to the Scoptsis, and the extension of their sect. *Bilibris tritici* signifies the sacrifice of castration; *tres bilibres hordei denario* signifies that one not castrated must work three times more than the eunuch to attain salvation. *Oleum* signifies grace, *vinum* joy, destined for the Scoptsis. The eighth verse has relation to Nicholas I, who delivered the people of God—the Scoptsis—as a prey to the beasts of the earth, to the archbishops, and impure authorities. In the ninth chapter, the "seal of God" signifies mutilation, and the "locusts" war and crimes.

This is a tolerably faithful, although certainly not complete picture of this savage and extraordinary sect. The fully proved existence of such a sect, especially as a Christian sect, seems to be a phenomenon truly worthy to attract the attention of anthropologists.

Dr. Kopernicky says that he considers there are many reasons for believing that this aberration in Christianity cannot be explained otherwise than by the psychological peculiarity of the race of Moscovites, in which it prevails. He adds, that he well recollects the judicious and profound opinions pronounced by the Rev. Dunbar Heath, already alluded to, upon the difference which exists between the Semite and Aryan races in their appreciation of the doctrine of Christianity. In reflecting on the Scoptsis, who exist and prosper among the Moscovites, it may be equally asked—what is this race which, having received Christianity, is capable of producing and suffering such fruits.

Dr. Kopernicky holds it for an anthropological fact least questionable that the ideas and religious creeds, sound or absurd, moral or immoral, etc., which are produced, or develop themselves among a certain race, depend greatly upon the character of the psychological sentiments natural to that race. This is the reason why the Gospel was so readily accepted, and has taken such root among the Aryan people, and why, on the contrary, the Koran has had most success and most persistence among the Semites. It is also the reason why, as has been demonstrated by the learned discussions in the bosom of this Anthropological Society of London, the propagation of Mohammedanism has more chances of success among African Negroes than Christian missions have hitherto had.

In examining the nature and the origin of Christian sects from this point of view—as so many varieties in religious belief produced in Christianity—it is seen that we shall confirm the same fact of the existence of an intimate and natural bond between the psychological character of a race and its religious ideas and practices. Thus, among the Christian sects so numerous in the United States of America, we only see for the most part extravagances which are purely doctrinal, or different aberrations which manifest themselves by strange rites, and which are at most ridiculous or absurd. But a sect so *dénaturée et barbare* as that of the Scoptsis, the Chlystis, the Molokans, and others which prosper among the Moscovites, never could subsist in America, even for half a year. They would be driven away in a manner the Mormons, who are much less monstrous than the Scoptsis, have been driven into the desert.

Then what is this Moscovite race, which, becoming Christian, gives birth to religious monstrosities of this kind? It is not the Slave race without doubt, since that which precisely distinguishes the Slavonic nations in their religious creeds is their attachment to a religion once adopted and become traditional. Thus, to speak only of the *Orthodox* Slaves, the nearest to the Moscovites, *i.e.* the Ruthenians and the White Russians, the fact is, that since the introduction of Christianity there have never existed sects among them, in the way that they are seen among the Muscovites.

But, it may be replied, that race has nothing to do with the origin of such sects as the Scoptsis, since this is a *morbid* phenomenon, so to speak, and which, under one form or another, may arise anywhere, especially where, as in Russia, the people are not enlightened and the clergy ignorant.

A reply might be made by directing attention to the same Ruthenians, the Serfs, the Bulgarians, and the Moldo-Wallachians, who are not at all more advanced in civilisation than the Moscovites, but among whom a similar phenomenon never has been and never will be produced. It is certainly because that, in the nature of these races, there are no necessary elements for the production and nourishment of such monstrosities.

There is one thing among the Scoptsis to which Dr. Kopernicky is disposed to attribute a Tatar origin, *i.e.*, their dancing and rotation until fainting and ecstasy are produced, which reminds us of the whirling Dervishes of Central Asia. This is so much the more probable, as there are other sects, as the Chlystys and the Dancers, in which dancing and prophesying constitute integral parts of their religious mysteries.

Dr. Kopernicky's recital reveals a striking difference in the state of society and laws under which the Scoptsis are placed from those which prevail in this country. Here all things are tolerated in religion, even enforced celibacy, both of males and females, however unnatural. Although not accompanied with mutilations such as those practised by the Scoptsis, it is equally contrary to the law of nature, and also productive of a frightful amount of evil. Similar mutilations to those practised by the Scoptsis, as far as castration goes, are sometimes met

with in this country, but they are usually made known only among the inmates of our lunatic asylums, who occasionally mutilate themselves.

The term "Raskol", it has already been explained, is the name under which all dissenters in Russia are included. This designation appears to be applied to the Great Russians or Moscovites solely. It is worthy of being communicated to the Society that there is another sect of the Bespopovchchina, or first division of the Raskol, who are in Siberia, which sect has proceeded to greater lengths even than those exhibited by the Scoptsis. This is the Tschovstevennicks (meaning those who are sensible, as if in derision of their practices) who, not only live in celibacy, but also voluntarily devote themselves to the flames, which has been done in recent times amid religious chants, and without drawing from them any indications of pain by cries or trepidation. It was thus that in the neighbourhood of the town of Tumen, in Western Siberia, one thousand seven hundred persons, with an ecclesiastic named Dometian, took the resolution to burn themselves together.

In confirmation of the theory of Dr. Kopernicky, a reference might be made to the races of India, in whom religious practices most contrary to reason and nature prevail extensively. Devotees observe rites which are quite frightful and abominable. One which is practised may be mentioned. There are some fanatics who avoid excrementitious evacuations. They are said to live upon milk, and, after having taken it some little time, they swallow a small ball attached to a string, which causes them to vomit up the remora. They thus avoid the evacuation of feces in the ordinary and natural manner.

It may be added that the priests of the Phrygian Cybele castrated themselves, which was done with a potsherd, that by lacerating the vessels would prevent hæmorrhage. The same rule was binding upon the priests of the "Dea Syria," who in many points resembles the Greek Aphrodite, and was worshipped at Edessa. But it is related that they emasculated themselves by the external application of a plant which is translated "hemlock". A learned friend, who has reminded me of these instances, says that there was not any early Christian sect observing such a rule, but that individuals thought it imperative to obey the injunction in St. Matthew, as in the case of the celebrated Origen.

The mode of arranging the hair seen in the photographs of the Scoptsis, by parting it down the middle, is not exclusively peculiar to that sect. All the Moscovites, without exception, wear it in the same manner. This fashion does not prevail among the Little Russians, nor among the Lithuanians or Poles.

It is not known at what period the sect of the Scoptsis took its rise, but it probably arose during the latter half of the last century, about the time of the great revolt of Pougatcheff (1770-73), which would connect it with the Emperor Peter III, their saint.

The kind of operation practised by the Scoptsis upon women is wholly unknown.

It is remarkable, but deserving of anthropological notice, that the

Moscovites or Great Russians, amongst whom exclusively the Scoptists prevail, are also distinguished among the people of Russia for their fits of drunkenness, which are not met with among the Little Russians, nor the White Russians. These are regarded as a disease, which has the name of Zapoi.

Discussion having been invited,

The Rev. DUNBAR I. HEATH said that the paper was very opportune, as Professor Max Müller had lately drawn attention to the natural law by which all known religions had grown one out of the other. The subjects to which he would direct attention were two : first, to what racial religion this extraordinary sect belonged ; and second, to the great question which their practices so vividly brought before us as to the contest between individual rights against society and those of society against the individual. It had been said that, being Christians, their religion must be substantially Semitic. Not so. Throughout the whole of the Hebrew sacred writings it was recognised that sexuality was not evil. The Jews held the eunuch to be unclean, and for that reason rejected the prophet Daniel, from whom we derive the most fundamental ideas of our present Christianity. Neither in the history of their greatest saints, nor in the precepts of their greatest writers, was even ordinary chastity recommended, still less the essential rites of these Scoptsi. As to putting down the Scoptsi by force, on the plea that their practices are injurious to society, there were at that moment women in England not only suffering from one of the most frightful of diseases, but one which was also most frightfully contagious, and not only most frightfully contagious, but most frightfully hereditary. The harm done to society by these unfortunates is a thousandfold greater than that done by the Scoptsi, who simply take the most straightforward means of escaping from what they conceive to be wicked. Yet very many are seeking in the name of individual right to perpetuate misery and deformity among our progeny. The solution of this great contest, viz., the contest between opposing rights is to be found, as Buckle says, only in the increase of knowledge, society is happily now more and more emancipated from the old ideas imposed on it by a tyrannical religiosity. It is becoming more and more benevolent, more and more charitable, affectionate, and good.

Dr. T. SPENCER COBOLD described the extent of the mutilation as shown by the preparation exhibited.

Dr. CHARNOCK said it seemed doubtful from the paper upon which verse in Matthew the Scoptsi based their origin. In two places it was said that they acted in accordance with Matth. xix : it afterwards appeared that the peculiarities of the sect arose through the literal interpretation of the Evangelist "*Expedi enim tibi ut pereat unum membrum tuorum*" (Matth. v, verse 29) ; but the latter had reference to plucking out the right eye, cutting off the right hand, and however silly these people might be, they could have hardly confounded the eye or the hand with the *membrum virile*. Without doubt the sect had originated through the misinterpretation of Matt. xix, v. 12 :—"For there were some eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb, and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men, and there

be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it let him receive it." According to the best commentators, the assertion that some eunuchs made themselves such referred to the living a life of celibacy and not to mutilating the body,* and the words "ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν, χωρεῖτω, merely meant that those who were able to lead such a life had better do so. It was not, however, difficult to understand that the Scoptsi should have mistaken the passage in Matthew. Origen, the celebrated Christian writer, interpreting this to the letter, castrated himself; but it was a fact that he afterwards repented of what he had done, and in a commentary on Matth. xix, repudiated this literal understanding of the words. Again, a sect called Valentinians (who took their name from the celebrated Gnostic Valentinus), interpreting this injunction to the letter, castrated themselves. Moreover the practice is recommended by Philon the Jew and other ancient philosophers for the sake of chastity. Dr. Barnard Davis says that among the Ruthenians, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Moldo-Wallachians, who are not more advanced in civilisation than the Moscovites, similar phenomena never have been, and never will be, produced. It was, perhaps, questionable whether civilisation had anything to do with the matter, and it was impossible to say what might not take place. Dr. Charnock was glad to hear the opinion of the authors of the paper as to the terms "Aryan" and "Semitic." The former term had no meaning, either ethnologically, geographically, or philologically, and was only equalled in absurdity by that of Turanian. The name of the Scoptsi was no doubt derived from the Russian word *skopet*, to castrate. The word *Popovshcheena* meant "those who have priests;" *Bespovoscheena*, "those without priests." He agreed with Dr. Carter Blake that the facial character, as shown by the photographs produced, differed little from that of the Russians generally.

Mr. W. R. S. RALSTON (of the British Museum) said that the word Scoptsi was derived from the verb in its infinitive, *skopit*, to castrate. Hence *skopets*, an eunuch; and nominative plural *skoptsi*, eunuchs. Their numbers were supposed to have been at the time of the report sent in to the minister of the interior (in Russia) about two thousand. Almost all of them live in the governments of Moscow or Tambof. But about one hundred and seventy are at St. Petersburg, chiefly money-changers. The appearance of these people is so strange and characteristic, that no one who has observed them can fail afterwards to recognise them. At a little distance, their faces seem almost youthful; seen nearer, they are found to be equally wanting in the usual marks of early life or of later age. The cheeks are generally smooth, though some of them have a thin whisker or beard, and they have a kind of creased or rumpled look. The mouth is usually weak; but the most striking features are the hue of the skin and the expression of the eye. Their complexion is pallid, tallowy, and unwholesome; and, although it may have a touch of colour, the skin seems to be rather painted than suffused. Below the eye, the skin is drawn

* The Vulgate has, however, "Et sunt eunuchi, seipsos castraverunt propter regnum cælorum."

and dark ; in extreme cases, the eye itself is glassy and lustreless, while, from its corners, thousands of fine wrinkles spread over the face, puckering it so strangely as though a cobweb were clinging to it. Many Scoptsis do not differ much in appearance from other Russians ; but they are always recognisable at first sight, owing to their having some of that worn and haggard aspect which, in other members of the community, becomes utter ghastliness. In a curious collection of documents relating to the Roskolniks, or schismatics, of Russia, printed privately, by order of the Russian Government, but afterwards reprinted in London, and published by Mr. Trübner, with a French title (*Recueil de Documents Officiels sur les Dissidents Russes*, 6 vols. London : 1863), much information is given concerning the Scoptsis. This work is accompanied by an album of photographs, most of which are taken from drawings made for the purpose of illustrating the volume devoted to this and several kindred sects. Among them are five representations of secret rites of the Scoptsis. The first of these pictures represents their ceremony of initiation ; in the last, a novice is being received at a formal meeting of the members of the sect. The others show their wild dances, technically called *Radzeniga* (*Radzenie* properly means zeal). The circular dance of the Scoptsis is called the "boat *Radzenie*"; for their community is styled by them "the boat" (*Kopablik*), and its members "boatmen". Their enemies assert that these dances degenerate into horrible orgies ; but such charges must always be regarded with suspicion. In many respects they may be compared with the Essenes, especially so far as they form a permanent community, in spite of their singular ideas about the marriage state. The Essenes were recruited from without, and so are the Scoptsis. Every Scoptet is anxious to enlist new members ; for he becomes an "apostle" as soon as he has made twelve converts. They are well-behaved people in most respects, honest, sober, thrifty. But the government has always more or less proscribed them, and attempts have been made from time to time to crush them. The chances are that as education progresses in Russia, and a purer religious feeling spreads among its inhabitants, such manifestations of diverted piety as these pitiable fanatics exhibit will become rarer and rarer, and finally disappear altogether.

After further remarks from Mr. Walter Dendy, Mr. Moncure Conway, Mr. Charlesworth, and Mr. Lewis, the meeting adjourned till 5th April.