

**FROM A RUSSIAN
DIARY, 1917-1920**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649095247

From a Russian diary, 1917-1920 by An Englishwoman

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AN ENGLISHWOMAN

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BY AN ENGLISHWOMAN

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1921

TO MY
PARENTS

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TO
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FOREWORD

WHEN the revolution broke out in Russia I was living in a provincial town, which since the war had become of considerable importance.

For some time before February 1917 the newspapers had been daily scanned with ever-increasing anxiety. Not only did it daily become more evident that there was much treachery and treason, but it seemed that the only one who could have put a stop to this state of affairs lacked either the wisdom or the courage, or both.

Each time that the name of a newly appointed minister was read out people looked at each other in amazement, and then came the never-varying exclamation, "What are they aiming at? A revolution?"

Even before the date I speak of thoughtful Russians had foreseen a revolution "from below," but they hoped it would be staved off until the close of the war. The revolution which they now spoke of was one which they thought might prove merely a palace revolution.

The murder of Rasputin seemed to arouse expectancy in everyone. All thought that the monk's death meant a new chapter; but what were the contents to be?

Much as the Czarina was disliked among the upper classes of Russia, never was any scandal breathed about her wedded life. The influence gained by Rasputin was attributed solely to his extraordinary

powers over the health of the young heir. In England one is apt to say that there were no powers, merely trickery. It is the old story of doubting Thomas. Those who were in a position to know best declare that he undoubtedly had great powers. On one occasion the child was brought back from the front in what was thought to be a dying condition : he was weak from loss of blood. The monk no sooner approached than the bleeding stopped.

Towards the middle of February we were left for some days entirely without news. One morning word went round that something must be happening in Petrograd, for the imperial train had sped through our station, bearing the Emperor to his capital. Again a silence. It was broken by news that the railwaymen had received an address begging them to go on with their work in the same efficient manner that they had done in the past, and telling them that, for the present, they were to obey the Duma.

Soon news came like a flood. Many hoped that the Czar's brother had but temporarily refused the crown ; maybe he wished to avoid the humiliation (if such it can be called) of renouncing rights held by his predecessors, perhaps he preferred to accept a crown offered by a Russia which had already drawn up a constitution for herself. Unfortunately this was not the case. If there had been any one member of the Imperial Family universally beloved and respected all might have been well. Russia was left to the mercy of a party who, though for years it had dreamed of, plotted and planned this revolution, had no constructive idea : it had pulled down but had not the courage to build up. In the midst of a mighty war a huge Empire was left without Emperor, without any administrative or executive powers. Governors, vice-governors, police of all classes were

done away with. The party which was too cowardly to assume even temporary responsibility spoke of a Constituent Assembly. But *when* could it come together? Russia is so vast that many parts of the Empire did not hear of the Czar's abdication until many months had passed; so vast that his subjects belong to many hundred races and tribes. Were they all to come to the Assembly? If not, where was the line to be drawn? Who was to draw it?

Days passed; no orders of any kind were received from Petrograd. Some of the more energetic of our townsfolk, on the suggestion of a woman, organised a provisional local government; the hospitals, the schools, the railway, the soldiers, the merchants, the factories, etc., all sent representatives.

Some days later orders came from Petrograd to form local provisional governments; we had already done so.

For a time things went along better than in most places. Unfortunately, from the start the workmen got into bad hands; as usual, instead of voting on the merits of the question, which in such a small Assembly was quite possible, they took a leader and played the old game "Follow the Leader." This leader was the head of a girls' high school, a man who had only recently come to our town from quite another part of the Empire. (Once I sat just behind him; unless my eyes strangely deceived me, he had that morning used rouge.)

As time went on things did not improve. The sittings used to drag on until two and three in the morning. Often when nearly everyone had gone home, to snatch a few hours' rest before their ordinary day's work began, the workmen, who did not attend their ordinary work, but lived on party funds, would propose some important by-law. As there was nearly

telegram saying he was down with typhus in a frontier town. Although these brothers, clever, energetic men, did all in their power to obtain a permit which would enable the father to travel to his son, they did not succeed until many, many days had passed, and then—when they had the permit—there was no train.

These brothers were like nearly all government employees out there. They detested the Bolsheviks; they worked because, otherwise, they would have been in the third category and would have died of hunger. In few government offices is there more than a sprinkling of Bolsheviks. In one big office I could name there was for a considerable time not a single Bolshevik.

Russian women have been splendid. The men being mostly at the front, the big estates were in more cases than usual being run by the women. In 1917 they went on with the sowing of crops as if nothing had happened, yet the difficulties and expenses were enormous, and they knew that in all probability the crops would not be theirs—as indeed they were not. Even after this, those who still held their lands did their utmost to get the autumn sowing done. They realised that if they did less they would not be worthy of their position; if Russia was to starve the responsibility would not lie at their doors.

Time after time I have heard them asked why they did not sell their pedigree stock whilst it was still possible; it would at least mean some ready money in their pockets. The answer was invariably the same: a good herd takes years to form; when formed it constitutes a part of the nation's wealth which even the owner has no right to destroy. So to the bitter end they bravely did their duty to the nation which now is treating them so infamously. The soil lies untilled; the herds have been broken up; bulls im-