GEORGE A. SIMONS AND THE KHRISTIANSKI POBORNIK
A Neglected Source on St. Petersburg Methodism

by John Dunstan

I. Vasilevski Ostrov

On May 16, 1703, on one of the tiniest of the swampy, wooded islands of the Neva delta in north-western Russia, Peter the Great laid the foundation stone of a fort and ordered the building of a city. How Russia thus cut through its window into Europe, at the enforced cost of thousand upon thousand of lives through flood, fire and pestilence, is a familiar epic whose harrowing aspects time does little to alleviate. But St. Petersburg rose: first directly to the north of the fort on the island now known as Petrogradskaya Storona (Petrograd Side); almost simultaneously to the south, across the River Neva, which we think of as the mainland and the heart of modern Leningrad; and later on another island over the Malaya Neva to the south-west.

Two and a half centuries before, a merchant called Vasili Selezen had owned lands on this island, and it was probably from him that Vasilevski Ostrov (Basil’s Island) derived its name; it is first so called in a document of 1500. Peter fortified its eastern tip in 1703, and in 1709 presented it to Prince Menshikov, Governor-General of the new city. Near the fortifications Menshikov promptly erected a wooden palace, which was replaced over the years 1710-1714 by a lavish stone one, turned part of the forest into gardens and orchards, and cut through a vista to the western extremity of the island where the Neva river-pilots had their huts. This later became known as the Bolshoi Prospekt (Great Avenue); and here it was, two hundred years later, just as the Great War was breaking out, that the Methodist Episcopal Church finally secured a property of its own, at no. 58.

But in the meantime Vasilevski Ostrov had changed its face. In 1715 Peter decided to turn the island into a new Amsterdam, with rectangular blocks intersected by tree-lined canals. Within some ten years a quarter of the territory had been covered with houses, mostly

2 Ibid., 10.
3 Ibid., 12-13. See also Christopher Marsden, Palmyra of the North (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), 52-53, 62-63.
wooden ones, laid out in so-called "Lines", and since Peter regarded it as the future municipal centre, foreigners had been ordered to move there from other areas of the city. Although the few canals that were cut proved insalubrious and in 1766 were filled in, and the island was too inconveniently placed ever really to take off as the city centre, it acquired considerable commercial importance. 4 The foreigners remained, a fact of great significance for our incipient theme. A French Roman Catholic chapel was established (with a somewhat wayward priest) 5 and likewise a Lutheran church for the German population, still standing at the corner of Bolshoi Prospekt and 1st Line. 6

We linger briefly on the "Lines" since they will recur in our story. By the 1760s they were crossed, to the north, by two further avenues — the Sredni (Central) and Maly (Little) — and extended to the 16th Line, nearly halfway over the island. The grid pattern and the use of numbers rather than names seems more American than European, but there are differences: the "Lines" refer specifically to the houses along the streets, so that the 8th Line, for example, faces the 9th across the same street. Originally they were to have been two streets separated by a canal.

For the next hundred years residential development remained very slow, but the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 brought in its train enormous industrial growth, which apart from brief periods of stagnation in the early 1880s and around 1900 continued to the end of the imperial era. The island was still one of the two most popular areas for foreign residents, and the part of it initially settled (between Sredni Prospekt and the Neva to the south), although its social composition was very mixed indeed, commanded the highest rents in the city outside the centre. 7 Around the turn of the century growth was more marked in the predominantly working-class district to the north, but overall the population density was rising because of the replacement of small wooden houses by large tenement blocks of up to seven storeys with courtyards and wells. 8 The actual number of foreigners had changed little, and adjacent areas of the city were similarly populated, but Vasilevski Ostrov remained the focus of business and cultural life. 9 Both the Stock Exchange and the University were there. So were

5 Marsden, op. cit., 77.
6 Pirogov, op. cit., 23. — This mixture of translated and untranslated street-names, admittedly inconsistent, follows the usage of the St. Petersburg Methodist leadership.
8 Ibid., 318, 324-25; Pirogov, op. cit., 28-29.
factories whose workers lived in dark doss-houses and dank basements, many of them former peasants from the Finnish-speaking villages outside the city. The considerable social diversity of the island's population was to be another factor in the later history of Methodism in the Russian capital.

II. The Beginnings of St. Petersburg Methodism

The history of Methodism in St. Petersburg is bound up with that in the Nordic countries, all of which received it as a result of work among Scandinavians, frequently sailors, in New York. This is how it first reached Finland in 1859. Systematic missionary work in Finland, however, did not begin until the 1880s, with a third phase of outreach associated initially with a Swedish local preacher called Karl Lindborg; in 1881 he became leader of a Methodist society in Nikolaistad, where the first Finnish church was opened the following year. About the same time he was invited to preach in St. Petersburg, apparently among the large Swedish community there; and thus 1881 or 1882 marks the Methodist Episcopal Church's earliest witness in Russia.

The first ordained Methodist missionary to work in St. Petersburg was Bengt August Carlson (1833-1920), an American of Swedish birth. In 1869 he had been one of the two men sent to open up Methodist activity in Sweden; in 1884 he was transferred to similar duties in Helsingfors (Helsinki). The sources are contradictory as to whether Carlson originally visited the Russian capital in May 1889 or a year earlier, but that need not detain us now. The first reference is a contemporary one of 1888: "Rev. B.A. Carlson writes from Helsingfors, Finland, April 7th, that he has just received a call from St. Petersburg, Russia, to go there and preach the Gospel. We may yet hear of a redeemed Russia." Bishop Mallalieu made a preliminary visit to St. Petersburg in the same year, and later expressed his hopes

11John L. Nuelsen et al., Kurzgefaßte Geschichte des Methodismus von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 2nd ed. (Bremen: Verlagshaus der Methodistenkirche, 1929), 760.
13For 1888: B. A. Carlson, Minnen ur mitt liv: Självbiografi (Stockholm: Nya Bokforlag Aktiebolaget, 1921), 140-41. (The writer is grateful to Jean Morgan and Eva Holmqvist for their help in translating this source.) For 1889: Carlson, loc. cit. (1896); Nuelsen et al., op cit., 767.
14"Our Missionaries and Missions," GAL, June 1888, 287.
of seeing a Methodist missionary established there in a few months, to serve the Swedish population;\textsuperscript{15} and after the Swedish Annual Conference of 1889 Carlson arrived with Bishop Fowler. On August 9 they rented a "convenient preaching room" in the Vasilevski Ostrov district (we do not know the precise site) for 30 roubles a month, Carlson paying the first quarter from his own pocket. On the morning of September 17 the work began; Carlson preached to a crowded congregation on Luke 10: 28. The need and the opportunity were manifest.\textsuperscript{16}

But to make a permanent appointment to St. Petersburg was easier contemplated than done. According to Carlson, the men available regarded the prospect with as much enthusiasm as a posting to Siberia. As Presiding Elder of the Finland District, Carlson had responsibility for the work and had to content himself with monthly visits. On November 10 the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated for the first time and a society of seven probationary members was formed, shortly to be joined by four more.\textsuperscript{17} One of these became a local preacher and acting pastor of the society.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1890, at the request of Bishop Fowler, the Board of Managers granted $250 for St. Petersburg, and in 1892 the General Conference resolved that "the Swedish Annual Conference may set apart the work in the Russian Empire, and organize the same into the Finland and St. Petersburg Mission."\textsuperscript{19} But as far as the Russian capital was concerned, this did little to help. Already the Methodists had lost their hall through shortage of funds;\textsuperscript{20} there were language problems, for the work was among Finns and Swedes who tended not to understand one another; and the Methodists were not allowed to advertise their services and could spread word of them only by very discreet visits to people's homes. Carlson, in his memoirs, hints at a lack of corporate self-confidence.\textsuperscript{21} Difficulties are certainly suggested by the membership figures. Late in 1890 there were 20 (11 full members, 9

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15}S. Thomoff, "Annual Meeting of the Bulgaria Mission," GAL, November 1888, 508.
\item \textsuperscript{16}Carlson, op. cit., (1921), 141-42.
\item \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 142; Carlson, loc. cit. (1896). The numbers cited in Barclay, ed., op. cit., 979, differ very slightly.
\item \textsuperscript{18}According to Nuelsen, loc. cit., this was H. K. Ridderstrom. Oddly enough, Carlson does not mention him in his autobiography, but refers with appreciation to K. U. Strandroos, who recurs in the story later.
\item \textsuperscript{19}"Boundaries of Foreign and Mission Conferences and Missions," GAL, July 1892, 337.
\item \textsuperscript{20}J. Tremayne Copplestone, History of Methodist Missions, vol. IV (New York: Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, 1973), 366-72, at 367. Copplestone's useful study is the most complete account in English of the history of Methodism in the Russian Empire known to the writer, and the fullest on St. Petersburg before the present essay.
\item \textsuperscript{21}Carlson, op. cit. (1921), 143.
\end{itemize}
probationers;22 in 1897, 27 (8 and 19 respectively);23 in 1898, 17 (13 and 4);24 and 20 in 1904.25 By 1894 the Finnish work was taking a prominent place, with several conversions, but the fourteen new members received that year clearly did not last long. Although August Ek doubled as preacher at St. Petersburg and Viborg in 1895 and 1896, for the next two years the former was listed as “to be supplied”.26

When Carlson, who for his children’s sake had had to return to his native Sweden in 1891 following his wife’s death, came back to St. Petersburg in 1902 as District Superintendent, he was evidently dismayed by what he found. The tiny group was reduced to meeting in a room where lay-preacher Strandroos lived. Carlson was invited to preach for the Methodists in the “English Congregational Church”27 (presumably what was conventionally known as the British-American Chapel), and felt that they should have such a base for themselves; the present funds, scanty enough anyway, were being wasted. A similar plea was put to the General Missionary Committee by Carlson’s successor, J. William Haggmann, in 1905.28 But in fact there had been serious legal constraints on evangelical action.

III. St. Petersburg Methodism: A New Era

At last, in 1906, the situation in Russia began to improve. This followed the “Edict of Toleration” of April 1905 giving religious minorities the right to exist, though not to seduce the Orthodox faithful. Secret missionary activity by the North German Conference in Russian Lithuania could now come into the open, and soon work began also in Estonia and Latvia, though their history cannot be considered here. (Estonian Methodism continues to this very day.) Thanks not least to the energies of the Bishop in charge of Europe, William Burt, the General Missionary Committee allocated an extra $1000 for the work in Russia, and a Finnish- and Russian-speaking

22Ibid., Adherents included, the total was probably about 40 (GAL, January 1891, 29; Khristianski Poborinki, 1/8 (August 1909), 64).
23GAL, March 1898, 129.
24GAL, January 1899, 22.
25Nuelsen, loc. cit. It was later claimed that in recent years the returns had been falsified to present a more satisfactory picture (George Albert Simons, “Report of the Superintendent” (1910), 8: ms. in Burt Collection, Archives Division, United Methodist Church, Lake Junaluska).
26GAL, March 1896, 116; February 1897, 123; March 1898, 115; January 1899, 7. — A society had been founded at Viborg, then in Finland, in 1892; there, six years later, things were much more buoyant, with 49 members, 21 probationers and a Sunday School of 180 (Ibid.).
27Carlson, op. cit. (1921), 144.
28Nuelsen et. al., op cit., 762-63; Copplestone, loc. cit.
pastor, Hjalmar F. Salmi, born in St. Petersburg, educated at a Methodist school in Finland, and with practical experience of ministry among Finnish Americans, was appointed to the city. In March 1907 he obtained permission to hold public meetings in the St. Petersburg province, on condition that political issues were avoided, and he extended his preaching to some Finnish-Russian villages, where a revival began.29

In October Salmi was joined by George Albert Simons.30 The new Superintendent of the Finland and St. Petersburg Mission was born at Laporte, Indiana in 1874, son of a Methodist pastor who as a former sailor had been converted by reading a tract on the Bible handed to him in a Glasgow street. After working as a bank-clerk and helping his father in his spare time, Simons decided to follow in his footsteps and successively trained at Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio; New York University; and Drew Theological Seminary. He became a minister in 1899 and served various charges in the New York area. Bishop Burt broached the idea of working in Russia soon after the Edict of Toleration was issued, but Simons at first resisted and over two years passed before the call came clearly early one morning: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”.31 Russia was in a notoriously unsettled state, but Simons’s slowness of response betokens commonsense rather than cowardice; events showed him to be a man of courage, resilience and enthusiasm. When he arrived in St. Petersburg he discovered that the legacy of the 1890s consisted of a Swedish meeting of “ten aged women and a feeble man, not one of whom belonged to our church”.32 Although these soon allowed themselves to be blown away by the winds of change, all sorts of new work began.

So in 1908, within a few weeks of his arrival, Simons began to publish a quarterly missionary magazine in English, entitled Methodism in Russia, printed in Rome and distributed from the Methodist Press there. The first number, dated January-March 1908, mentions preaching in Finnish, Swedish and Russian at St. Petersburg, and in Finnish at the Khandrovo Circuit of six places, where Salmi’s

29Ibid.; Methodism in Russia, 1/1 (January-March 1908), 15-16 and outside rear cover.
30Simons died unmarried in Glendale, New York, in 1952. The author would be pleased to hear from any reader who knew this interesting man.
32Simons, loc. cit., (see note 25 above); Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church (hereafter AR) for the Year 1910 (New York: The Board..., 1911), 478.
The Khristianski Pobornik

evangelistic campaign had resulted in over 150 conversions. Salmi, fluent in all three languages, was listed as the pastor, living at 33, Bolshoi Prospekt and assisted by local preacher Strandroos, while the “First Methodist Episcopal Society” met at 15, 10th Line. This was the first of three temporary meeting places before the society could acquire its own building; it had opened for services on November 3, 1907. Simons himself was living in the city centre at 24, ulitsa Gogolya (Gogol St.), where one J. Grothe had a bookstore which as an agency for Protestant publications served as the Depository of Methodist Literature, selling Bibles, books and tracts in English, Finnish, German, Russian and Swedish. During his first four months Simons had attended the Annual Conference of the New Molokans, offshoot of a sect originating in 1760 and similar to the Dukhobors; visited Methodist congregations in Finland and in Lithuania; and revisited Western Europe to promote interest in the work. Methodism in Russia was, of course, explicitly designed for the same purpose.

But what of the need for light and learning of the Russians themselves? The Finnish- and Swedish-speaking members and enquirers had access to Methodist journals printed primarily for use in those countries. We have noted that special funds had been authorised for the work in Russia, and Hjalmar Salmi’s command of Russian symbolizes a new departure. The next step would be to publish an evangelical magazine in the Russian language. It was soon to be taken.

IV. The Khristianski Pobornik as a Christian Magazine

Methodism in Russia had presumably been printed and distributed in Rome partly because of existing facilities there and partly because the evangelisation of the Orthodox remained legally forbidden; although preventive censorship had been formally abolished and new journals could be published without permission, it was not difficult to fall foul of the law. But as 1909 approached the church was about to acquire legal status, and thus Simons must have felt sufficiently confident to take the decision to bring out his second new magazine. The first monthly issue of the Khristianski Pobornik

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33This is where Simons preached his first sermon after arriving in Russia and escaped a drunken murder attempt (Ibid.). He afterwards liked to suggest that his epitaph might have been “Here lies a Metodistski pastor, killed by vodka...”

34Methodism in Russia, 1/1 (January-March 1908), inside front cover and 15-16. This first issue is held at Lake Junaluska. There appears to have been a set in the New York Public Library which cannot now be traced. The author would be interested to learn of any other surviving copies. Professor Wilhelm Kahle (Marburg) is thanked for his comments on the Protestant background at this point.

35AR 1909, 51, 482; AR 1910, 477; Nuelsen et al., op. cit., 769.
(Christian Advocate), consisting of eight pages, appeared in January 1909. It was edited by Salmi and published from Apartment 12 at 18, 9th Line, to which Simons had recently moved.

In 1910 Simons reported that the Pobornik was published in an edition of 1000 copies, with a further thousand at Christmas, Easter and Conference time. Its subscribers included the Orthodox Synod, the Orthodox Seminary, the Department for Foreign Relations and leaders of various churches. He also told a nice story about it: “One of our converts in St. Petersburg, having charge of a vodka dispensary, whose contract with the government would not be up for about a year, hence could not become a member of our church; [but he] has made a practice of giving [away] a copy of Khristianski Pobornik with every bottle of vodka, thus counteracting the evil effects of the spirits with a spiritual antidote!”

The author has attempted a rough content analysis of the Khristianski Pobornik from an almost unbroken set recently discovered at the Leningrad Public Library spanning the years 1909-1917. Whether it continued after 1917 is not yet known. There are twelve issues for each of the years 1909 and 1912 to 1916; 1910 and 1911 have eleven each, including a double issue; and for 1917 there are four single and two double issues, but those from July to October are missing. The average number of pages per month, including eight months of 1917, is 10.3. During the nine years there are five successive editors, and from February 1915 until June 1917 there is a special English-language section probably edited by Simons himself, averaging slightly over half the length of the Russian part. A classification scheme previously devised for church magazines has been adapted for this purpose; occasionally the content of a piece overlaps and is then notionally divided between categories.

The Khristianski Pobornik as a Russian-language journal was always predominantly instructional in its functions. In October 1910, with growing political reaction, new regulations were introduced curbing Protestant outreach (see section V.C below), and this seems to have had the effect of increasing the safer devotional and theological content while keeping input of a missionary or pastoral nature to a fairly modest level. Successive editors maintained a low profile. Nobody would suspect from reading these pages that the number of strikes in Russia rose from 222 in 1910 to 4098 in the first seven months of 1914! What we have classified as “home and local” items

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36 Simons, op. cit., 19.
37 It is also unknown whether any copies have survived in the west, though such Methodist librarians and archivists whom we have consulted in Britain, Germany, Switzerland and the U. S. A. think not. But since the journal was sent out of the country, the possibility cannot be ruled out.
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Note: Individual items may not add up to 100% or to sub-totals because of rounding.
are generally reports of meetings in the Russian or Finnish societies or the Conference; they do not reveal plans to campaign for the conversion of the Orthodox. The very few references to fund-raising are strictly for charitable purposes or concern China, where Orthodoxy scarcely had much at stake. In 1911 articles appeared praising the tsar’s grandfather, Alexander II, assassinated thirty years earlier just after signing a decree which would have set up a representative assembly; though, assuming Simons had a hand in editorial policy, it must have been considerably easier for him to praise the “Tsar-Liberator” than that emperor’s reactionary successors.

With the coming of the Great War, the picture changes somewhat. Censorship or at least self-censorship must have been at work in 1914; although war broke out in August, there is no mention of it until December, though the new name of Petrograd (less German-sounding than Sankt-Peterburg) is first used in the September issue. In December there is a photograph of Ensign Adalbert Lukas, one of the ordained men serving what we must now call the Petrograd society, and a picture of Christ comforting a wounded soldier on the battlefield; the two items were more closely linked than might have been realised, for Lukas had already fallen, though nobody heard until March.

After 1914, however, more and more is heard about the war, and the topical articles and miscellaneous news items together rise from an all-time low of 2.8% in 1914 to 10.9% in 1915 and over 26% in 1916-1917, with a corresponding reduction in the worship and doctrine content from its highest ever at 87% in 1914 to little more than half that amount in 1916-1917, though the 1917 issues examined cover only two-thirds of the year. The English section during its brief existence had primary functions that were basically different from the Russian: to encourage American-Russian solidarity — although that was an increasingly evident subsidiary function of the Russian section — and to provide a local news service for the American community in Petrograd. Its attention to Christian teaching was not insignificant, but it was minor, dropping to 15.4% in 1916, while topical features and miscellaneous short news items, combined with biographical articles which were usually about locally prominent Americans such as Ambassador George T. Marye or Henry Dunster Baker, the com-

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38*Kristianski Pobornik* (hereafter *KP*), 2/2 (February 1911), 12-14.
39*KP*, 12(48) [sic!] (December 1914), 9, 11. The serialisation is erratic.
40The Methodist church apparently became known as the American Church (George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920: Russia Leaves the War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 111-12).
41*KP*, 7/2 (February 1915), 11-12.
mmercial attache,42 comprised 52.3% in 1915 and rose to 71.5% in 1916. The pages that we have designated “Service, Pastoral Work” were devoted to medical war relief, social care and temperance, increasingly the last-mentioned following the 1914 decree on prohibition, and this was true of both sections. But the English one fell an early casualty to the upheavals of 1917.

Apart from changes in content likely to have resulted from exogenous influences, those apparently attributable to a change of editor are minor and probably indicate personal tastes. When Hjalmar Salmi relinquished the editorial chair to Vladimir Datt in August 1910, sermons ceased abruptly and articles became more numerous and shorter. In November 1911 Datt handed over to N.P. Oksochski, evidently an individual of serious demeanour; the fiction introduced by Salmi in January 1910 and intermittently sustained by Datt was cut out as soon as it could be, back came the sermons in abundance for the next two years, and study materials in the form of Sunday School lessons were lengthened so much that they sometimes occupied nearly half of the issue. The brief incumbency of A.A. Lukas43 saw the inception of a series of sermons by Simons, and that of I.A. Tatarinovich starting in June 1915 is marked by a penchant for verse, ranging from the religious poetry of the Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich Romanov to translations of the “International Sunshine Song” and “When Johnny comes marching home".44

V. The Khristianski Pobornik as a Source on St. Petersburg Methodism

We move now to a consideration of the Khristianski Pobornik as a source on the life and outlook of St. Petersburg/Petrograd Methodism, drawing on additional sources as appropriate. We shall first survey the day-to-day activities of the Methodist Episcopal Church there and the development of the work up to the beginning of the Soviet era, and then turn our attention successively to its doctrinal emphases and the formation of a Methodist consciousness, and to missionary strategy and relations with the secular authorities.

A. Daily life

During 1908 the First Methodist Episcopal Society moved from 15 to 37, 10th Line, an apparently detached two-storeyed wood and brick

42KP, 7/82 [sic!] (October 1915), 11-13.
43September 1914 to May 1915; this was the preacher killed at the front, for the editor’s Christian names given in the St. Petersburg directory for 1915 (Ves’ Peterburg na 1915 god) match those in his obituary (KP 7/4 (April 1915), 8-11), but it is odd that his name was retained after the news of his death. Certainly his successor continued to be listed as editor after being drafted about June 1916 (KP 8/91 (July 1916), 11).
44Respectively KP, 7/80 (August 1915), 5; 8/85 (January 1916), 10; 8/90 (June 1916), 3.
building with attics, its side of seven bays facing the street; the front of five bays was approached through a walled courtyard. It was owned by the Jewish Orphans' Home. In 1909 Simons moved to a nearby address (Apartment 12, at 18, 9th Line) to supervise the work more closely. The Methodists had Sunday services in six languages (German at 10 a.m., English at 11.30, Russian at 3.45 p.m., Swedish at 5 and Finnish and Estonian at 6); a morning Sunday School held in several languages; and weeknight meetings in Finnish (Monday at 7.30 p.m.), Estonian (Tuesday and Friday at 8), English and Russian (Wednesday at 7.30) and German (Thursday at 7.30).

When Simons delivered his report to the 1910 Conference of the Finland and St. Petersburg Mission, he was able to claim a total congregation of 500, of nine different nationalities, including 80 full members and 52 adult probationers, most of whom had been meeting in class once a week for instruction by him; testimonies could be heard in five languages. In addition, the Superintendent was averaging four sermons each Sunday, holding a Bible class for Russians on Wednesdays, speaking to a German group on Fridays, and giving a three-hour catechism class on Saturday afternoons for five boys and four girls who had voluntarily appeared for it. Their three-year course comprised Biblical and church history and the history, catechism, doctrines and discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church; some of them might join the ministry. The Sunday School, with 175 scholars and teachers, was run by Vladimir Datt with a board of eight men and seven women teachers to help him. It included Bible classes for various nationalities; Simons himself led a class for some fifty Germans aged from 14 to 50. In the previous year the Sunday School had raised 175 roubles, of which nearly half had gone to China to support the new "St. Petersburg Day School" for boys there. The society as a whole had raised over 3200 roubles for self-support, benevolent and missionary purposes.

The home missions and Christian service activities of the St. Petersburg society merit fuller attention. As well as the parts of the Empire already mentioned, there had been outreach in Karelia, terminated by the authorities, and west of Mariinsk on the Trans-Siberian Railway. In 1910 the latter work had just started through

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43 Photograph in KP, 2/22 (October 1912), 83.
44 Ves' Peterburg na 1909 god (St. Petersburg: Izdanie A. S. Suvorina, no date), col. 212.
45 KP, 1/1 (January 1909), 8.
46 KP, 1/20 (August 1910), 63; supplemented from Simons, op. cit., 6-8, 23. On the Chinese school see also KP, 1/13 (January 1910), 3. There is also mention of a further day school, in Korea (AR 1912, 414; AR 1913, 412). For further details of the Sunday School see KP, 1/17 (May 1910); 41-42.
47 For the Karelian episode see Copplestone, op. cit., 369-70. Mariinsk is now in Kemerovo Region, 350 km. east of Novosibirsk.
the initiative of August Karlson, a British and Foreign Bible Society colporteur who had made contact with the Methodists when visiting the capital and studied their faith and practice. By 1914 he was preaching in seven widely dispersed villages, and in one of them, Vambolsk, a "prayer house" was being built. Martin Prikask, another of Simons's preachers, made the nine-day journey there to open it in December. He found himself helping to finish it in temperatures of minus 40-47°C, but it was ready for Christmas Day. He recorded that the local people were in a very sorry situation. The place had been settled for seven years; some had built little houses, but others were still living in caves; there were no schools for their children; and during the long winter they all lived together with their animals. The spiritual life there was at the same low level. Karlson's son Paul formed a choir and the Petrograd friends sent them an American organ.  

Back in the capital, as we saw in the introduction, there was also poverty and squalor. To the relief of this, Methodism made a contribution which earned wide respect. Sister Anna Eklund, a deaconess of Finnish birth who had trained in Germany, joined Simons soon after his arrival. Within months she had gathered four other sisters about her and they had a cholera epidemic on their hands. This meant that they had already begun to be known by November 1908 when the "Vifaniya" (Bethany) Deaconess Home was opened in a five-room apartment, no. 10, at 44, 3rd Line. Morale was high; the only difficulty was a shortage of funds for the work and for the two-year training of the younger sisters.  

The range and extent of Bethany's activities can perhaps be best summarised from a statistical report filed by Sister Anna in the summer of 1911. Over the previous year they had accumulated 256 days and nights of nursing in private houses and 36 night duties, treated 148 paying and non-paying massage patients, undertaken 345 visits to homes and hospitals, made gifts to 305 people at Christmas and Easter, and given clothing and bread to 400-500 people a week during the summer. A few weeks later she was appealing for bread, clothes, firewood and medicines for them. In 1913 a children's home...
named after Ottilie, Simons’s mother, who had recently died in St. Petersburg, was opened at Khandrovo; one of the deaconesses was in charge of this and also a small day school. When the war came, Simons himself issued appeals for shoes and clothing for Methodist relief work among refugees and destitute families.

In 1909 Sister Anna also assumed responsibility for the sale of Methodist literature. The following summer Simons reported on his first ten months of book publishing. The Standard Catechism (called in Russian Sushchnost veroucheniya, i.e. The Essentials of Doctrine) had been translated and published in an edition of 5000 copies; the translation of the 1908 edition of the Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church was nearing completion and the first part had been printed; a pamphlet had appeared in a Russian edition of 5000 copies—and an Estonian of 3000 entitled The Methodists: Who They Are and What They Want; some of Wesley’s sermons had also been translated into Russian; and Estonian and German hymnbooks had seen publication too.

Very few data have come down to us on how and to what extent the St. Petersburg Methodists themselves managed their society’s affairs. Obviously, in a missionary situation which had suddenly begun to evince such vigorous renewal that sixteen years later the renaissance was authoritatively taken for the start, it was only to be expected that the missionary leadership should assume the dominant role. By March 1909, however, there had been sufficient progress to organize an Official Board (tserkovny sovet, literally church council) consisting of eight men and Sister Anna. Its chairman was Robert Albertovich Mertins, a bank clerk and native of East Prussia who had come to St. Petersburg at the age of 10. But after one year as chairman he died of consumption, at 49. One of the speakers at his funeral referred to his harsh background and great goodness. We do not know how significant a proportion of the membership the lower middle class comprised, but the hardness of his life must have been fairly typical of

56 See note 33.
57 AR 1913, 411; KP, 12(48) (December 1914), 14; Copplestone, op. cit., 372.
58 KP, 8/86 (February 1916), 24; 8/94 (October 1916), 4; 9/98 (February 1917), 28. Two of these were directed at the English-speaking community.
59 KP, 1/20 (August 1910), 67.
60 Ralph E. Diffendorfer, ed., The World Service of the Methodist Church (Chicago: Methodist Episcopal Church, Council of Boards of Benevolence, Committee on Conservation and Advance, 1923), 220. One of the very few Soviet writers to refer to Methodism, K. Smolin, “Metodizm i metodisti. Proshloe i nastoynshchee,” Ateisticheskie chteniya, 8 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1976), 115, also seems to think that St. Petersburg Methodism began in 1907.
61 KP, 1/20 (August 1910), 63.
62 KP, 1/16 (April 1910), 28-29.
the members. The Finns in particular were an impoverished group. 63

Thus we have a picture of vibrant activity, with recurrent glimpses of its poverty-stricken setting. By 1911 the development of the work justified the formation of the Russian Mission, separate from the new Finland Conference, and that earned a grant of $1500 towards a printing press, but in general Simons's regular pleas to the Board of Foreign Missions went unheeded and the appropriation for Russia was the smallest of all. 64 Truly it was amazing what faith could do when funds were wanting.

An exceptional windfall, however, came on the eve of the war. Prior to that, after a four-year sojourn at 37, 10th Line, the Methodist meeting place had been moved late in 1912, following government interference, to 3, Malaya Grebetskaya ulitsa, on Petrogradskaya Storona, the island to the north-east of Vasilevski Ostrov. 65 The new location, fairly close to the bridge linking the two districts, was known as Fyodorova's Hall after its owner. But then Simons received a gift from an American benefactress, Mrs. Fanny Nast Gamble, which enabled him in 1914 to realize the long-cherished dream of buying a property. This was 58, Bolshoi Prospekt, on the south-east corner of its junction with 20th Line. Simons, who had been living at the latest address of Bethany (34, 9th Line) for a season, soon moved in and set up his headquarters. After months of waiting, permission finally came on December 20, 1914 to open the "prayer house". 125 people came to the first meeting six days later, and an invitation to "English-speaking friends and strangers without a church home" promptly appeared in the Pobornik; open house would be kept for them on Thursday afternoons. 66

After the dedication services on March 1, 1915, a note in the English section of the magazine described the church as modest but home-like and large enough for 200 persons: "it is hoped that a large Central Building with a commodious auditorium will be erected in the not too distant future". 67 A more unrealistic scenario can scarcely be imagined; a less unrealistic one could hardly be expected.

It would be tedious to enumerate the minutiae of changes in the church’s life between 1909-1911 and 1917. We will restrict ourselves to trends in the primary form of corporate activity, the Sunday services and weeknight meetings. 68 The earlier pattern of worship in six

64 Ibid., 22; Copplestone, loc. cit.
65 KP, 2/24 (December 1912), 124; 5/25 (January 1913), 8; AR 1912, 415.
66 KP, 7/1 (January 1915), 11.
67 KP, 7/4 (April 1915), 19.
68 The question of Sunday schools is considered below, vis-a-vis relations with the secular power.
languages does not seem to have been maintained from 1912: Swedish and Finnish disappeared from the list then and Estonian a year later. Against this, there was growth in the German work (two Sunday services and two meetings on other evenings in 1912) in the Russian (rising to four or five weekly meetings in 1914). In 1923 it was to be reported that Russians of German origin, mainly professional people, and Russian artisans formed two separate groups of members between whom there was very little contact. This may well have been true of the pre-1917 situation. The outbreak of war put a discreet stop to activities in German. Since Protestantism was identified with Germany, Simons publicized and developed the American connexion. Work in English took on new life with a Sunday evening service and the unusual evangelical device of English language classes including hymn singing and Bible reading on Monday evenings, with Simons teaching the “University Class” and his sister, another Ottilie, the beginners. A hint that these attracted a somewhat better-placed audience occurs in the record of the presents given to the teachers, ranging from “a rare set of Turgenev’s works” to a Thanksgiving turkey.

B. Emphases in Worship and Doctrine

Although no detailed accounts of the form and content of the St. Petersburg society’s worship appear to have survived, it can be deduced from the Khristianski Pobornik that it was in the mainstream Methodist tradition, with much attention to the sermon and to congregational singing, and the same is undoubtedly true of the doctrine. The need for gospel preaching was the keynote of Simons’s first report; there are occasional references to hymns in the meetings, the Estonian and German hymnbooks have been mentioned, from time to time the Pobornik printed Russian translations of well-known hymns such as “Jesus, Lover of my soul” and “Low in the grave He lay”, and a Russian book of about 100 translated favourites appeared in 1913.

The journal lost no time in acquainting its readers with Methodism’s doctrinal emphases. It began with four celebrated ser-

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69KP, 2/22 (October 1912), 90.
70KP, 7/1 (January 1915), 12.
71John L. Nuelson, “Report on Russia to the Executive Committee of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church” (1923), 23: ms., Russia Conference, Archives Division, United Methodist Church, Lake Junaluska.
72KP, 7/81 (September 1915), 16; 8/86 (February 1916), 11, 24; 8/96 (December 1916), 16; 9/100-101 (April-May 1917), 52. The classes had started in 1912.
73Copplestone, op. cit., 369.
74Marshall, op. cit., 27.
75KP, 1/1 (January 1909), 2; 1/4 (April 1909), 28; AR 1912, 415; AR 1913, 411.
mons by John Wesley: Salvation by Faith, The Almost Christian, Scriptural Christianity, and Justification by Faith. Simons contributed a lengthy three-part article on conversion and followed it up with Wesley on the New Birth. We have already perceived the distinctively Methodist character of the book publishing program. Other efforts to develop a Methodist consciousness ranged widely: there was a significant amount of historical material, with related biographical articles on luminaries such as George Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, and Francis Asbury on the centenary of his death; Methodist news, with much Conference reporting, items such as the opening of the Central Hall, Westminster; and letters on American Methodism from that later controversial figure Julius Hecker; the emphasis on temperance noted above; and the choice of none other than Mark Guy Pearse as the first storyteller. What, one wonders, did those Russian peasants or ex-peasants make of the English village Wesleyans who were "Mister Horn and his friends"?

C. Missionary Strategy and Relations

With the Authorities

As we have seen, Russian Methodism began on Vasilevski Ostrov. The choice of this location, the abode of foreigners, epitomizes the initial approach. Russia was missioned through the non-Russian-speaking population and from the countries where their forebears had originated; Finns and Swedes were both shepherds and flock. Russia was regarded as a vast field of opportunity, but in a vague manner, and in the late 19th century the specifics of advance there appear to have been little discussed. True, the Board of Missions was short of funds at the time, but there were other constraints that did much to determine both the foothold approach and the powerlessness to stride forward: work among ethnic Swedes and Finns was tolerated, but

76KP, 1/2 (February 1909), 9-11, 14-16; 1/4 (April 1909), 25-27, 32; 1/7 (July 1909), 49-51, and 1/8 (August 1909), 57-59, 63; 1/14 (February 1910), 9-11, and 1/15 (March 1910), 17-19, 22-23.
77KP, 1/10 (October 1909), 75-77, 80; 1/11 (November 1909), 83-85; 1/12 (December 1909), 92-93.
78KP, 1/16 (April 1910), 26-27; 1/17 (May 1910), 38-39; 1/18 (June 1910), 45-47.
79KP, 7/79 (July 1915), 3-6.
80KP, 8/90 (June 1916), 1-2.
81KP, 2/24 (December 1912), 117-19. There was also fairly frequent reporting of international Christian news (World’s Sunday School Association, World Week of Prayer, YMCA etc.).
82KP, 5/33 (September 1913), 5; 6/37 (January 1914), 8.
83Not Cornish, but English: said to have been based on “the honest yeomanry about Ipswich [in Suffolk], where he was stationed from 1867-9” (Mrs. George Unwin and John Telford, Mark Guy Pearse: Preacher, Author, Artist (London: Epworth Press, 1930), 112). Serialized in KP from 1/13 (January 1910) to 2/3-4 (March-April 1911).
mission to the Russians was forbidden by harsh legislation. A law of 1894 betokened a worsening climate: the Stundists (originally meaning Baptist, this term came to be applied to all Protestants) were deprived of the right of assembly and much persecuted. But the small scale of the Methodist activity, so much criticized by later missionaries, was in effect its salvation from the attentions of officialdom.

The situation had changed by 1907 when Nicholas II’s Easter Decree of 1905 was, temporarily at least, making things easier for Protestant denominations. Simons clearly saw Methodism as providing a great light for a nation walking in darkness. Under the 1905 legislation the Orthodox were for the first time permitted to transfer to another denomination, and Orthodoxy was for him a write-off. So he regarded it as essential to develop Russian-speaking work, not only in St. Petersburg but in the emergent Methodist activity elsewhere. His command of German meant that another important non-native group could now be catered for, until the political situation prevented it. Preaching was backed up by extensive publication. Simons drew on the services of experienced colporteurs and made it a priority to train indigenous Russian-speaking pastors and lay preachers. Except for primary education, the Orthodox Church had traditionally been little concerned with social matters before 1905; here too there was a backlog of need to supply. Methodism’s social involvement included the deaconess work at St. Petersburg — nursing, sick visiting, helping the poor — and this took on additional significance during and after the Great War.

How successful was this strategy? Certainly, the relaxation of the law gave the Methodists their chance, and socio-economic circumstances provided much scope for action. On the other hand, the Edict of Toleration was increasingly disregarded in practice and considerably vitiated by the regulations of October 4, 1910. Thus we must not exaggerate what Simons was able to achieve in the face of despotism: although, almost on the eve of the war, new work was begun around Yamburg (Kingisepp) and Volosovo to the west of the capital, membership in Petrograd, with fewer than 200 full and probationary members, and elsewhere remained small.

84See Bishop Hurst’s remarks in GAL, December 1892, 592.
86Copplestone, loc. cit.
87This is clear from his reports to the Board. But he was always scrupulously careful not to give offense in the Pobornik, at least until the fall of the Empire. The Methodists’ real feelings about Orthodoxy can perhaps be better glimpsed at the end of 1917, when the magazine prints a miscellany of news of that Church, nearly all of it bad (KP, 9/107-108 (November-December 1917), 4-5).
The Methodist response to these later constraints was in effect to keep in with the authorities where possible, and to proceed discreetly where not. Under the 1910 regulations, permission had to be obtained for all church meetings except services, all meetings had to have a policeman present, and children’s services and catechistic instruction were banned. The last-mentioned was initially disregarded and later circumvented, for the Pobornik was still advertising its Sunday school classes in Russian among other languages in January 1911. Two years later, apparently after a period of enforced suspension, this was slightly disguised as “Bible Hour for Adults and Youth”, and from January 1915 more so as “International Bible Lesson”. But from a casual reference in an account of the Christmas celebrations of 1916 we know that there was a large Sunday School in Petrograd and others round about: the Petrograd society had raised the money to provide 300 parcels for 115 children in the Sunday School there and 185 in the village Sunday Schools. It is very interesting to watch the Pobornik’s changing attitude to events during 1917. The occasional contributions from 1911 honouring the Romanov dynasty and presenting the verse of Grand Duke Konstantin have been noted; this is prudential deference to the imperial family. But after the February Revolution and the abdication of Nicholas II, the journal immediately adopts a totally different tone which faithfully reproduces the typical American reaction to the turn of events. It is seen as what Kennan terms “a political upheaval in the old American spirit: republican, liberal, antimonarchical”. Thus the April-May issue includes the Russian and English text of a proposed new national anthem; an account of a mass meeting in the Duma (State Council) on the occasion of America’s entry into the war, at which Simons spoke; a report of the first of a series of open-air meetings in the church garden; a poem by Aksakov entitled “Free Speech”, which had been banned for 70 years; and in the English section, an article by Simons on “Russia’s Resurrexion”... “from the gloomy tomb of despotic tyranny and medieval terrorism into the joyous light and life of freedom and democracy”. The next issue has

88 Gerhard Simon, op. cit., 234-35.
89 KP, 2/1 (January 1911), 8.
90 AR 1912, 415; KP, 5/25 (January 1913), 8.
91 KP, 7/1 (January 1915), 12; similarly in 8/85 (January 1916), 6.
92 KP, 9/97 (January 1917), 12.
94 Simons subsequently set this to music and published it under the title “Brotherhood, Love and Freedom” (Marshall, op. cit., 26-27).
95 K. S. Aksakov (1817-1860), eminent publicist, critic and historian.
a Russian translation of Ebenezer Elliott's "God Save the People". These were Simons's main concerns, but there is a subsidiary motive which reflects America's, and indeed her allies', attitude to Russia's continued role in the war. In his speech at the mass meeting in the Duma his theme is America's strong moral consciousness which she now offers to her allies. The United States government expected not only that Russia would become a stable democracy but that she would play a reinvigorated part in the common cause against Germany. In point of fact, while the Provisional Government had the administrative experience, the soviets held the real power, and many socialists saw the war as irrelevant. The country was politically riven. Yet in his article quoted above Simons goes on to say: "It was the wonderful unity of purpose, strength of will and quick action of the men and women of various classes who saved the day in Russia". But those were the heady days of March. Such sentiments are no longer detected in the November-December issue.

VI. Epilogue

And there, at the end of 1917, the Khristianski Pobornik apparently ceases. The United States' new-found popularity (if we can believe the April-May issue) is even shorter-lived: in August 1918 the Americans are reluctantly involved in the allied intervention at Archangel, and in October George A. Simons is recalled by order of the U.S. government. Yet the Board of Missions envisions a future for Russian Methodism: it sees it in terms of opposition to Bolshevist influences, but apart from educational and medical work the perception of the way ahead is vague. And Methodism does have a future in the USSR, with nearly 2300 members and probationers by 1928. But this must be its apogee. It is the start of the First Five-Year Plan and the concomitant atheistic onslaught; the church building vanishes with the reconstruction of Bolshoi Prospekt; by 1931 even the doughty Sister Anna has fled; and the work based on Leningrad appears to cease altogether in 1939. Its history during the 1930s is utterly obscure; that of the 1920s is patchy, colorful, and largely untold. But at no other time is it as well documented as in the nine years of the Khristianski Pobornik.

97KP, 9/102 (June 1917), 53.
99Methodist Episcopal Church, The Centenary Survey of the Board of Foreign Missions (New York: Joint Centenary Committee, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1918), 25-29.
100Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Fall Conferences 1928 (New York, etc.: Methodist Book Concern, no date), 1108-1109. On page 662 there is a list of 28 places and circuits, of which five are manned by Methodists, and ten by others; the remainder are to be supplied.