

THE CITY OF TROUBLE

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The City of Trouble by Meriel Buchanan

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MERIEL BUCHANAN

**THE CITY
OF TROUBLE**

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BY
MERIEL BUCHANAN

WITH A FOREWORD
BY
HUGH WALPOLE

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1918

A FOREWORD

It has been one of the characteristics of the Russian Revolution—perhaps of every revolution—that the spectators of its evolution have named every fresh development a climax. Looking back now through the events in Russia during 1917, one sees the abdication of the Tsar, the revolt of Korniloff, the Bolshevik *coup d'état* as successive climaxes; but none of them as, in any sense, an ultimate climax. Although one is now a year and a half from that first wonderful day in March when the Cossacks lined the Nevsky and reassured the people who pressed against their horses that they would not shoot on their "brothers," the perspective is still not clear, and the day is still too soon for the authority of history.

There is, however, one thing that may be done, and I believe that I am speaking without any exaggeration when I say that this book of Miss Buchanan's is the first attempt of any writer in any language to give to the world a sense of the *atmosphere* of Russia under the shock and terror of those world-shaking events. By atmosphere I mean the summoning of big and little things

to form a mosaic—coloured, intricate, unique—that may lie behind and beneath the outside obvious events. We have read now in many books accounts of the policy of the Tsar, the first magnificence of Kerensky and his later weakness, the disintegration in the army, the speeches and opinions of Lenin, Trotzky, and the rest, but what we have not read as yet are the things that the man who sells pies in Ellisseieff's, the provision-shop in the Nevsky, thought of it, how the ladies who collected tickets on the trams looked at the changing manners and customs of their passengers, what the boys who ran up and down the switchback railway on the farther side of the Neva said when they saw a famous general shovelling the snow for a rouble an hour. I do not say that Miss Buchanan has actually informed us of those particular things, but I do say that she has given us a picture of human, private life under the pressure of vast historical events that is precious and permanent in its value. She has given us this not only because she was herself an actual observer of them, but also because she has the gift of imagination, the gift of colour, and a philosophy that is more than petulant.

I would not suggest that she has not also given us her view of the larger, more historical, events. Her picture of the Russian court is of the greatest

A FOREWORD

vii

interest, and her account of the weeks immediately preceding the Bolshevik rising are of political value; but it is for the smaller, more important, things that her book is unique. No one having read it can deny that it is true, vivid, personal, and moving.

Miss Buchanan has placed us all under a very real and serious debt. She has also done Russia a noble service.

HUGH WALPOLE.

August 19, 1918.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE EVENING REVIEW AT KRASSNOE	1
II. JULY 24	9
III. DECLARATION OF WAR	14
IV. MOSCOW	21
V. FIRST DAYS AT THE HOSPITAL	30
VI. 1915	37
VII. THE SECOND WINTER	43
VIII. THE CRIMEA	49
IX. SUMMER, 1916	56
X. THE COURT	63
XI. THE MURDER OF RASPUTIN	70
XII. THE GATHERING OF THE STORM	78
XIII. MONDAY, MARCH 12	85
XIV. THE EMPEROR'S ABDICATION	94
XV. THE FIRST WEEKS OF THE REVOLUTION	101
XVI. SPRING, 1917	109
XVII. THE WOMEN OF RUSSIA	117