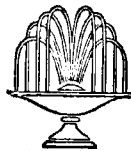


MOTHER RUSSIA

by

MAURICE HINDUS



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PREFACE

IT IS TWENTY YEARS since I first went to Russia on a special assignment from the late Glenn Frank, one-time editor of the now-defunct *Century Magazine*. In *Broken Earth*, the book which resulted from that trip, in stating the method and the purpose of my writing, I said:

"I went to Russia with only one purpose in view—to hear the people talk. I used the word 'people' not in the English but the Russian sense—meaning the dark masses; that is, the muzhik, the peasant. In the last analysis he is Russia; not the Russia that writes notes, issues ultimatums, signs treaties, entertains ambassadors, grants interviews to foreign correspondents, but the Russia that toils, produces, fights, and dies. . . ."

These words were written in 1926. Much has happened since then to change not only the aspect of the Russian land but the face of the "dark masses." The machine age, which has swept with fabulous speed the Russian countryside, has scraped the beards off their faces and ground the darkness out of their souls. It is out of these "dark masses" that for the first time in Russian history have come many great generals, among the greatest in the present-day Russian armies, Alexey Rodimsev, Andrey Yeremenko, Vasil Chuikoff, Semyon Timoshenko are only a few of their names. As the defenders of Stalingrad and the victors over picked German troops there, their names will rank as high as, if not higher than, those of Kutuzov and Suvorov, both noblemen, and of Ivan the Fourth (the Terrible) and Peter the Great, both czars. The fact that two of these generals, Yeremenko and Timoshenko, are Ukrainians is of special significance in the light of the Russo-Polish controversy over the Western Ukraine.

The truth is that the peasant of old is no more. The muzhik of Tolstoy, Chekhov, Bunin, and of other leading Russian writers who have for generations wept over him, scolded him, loved him for his sorrows and his simplicities, has vanished

from the Russian scene. With his disappearance has gone the former meaning of the word *narod*—people. The term no longer has its historic implication and has become as all-inclusive as its English equivalent. To-day *narod* embraces the entire nation and all the peoples within the vast territories of Russia.

Yet throughout the years in my writing about Russia I have deviated but little from my original method and purpose. I have never sought the counsel and the judgment of the elite and the eminent. I have never striven for the front-page headlines. Exciting and enlightening as would be the adventure of putting questions to Molotov, Stalin, and other leaders and hearing their answers in their own words, I have never been lured by it. The official nature of such answers would unfold little of the drama and the intimacy of the experience which Russia as a nation, a many-peopled nation, has known so overwhelmingly since the advent of the Soviets. Not even in these war days have I ever gone to the Kremlin gateway with a letter to Stalin soliciting an interview. I have always felt that a single day in a village or a single meal with young people in a factory would tell me more of the heart and the mind of Russia than an interview with any leader, however exalted.

Despite the limitations of such a method it has given me guidance to appraise calmly some of the stormiest campaigns of the Soviets and particularly the two most hotly-debated events in recent Russian history—the pact with Germany in August, 1939, and the military course of the Russo-German war.

On my return from Sweden on October 14, 1939, a reporter of the New York *Herald Tribune* asked for an opinion of the Russo-German Pact. In reply I said:

“I am convinced that Russia and Germany will go to war . . . the more they co-operate now the more cause they will have to clash later on.”

When the war broke out and the air was crackling with prophecies of Russia's imminent collapse within six weeks, or at most six months, I set to work on a book the title of which is *Russia Fights on*. The book was published in America in September, 1941, when the German armies were plunging madly towards Moscow, and in January, 1942, in Britain.

These opinions were no accident. They were no "hunch." Most manifestly they were no prophecies. They were logical and inevitable deductions from the mass of information I had gathered in my travels, especially in villages, and from hearing "the people talk."

There are writers, editors, diplomats, military observers, crusaders of social and other causes, to whom any account of Russia in the pre-war days which failed to depict the country as a land of atrocities and not much more carried little or no validity. Nor has the attitude of many of them substantially changed since the outbreak of the Russo-German conflict.

Of course there has been terror in Russia as grim as any nation has ever witnessed. A revolution means civil war, which is the most brutal form of conflict known to man. The larger the country, the more complicated its problems, the more varied its racial or nationalist make-up, the more ambitious the revolutionary programme, the more violent the opposition it stirs inside and outside its borders, the more cruel the terror is likely to be—a terror which often enough sweeps to doom the innocent no less than the guilty.

But to speak of Russia solely or chiefly in terms of terror and atrocities is like speaking of the Cromwellian revolution solely or chiefly in terms of the massacres in Ireland, or of the American Civil War solely or chiefly in terms of the depredations of the Northern armies, particularly of General Sherman's tactics, or of the French Revolution solely or chiefly in terms of the guillotine.

Here is Edmund Burke, the eminent British Liberal, than whom no European statesman was more horrified by the outrages of the French Revolution. In his memorable *Reflections on the French Revolution*, he fulminates brilliantly and achingly against these outrages.

He writes:

"France has bought undisguised calamities at a higher price than any nation has purchased the most unequivocal blessing! France has bought poverty by crime! France has not sacrificed her virtue to her interest but she has abandoned her interest, that she might prostitute her virtue. . . . France, when she

let loose the reins of regal authority, doubled the licence of a ferocious dissoluteness in manners and of an insolent irreligion in opinions and practices. . . . France, by perfidy of her leaders, has utterly disgraced the tone of lenient council in the cabinets of princes and disarmed it of its most potent topics. She has dark, suspicious maxims of tyrannous distrust. . . . They have found their punishment in their success. . . . Their cruelty has not even been their base result of fear. It has been the effect of their perfect sense of safety, in authorising treasons, robberies, rapes, assassinations, slaughters, and burnings throughout their harassed lands. . . .”

How familiar these words sound and how natural, too, in the mouths of those who because of religious sentiments, economic self-interest, political prerogative, love of social order, or of any of the other virtues and by-products of a stabilised and cultivated society in a democratic or autocratic world, abhor anything so untamed and so tempestuous as a revolution, even if it springs out of antecedents which they never had known or out of historical processes which their own lands might have long ago resolved—not always in a gentle way.

Yet subsequently Edmund Burke was impelled to admit the error of his thought not because he had become reconciled to terror but because of other forces in the Revolution which had eluded his comprehension. In his *Thoughts on French Affairs* he wrote:

“The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists. The remedy must be where power, wisdom, and information I hope are more united with good intentions than they can be with me. I have done with this subject, I believe forever. It has given me many anxious moments for the last two years. If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate.”

In commenting on Burke's extraordinary reconsideration of his earlier views, Matthew Arnold remarks:

"The return of Burke upon himself has always seemed to me one of the finest things in English literature, or indeed in any literature. That is what I call living by ideas. . . . I know nothing more striking, and I must add that I know nothing more un-English."

But living by ideas in moments of the stress and the terror they may eventuate and seeing beyond the havoc they stir is no simple matter. Hence Matthew Arnold's eloquent tribute to Burke's intellectual courage and integrity.

As for Russia the incontrovertible fact is that however costly the process of revolutionary change, it has not been without nation-saving reward. With an industry built largely since 1928, she has for nearly two years been effectively battling all alone on the European continent the most highly mechanised and the most powerful army the world has known, supported by the industry of Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia—of all western Europe—with a steel capacity from three to four times as high as her own.

To ignore or underestimate the meaning of this positive and astounding fact is to reckon without one of the most formidable forces of our time.

In this book, as in others I have written, my chief concern has been the people. After a quarter of a century of Sovietism and fighting the most crucial war of their lives and of their history, they are much changed. They are not like the people they were in 1917, in 1923, in 1928, hardly even like the people they were in 1936, the year of the adoption of the new Constitution. On this trip I found a Russia which in many ways was new to me—a Russia that had rediscovered her past, reappraised her present and her future, and whose people were ready to die—old and young, men and women—rather than to forswear their newly-fashioned identity and their immediate and remote destiny.

A neutral diplomat in Moscow once said to me: "Either England, America, and Russia develop a common language of action in the war and afterwards, or God help us all."

In these words the author heartily concurs. It is in the hope of bringing to the reader a fresh understanding of the Russian people, so that he can more clearly appreciate the full meaning of these words, that I have written this book.

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