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MODERN RUSSIA

BY

GREGOR ALEXINSKY

EX-DEPUTY OF THE DUMA

TRANSLATED BY
BERNARD MIALL

T. FISHER UNWIN
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TO
MY MOTHER AND FATHER
THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

ONE of the most notable characteristics of the life of contemporary society is its international quality.

The fundamental function of human activity—the production of materials to satisfy the needs of the masses—has assumed an international form. Capital, the organizing force of production and exchange, passes rapidly from one country to another, uniting them by indestructible material ties. International organizations of capitalists are coming into being, which are held in check by labour organizations of an equally international type. Every invention, every improvement in the technique of production, every scientific discovery, is at once transmitted to every portion of the globe. Besides the exchange of products we observe a mutual interchange of ideas, and the two form a common foundation, a foundation both material and spiritual, for the future development of human culture. The separate members of the great family of the peoples and States of the modern world are like the various portions of a single gigantic organism, or the links of a single chain. When one of these links is moved all the others promptly feel the movement. Every event that occurs in any country of the modern world is to-day an international event.

The “good old days” are gone, when humanity lived in groups; when the individual might live all his life in his native town or village without knowing what was happening at a few miles’ distance. The modern man is a citizen of the world.

The telegraph cables which enmesh the globe force him to keep an eye upon all the countries of the world. It is obvious that to the modern man a closer knowledge of the life of other peoples appears not only desirable, but necessary. The older nations—the French, Germans, and English—which have attained the highest degree of civilization, are in this respect in a favourable situation. Their way of life and their material and spiritual activities serve as examples to other nations, and are the object of attentive study. But a knowledge of the younger and more backward nations is far less widespread. This ignorance is most perceptible in the case of those nations which are divided from Western Europe not only by geographical distance, but also by linguistic remoteness. All will remember how Europe was surprised by the apparition of Japan in the guise of a first-class Power, equipped with the technical methods of the Occident. No one has yet forgotten the astonishment evoked by her army, so powerful and so highly trained, her Press, and her subtle and capable diplomacy.

Russia is a thought less strange to the European public, but the general knowledge of Russia leaves much to be desired.

If we take even an educated European—provided he be not a specialist, an investigator into Russian life—we shall find that his information respecting Russia is almost inevitably confined to extremely limited impressions, acquired by chance.

As a French critic declared, when the French edition of this volume was published, this ignorance is deplorable, and might well be dangerous.

The English public is, I must admit, perhaps the best informed in Europe upon Russian affairs. But its knowledge of the life of our country is yet highly imperfect. The English newspapers and reviews offer their readers information respecting Russia, but as separate drops of water do not make an ocean, so the various facts and articles provided by the Press cannot give a general or a well-grounded view of the life of the great people, or the agglomeration of peoples, which inhabits the vast plain of Eastern Europe. I trust this book of mine may serve as a guide to all

those who wish to know Russia better, and who are often perplexed by the amazing complexity of her life.

I have no wish to speak as a prophet unveiling the future or revealing the enigmas of Destiny. Nor do I speak as a political agitator; my aim is quite otherwise. I hope to speak the calm language of facts and figures and exact data. This book, in my intention, should be a small encyclopædia of Russian life in all its manifestations; an unpretending photograph, which seeks to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, the contours and the colours of reality. But the reader will readily understand that such a word-picture presents its difficulties. I should have preferred to reveal to him a little corner of the actual life of my country; but to present in a single volume all that I should like to say of Russia, all that might interest the foreign public, is beyond my means.

I shall be always brief in my explanations: *non multa, sed multum!* To say many things in a few words: that is the difficult problem before me. The reader must judge how far I have solved it.

G. A.

(The English edition differs in certain points from the French; the economic and political portion of the book has been enlarged, and three new chapters are included: one dealing with the Police and the Law, one with Self-government, and one with Foreign Politics and the Army.)

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