

THE BOLSHEVIK ADVENTURE

THE BOLSHEVIK. ADVENTURE

BY

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Умомъ Россію не понять,
Аршynomъ общимъ не измѣрить,
У ней особенная статья —
Въ Россію можно только вѣрить.

Ф. И. Тютчевъ.

“Russia cannot be understood by reason,
Apply the common rule to her—’tis treason:
Her stature is her own,” the poet saith;
“Russia can but be understood by faith.”

F. TYUTCHEV

Great Russia was, is, and will be. Whosoever
is allied with Russia, his will be World Victory.

GENERAL OLEG VASSILKOVSKY

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INTRODUCTORY LETTER

To MAJOR ROBERT M. JOHNSTON, *of the General Staff
of the American Expeditionary Forces.*

MY DEAR JOHNSTON,

This book deals with Bolsheviki's deeds, not their words.

You will remember how Andrew Lang once wrote to Stevenson :

Dear Louis of the awful cheek,
Who gave you leave that you might speak,
While all the world might smile and stare,
Of other fellows' brindled hair ?

I do not indeed propose to imitate the novelist's freedom in revealing his friends to the world; nevertheless, I feel that a word of apology is due for my present public intrusion upon you. Your uncle, General Albert Sydney Johnston, who was killed too soon for the Confederate side during the American Civil War, was one of Lee's most highly-prized lieutenants, and as, in the opinion of some good judges, Robert Lee gave proof of the most brilliant military genius recorded in history, his opinion on this subject

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would be hard to question. It was therefore natural that your bent should be for military history. Your mind, trained to the bird's-eye view, and free from the blinkers often imposed on those who only know their own country, has been occupied during the war with the fruitful consideration of strategy in practice, and if I address you now it is because at a distance I have tried to apply to the solution of some problems of the war the principles your teaching by the spoken and the written word has often made clear to me.

I went to Russia in March, 1915, to do relief work among refugees from the area of the war and returned last Thursday. In the interval I saw something of the front, much of the revolution, and more of the Bolshevik *régime* than was given to most Englishmen to see. I was in Petrograd during both the revolutions, in Voronesh when that town was taken by a band of Bolshevik ruffians fleeing from the Harkov front, in Moscow at the time of the attempt on Lenin's life, and in Saratov during Trotsky's visit there prior to the taking of Samara. Not being an official personage, and compelled during the last six months to live under a disguise, I was able to travel about the country with some freedom and to watch events from an independent angle. So lately as January last I travelled from Petrograd to Saratov, and it was on my return thence that I was denounced and narrowly escaped coming to a premature end in the capital. When I went to Russia I did not speak Russian, and

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my ideas about the country were drawn from books and acquaintances. Russia, however, is so different from other European countries that these are by no means safe guides, especially as one seldom hits on the most illuminating book beforehand. Judging from my experience, if I were asked to recommend the best single book from which a preliminary idea of Russia and Russian character might be acquired, I should name Colonel Burnaby's *Ride to Khiva*. As it was, my ideas were vague and merely enthusiastic. I took the legend of "the Russian steam-roller" at its face value, and, when this legend was shattered by the German offensive in Galicia and the way in which Russian fortresses fell like ninepins toppling over, it became a matter of absorbing interest to disentangle causes from their maze of effects and by piecing together international "more complete" reports to fit Russia into a real and not a fanciful "future" map of the war. Strategy in Russia turned out to be politics, and politics to be war. To take an instance, General Brusilov has related that he kept the date fixed for his offensive of 1916 a secret even from General Headquarters, for fear that it would be betrayed to the enemy. What staff work could be expected in an army where recourse was had to such methods? It was, I believe, the failure to apprehend the force of the direct action of politics on military affairs in Russia that vitiated the English view of the Russian effort, optimism and pessimism alike being at

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different times exaggerated. We did not seem to learn how to pick out the guiding threads, with the result that we committed many blunders and much injustice. This, of course, entered directly into the German calculations. For it was not politics in the ordinary sense that influenced the conduct of the war, but the use made by Germany of political machinery in Russia to stultify the efforts of the Russian army and supplement those of her own. In this respect the Germans displayed a thoroughness that was truly admirable. They neglected no opportunity. Not content with manifold organisations of spies in the Russian army, and doubtless in every Russian department of State, they kept track of even the smallest Allied efforts in Russia, pursuing their representatives with ingenious calumnies, sowing discord between them, and wherever possible insinuating spies into their midst. Under the old *régime* anti-Semitic sentiment was freely exploited to this end, and afforded traps that were rarely avoided by Britons who, having the best intentions, had not the knowledge to enable them to analyse the complex situations they were confronted with. They probably did not realise that analysis was required or that complexity existed, as when Protopopov, the Minister of the Interior, strongly suspected of being a German traitor, was acclaimed from our side as "such an excellent fellow" and with "How lucky Russia is to get a Minister like him!" Despite the advantages of our

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patriotism and the recognition of British bulldog tenacity, our position was in reality weak, since much of our information came from sources dominated by hostile influence. Even so, to-day, a well-known statesman gets his information with regard to Russia from his private secretary, who gets it from a London M.P., who gets it from his cousin with a German name, who gets it from a person kept in England by the Bolsheviks for exactly that purpose.

It may be imagined that if the Allied cause in Russia suffered from such causes under the empire, their potency was increased tenfold after the revolution. There was, for instance, a case of a young lady of attractive appearance and doubtful nationality who was a frequent visitor at an Allied institution in Petrograd. Cause being found to suspect her, no better way was discovered of dealing with the matter than to obtain her employment in another branch of the service, where she worked for a considerable time, getting a salary of five hundred roubles a month and spending several thousand. Ejected from this post, she turned up smiling at a certain Consulate in Moscow and was there at the time of the puerile plot to bribe the Lettish guards, which proved the long-sought lever for the Bolshevik Government definitely to oust the Allies from their already precarious position in Russia. The only question in this case seems to be, Was the lady a spy or an agent-provocateur?

But it was not only, or indeed chiefly, ourselves

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who were at fault. Other of the Allies too are tarred with the same brush. And here I beg forgiveness beforehand, lest I should offend. You know me, my dear Johnston, for too staunch an American to suspect my goodwill. By heredity and experience my sympathies have long since been strongly enlisted on your side of the Atlantic, and I have too many friends and the memories of too many happy days in America to waver in my affection. But the injunction, *know thyself*, seems to me stronger upon us in relation to the war even than it was before, and in the war we have been all one—on the one side France and her Allies, on the other the Boche, who indeed has had no allies but only vassals. So really I feel there can be no offence if I point to mistakes made in Russia by your country. Russia will recover sooner from the effects of the war than any other European nation, and will in our lifetime probably become the richest and most powerful in the world, not excepting the United States. It therefore behoves us to see where we have gone wrong, so as, if possible, to regain lost ground, and as regards America it must be admitted that much leeway has to be made up.

America doubtless welcomed the Russian revolution more keenly than many of the Allies. The Imperial Government of Russia was supposed to be one of the reasons why the United States did not come earlier into the war, and its downfall naturally created a wave of sympathy with the new-born republic in Eastern

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Europe whose country had been regarded as the stronghold of reaction. But the expression of that sympathy was not upon the same level of candour and certainty. I happened to be in Petrograd when Senator Root's mission arrived, and was present at a meeting of several thousand at Pavlovsk addressed by Mr. Edward Russell, the well-known American Socialist leader. Mr. Russell made a speech of fine fervour and simplicity, working up to the climax that America was the home of liberty and that every American would give his life to defend liberty. All went well, the speech being translated sentence by sentence by an interpreter gifted with tremendous lungs, but when he came to the central point this gentleman delivered himself in Russian of the sentiment that America was the home of liberty and that America would see that not one man more had to give his life in the cause of the war; which evoked uproarious applause from all Socialists in the huge building. On inquiry afterwards, I learned that the interpreter attached to Mr. Russell had been chairman of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies of Harbin, and had been engaged by the mission on its way from Vladivostok. A day or two later, lunching with Mr. Root at the Winter Palace, I found that the interpreter-secretary for the day was another gentleman of precisely the same kidney. The mission, in fact, was in the hands of its enemies, who, at critical moments, were thus able to render its best

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intentions nugatory. Is it to be wondered at that in these conditions it left without having accomplished anything? The same game was played with other missions, and if M. Albert Thomas did not suffer from such extreme misrepresentations, still even he can hardly have been fully aware of the extent and virulence of the anti-Ally propaganda among Socialistic circles with which Kerensky was in intimate touch. The real test, however, of the Allied representation in Russia was not until after the Bolshevik revolution, when the Embassies were sitting in a quasi-conventual retirement at Vologda, and Sir George Buchanan had already left the country.

It was in the summer of 1918 that an extremely able official of the Russian Red Cross, shortly before that institution was taken over and wrecked by the Bolsheviks, asked me what I knew about the work of the American Red Cross in Russia. I answered, with some surprise, that I should have expected him to answer the question better than myself. To which he replied: "So far as we know, with the exception of distributing condensed milk, they have done absolutely nothing here but political intrigue." Now we have it on good authority that "talebearers are as bad as talemakers," and I would not repeat this; but unless the point is made, it is hard, if not impossible, to understand the course of recent history in Russia. The leaders of the American Red Cross, who may have done excellent work in other spheres, undoubtedly

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threw their energy on to the side of the Bolsheviks; and it was understood in Moscow that Colonel Robins, who took part and was photographed in the Bolshevik Mayday parade last year, did his utmost to get the Conciliar Government recognised. As he had some English backing also, there were moments of very high tension in pro-Ally circles, and though recognition did not take place and the tension slackened, nevertheless an uneasy feeling remained after Colonel Robins' departure, which was not improved by the belief that the American Government stood in the way of intervention. The American public can hardly have grasped the fact that the War was going on all the time in Russia, and that the Bolshevik *régime* was nothing but a German *barrage*; had they done so, they could not have calmly accepted a policy that has cost them the sympathy of the entire upper class in Russia. Russians, who knew Americans as little as the latter did them, were ready when the United States came into the war to revise their somewhat crude notions and go forward hand in hand with a new Ally in the common cause; but the experience of watching American representatives apparently willing to enter into a compact with their national enemies, which might have put the latter into power so solidly as to render their removal impossible, destroyed their budding sympathy. Since that time Russians have witnessed one after another effort, some public, some private, in the same direction: the proposal of the

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Prinkipo Conference, rightly or wrongly, was attributed to President Wilson; another attempt to enter into peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks was barely averted; and there have been at least two schemes for sending into Russia food that every Russian knew would benefit no one but the Bolsheviks. Various American journalists and representatives of charitable societies have in the last few months visited Russia, more or less under Bolshevik protection, and have not scrupled to express opinions favourable to the Bolsheviks; which has about the same effect on Russian educated opinion as it would have upon Americans if Russians visited and belauded an insurrectionary Negro Government that had mastered, say, South Carolina and murdered most of the whites. When it is observed that some, at least, of these knight-errants are unacquainted with the Russian language and with the customs of the country, it ceases to be surprising that they take whatever they are told by the Bolsheviks as gospel; but this is only the more exasperating to Russians, who see the tragic situation of their country misrepresented to the outer world by persons who they consider have no right to express an opinion of any kind.

That what must be called the American pro-Bolshevik movement did not express the feelings and desires of a large part of the best representatives of the American nation is evident. If objective evidence of this were required, it could be found in that remark-

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able publication of the United States Committee on Public Information, *The German-Bolshevik Conspiracy*. No one studying the long series of documents collected by Mr. Sisson, of which perhaps six or seven are open to the suspicion of having been tampered with before they came into his hands or of having been copied by his agents from memory, could fail to be convinced of the impossibility of any enemy of Germany making peace with the Bolsheviks. If anyone doubts the testimony of that cloud of witnesses, of whom I am probably the latest, to the truth concerning the acts and intentions of the Bolsheviks, let him read Mr. Sisson's pamphlet. I should perhaps say that I saw it for the first time after escaping from Russia in February, so that his documents can have had no effect on my judgment, which was formed purely by a consideration of the facts I had observed. The reader will find there, not a description of events in Russia, but an adequate account of their causes, and an explanation of what has happened. Indeed, only neglect of Mr. Sisson's work could have made possible the frame of mind of a New York banker who explained the United States attitude towards the Bolsheviks by a desire of American business men to have the cards reshuffled and a fresh deal made. Lord Acton once being asked what was the moment of greatest danger in England's history, answered, "When Fulton offered to transport Napoleon's army across the channel by steamship." Had he lived he

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would have seen a greater danger even than this, when the Allied Governments, having beaten Germany in the field, let themselves be brought to the verge of a peace with her agents, our most dangerous enemies, in Russia. But this was a danger not only to England, but to America also, since Bolshevik Russia, reorganised by Germany, would have been able to meet and crush the entire world.

Of the studies in Bolshevik history that make up this volume, only two have been published before. Taken as a whole, and especially those now offered to the public for the first time, they give a fairly comprehensive account of development in Russia from the fall of Kerensky to March, 1919. They do not aspire to be history. It would be too soon to attempt a history of the Bolsheviks, and it is doubtful if a full and true history of their adventure can ever be written. But I venture to hope that the facts I have brought together and the account of my own experiences will shed some light on dark places in Russia. If I could think that they will reveal part of the truth to Americans, my ambition would be more than satisfied.

I should perhaps add a word on a delicate subject. You will in this book find numerous references to the part played by the Jews in Bolshevik Russia. It is impossible not to mention so prominent a feature in the Bolshevik movement, but it must not be thought that my remarks are inspired by any feelings of hos-

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tility to the Jewish race. It is not the fact that all the Jews are Bolshevik; on the contrary, very many of them have suffered bitterly from the terror. This could not be otherwise, when it is reflected that the legal profession and journalism in Russia are largely recruited from among men of Jewish blood, and that the Press and the law courts have been abolished by the Bolsheviks. The journalists especially did good and dangerous work for Russia until they were finally muzzled. But it is the fact that almost all the Bolshevik leaders are Jews or have intimate Jewish connections. The reason for this is clearly that the persecution of the Jews by the Imperial Government implanted in many Jewish exiles an ineradicable hatred of Russia; and it was of this hatred that Germany took advantage in sending Lenin and his associates back to their foster-country. Russian Jewish patriots were unable, more than others, to stem the tide of treacherous propaganda conducted by them, and, like others, have suffered from its success. Russian Jews have now indeed a terrible grievance, but it is against the Bolsheviks, not against Russia; for the preponderance of men of Jewish blood in the Bolshevik camp has resulted in what did not exist before among Russians, though it did among Poles, a deep-seated exasperation against the Jews as a whole, and a grave distrust of their motives. In former days pogroms were engineered by gendarme agents at the bidding of reactionaries in the Government; but when the Bol-

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sheviks are cleared out the difficulty of the true representatives of democratic Russia, come to reconstruct the State, will be to restrain the people itself from wreaking vengeance on the race of which the Bronsteins, Apfelbaums, Rosenblums, and Joffes are the reckless and criminal offspring. I believe the new leaders will do their best to prevent anti-Semitic excesses, but if they cannot, it is Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev whom the Jews will have to thank. A new chapter in history is about to open, but the old causes remain and will work themselves out in ways that we cannot foresee but will surely be bitter with suffering and wrath.

Yours ever,

JOHN POLLOCK.

May 22, 1919.

NOTE.—The “Soviets,” which are supposed to constitute the governmental system of Bolshevik Russia, are generally referred to in England by their Russian name. The objection to this seems to me that the word “soviet,” if it represents anything to an English reader, must seem to imply something exceptional and grand. In fact, the word is the ordinary Russian for a council of any description, *e.g.*, the Cabinet Council or the administrative body of an insurance company. In the Bolshevik system it is used shortly for “a Council of Workmen’s, Peasants’, or Red-

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Armymen's* Deputies," or for the Council of the People's Commissars, which is at the top of the system; and the epithet "sovietsky" for anything appertaining to such a Council. It appears to me simpler to use the English words "Council" and "Conciliar."

* The word "soldier" has been abolished by the Bolsheviks as reactionary, and replaced by "Red-Armyman."

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