

THE LIFE AND LETTERS SERIES NO. 41

MAURICE HINDUS

HUMANITY
UPROOTED

London - JONATHAN CAPE - Toronto

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*For some a prologue,
For some an epilogue.*

BULGAKOV.

P R E F A C E

I WAS born in a Russian village, so deaf, as the Russians would say (meaning so far removed from centres of civilization), that not until I had started for America at the age of fourteen, did I see a railroad train or an electric light. After a lengthy sojourn in this country I returned to Russia in 1923 and spent a year there, wandering about the cities and villages. Since then I have visited Russia almost annually, roaming at leisure in Siberia, the Caucasus, the Volga region, the Ukraine, the Crimea and the far North. Everywhere it was the same story – humanity in a state of feverish agitation, convulsed with thought and feeling. Life in Russia is so violent an experience, so painful a trial and to him who bursts with the new faith so glorious an ecstasy, that one cannot remain simply passive. One must react somehow to the heaving turbulence, with fervour, with fury, with hope, with despair, with madness or even with death.

For good or for evil Russia has plucked up the old world by its very roots and the Party in power is glad to see these roots wilt and turn into dust. Hardly an institution – property, religion, morality, family, love – has escaped the blasts of the Revolution.

It was the learned Dr. Hu Shih in Shanghia who told me that what struck him most forcibly about the Russian Revolution was the deliberate attempt to build a civilization based on an entirely new pattern. Of course there is nothing new in that. Japan has done it wisely and well. But Japan

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has had a model to follow. The Western world furnished her with a complete set of diagrams. Not so with Russia. The civilization she is seeking to enthrone never was on sea or land. She has had no ready models to guide her. She wants a society without religion, with sex freedom, with external compulsions removed from family and love, with mental and manual workers reduced to a plane of equality, with the individual depending for his salvation not on himself but the group. A whole generation is being vigorously reared in the belief that religion is a monstrous unreality, that the accumulation of material substance is the grossest of wrongs and that the man in its pursuit, especially the business man, is the slimiest creature on earth. A whole generation of women is being reared in the idea that women must be economically independent, and must participate in the affairs of the world – in industry, in education, in government, in all other national pursuits, on a basis of equality with men. Whatever we may think of feminism something stupendous must come out of this effort to draw on the intelligence and energies of women in the task of rebuilding a civilization.

Those of us with an American or some other Western background and with a knowledge of the Russian language, who have had the opportunity to observe at close range Russian humanity in these years of tumult and tribulation, have had an extraordinary experience, fraught with great sorrow, yet not void of romance. Agony there is in Russia, more, I am sure, than in any land in the world. Rapture also, the highest man ever has tasted.

In this book I have attempted to give a picture of the results of the revolutionary effort to uproot ancient institutions and to re-fashion the ways of man.

Some of the chapters, in somewhat abbreviated and altered form, have appeared in *Asia*, in the *Century* and in

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the *Round Table*. To the editors of these publications I wish to tender my thanks for their permission to incorporate in this book the material they have printed.

MAURICE HINDUS

NEW YORK,

May 1st, 1929.

N O T E T O S E C O N D E D I T I O N

Owing to the amazing spread of collective farming in the past year it has been necessary to revise the final part of the chapter on The Peasant. Otherwise with the exception of stylistic corrections and explanatory sentences the book remains unchanged.

M. H.

INTRODUCTION

THE following passage taken from the chapter on Youth seems to me to be itself a suitable introduction to the entire book: at least to the attentive reader it suggests the animated spirit of Mr. Hindus' extraordinary account of the extraordinary Russian scene. 'Often when I would tell Russian youths that I was a writer they would immediately ask what was my political orientation. What they really meant was whether I was for or against the class struggle. They could not conceive of a writer being apolitical and indifferent to political viewpoints.' The passage is intended to tell something about the attitude of Russian youth. In fact, it communicates even more about the point of view from which Mr. Hindus has surveyed the Russian situation.

To take sides, to find something to praise or to blame, and then allow the purpose of blame or praise to control all one's ideas of a social situation is almost as natural to humanity as it is to breathe. The idler on the bank of a stream can with difficulty observe two chips floating downwards near each other without thinking of them as engaged in a struggle and identifying himself with one against the other. When the conflict is actual and is human, when it includes within itself forces and interests wherein the spectator is already committed by education, prejudice and aspiration, impartiality of observation and report is well nigh beyond human power.

It is not merely Russian youth who find it hard to conceive that a writer should be interested in what is going on

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in their country simply as something to behold and if possible to understand. All over the world, it is assumed that a person must of necessity be interested in the scenes as one who is for the new regime or is against it. It is incredible that one should be concerned to look and to note as a spectator may assist at the unrolling of a drama in which human passions, beliefs and fortunes are engaged deeply and on the most tremendous scale. To see for the sake of seeing and to tell others so that they may vicariously share in the seeing – that is beyond the reach of the imagination of most men in respect to Soviet Russia. To them it is not a scene to behold; it is a battle to take part in. Failure to be an open partisan is itself suspect. To my mind the striking thing about this book by Mr. Hindus is that with the most intimate sympathetic response to all the human issues involved in the revolutionary transformation, he is nevertheless content to see and to report. Nowhere does he assume the divine prerogative of blessing or condemning; nowhere is he the avenging angel of divine wrath nor yet the angel of benediction.

In consequence, readers who have not already made up their minds, who have not already formed judgments incapable of change, will find the means in this book for reaching a juster and more appreciative understanding of Bolshevist Russia than in any other book known to me. Those who have made up their minds for or against will, each of them, find plenty of material that may be isolated from its context and be used to support their pre-formed views. There is hardly a book in existence that affords more material for hearty damnation of Russia if one merely selects passages with that end in view. But there is also a dispassionate and compassionate account of all the factors that have fired the imaginative ardour of the most devout adherents of the revolution. Yet what has been said would