

# One Disillusionment More

THE BOLSHEVIST MYTH (Diary: 1920-1922). By ALEXANDER BERKMAN. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1925. \$3.

THE SPECKLED DOMES. By GERARD SHELLEY. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1925. \$4.

Reviewed by PITIRIM SOROKIN

Author of "Leaves from a Russian Diary"

**F**OR many who are sick with the sickness of Revolution and Communism, Soviet Russia, it seems, is a wonderful sanatorium. If such a sick person is sincere and honest it is enough to send him to the Communist Kingdom for some months to cure him radically and forever from his illness. "The Bolshevik Myth" is a remarkable confirmation of this statement. Its author is a leading anarchist. After years of imprisonment in America, at the end of 1919 he was deported from the U. S. to Soviet Russia. We can easily understand his feelings at the moment of entering the country of Revolution.

*A feeling of solemnity, of awe overwhelmed me. Thus my pious old forefathers must have felt on first entering the Holy of Holies. A strong desire was upon me to kneel down and kiss the ground of Russia. I longed to lay my heart at its feet, to give my life a thousand times to the service of the Social Revolution. It was the most sublime day of my life. I came exultant with the Revolution, full of admiration for the Bolsheviks and flushed with the joy of useful work awaiting me in the midst of the heroic Russian people.*

Such is "the prologue" of Berkman's story. What is its "epilogue"? Very similar to what has been told by many foreign revolutionists and by thousands of the Russians.

Gray are the passing days. One by one the embers of hope have died out. Terror and despotism have crushed

the life. The slogans of the Revolution are foresworn, its ideals stifled in the blood of the people. Dictatorship is trampling the masses under foot. The Revolution is dead. High time the truth about the Bolsheviks were told. The whitened sepulcher must be unmasked, the clay feet of the fetish beguiling the international proletariat to fatal will o' the wisps exposed. The Bolshevik myth must be destroyed. I realized at last that Bolshevik idealism was a myth, a dangerous delusion to liberty and progress.

The book tells us how the author came from his enthusiastic prologue to this epilogue. It was not easy for him because "closely associated with the leading Communists, I shared their interests and hopes, helped in their work, and was inspired by their devotion to the Revolution". However, "Life continuously challenged my faith. I saw inequality and injustice on every hand, humanity trampled in the dust, alleged exigency made the cloak of treachery, deceit, and oppression. Every day the damning evidence was accumulating". In brief, Mr. Berkman saw too much and life was too stubborn to permit him to be further a Don Quixote of the Bolshevik Dulcinea. After eighteen months of "anguish and heartrending experience" his eyes were open and he understood, at last, that the Communist Dulcinea was not a *Lumen Coeli*, *Sancta Rosa* which he expected to find out but only a "dirty and bloody prostitute".

The book represents a diary written by the author from day to day during 1920-1921. Reading it one easily begins to understand the conversion of Berkman into the bitterest enemy of the Soviet régime and its rulers. There is no philosophy in the book. There is only the everyday experience of the author. But that depicts the situation, perhaps, better than any abstract analysis. He who wants to know the inner life of the Russian Revolution, the real pictures of its leaders, the manner of behavior of many foreign "labor" delegates and notables in Russia, at last, he who wants to read something "adventurous and thrilling": he will find a great deal in this remarkable book. From my part I may add that all facts depicted by the author are true and correct. The book is especially instructive for those "impartial" Don Quixotes of Bolshevik Dulcinea who, not knowing anything about her, except their illusions, are still fighting for "the dirty girl" of Moscow. The book will help them to understand that their attitude is utterly absurd.



"The Speckled Domes" by Shelley is a chronicle by an Englishman of his experiences in the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russia. Typically superficial, with many mistakes, it is quite an average story in all respects, except one. The author is a great admirer of...Rasputin. He slanders the Russian aristocracy, he curses the Russian intellegentzia and people. Only Rasputin and the Czarina are spared by him, and depicted as the saint and great giants.

In a land of bribe-takers and corrupt officials, Rasputin stood out like the giant figure of a saint moulded in rugged iron. He, of all men of Russia, was immaculate. He lived a poor and simple life. Such virtue was almost unknown in Russia.

This quotation shows the author's attitude towards Rasputin and Russia. There is no doubt that this viewpoint is original but there is no doubt also that it is absurd. After what we know about Rasputin neither the author nor anybody else can convince us that their "original opinion" is true. As many pro-bolshevik writers are now slandering the Russian people to justify the bestialities of their friends, Shelley is doing the same in another way: in order to justify his friend Rasputin he is ready to condemn the whole nation. If his "beatification" of Rasputin is hopeless the fallacy of his opinion about the Russian people is excellently shown by the author himself. When he was hunted and imprisoned, when he was starving and sick, many Russians whom he did not know, who themselves were in the same conditions, divided with him their last crumb of bread, their last clothes and, at their own risk, tried to help him as much as they could. These facts given in abundance in the book, do not, it would seem, warrant the author's angry utterances. Bestialities in any Revolution have always been performed by the minority. The majority of the people have always been the victims but not the authors of revolutionary cruelties. It is impossible therefore to make a whole nation responsible for the crimes of Rasputins and Lenins.