

**THE BLUE STEPPES:
ADVENTURES
AMONG RUSSIANS**

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The blue steppes: adventures among Russians by Gerard Shelley

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GERARD SHELLEY

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PREFACE

IN WRITING THESE PAGES, I have endeavoured to throw a light on those dark forces which were so long fermenting in Russia and produced the most staggering of upheavals. Bolshevism is not the product of air or angels. It was of long growth in the soil of Russia and was showing its features in the lives of the intelligentsia long before it acquired political power. So I refrain from giving soulless lists of statistics, undertakings, railways, tables of imports and exports and the rest of the material scaffolding. It is not the house, not the style of its decorations, nor the dresses of its people, but their actual lives, thoughts, outlook and reactions which are really instructive and decisive. For it is by these forces alone that heaven or hell is made, society is run or ruined and the unembodied theories of doctrinaires are put to the acid test. Governments and theoreticians may come and go, but the people go on for ever. And it is because Russians are such confirmed lovers of theory that their actual lives are so interesting. For the rest, I will quote Merejkovsky's words to Western Europe :

"We resemble you as the left hand resembles the right ; the right hand does not lie parallel with the left, it is necessary to turn it round.

The Blue Steppes

What you have, we also have, but in the reverse order ; we are your underside. Your genius is of the definite, ours of the infinite. You know how to check yourselves in time, to find a way round walls, or to return ; we rush onward and break our heads. It is difficult to hold us back. We do not go, we run ; we do not run, we fly ; we do not fly, we fall. You love the middle ; we, the extremities. You are sober ; we, drunken. You, reasonable ; we, lawless. You guard and keep your souls, we always seek to lose ours. You are in the last limit of your freedom ; we, in the depth of our bondage, have almost never ceased to be rebellious, secret, anarchic. Not in reason and sense, in which we often reach complete negation—nihilism—but in our occult will, we are mystics.”

Following are my experiences.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	7
CHAPTER	
I. IN THE TRAIN	11
II. A FAMILY OF NOBLES	29
III. A FAMILY OF NOBLES (<i>continued</i>)	42
IV. THE END OF A FAMILY OF NOBLES	54
V. THE ERA OF RASPUTIN	66
VI. DAYS AND NIGHTS WITH RASPUTIN	81
VII. THE HOUSE IN THE HORSEGUARDS' ALLEY	98
VIII. THE HOUSE IN THE HORSEGUARDS' ALLEY (<i>continued</i>)	115
IX. THE HOUSE IN THE HORSEGUARDS' ALLEY (<i>continued</i>)	133
X. THE HOUSE IN THE HORSEGUARDS' ALLEY (<i>continued</i>)	146
XI. A GARDEN OF EDEN	166
XII. THE HOMES OF THE MIGHTY (PETROGRAD)	184
XIII. THE HOMES OF THE MIGHTY (MOSCOW)	198
XIV. A MIXED HOUSE	230
XV. A BAG OF DIAMONDS	249
XVI. OUT OF THE JAWS OF HELL	262

THE BLUE STEPPES

Chapter I

IN THE TRAIN

PEOPLE WHO CAME from Russia would never cease talking about the mysterious beauty of the country they had left. Not all the splendour of the haunts of fashion in Western Europe could still their longing for the land that lay, deserted and snow-bound, so far away. They brought with them their Bacchanalian zest in enjoyment, their caviare and their regrets, and Western Europe offered them its choicest pleasures for their ringing roubles. But their thoughts were ever turning to the blue steppes, the kingdoms of flatness and poverty, moujhiks and vodka, grand dukes and anarchists.

They were enchanted by the blue steppes. "Space!" they would exclaim, flinging their arms wide apart. "Here in Western Europe everything is so narrow, so conventional. One is afraid to be free."

I felt at the time that there must be a great idea behind such yearnings and such affection