

RUSSIA AND ITS CRISIS.



Paul Milyousov.

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BY
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PREFACE

THIS book is not a political pamphlet written for the occasion, but a result of long years of study devoted to the explanation of the Russian present by the Russian past. The present crisis in Russia necessarily commands attention, and everything discussed in this work converges to the one aim of explaining this crisis. But the conditions which have brought on the crisis are so deeply rooted in the past, and are so closely interwoven with every aspect of Russian life, whether of religion or of politics, of doctrines or of institutions, of social forms or of the composition of society, that an explanation of the present situation, to be at all adequate, must necessarily be a general picture of Russia and a general description of the conditions under which its civilization has developed. The crisis will pass, but the conditions of civilization remain; and my ambition has been to explain, not the momentary and transient, but the permanent and lasting, elements in the political, social, and religious life of Russia.

The contents of the book are essentially the same as those of my lectures on "Russian Civilization" delivered during the summer of 1903 at the University of Chicago, on the *Charles R. Crane Foundation*. The first four chapters were put into type more than a year ago; the two following have since then been entirely recast, on a much larger scale; and chap. vii is a new addition, reproducing the contents of my lectures on "The Russian Crisis" delivered at the

Lowell Institute in Boston, in December, 1904, during my second visit to this country. In the last pages of that chapter the events occurring in Russia during the months of December, 1904, and January, 1905, have been considered. But it gives me satisfaction to state that I have had nothing to add to my conclusion, which is published just as it was written in 1903, with the addition only of a few lines mentioning the subject of chap. vii. The reader may find it advisable, before perusing the book, to make himself acquainted with this conclusion, as it contains a summary, and points out the main thread, of the argument.

I thought out and wrote this book in English, though I am fully aware how imperfect is my command of this beautiful language. Still, I think that this was a better method than to have had it translated from a Russian text. The most salient blunders have been removed by my English and American friends, and I avail myself of this opportunity to express my appreciation of the kind assistance rendered me by Miss E. M. Hughes, of England; Mr. Nott Flint and Dr. W. Muss-Arnolt, of the University of Chicago; Professor Leo Wiener, of Harvard University; and the reader of the University Press. On the other hand, I alone am answerable for such imperfections of style as may still remind the reader that the writer is a foreigner.

My system of writing Russian names will be found to differ somewhat from the usual method. For instance, I write *Keeyev*, where an English writer is accustomed to find the spelling *Kiev*; *Novoya Vraimya* instead of *Novoe Vremia*; etc. In order to explain

this difference, I must say that the only existing "scientific" system of transliterating Russian names is founded on the German pronunciation, with the addition of some diacritical signs. I have thought that an English reader is justly entitled to his own transliteration, founded on the English pronunciation; and as I have found it impracticable to employ any diacritical marks, it remained for me to adopt a merely phonetic method. I do not assert that I have been entirely consistent in this, and sometimes I have preferred to retain the usual spelling of a name which I supposed to be universally known; but I wish that my hint might be taken up by somebody more experienced than I in the orthography of foreign names.

I hope my personal attitude toward the questions I have discussed in this book will be clearly understood by every unbiased reader. I am not a "violent agitator," as one of the Chicago "yellow" papers was good enough to call me—without ever having heard me, I presume. But neither am I what a gentleman connected with the organization of the St. Louis Exposition expected me to be when he wished me to give some suggestions as to the arrangement of the Russian exhibit—suggestions that would please the Russian government. I told this gentleman that I was not the person to consult on such a subject; and I took the liberty of adding that many other Russians would likewise be perplexed to answer his question, for the reason that there exist two Russias, one quite different from the other, and what pleases one is quite sure to displease the other; so that trying to please both at once would be a hopeless task. Since that time, however,

people in America have become better aware of this important distinction; and I flatter myself with having contributed a little to this result, if I may judge from the interest taken in my discussions by the very appreciative audiences which I had the pleasure of addressing in Chicago and Boston.

Thus I am tempted once more to emphasize this distinction. Were I to label these two Russias, I should designate the one as the Russia of Leo Tolstoy, the great writer; and the other as that of Plehve, the late minister of the interior. The former is the Russia of our "intellectuals" and of the people; the latter is official Russia. One is the Russia of the future, as dreamed of by members of the liberal professions; the other is an anachronism, deeply rooted in the past, and defended in the present by an omnipotent bureaucracy. The one spells liberty; the other, despotism.

Exception may be taken to my drawing such a line of demarkation between the two Russias, on the ground that it is too contradictory and admits of no possible third. I shall not deny the element of truth in this objection, but I hope that the soundness of my distinction will become manifest after some further explanation.

To be sure, Plehve, whose name is everywhere recognized as synonymous with despotism, represents only an aggravated form of what official Russia generally is; and now that he is gone, he is even disavowed by the very people whose cause he championed and in whose defense he lost his life. In so far it would seem unfair to call the whole of official Russia by his name. Attempts, however, have already been

made by some of our political writers—and I deem them not unsuccessful—to prove not only that the policy of Plehve was logically connected with the position of official Russia, but that, under existing conditions, it was the only possible policy for the autocracy. This policy, these authors argue, was nothing but the logical outcome of a desire to continue the defense of a position which was virtually lost and avowedly untenable. I admit that Plehve was only a *reductio ad absurdum* of autocracy—autocracy gone mad; but this only because autocracy itself is reduced *ad absurdum* by the very trend of life. If it is to survive at all, there is really no other means of keeping it alive than the policy of Plehve. If this, the “only possible,” policy has proved impossible, the fault is not with Plehve. His failure is the most instructive object-lesson ever held up to autocracy; the only conclusion to be drawn from it is that not the man, but the system, should be condemned. Unhappily, the lesson does not appear to have been heeded, and as a result we are now witnessing an attempt at welding autocracy and liberalism. The successors of Plehve will soon realize the futility of this endeavor. But the country at large is tired of object-lessons and no longer needs them. The people ask for political reforms which imply a negation of autocracy. So long as autocracy does not surrender, one may feel justified in regarding the cause and methods of Plehve as identical with those of official Russia, or with those of autocracy. And for this reason we emphasize our distinction: autocracy and liberalism are incompatible and contradictory, not only according to my definition, but in life itself.

My designation of the other Russia as that of Leo Tolstoy likewise needs explanation. This, too, may seem, and with more reason, an exaggeration, a going to the opposite extreme. In Tolstoy's teachings, the idea of liberty is abstract and absolute; it is worked out and shaped into a system of Christian anarchism. Now, as a matter of fact, the Russian "intellectuals" do not care much about the Christian element in it, and no anarchism exists in Russia. We shall show that what in Russia is really opposed to officialdom and autocracy is either liberalism or collectivism. Nevertheless, Tolstoy's name stands for Russian opposition, and will continue so to stand as long as it remains a synonym for liberty in general—liberty as the absolute negation of the existing order of things.

I shall not be expected to discuss Russian affairs from the point of view of Plehveism. It is the cause of the other, the "greater Russia," that I have made mine. But, I am asked, is it seasonable, is it patriotic, to speak of two Russias at a time when they should forget their differences and unitedly face the common enemy? The question may seem a delicate one. It has of late been much debated in Russia, and has been very differently answered. Many who were friends became enemies when, in pleading for this or that solution, they discovered themselves to be at variance. Permit me to state, though not in my own words, the typical answer given in Russia. Recently, in a circle of intimate friends, I overheard what I think may be called such an answer. Curiously enough, it was a military man, a young officer, who gave expression to the general feeling. "Unpatriotic?" he exclaimed,

replying to the above question. "But are we permitted to be patriotic? What is it to be patriotic but to love one's country, to know it, and to be free to act for its best interests? Now, are we permitted to know all about Russia? Are we permitted to act for Russia? No, we are not. The censorship keeps us from knowing the truth; and never was the lack of real knowledge of current events felt more sorely than now, during this wretched war. And what about the possibility of doing something for Russia? Is not every spontaneous action doomed? Is not every public initiative cut short? Is there any room left for conscious patriotism? Has not even the humble attempt of the self-governing assemblies to unite in helping the sick and wounded been denounced as criminal, and forbidden by Plehve? What wonder, then, if the outward manifestations of our patriotism are not like those of other nations? How can it be otherwise, as long as real patriots are treated as traitors, while traitors are proclaimed patriots?"

So spoke the officer. The sympathies of a foreign public may, indeed, have been chilled by what was considered a conspicuous lack of patriotism in my countrymen; for example, by a certain, seemingly utterly unpatriotic, letter of Tolstoy's on the war. But, in justice to us, it must be borne in mind that of necessity our love of country sometimes assumes unexpected forms, and that its apparent absence in reality represents with us the very highest expression of true patriotic feeling. We may be thought a queer sort of people, but we cleave to our own ideas of patriotism; and we have no hesitancy in deciding which of the two

is the traitor and which the patriot, Plehve or Tolstoy, if we are obliged to choose between them. We do not call it patriotic to paralyze the living forces of the nation by a police régime, and to name such a destructive policy a work of pacification. We do not call it patriotic to wage war for new markets while we cannot yet control our own, and to destroy the fountain-head which makes the domestic market prosper—the purchasing power of the agricultural producer. We even go so far as not to care a whit about making other people believe what we do not believe ourselves. If such “make-believe” goes for “prestige,” then we are greatly averse to sacrificing truth to the preservation of prestige. Perhaps this sort of political recklessness is, at bottom, based on a certain self-confidence among our people. We think, indeed, that the prestige of Plehve’s Russia is once for all ruined, beyond the possibility of restoration. But we think, too, that the prestige of Tolstoy’s Russia is greater than ever, and that we do not lose anything—nay, that we gain enormously—if by the eclipse of the former sort of prestige the cause of reform is the winner.

Everybody knows a certain beautiful fairy-tale of Andersen’s. Some wise men came to a country and promised to make for its king a state robe of a gorgeous material, but such as only wise men would be able to see. The king was delighted, and the wise men set to work. The robe was soon ready, and a solemn procession on a feast-day was chosen as the occasion for trying on the new dress. The state councilors could see nothing, but as they were anxious not to be taken for fools, they expressed admiration for the

dress of the king, and went with him in the procession. The terrified throng likewise saw no garment; but they were afraid to speak. And so the procession went on in silence, until some little unsophisticated boy, too young to be terrified or to be afraid of making a fool of himself, suddenly cried out, amid the general silence: "But the king is naked!" The crowd howled and groaned; the cowardice and rascality of the councilors became manifest to everybody; and the king was ashamed and furious.

Thus it is with Russia. Serious men for years and years have worn a state robe whose beauty was clear only to a few conjuring wiseacres; and millions of men, groaning under the burden of its cost, have mournfully kept silence watching the solemn procession, until an untoward event has come, like the child in Andersen's tale, to tell the whole world that the wisdom is counterfeit and the wearers of the robe are "naked." This event is the war.

Well, the only advice we can give to these people is: Put on new clothes, and do it as soon as possible!

PAUL MILYUKOV.

CHICAGO,

Abraham Lincoln's birthday, 1905.

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