

THE PALE HORSE

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The pale horse by B. Savinkov & Z. Vengerova

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B. SAVINKOV & Z. VENGEROVA

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By "ROPSHIN"

[*Boris Savinkov*]

Author of "What Never Happened"

Translated from the Russian

By Z. VENGEROVA



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INTRODUCTION

THE soul of Russia is revealed even more in her literature than in the realities of her life. If her activities are handicapped in many ways, her spirit lives in a sort of Utopian Freeland, where it is concerned only with problems of spiritual law and spiritual obligations. Russian novels—certainly the best of them—express this spirit, and are for that reason ‘human documents’ of great intensity.

Each epoch of Russia’s spiritual life is expressed in a few books of a highly imaginative character. Among those literary works which illuminate with a rare light the period just before the war, the problems which had to be faced by the heroic will and the mystic tendencies of a tragically unbalanced generation, Ropshin’s *Pale Horse* ranks as one of the most characteristic. The Russian writer Dmitry Mereshkovsky has called it ‘the most Russian book of

the period,' as it contains the tragedy of every individual conscience in Russia possessed by the necessity of violent political action and the equally strong religious objections to it. The problem of Ropshin's hero could be summed up in the words: 'I am bound in conscience to do it—yet my conscience imperatively prohibits me to do it.' The author's aim is to show the psychological consequences of this very Russian, this very modern problem. Nevertheless, the book is far from being an objective psychological study, but bears more the impress of a personal confession forced out by some urgent inner need. It is more than mere 'literature,'—it is life's tragedy interpreted by one who had lived every bit of what he writes about.

The Pale Horse is a story of a revolutionary plot, yet it contains nothing of the old conventional and romantic type of the 'Nihilist story,' as it used to be written—especially in England. The picturesque side of revolutionary life—its continual dangers, disguises, conspiracies—forms merely the background. The object is to show the changed spirit of a new generation of revolu-

tionaries, more fully aware of higher responsibilities than the former romantic fanatics of terrorism. As they appear in *The Pale Horse* the Russian revolutionaries remind one of the mystic heroes of Dostoevsky who seek for justification of their acts.

The book reveals the nature of the change that has taken place, and makes clear the fact that the 'Nihilists' who deliberately had shaken off all religious and idealistic conceptions, in order to secure their immediate political aims, are a thing of the past. The new revolutionaries are more spiritualised, more close to the religious wants and sentiments of the Russian people. This has made their problems more complex, and *The Pale Horse* shows how distressing their dilemma has become. Yet, in spite of the story's pessimistic tone, there is a suggestion of hopefulness in the struggle for the establishment of idealistic values, in the attempt to make the will conform to the standards of enlightened thought.

Ropshin's heroes are men and women living in a period of transition, and as such they are

necessarily unbalanced, unsettled, more given to reflecting upon new spiritual values than to facing their problems with the determined and undivided will they need for their purpose. They are tragic in the absolute sincerity of their divided minds. In spite of their doubts and indecision, their way leads to future harmony—it is the way of high-strung idealism applied to the problems of real life. This is the hopeful prophecy of *The Pale Horse*. The vision of a new and regenerated Russia rises above the sad tale of shattered lives and cruel destinies.

No one is more entitled to reveal the new psychology of the Russian fighters for freedom than the author of *The Pale Horse*. Ropshin is his *nom de plume*. He played a conspicuous part in the revolutionary movement of about ten years ago. Since then his views underwent a marked change: *The Pale Horse* is confessional and autobiographical. He gave up party work, came into touch with a strong religious current in the Russian literature of recent years, and made his first appearance as an author with *The Pale Horse*. The book created a sensa-