

A PRISONER OF THE BOLSHEVIKI

SOME IMPRESSIONS IN THE FORTRESS OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL

BY HENRY PEARSON

DURING the twenty-five years of my life in Russia I frequently gazed at the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, and listened to the tales of horrible deeds perpetrated within those grim gray walls. But little did I think that I, a peaceable British subject, would ever be one of its tenants.

How came I to be arrested, on the charge of murder, and sentenced to be shot in a few hours, on the 31st of August last? I started off from home on a fine afternoon, carrying a small packet of sandwiches, as I intended, after calling at the British Embassy on business, to walk to the Elagin Island and the Point, and stroll about the Parks there. Almost everyone in Petrograd knows the red building where the Embassy is housed, bounded on one side by the French Quay, and on the other by the Mars Plain. I arrived there about 4.15; having finished my business, I was just preparing to go out of the small reception room which leads on to the principal staircase, when I heard a great hubbub and shouting. Suddenly a band of villainous-looking men, dressed as sailors, and led by commissaries, all armed with revolvers, burst into the room where I was with two members of the Consular Staff, and surrounded us, crying 'Hands up, or we fire.' We all put up our hands, and were led into the principal room, where most of the Consular Staff had already been rounded

up. Still with hands up I was marched past the line of officials, and put near the door leading to the private reception room of our former Ambassador (Sir George Buchanan). No sooner had I been placed into line, than from the direction of the principal staircase a tremendous shooting commenced. Immediately all the commissaries rushed out, I presume, to see what was the matter; and, as I supposed this was the signal for the cold-blooded murder of everyone of us, still with hands up I sought for a way of escape. I wandered into the next room, and from thence through a corridor, where I saw another commissary who had been shot, holding his stomach and screaming out that he was dying. I made my way down a back staircase, and was surprised at the bottom by another band of sailors, all shrieking 'Shoot him, shoot him!' However, they did not shoot me, but instead dragged me down the stairs into the yard, then through a gateway and round by the back of the Embassy, along the side by the Suvoroff Square, and on to the Quay, where I was hustled into an open motor. All the time the sailors were screaming 'Hands up, or we'll shoot you!' One of them was told off to escort me to the Gorokhovaya Street, No. 2, the headquarters of the (so-called) 'Committee for dealing with counter-revolution and speculation.' As we jolted madly along (there is no speed limit for Bolsheviks)

in the car, my brutal-looking captor held his revolver close to my forehead, threatening every moment to blow out my brains, and using all the vile epithets he knew (a Russian Bolshevik does know a lot of these), the least offensive being 'cursed Englishman' and 'English brigand'! He also informed me I was to be shot, in revenge for the murder of his comrades at Murman and Archangel, and likewise for those who were killed at the Embassy. In the confusion I had left my hat behind, and must have presented a weird spectacle to the onlookers, as I sat in the car, with hair flying in the wind, and a mad sailor raving at me and waving his revolver about. Seeing my parcel of sandwiches dangling by a string from my finger, he suddenly snatched it from me, screaming 'That's a bomb!' When I tried to explain that it was no bomb, but plain sandwiches, he crushed them in his hand and threw them in my face. Upon our arrival at Gorokhovaya, No. 2, I was hustled into a room on the ground floor, and the first person whom I saw was Mr. Woodhouse, the British Consul, who had been arrested the evening before, in the street on his way home. I was kept in this room for two hours, and then, after having been relieved of my passport, was shown into a small upper room, where I found the whole of the Consular Staff and the officers of the British Mission in Petrograd, and also the Reverend Mr. Lombard, the clergyman of the English Church. They had all been arrested at the Embassy and kept there under guard for about two hours; and, finally, had been marched through the streets, convoyed by Red Guards. From them I heard an account of all that had occurred at the Embassy, and of the murder of Captain Cromie, the naval officer who was formerly in charge of the British submarines in the Baltic. For some time

previous the Bolsheviks had been in search of Captain Cromie, but he seems to have borne a charmed life, and until this time had managed to evade his pursuers. He was in the Embassy at the time of the raid, a fact of which his enemies, well informed by their spies, seem to have been aware. They are desperate men, many of them criminals of the worst type, and they stick at nothing. It is supposed that the sailors, at the command of the commissaries, attempted to arrest the Captain. It is not definitely known who fired the first shot, but, in consequence, the Captain was killed and his body mutilated by these ruffians. Their own report says that Captain Cromie shot three commissaries, one of whom was killed.

After waiting another couple of hours, we were taken out, one by one, for examination. As I happened to be nearest the door, I was chosen as the first victim, and led into the presence of two ferocious-looking Jews, acting as interrogating commissaries, and ordered to answer the questions put to me. The first commissary began to abuse me with all the vile language at his command, and demanded to know why England was making war upon the Bolsheviks and shooting down their comrades in Murman and Archangel; why our Government was plotting in Russia with the White Guards and the Czecho-Slovaks and all the counter-revolutionary parties; and how we dared to plan and commit the murder of their comrade Urtizky. I told him that, as a peaceable British subject, during the whole of my twenty-five years' sojourn in Russia, I had never interfered with Russia's internal politics, and if he wanted an answer to his charges, he must apply to the British Government through its ministers, as I was responsible only for my own actions. He then accused me

of being in the Embassy for the purpose of plotting against the Bolsheviki, and of taking part in the shooting of their comrades there. This I denied, whereupon the second Jew, sitting on the opposite side of the room, screamed out that I was a liar, and that he had seen me in the act of shooting from a revolver, which I had subsequently thrown down, and then had run away. I asked him to speak according to his conscience, and refrain from lying, upon which he became still more furious. After writing out a protocol, in which I gave a true statement of my reasons for being in the Embassy, and related all I had seen there, I was ordered out into an anteroom, and told to await further examination. After another hour had passed, I was summoned into the presence of the second commissary, the one who had charged me with shooting in the Embassy. In the meantime he had changed rooms, and received me alone. He was in an absolute rage, and behaved like a madman, flourishing his revolver, and threatening to shoot me on the spot, asserting that all British people were deceitful and cunning swine, and finally assuring me that the Bolsheviki intended to organize a rising in England. He swore repeatedly, that within an hour I should be shot like a dog, and, in proof of this, wrote out my death warrant in red ink, a sure sign of 'smert' (death).

After this I was taken to the commandant, and shown into a room near the top of the building, containing about twenty bedsteads, with dirty mattresses, but no bedding. The room was crowded, I counted ninety-seven people. There were a few wooden benches standing near the walls, and with difficulty I managed to secure a seat on one of these. The place was filthy beyond description, and infested with all manner of vermin. All the

prisoners were dumped down together. There were murderers, and thieves of the lowest possible type, rubbing elbows with officers of the former army; princes, counts, barons, members of old aristocratic families, members of the former government, generals, etc., well-educated people, their only crime being that they were intellectuals, and consequently counter-revolutionists. To be educated and to occupy any position of trust and authority is an all-sufficient reason for arrest and imprisonment. No food was given to us, and my only means of sustenance, for two days, were the two small sandwiches I had on me when arrested, and which the Bolsheviki graciously allowed me to retain. On the Monday afternoon I was allowed to have a small parcel of food from home.

On Tuesday all the British and French, along with some of the Russian aristocrats, were ordered to assemble for removal elsewhere; and then we learned that we were to be marched, guarded by a strong force of Red Guards, to the much-dreaded Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. All the tales of horror, suffering, and inhumanity, which I had heard and read of, in the dreaded dungeons, rose before my mind like an awful nightmare; and I asked myself, could it be possible that a body of free-born Britons were to be subjected to such cruelty and ignominy? However, we determined to show them we were not afraid of anything they might do to us, and we tried to laugh and joke and keep a cheerful countenance. So much so, that we were told it was no joking matter, as we should discover for ourselves. In the yard we were formed up in fours, and, closely guarded, were marched out under a strong escort, the members of the Consulate in front, and the civilians in the rear. Just as I was stepping out of the gateway into the street, I saw my

younger daughter, who had been waiting five hours outside the prison, with food for me. She had repeatedly begged the Red Guards to let it through, but they had refused and threatened to shoot her. She bravely stuck to her post, and was at length rewarded by seeing us marched out. She rushed past the guard, and slipped the parcel into my hand, which was a mercy, as I got no other food for four days. We were marched, like felons, along the road to our destination, fully a mile away. We tried to keep up our spirits, and show cheerful faces, and many were the looks of pity and sympathy we got from the people along the line of march; but so cowed is everyone by the inhuman brutalities of the Bolsheviki, that none dared openly show their sympathy. I noticed several ladies crying as we passed, and one, when she saw us, put up her hands and covered her face to shut out the sight. All the time my daughter walked alongside on the parapet, but was not allowed to come near us in the roadway; and when we came to the gates of the Fortress, I called out and bade her good-bye, wondering if I ever should see her again.

All the way from the Gorokhovaya we had been escorted by a little Jew commissary of about seventeen years of age, seated in a powerful and elegant motor. He handed us over to the charge of the commandant of the Fortress, also quite a youth, who gave himself a lot of airs, and seemed, judging from his accent, to be a Lett from the Baltic provinces. With a supercilious smile he gave the order to form in twos. All the while I was wondering where we were to be placed, whether beneath the level of the river or not. To my intense relief we were marched to the Troubetskoy Bastion, to a corridor leading to the upper cells; corridor after corridor we traversed, meeting the anxious gaze of prisoners, peering

out of the peep holes in the cell doors. It was a ghastly sight — those white faces of poor starving creatures, worn out by months of hunger and suspense and brutal treatment, their big staring eyes almost starting out of their sockets. We went on and on, through all the length of the passages, until five of us Englishmen were ordered to halt opposite the last cell but one, No. 71. The guard opened the cell door, and what a sight met our eyes! Fifteen men, all Russians, were lying on the cold, damp floor, and we were nearly suffocated by the foul air of the place. Can you imagine a cell originally constructed for one person, measuring ten feet by twenty, and about eight feet in height, with a small barred window set near the ceiling; a little door, with a peep hole near the centre, just big enough for a head to pass through; one small iron bedstead, minus mattress, bedclothes, or pillows; a little iron table riveted to the whitewashed wall; and floor of cement. Twenty men were confined in this small space! The only place to lie or sit was on the cold floor, swarming with vermin of various kinds. Most of the Russians had been months in this prison, and were mere skeletons, too weak to stand up, having tasted no food for four days. They were utterly dispirited and broken down, and dirty and filthy in the extreme, and what crime had they committed? Some had been officers in the former army; some had refused to join the Red army. They were all intellectuals, who had had the misfortune to spring from good families. None had been guilty of taking up arms against the Bolsheviki. Most of them were fine fellows and as soon as they learned we were British they squeezed up closer together, giving us the best places on the floor; but what a tight place was that cell, not an inch to spare, we were indeed 'cribbed, cabined, and confined,'

and the air, as they say, you could have cut with a knife.

We had many interesting discussions with our Russian fellow sufferers. Most of them spoke English, some fluently, as well as French, German, and Russian. The whole burden of their cry was, When are the English soldiers coming, to liberate us from the brutal tyranny of the Bolsheviki and the Red army? Parcels of food had been brought for them by relations and friends, but the commandant refused to deliver them to the prisoners. Crowds of people, mothers, sisters, wives, asking for news of their dear ones, or bringing food and warm clothing for them, were driven away from the Fortress gates, and threatened with shooting or arrest. My daughter brought me a basket of provisions on the sixth day of my internment, but only after three days was I allowed to have it, when the cutlets had gone bad and were alive with maggots; and during this period all the nourishment I received was half a pint of liquid, misnamed soup, consisting of warm water, a few small bits of cabbage, and two or three rotten dried fish, like minnows. By bribing one of the soldiers, we got a message through to the Dutch Minister (who, after the attack on the British Legation, had been put in charge of British interests), and he went to the Bolshevik headquarters and protested. After this our parcels from home were taken to the Dutch Legation twice a week, and brought in the Legation motor by Mrs. Oudendyk, the wife of the Minister, to the back gate of the Fortress; and a few of the British prisoners were let out of the cells and allowed to bring the parcels straight to us. I wish to say here, how much we are indebted to the Dutch Minister and Mrs. Oudendyk. Had it not been for his energy and insistence, most of us would assuredly have been shot. In

fact, for some hours after our arrest, our lives were not worth a moment's purchase. I was told this after my release from the Fortress, by Mr. Oudendyk himself. To Mrs. Oudendyk we owe a deep debt of gratitude for all her sympathy and kindness to us (by the way she is an Englishwoman). We endeavored to cheer up our Russian fellow prisoners, but hope had deserted their hearts, and all were depressed and discouraged by months of suffering and acute hunger and cruel treatment. The Bolsheviki have employed every form of cruelty it is possible to devise, and gloat over the sufferings of their victims. The movement is run almost exclusively by Jews. Nearly every commissary is a Jew, and nearly all speak English, most of them with an American accent.

To return to my own particular story, on the third night of my imprisonment in the Fortress we were awakened by the Red Guard singing out in the corridors; that we were to dress and get all our things together (as a matter of fact we never undressed at all, but slept in our clothes). The cell doors were unlocked, and we were told to form in twos in the corridor. The news passed round that we were to be taken down to the Neva and taken in barges to the much-dreaded Kronstadt. I cannot express the agony in my mind as we were driven at a trot to the entrance of the Fortress. Old men, of seventy and eighty years of age, were clubbed by the Red Guards with the butt ends of their rifles, many were knocked half senseless, and were unable to rise. The fiendish Guards kicked them about, with all the foulest oaths imaginable ordering them to get up, and pulling out their revolvers and threatening to shoot them. Several old priests were tottering along, bent double under the weight of their rugs.

and bundles. The guards seized some of them by their long white beards, and dragged them along, more dead than alive. Just as we got to the entrance, the order was given for the British and French prisoners to be taken back to their cells. Till this day, how my heart aches, when I think of the dreadful fate of those fine young fellow prisoners of mine! How I had learned to admire their kindly and lovable natures, and their gentle and gentlemanly bearing; not a word of reproach against their torturers. Sadly and silently they left us, with a clasp of the hand and a friendly good-bye. Afterwards we learned that most of them had been thrown overboard on the way to Kronstadt, and the rest, who can tell where they are (if any are left alive)? One anxious old mother, who came day after day to the Fortress gate, begging for some news of her son, was at last told to pray for his soul. Most of the survivors were shot, and a few may be left, slowly dying in the damp dungeons of Kronstadt. Many bodies were washed up on the Finnish coast, bound together, two and two, with barbed wire.

We were marched back to our cells, and all the British were placed together, ten persons in each cell. This was an improvement, and the air became decidedly purer, and we at once commenced to clean up. We got water from the tap in the cell wall, found some empty bottles left by the Russians, filled these with water, which we poured on to the floor, mopping up the dirt with old newspapers. By dint of hard scrubbing we managed to remove some of the crust, and glimpses of the original cell floor began to show through. Our friends from outside had sent in disinfectants, and we commenced a war on the lice and vermin, but, so numerous were they, we never got entirely rid of them. To while

away the time, we sang, like Paul and Silas, but no earthquake nor any other disturbance came to release us. We sang hymns, 'God Save the King,' 'Rule, Britannia,' and other patriotic songs. The Red Guards came to the peep holes in our doors, and angrily ordered us to stop. We took no notice, but sang all the louder. Then they threatened to shoot us from the doorway, and we told them to shoot and be hanged to them. They came again and asked us to stop it, calling us 'Comrades.' We replied that we were no comrades of theirs, but honest British citizens; and giving up in despair they let us alone. We had among us the correspondents of the *Standard*, *Daily Chronicle*, *Daily Express*, and *Morning Post*. The *Daily Chronicle* correspondent in our cell managed, by bribing the soldiers, to get out two letters to his paper; but his third, we have reason to believe, was caught. Certainly the Red army man never appeared on guard again. We wrote our names and the date of our entry on the cell walls.

We found many inscriptions written by well-known Russians who had been imprisoned by the Bolsheviks, among them Burtseff, the revolutionist, who had suffered under the Tsardom, only to be denounced later by the Bolsheviks as a reactionary and counter-revolutionist. On the wall, just over the table, was a pathetic piece of writing, to this effect: 'On [such a date, which I forget] Shingareff, one of the leaders of the Cadet Party (or Constitutional-Democrats), was taken away from here. I bade him good-bye, and have never seen him since. Alas, poor Russia!' It will be remembered that Shingareff and another Cadet leader, Kokoshkin, were taken away from the Fortress in January, 1918, and conveyed to one of the hospitals, on the excuse of illness, where one night they

were brutally murdered by the order of the Bolsheviks. A few cells away were confined some generals of the old army, together with some members of the old nobility. One of the generals was over eighty years of age, with a long white beard, a most patriarchal-looking old fellow with a kindly face, whom I met several times, on the rare occasions when we were let out of the cells for a five-minute walk in the corridor. These people were particularly obnoxious to the commandant and the Red Guards, and, with devilish ingenuity, they invented the following mode of persecution. Orders were given to seal up the little opening in the window, about five inches by four inches and the only means by which outside air can enter the cells. Next they sealed up the little peep hole in the door and left the cell absolutely hermetically closed for two days, and not a particle of food was given to the poor unfortunate prisoners. At the end of two days the few women whose business it is to take round the soup begged the commandant to open the cell, when they found most of its occupants unconscious, and the rest unable to stand. They had crawled up to the cell door, trying to save their lives by breathing the little air which came from underneath. Truly it has been said that the Bolsheviks are devils in human form. No one was allowed to visit us, nor were we ever allowed outside for a breath of fresh air. Sometimes once in a week, sometimes once a fortnight, we were let out in the corridor for about five minutes, but as the corridor was dark and damp and foul in the extreme, it did us no good, but we were glad of it as it gave us a chance to talk things over with our comrades from the other cells. We were in all thirty-four British; about half, including the Consular Staff, were arrested at the Legation; of the rest some were

taken in the streets and some from their homes.

The day after my arrest a commissary drove up to my house in a motor along with some Red Guards and demanded to search the place. My younger daughter refused to allow them in and held the door, whereupon the commissary ordered the guards to remove her, which they promptly did, throwing her forcibly across the room and threatening to shoot her. They took from the house 18,000 rubles in money and 12,200 rubles' worth of goods which they 'nationalized.' In addition they took from my pocket-book, when I was arrested, 1,140 rubles; and as up to my departure from Petrograd I did not get it back, I presume they have also nationalized that. We were cut off from all means of communication with the outside world. No letters were allowed to be sent in or out of the prison. I have already told how we circumvented this. Newspapers were also prohibited, but we bribed the guards to get us these. Only three newspapers, the official organs of the Bolsheviks, are published; and they have an elaborate agency which suppresses all inconvenient facts and exaggerates all news in their favor and manufactures lying statements. All the other papers have been suppressed long ago, their offices and printing machinery taken over by the Bolsheviks, and their editors put in prison, and many of them are lingering there yet. And these (the Bolsheviks) are the very people who not long ago were inviting the sympathy of the world in their struggles for a free press and freedom of speech! What a travesty!

We read in the *Northern Commune* Mr. Balfour's note to the Bolsheviks — sent through the Dutch Minister — demanding the punishment of Captain Cromies's murderers, and the immediate release of all the British prisoners, and

declaring the Bolsheviks outlaws. We were much cheered thereby, and the Russian prisoners were delighted. Chicherin's impertinent reply to this note was also printed in this paper. At the end of four weeks, the members of the Consulate and the officers, seventeen in all, were liberated, and, while glad for their sakes, we were a little depressed for our own. Three more weeks passed drearily by, and in the meantime my health had broken down. I had an attack of bronchitis, brought on by the damp and cold, my nerves gave way, and my heart was affected, as the result of the trying conditions under which I was arrested and the ordeal of expecting to be shot.

On Sunday, October the 20th, at midday, just as I was having a bite of food, I heard my name sung out by the guard on watch in the corridor, who ordered me to dress at once and collect

my things together. My preparations took me no more than two minutes, and with beating heart and nerves at breaking point I followed the guard to the commandant's office. After waiting two and a half hours, I was given a document, the order of release. I staggered under my burden of bundles through the Fortress gateway, and as for fifty days I had not seen the sky nor enjoyed the fresh air, I was overcome. Faint and weary from weakness, I stumbled along, with head nearly bursting from the effects of the fresh air. I made my way home, ten miles away, where I utterly broke down. I felt that I required a quiet rest and a sojourn in England, a land of real liberty and freedom; and I pray God she may be kept from the blighting and monstrous inhumanities, the murders and robberies of the travesty of a system known as Bolshevism, which is really Socialism run mad.

The Nineteenth Century and After

VICTORIAN POETRY

BY LAURENCE BINYON

I MET the other day a young Frenchman who, after serving with the army, had been studying English literature; and he brimmed over with enthusiastic wonder at the inexhaustible fountain of poetry which for hundreds of years has flowed from the heart of this nation and never seems to fail. He seemed to be in a state of perpetual stupefaction before this phenomenon, and, like other foreigners, was the more struck because we pass for a race distinguished by our lack of imagination.

However it is to be explained, the fact is there. The bull-dog breed and the British Empire may pass away; but English poetry will always be remembered. The new volume of *The English Poets*, edited by Mr. Humphry Ward, is a reminder, if one were needed, of the continuity and rich abundance of the stream. It opens with Browning, Arnold, and Tennyson, and closes with the trumpet-notes of Rupert Brooke's last sonnets. It may be remembered that the original edi-