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RUSSIA

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A NATION

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In this time of crisis, when the clash of ideas seems as fierce as the struggle of the hosts, it is the duty of those who possess authentic information on one or the other point in dispute to speak out firmly and clearly. I should like to contribute some observations on German and Russian conceptions in matters of culture. I base my claim to be heard on the fact that I have had the privilege of being closely connected with Russian, German, and English life. As a Russian Liberal, who had to give up an honourable position at home for the sake of his opinions, I can hardly be suspected of subserviency to the Russian bureaucracy.

I am struck by the insistence with which the Germans represent their cause in this world-wide struggle as the cause of civilization as opposed to Muscovite barbarism; and I am not sure that some of my English friends do not feel reluctant to side with the subjects of the Tsar against the countrymen of Harnack and Eucken. One would like to know, however, since when have the Germans taken up this attitude? They were not so squeamish during the 'war of emancipation' which gave birth to modern Germany. At that time the people of Eastern Prussia were anxiously waiting for the appearance of Cossacks, as heralds of the Russian hosts who were to emancipate them from the yoke of Napoleon. Did the

Prussians and Austrians reflect on the humiliation of an alliance with the Muscovites, and on the superiority of the Code Civil, when the Russian Guard at Kulm [1] stood like a rock against the desperate onslaught of Vandamme? Perhaps by this time the inhabitants of Berlin have obliterated the bas-relief in the 'Alley of Victories' which represents Prince William of Prussia, the future victor of Sedan, seeking safety within the square of the Kaluga regiment! [2] Russian blood has flowed in numberless battles in the cause of the Germans and Austrians. The present Armageddon might perhaps have been avoided if the Tsar Nicholas I had left the Hapsburg Monarchy to its own resources in 1849, and had not unwisely crushed the independence of Hungary. Within our own memory, the benevolent neutrality of Russia guarded Germany in 1870 from an attack in the rear by its opponents of Sadowa. Are all such facts to be explained away on the ground that the despised Muscovites may be occasionally useful as 'gun-meat', but are guilty of

[1] *Kulm.* After the defeat of the Allies by Napoleon at Dresden in 1813, the French corps of Vandamme appeared in their rear. If it had succeeded in cutting the line of communications with Prague, the retreat of the Allies might have been turned into a rout. The First Division of the Russian Guard was ordered to stop Vandamme, and this it did at Kulm on August 29, although it was outnumbered by three to one and lost almost half its men in killed and wounded. On the next day, Prussian and Austrian troops came up, and Vandamme surrendered with the remainder of his corps. The battle was the turning-point in the campaign of 1813. The King of Prussia granted the Iron Cross to all those who took part in this desperate struggle; hence the Iron Cross was called the 'Kulm Cross' by the Russians.

[2] *Prince William of Prussia and the Kaluga regiment.* The future conqueror of Sedan first fought as a boy of seventeen at Bar-sur-Aube (February 27, 1814). In that battle he joined the Russian Fifth Infantry (Kaluga), a regiment of which he afterwards became an honorary colonel.

sacrilege if they take up a stand against German task-masters in 'shining armour'? The older generations of Germany had not yet reached that comfortable conclusion. The last recommendation which the founder of the German Empire made on his death-bed to his grandson was to keep on good terms with that Russia which is now proclaimed to be a debased mixture of Byzantine, Tartar, and Muscovite abominations.

Fortunately, the course of history does not depend on the frantic exaggerations of partisans. The world is not a class-room in which docile nations are distributed according to the arbitrary standards of German pedagogues. Europe has admired the patriotic resistance of the Spanish, Tyrolese, and Russian peasants to the enlightened tyranny of Napoleon. There are other standards of culture besides proficiency in research and aptitude for systematic work. The massacre of Louvain, the hideous brutality of the Germans towards non-combatants—to mention only one or two of the appalling occurrences of these last weeks—have thrown a lurid light on the real character of twentieth-century German culture. 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' said our Lord; and the saying which He aimed at the Scribes and Pharisees of His time is indeed applicable to the proud votaries of German civilization to-day. Nobody wishes to underestimate the services rendered by the German people to the cause of European progress; but those who have known Germany during the years following the achievements of 1870 have watched with dismay the growth of that arrogant conceit which the Greeks called ὕβρις. The cold-blooded barbarity advocated by Bernhardi, the cynical view taken of international treaties and of the obligations of honour by the German Chancellor—these things reveal a spirit which

it would be difficult indeed to describe as a sign of progress.

One of the effects of such a frame of mind is to strike the victim of it with blindness. This symptom has been manifest in the stupendous blunders of German diplomacy. The successors of Bismarck have alienated their natural allies, such as Italy and Roumania, and have driven England into this war against the evident intentions of English Radicals. But the Germans have misconceived even more important things. They set out on their adventure in the belief that England would be embarrassed by civil war and unable to take any effective part in the fray ; and they had to learn something which all their writers had not taught them—that there is a nation's spirit watching over England's safety and greatness, a spirit at whose mighty call all party differences and racial strifes fade into insignificance. In the same way, they had reckoned on the unpreparedness of Russia, in consequence of internal dissensions and administrative weakness, without taking heed of the love of all Russians for Russia, of their devotion to the long-suffering giant whose life is throbbing in their veins. The Germans expected to encounter raw and sluggish troops under intriguing time-servers and military Hamlets whose ' native hue of resolution ' had been ' sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought '. Instead of that, they were confronted with soldiers of the same type as those whom Frederick the Great and Napoleon admired, led at last by chiefs worthy of their men. And behind these soldiers they discovered a nation. Do they realize now what a force they have awakened ? Do they understand that a steadfast, indomitable resolution, despising all theatrical display, is moving Russia's hosts ? Even if the Russian generals had proved mediocre, even if

many disappointing days had been in store, the nation would not have belied its history. It has seen more than one conquering army go down before it. The Tartars and the Poles, the Swedes of Charles XII, the Prussians of Frederick the Great, the Grand Army of Napoleon, were not less formidable than the Kaiser's array, but the task of mastering a united Russia proved too much for each one of them. The Germans counted on the fratricidal feud between Poles and Russians, on the resentment of the Jews, on Mohammedan sympathies with Turkey, and so forth. They had to learn too late that the Jews had rallied round the country of their hearths, and that the best of them cannot believe that Russia will continue to deny them the measure of justice and humanity which the leaders of Russian thought have long acknowledged to be due to them. More important still, the Germans have read the Grand Duke's appeal to the Poles and must have heard of the manner in which it was received in Poland, of the enthusiastic support offered to the Russian cause. If nothing else came of this great historical upheaval but the reconciliation of the Russians and their noble kinsmen the Poles, the sacrifices which this crisis demands would not be too great a price to pay for the result.

But the hour of trial has revealed other things. It has appealed to the best feelings and the best elements of the Russian nation. It has brought out in a striking manner the fundamental tendency of Russian political life and the essence of Russian culture, which so many people have been unable to perceive on account of the chaff on the surface. Russia has been going through a painful crisis. In the words of the Manifesto of October 17/30, 1905, the outward casing of her administration had become too narrow and oppressive for the

development of society with its growing needs, its altered perceptions of rights and duties, its changed relations between Government and people. The result was that deep-seated political *malaise* which made itself felt during the Japanese War, when Russian society at large refused to take any interest in the fate of the army ; the feverish rush for ' liberties ' after the defeat ; the subsequent reign of reaction and repression, which has cast such a gloom over Russian life during these last years. But the effort of the national struggle has dwarfed all these misunderstandings and misfortunes, as in Great Britain the call of the common Motherland has dwarfed the dispute between Unionists and Home Rulers. Russian parties have not renounced their aspirations ; Russian Liberals in particular believe in self-government and the rule of law as firmly as ever. But they have realized as one man that this war is not an adventure engineered by unscrupulous ambition, but a decisive struggle for independence and existence ; and they are glad to be arrayed in close ranks with their opponents from the Conservative side. A friend, a Liberal like myself, writes to me from Moscow : ' It is a great, unforgettable time ; we are happy to be all at one ! ' And from the ranks of the most unfortunate of Russia's children, from the haunts of the political exiles in Paris, comes the news that Bourtzeff, one of the most prominent among the revolutionary leaders, has addressed an appeal to his comrades urging them to stand by their country to the utmost of their power.[1]

I may add that whatever may have been the shortcomings and the blunders of the Russian Government,

[1] *Bourtzeff, a prominent Russian revolutionary leader.* I am glad to note that Bourtzeff fully endorses my view in a letter to *The Times* (issue of September 18, 1914).

it is a blessing in this decisive crisis that Russians should have a firmly-knit organization and a traditional centre of authority in the power of the Tsar. The present Emperor stands as the national leader, not in the histrionic attitude of a War Lord, but in the quiet dignity of his office. He has said and done the right thing, and his subjects will follow him to a man. We are sure he will remember in the hour of victory the unstinted devotion and sacrifices of all the nationalities and parties of his vast Empire. It is our firm conviction that the sad tale of reaction and oppression is at an end in Russia, and that our country will issue from this momentous crisis with the insight and strength required for the constructive and progressive statesmanship of which it stands in need.

Apart from the details of political and social reform, is the regeneration of Russia a boon or a peril to European civilization? The declamations of the Germans have been as misleading in this respect as in all others. The master works of Russian literature are accessible in translation nowadays, and the cheap taunts of men like Bernhardi recoil on their own heads. A nation represented by Pushkin, Turgeneff, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky in literature, by Kramskoy, Verestchagin, Repin, Glinka, Moussorgsky, Tchaikovsky in art,[1] by Mendeleeff, Metchnikoff, Pavloff in science, by Kluchevsky and Solovieff in history, need not be ashamed to enter the lists in an international competition for the prizes of culture. But the German historians ought to have

[1] *Kramskoy, Verestchagin, Repin,* &c. Only a few names are selected almost at random. Of course, no description of pictures and no characterization of painters can convey any adequate impression. Those who wish to form an opinion of Russian painting should go to Moscow and pay a visit to the Tretiakoff Gallery.

taught their pupils that in the world of ideas it is not such competitions that are important. A nation handicapped by its geography may have to start later in the field, and yet her performance may be relatively better than that of her more favoured neighbours. It is astonishing to read German diatribes about Russian backwardness when one remembers that as recently as fifty years ago Austria and Prussia were living under a régime which can hardly be considered more enlightened than the present rule in Russia. The Italians in Lombardy and Venice have still a vivid recollection of Austrian gaols; and as for Prussian militarism, one need not go further than the exploits of the Zabern garrisons to illustrate its meaning. This being so, it is not particularly to be wondered at that the Eastern neighbour of Austria and Prussia has followed to some extent on the same lines.

But the general direction of Russia's evolution is not doubtful. Western students of her history might do well, instead of sedulously collecting damaging evidence, to pay some attention to the building-up of Russia's universities, the persistent efforts of the Zemstvos, the independence and the zeal of the Press. German scholars should read Hertzen's vivid description of the 'idealists of the forties'.[1] And what about the history of the emancipation of the serfs, or of the regeneration of the judicature? The 'reforms of the sixties'[2] are

[1] *The idealists of the forties.* They have been described by Hertzen in his *Byloe i Dumy* (*Past and Thoughts*) in connexion with intellectual life in Moscow. Both Westerners like Granovsky, Stankevitch, Ketscher, Hertzen himself, and Slavophiles like J. Kireievsky and Khomiakoff, are vividly characterized in this brilliant autobiography.

[2] *The reforms of the sixties.* They comprise the great reforms carried out with rare patriotism and insight during the early years

a household word in Russia, and surely they are one of the noblest efforts ever made by a nation in the direction of moral improvement.

Looking somewhat deeper, what right have the Germans to speak of their ideals of culture as superior to those of the Russian people ? They deride the superstitions of the *mujikh* as if tapers and genuflexions were the principal matters of popular religion. Those who have studied the Russian people without prejudice know better than that. Read Selma Lagerloef's touching description of Russian pilgrims in Palestine[1]. She, the Protestant, has understood the true significance of the religious impulse which leads these poor men to the Holy Land, and which draws them to the numberless churches of the vast country. These simple people cling to the belief that there is something else in God's world besides toil and greed ; they flock towards the light, and find in it the justification of their human craving for peace and mercy. For the Russian people have the Christian virtue of patience in suffering : their pity for the poor and oppressed is more than an occasional manifestation of individual feeling—it is deeply rooted in national psychology. This frame of mind has been scorned as fit for slaves ! It is indeed a case where the learning of

of Alexander II's reign. The principal were—the emancipation of the peasants (1861), the reorganization of the judicial system (1864), and the creation of Zemstvo self-government (1864). There was a number of other reforms besides—the University Statutes of 1863, the Press Law of 1865, the partial abolition of corporal punishment in 1863 : and so forth. Many of these reforms have been adulterated by subsequent modifications ; but the main current of progress could not be turned back, and there are no greater names in the history of Europe than those of N. Milutine, D. Milutine, Prince Cherkassky, J. Samarine, Unkovsky, Zarudny, and their companions.

[1] *Selma Lagerloef on Russian pilgrims.*—"Jerusalem," vol. ii, "On the Wings of the Dawn."

philosophers is put to shame by the insight of the simple-minded. Conquerors should remember that the greatest victories in history have been won by the unarmed—by the Christian confessors whom the emperors sent to the lions, by the 'old believers' of Russia who went to Siberia and to the flames for their unyielding faith, by the Russian serfs who preserved their human dignity and social cohesion in spite of the exactions of their masters, by the Italians, Poles, and Jews, when they were trampled under foot by their rulers. It is such a victory of the spirit that Tolstoy had in mind when he preached his gospel of non-resistance; and I do not think even a German on the war path would be blind enough to suppose that Tolstoy's message came from a craven soul. The orientation of the so-called 'intelligent' class in Russia—that is, the educated middle class, which is much more numerous and influential than people suppose—is somewhat different, of course. It is 'Western' in this sense, that it is imbued with current European ideas as to politics, economics, and law. It has to a certain extent lost the simple faith and religious fervour of the peasants. But it has faithfully preserved the keynote of popular ideals. It is still characteristically humanitarian in its view of the world and in its aims. A book like that of General von Bernhardi would be impossible in Russia. If anybody were to publish it, it would not only fall flat, but earn for its author the reputation of a bloodhound. Many deeds of cruelty and brutality happen, of course, in Russia, but no writer of any standing would dream of building up a theory of violence in vindication of a claim to culture. It may be said, in fact, that the leaders of Russian public opinion are pacific, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian to a fault. The mystic philosopher,

Vladimir Solovieff[1], used to dream of the union of the Churches with the Pope as the spiritual head, and democracy in the Russian sense as the broad basis of the rejuvenated Christendom. Dostoyevsky, a writer most sensitive to the claims of nationality in Russia, defined the ideal of the Russians in a celebrated speech as the embodiment of a universally humanitarian type.[2] These are extremes, but characteristic extremes pointing to the trend of national thought. Russia is so huge and so strong that material power has ceased to be attractive to her thinkers. Nevertheless, we need not yet retire into the desert or deliver ourselves to be bound hand and foot by 'civilized' Germans. Russia also wields a sword—a charmed sword, blunt in an unrighteous cause, but sharp enough in the defence of right and freedom. And this war is indeed our *Befreiungskrieg*. The Slavs must have their chance in the history of the world, and the date of their coming of age will mark a new departure in the growth of civilization.

[1] *Vladimir Solovieff.* A talented philosopher, the son of the famous historian S. Solovieff. He was a professor at Moscow for a short time.

[2] *Dostoyevsky's speech.* It was delivered in Moscow in 1880, on the occasion of the unveiling of Pushkin's statue in that city.

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