

THE RUSSIA OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Mr. Isaac Don Levine's History of the Russian Revolution a Stirring Account of a Great Nation's Struggle to Free Itself from a Despotic Past

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION. By Isaac Don Levine. Harper & Brothers. \$1 net.

NO country has achieved freedom without strange and dramatic occurrences, without staging a great human story that is read and studied by succeeding generations not only for its lessons and its realized hopes, but for its romance and adventure. During revolutions individuals stand out vivid and gigantic, making gestures that become immortal, whether for good or evil. The simplest turn to heroism, the craftiest make slips, coincidences crowd into the story, men die with words on their lips that become a rallying call for generations.

Of all the countries and nations, Russia and the Russians have summed up every element of the drama of freedom achieved through revolution. For a hundred years of cruelty and agony the struggle has continued. Generations have gone to a bloody death or languished in the foulest of prisons, and the eyes of the world have looked on in pity and wonder. The best of Russia's sons and daughters were driven out, exiles, and about each hung the shadows of torture, the threat of death. Prince and stu-

dent, worker and peasant, they wrote the tale of what they endured, of what those left behind were yet enduring, and the world read these tales. At varying intervals the press of the world published details of hideous massacres, of sickening executions, of women outraged and children murdered. And still, firm amid the sea of blood, the throne endured.

Perhaps, outside of Russia, few were left to believe that she would achieve freedom, that at least in our space of time the heavy yoke of her Czars and her German-ruled Court could possibly be broken.

And then, in a day, almost in an hour, the impossible had occurred. The revolution was over. The Czar was a creature of the past, the Princes were scattered, the autocracy had ceased to be. A miracle had taken place, here and now, and was before us, printed in the daily papers, to be read at every breakfast table.

In those first barren announcements there was little beyond the fact itself. That once again revolution was mixed with romance and wonder, with strange acts and

unbelievable events, we hardly guessed. But gradually, as the full account gets itself into print, we find it match the wildest creations of fiction, and take its place in the forefront of historic dramas.

"The Russian Revolution," by Isaac Don Levine, tells in crisp, journalistic style, and with a full sense of its amazingness, this latest romance of human freedom. The author draws from a full and deep knowledge of Russia; he is able to sum up the salient facts leading gradually and surely to the revolution without wasting time or losing the reader's attention. These facts are peculiar and interesting. We will return to them. From a résumé of the past he advances to the present, the effects of the war, the swift developments it brought, the unnatural union between the two Russias at its outbreak, bureaucratic, or Prussian Russia, and the democratic Russia, each standing together in the first peril of the German onslaught. Then the break between the two parties, constantly widening as the autocracy realized that a defeat of Prussia meant its own annihilation, and proved ready to betray its country to the German, while the democracy found cohesion, strength, and a new power of expression in the shared perils of the trenches, the huge service of the relief and hospital work, and the realized fact that in fighting Germany it fought the very fountainhead of autocratic power and government.

The death struggle that developed between these two Russias behind the dark curtain of the war is graphically depicted, and at the end we see the revolutionists in power, facing the terrific burden of establishing stable and enduring forms of government on the yet rocking elements of change and new birth. The story, as Mr. Levine tells it, is brought down almost to the very moment. Having read it, we may watch with a clearer understanding and deeper sympathy the future path of this tremendous development in a people's life.

It was the French Revolution that became the inspiration to Russia, and this, in the fantastic manner of history, which is always so much stranger than fairy tale, entered by way of Napoleon's invasion. Following the French defeat a Russian army invaded France. "Autocratic Russia," says our author, "had come to France to defeat her imperial ambitions. In return France communicated to her the ferment that was to prove the doom of Russia's imperial autocracy." The young officers of that army, educated in the French language as they were, returned to Russia, a land of serfs where liberty had never been born, and determined that they must work for a change in the Government.

A hundred years later, as France's ally, Russia has achieved political freedom.

But between then and now Germany had become the dominating force of the ruling class in Russia. The Czar was far more German than Russian, the Czarina, Princess Alix of Hesse, entirely German. For generations places of power and influence in the Government had been given to Germans. Prussia and Russia, the last strongholds of autocracy, were brothers in blood as well as in a common aim.

United, Germany and Russia might have defied democracy for generations, perhaps for centuries. Divided, they exposed themselves to succumbing to democracy individually and more speedily.

Why, one asks, divide? Because once again Prussia bungled, overleaping her ambition, and falling on the other side.

Fortunately for humanity, Prussian autocracy aimed at more than the fortification of monarchism in Europe. Prussia began to dream of world power.

Even back in the days of Alexander III, Prussia began to affront her natural ally. And it was finally to France that that Emperor turned when he looked for a friendship that might help him against aggression. This rapprochement developed by degrees into the alliance with France toward the end of the nineteenth century, which seemed so unnatural—a radical republican tying up with a reactionary despot. But this union, advantageous as it was to France, was the work not of the French diplomats so much as of the Prussian ambitions.

Nevertheless, Germany kept her grasp on Russia. Both Russia's high command and her economic interests were dominated by Germany. "From the economic point of view Russia was a vast colonial empire at Germany's side." Russia supplied enormous quantities of raw mate-

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rials, and Germany was able to stifle Russia's efforts to become, in her own right, a manufacturing and producing country.

Germany had every reason to be satisfied. But Germany wanted Europe, the world. She challenged the Franco-Russian alliance without realizing the turn events were to take on account of her military tactics. Just as Prussianism did not foresee that the war it initiated was to become the decisive struggle between democracy and autocracy, so Czarism did not realize, upon taking up arms in July, 1914, the nature of the approaching conflict.

Which is confirmation of the old adage that when thieves fall out honest folk come to their own.

Mr. Levine points out that there was absolutely no sympathy for Germany among the Russian people, however it might be with their rulers.

The people remembered that some of the most cruel and inhuman suppressors of the Russian revolutionary movement were of German blood and name; that, while all the foreign nationalities inhabiting the country united with the Russian democracy in its struggle against autocracy, the German element in the nation stood for reactionalism, Czarism, and oppression.

So much for the beginnings. Mr. Levine now leads us on to see the forces working toward freedom. He shows us the birth of what he calls social Russia, visible first in the work and the influence of the Zemstvo Party, the land party, led by Prince G. E. Lvoff. This organization met at the outbreak of the European war to inaugurate plans for relief work. In developing these plans it proved its tremendous strength and its power to handle the people, to get things done, to bring order out of confusion. It was the war that aroused this great society, which soon drew in practically the whole of democratic Russia, developing into other unions, all under one head, and it was this social Russia that engineered the revolution. Without the war there would not have been a revolution.

The political physiognomy of Russia

underwent unprecedented changes mainly because of the activities of social Russia. Therein lies part of the wonderful ease with which popular Russia cast off the burden of autocracy.

The chapters devoted to Nicholas II., to his Court and the Dark Forces, to the amazing monk, Rasputin, with his sinister and unbounded power; those that tell of the growing tension between people and Government, of the treacheries of Protopopoff, Stürmer, and the Czarina, and of the growing strength of the Duma, are breathlessly interesting. Then, following what in any other country but Russia would have been incredible events, comes the actual revolution. Rasputin dead. Protopopoff almost insane. The Czar imbecile in his blindness and the autocracy thundering down to destruction and utterly incapable of realizing the fact. The last tremendous scenes are told with spirit.

And what of the Czar? When it is all over he is told, and this is what he replies:

"Well, thank God, I will go to Livadia. If the people want it I will abdicate. I will go to Livadia to the gardens. I am so fond of flowers."

And this was "the man who had caused his country more suffering than any other Russian ruler since the days of Ivan the Terrible."