

WAR & REVOLUTION IN ASIATIC RUSSIA

Morgan Philips Price

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Volume 3

WAR & REVOLUTION IN ASIATIC
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MORGAN PHILIPS PRICE

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WAR & REVOLUTION IN ASIATIC RUSSIA

BY

M. PHILIPS PRICE

(Special Correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian")



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PREFACE

In November 1914 I came to Russia, as special correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. Up to March 1915 I was engaged in Petrograd and Warsaw, and then spent three months in the rear of the Russian army in Galicia. After the disastrous retreat of the Russians from Lemberg I made my way back to Petrograd. The difficulty of carrying on press correspondence from the European fronts in Russia was very great. It was impossible to report the true state of affairs. The persecution of the Ruthenes and the pogroms of the Jews, which I witnessed during the retreat, had to remain unrecorded. A rigid censorship made the task in which I was engaged a hopeless one. And yet I could not write and say that all was well, or join the chorus of those who conceived it their duty to hide the truth. Rather than bury my conscience in Europe I decided to betake myself to Asia. When I arrived in the Caucasus, that "gateway" into Central Asia, the whole of the Middle East was before me. No one had worked out the story of what was happening there while Europe was seething. I therefore spent the latter half of 1915 and the whole of 1916 in the Caucasus, making journeys into the neighbouring regions of Persia, Greater Armenia, and the Black Sea coast. While I was on these journeys I kept a careful diary of all that I

Preface

saw, and sent frequent dispatches to my newspaper. Part II of this volume is made up out of my diary and out of articles which appeared during these months in the *Manchester Guardian*. During the summer and autumn of 1916 I was doing relief work among refugees in the Trans-Caucasus and the neighbouring regions of Turkey. While on this work I travelled through a large part of the province of Fars and Lazistan, both of which little-known regions I describe in Chapters VI and VII. Part I is a short history of the Caucasus campaign which I compiled during the winter of 1916, while living in Tiflis. In the Introduction I try to connect the great events that were taking place in the Middle East with the past history of Central Asia, and to sketch the lines along which an international settlement might be made. I was just completing this when the Russian Revolution broke out, and I became a witness of its effects in the Asiatic provinces. In Part III, I lead up to this theme. I show in Chapter IX the real state of Asiatic Russia, as I saw it in the months preceding the Revolution. In Chapter VIII I show how the Russian reaction was in part responsible for the disastrous state of affairs in Armenia, and was contributing with the Turkish Government to bring that unhappy country to the verge of ruin. In the last Chapter, I describe the Revolution in Asia and the dawn of the new era which Russia has now made for the people of that continent.

M. PHILIPS PRICE.

PETROGRAD.

May 19, 1917.

NOTE.—A chapter on "*Persia and her Future*" will be included in later editions after the war or when there is no Censor to be consulted.

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INTRODUCTION



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WAR AND REVOLUTION IN ASIATIC RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION

IF we look at a map of the old hemisphere, we shall be struck with two important facts. We shall first observe that what is known as Europe is a westerly projection of the much greater continent of Asia ; and secondly that there are two passages between these two portions of the continent. One of these passages leads from the deserts of Central Asia across a wide plain into Central Europe and covers what is known politically as Russia ; and the other, a narrower one, leads from the plateaux in the heart of Asia across a projecting promontory, known as Asia Minor, into south-eastern Europe. These two passages are separated from each other by a depression filled with water, which is the Black Sea. People in the heart of the continent, if they wish to move west, must cross by one or other of these two passages. For the sake of convenience let us call them the *gateways* between the two portions of the continent.

Now if we think of the great events of human history that have helped to build up modern Europe, such as the rise of Greek civilization, the birth of Christianity, the fall of Constantinople and the invasion of Russia by the Tartars, we shall see that they have all taken

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place either in or near these two passages. It would seem in fact as if from the earliest times action and reaction, movements and counter-movements, have been going on between the peoples of Europe and Asia. What has caused this continuous unrest? One may attribute it perhaps to religious impulses, like that which inspired the Arabs, or to abstract ideas, which aimed at giving to mankind a uniform political and legal system, such as those which moved the Romans. This explanation will only suffice if we assume that the impulses which lead man to change his modes of thought and his habits of life, come direct from the "free spirit", untrammelled by the chains of material existence. If that is so, then these spiritual movements cannot be traced to peculiarities of climate or geography. But if on the other hand they are connected with the material side of life, then the structure of continents, their temperature, soil and climates, must influence the human types that live there, and must affect the forms of society and the different political and religious movements that take place there.

Now Central Asia is a huge expanse of alternating high plateau and low plain, divided by great ranges of mountains. The climate of one part of it is widely different from that of another. Physical obstacles have prevented the people of Asia from uniting in one common political system. The history of Central Asia from the Islamic renaissance to the Mongol Empire may be regarded as an attempt to create this unity. But the caprices of nature have always frustrated the ideals of man. The rulers of the Bactrian oases could subject their own neighbours, but they could not make their influence felt beyond the Pamirs or the Tian-shan. The Bedouin

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shepherds of Arabia, inspired with the simple faith of Islam, were ignorant teachers and but transitory rulers of the refined Persians of Isfahan. Two separate types of humanity can be observed in Central Asia from the earliest times down to this day. There are the inhabitants of the oases, who live a sedentary life, and are able with little labour to satisfy their material needs. On the other hand the nomads of the mountains and deserts are obliged to resort in years of drought to raids on their neighbours' territory, or else to go hungry. Such extremes of severity and luxury have produced these two types of men ; one the submissive peoples of the oases, prone to abstract thought, with their schools of philosophy and their mystic sects ; the other, predatory by instinct, and from time to time sending forth hordes of invaders with their tyrant emperors.

For these reasons a stable political system in Central Asia has been hitherto impossible. Hungry nomads to this day periodically invade the fertile oases ; and in earlier times they often banded together and pushed their migrations far into the West. The Mongols, Tartars and Osmanlis, whose movements had such a profound effect upon Eastern Europe, are all examples of this process. Following the lines of least resistance, they passed through the two gateways between Europe and Asia, the Russian plain and the Asia Minor plateau.

The reverse movement from West to East has also been taking place. Europe for the last hundred years has slowly, but systematically, penetrated western Asia and established its economic influence there. Now the western peninsula of the Europeo-Asiatic continent has to a large degree acquired a common standard of culture

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and ideals, and has been saved from the instability which results when fierce nomads live, as in Asia, beside defenceless oasis-dwellers. Protected from these hordes in the middle ages by the races which inhabited the Russian plain and the Asia Minor plateau, European man commenced his political and cultural development as soon as the Reformation had cast off the shackles of ecclesiasticism, and set free the spirit of reason and enquiry. Assisted by an even climate and a soil of moderate fertility, he learnt early to develop the material side of civilization, and to conquer nature by the arts and crafts. Accumulations of energy stored up in the form of capital were then exported abroad. The tide of human movement turned to Asia once more, and Europe began to swing back the pendulum, which the Turanian hordes had pushed towards her in the middle ages. Again the "gateways" between the two halves of the continent became the scene of race-movement and political struggle. The first move was made by the Slavs, who began their migrations eastwards as far back as the 11th century. They took as their sphere the northern gateway, or the Russian plain. To the lot of the Western Powers, some centuries later, after the decline of the Ottoman Empire, fell the southern gateway. Then began the competition between the Powers of Europe over the Balkans, and over railway concessions in Asiatic Turkey. All these movements and conflicts were indications of Europe's "Drang nach Osten".

Besides the eastern and western movements through the two "gateways" of Europe and Asia, one can also trace all along the centuries a movement from North to South. For many centuries the nomad races from the

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Russian plain have passed across the narrow isthmus of the Caucasus, which connects the northern with the southern gateways. In very early times the Parthians invaded Persia by this route, and established their dynasty there. So also in the middle ages did the Scythians and Alans. In recent times the Russians have done the same, penetrating North Persia and Armenia by way of the Trans-Caucasus. These movements may be attributed to the natural tendency of a people, living in a temperate or sub-arctic region, to establish commercial relations with the peoples of sub-tropical countries.

Thus we observe three principal trends of race movement in the regions that lie between Europe and Asia. There is first the movement from Asia to Europe (now at an end); then there is the movement from Europe to Asia, which is taking place at the present day; and, thirdly, there is the movement from the Russian plain into the southern gateway across the isthmus of the Trans-Caucasus. In all these we can trace the effect of economic necessity. The exchange of sub-arctic timber and cereals for southern cotton and fruit establishes a close relation between the Russians and the people of the Middle East. The existence also of undeveloped regions in the southern "gateway" gives the financial interests of Europe the opportunity to export capital and acquire spheres of exclusive economic rights. As a result the financial groups of Europe have contended with each other for this Eastern booty, while the proletariat, not yet organized sufficiently to control the production of wealth and the application of capital, has become the victim of wars for "spheres of influence". It is no accident, therefore, that this great war has been fought

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not only on European battlefields, but far away in Mesopotamian deserts, Armenian plateaux, and Persian oases. For in these regions lie the prizes for the financial "interests" of London, Paris and Berlin. In these Eastern *dominions* also the now vanished Court of the Romanoffs hoped to find governorships and vice-royalties for Grand Dukes. Thus in that region of Asia lying in a triangle between the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf, all the conflicting interests of East and West meet to-day, just as they met during the migrations of the nomads in the middle ages. In the struggle that has ensued, the Caucasus campaign has played no mean part.

In order more clearly to understand the political problems of the Middle East, let us consider a little more in detail the geographical and ethnological characters of these regions. Asia in its main physical features consists of a system of mountain chains and parallel plateaux running from the Far East of the Chinese Empire to the threshold of South-East Europe. In its most westerly limit this great plateau is narrowed down to the area between the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf: but owing to compression in this comparatively small space, the plateau is puckered and folded into a number of regions varying greatly in altitude and consequently in climate. Each climatic zone and geographical region possesses its corresponding human type, and hence we find between the Caucasus mountains and the Levant a most varied assortment of human beings, each type with its own culture and social habits. The region with the lowest altitude of all is found along the coast of the Black Sea and the Levant. The whole of this region

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has a uniform sub-tropical climate, producing the same kind of vegetation and the same human type all along its sea-board. Shut in by high ranges of mountains, this narrow strip of coast-line is protected from the cold plateau winds, and moistened by the soft sea breezes. The produce of the tiny maize-fields, perched up amid forested slopes, and the fruit of the terraced vineyards, which surround the red-tiled houses, are brought along narrow by-ways to the cool bazaar towns, from which they are transported by ship to the West. Thus the inhabitants of this coast are by nature a race of small cultivators of sub-tropical produce, merchants and mariners. From the earliest times the waves of Greek civilization have lapped along these shores, and the people, though their racial origins are various, have turned their eyes in each successive generation to the mother-cities of Athens and Constantinople. Their commercial life brings them into constant contact with the maritime peoples of the West, and tends to make them keen business men. Their great historic past, and their position on a sea highway, have made them politicians with imperialist leanings. The sub-tropical climate also in which they live, and the moderate degree of leisure which most of them can enjoy, have been favourable conditions for controversial and speculative thought.

Behind the ranges bordering the sea-coast the country opens out into the wide table-land of Anatolia,¹ varying from 2,500 to 4,000 feet above sea-level. The tempera-

¹ The Greek name for Asia Minor, corresponding to the "Levant" of the Italians—the "Orient," or "Land of the Rising Sun." *Anatolia* is by the Greeks strictly limited to Asia Minor; *Levante* is by the Italians extended to all the lands lying East of the Mediterranean, and *Orient* is applied to the East in general,