

Too Late for Calumny

An Open Letter to Konstantin Simonov

MAURICE HINDUS



—Editta Sherman.
Maurice Hindus

I HAVE been following closely the letters you, Konstantin Simonov, your compatriot Ilya Ehrenburg, and the British novelist J. B. Priestley have been exchanging in the press of Russia and Great Britain.

The correspondence began early last spring, as you will remember, when Mr. Ehrenburg addressed an open letter to a number of leading Western writers, appealing to them to sign the so-called Stockholm Resolution, which calls for the unconditional prohibition of use of the atomic weapon, the establishment of strict international enforcement of this prohibition, and the branding as a war criminal of the government which first uses the atomic weapon against another.

One of the writers Mr. Ehrenburg addressed by name was J. B. Priestley. In a reply published in the *London New Statesman and Nation*, Mr. Priestley cast doubt upon the sincerity of the sponsors of the Resolution and of Ehrenburg himself. "Let me hear you or your colleagues openly denouncing the size of the Red Army, the creation of huge submarine fleets, the work on bombs and rockets and other horrors, the building of a large police force in Germany, the rigid barriers between East and West, and the heaping up of lying propaganda between hundreds of millions of folks who want to live in peace."

This was where you came in, my dear Simonov. You professed in a lengthy screed to answer Priestley, but you dismissed the questions he asked

as "threadbare slanders" which "it would be a waste of time to discuss." Your letter bristles with false and misleading accusations. You say that Priestley "dares to come out against peace," when in fact he demonstrates his devotion to that cause again and again.

In its entirety your letter is an astounding document to come from a man who as editor of the *Moscow Literary Gazette* wields enormous influence with the Russian reading public. It reveals clearly and dramatically the immeasurable gulf you Soviet writers since the war have deliberately dug between yourselves and the writers of the outside world. It does much more: it reveals why the whole world is getting ever closer to the day when it may not have time to choose between life and death—your country, too, Mr. Simonov, at least as much as mine.

Mr. Priestley and other Western writers like myself have good reason to be skeptical about your sincerity in advocating the Stockholm Resolution. It calls for a ban on a weapon in which your country is deficient—the atomic bomb—but says nothing about a ban on tanks, artillery, infantry, and cavalry, in which your country is more mighty than all Western nations combined. If you Soviet writers hate bloodshed as desperately as you profess, why is the Stockholm Resolution so silent on the weapons of death in which your country is supreme? This question bothers a lot of people in the Western world, including the best friends your country has ever had.

Do not for a moment imagine that

the people of America and Great Britain are happy about the atomic bomb. Millions of us have read John Hersey's poignant tale of Hiroshima and have been more broken-hearted about it than you Soviet writers. Some of us wish the bomb had never been invented, and I know not a single British or American writer who does not hope with all his heart that it will never be used anywhere in the world. Nothing would cheer us more if all arms were scrapped forever.

YOUR illustrious Academician Eugene Tarle made some startling observations on Hiroshima in the course of a personal peace appeal to "Academicians, Professors, Scientific Workers in the Universities of Paris, Norway, and Algeria," published last July in the Government-controlled *Pravda*. He asserts that in August 1945, presumably in Russia, there were some who "firmly declared that the annihilation by American bombs of thousands of women and children in Hiroshima . . . had no military significance, was in reality more abominable than any of Hitler's atrocities."

Who were these individuals? Why does not your learned academician mention them by name, if only for the historical record? All I know is that Joseph Stalin was *not* one of them. When President Truman confided to him in Potsdam that America had the atomic bomb did he urge the American President to scrap it? Did he in his indignation scorch Truman with invective for planning to use it? He did none of these "humane" things.

Here is what James Byrnes, then



Secretary of State, says about it in his "Speaking Frankly," a book which the Russian public will never be permitted to read. When the President "had told the Generalissimo that after long experimentation we had developed a new bomb, far more destructive than any other known bomb, and that we planned to use it very soon unless Japan surrendered Stalin's only reply was to say that he was glad to hear it and *hoped we would use it.*" (Italics mine.)

Not even Tarle can expunge from the record the fact that the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima with the consent of Joseph Stalin.

On one statement in your letter, Mr. Simonov, you and I are in complete agreement: there is nothing your people yearn for more than peace. Consider the history of your people since 1914: World War I, civil war, famine, liquidation of kulaks, famine again, big purge, war with Finland, World War II. At a conservative estimate the toll is thirty-five million lives, almost the total population of France, three times the entire population of Canada.

Yet had you Soviet writers deliberately set out to inflame the spirit of war in the world you couldn't have been more brilliantly successful. What have any of you Soviet writers actually done to stem the flood of lies and hate that daily pours into your press and roars out of your radio against one country after another and particularly against America? Didn't your Generalissimo declare during the war years that to fight the enemy you must hate him? If this is so—and surely you wouldn't question the Generalissimo's words—then what are your daily hate sermons in the Soviet press and on the Soviet radio but preparation for war, indeed weapons of war.

Consider a few characteristic salvos you Russian writers have been firing of late in your campaign of hatred and prevarication against the West. Last July *Izvestia* printed an article by Dmitri Shostakovich in which he excoriated a group of Western writers, among them Upton Sinclair and John Steinbeck, both hitherto as highly regarded in your country as in their own. Shostakovich declared that Sinclair is a man "without honor," that he has deserted his people and is "burying the culture of his people."

Yet for over a generation no other living foreign writer was so enthusiastically read

in your country as Upton Sinclair. Of no other living author did your young people, even in remote Siberian villages, ask me so many eager questions in the course of my travels through your country. When Konstantin Fadeyev, a Russian patriot if there ever was one, came to New York on a "peace mission" he paid Sinclair the tribute of including him in his own list of "the finest writers in the capitalist world," who with others "had become friends of the Soviet Union." That was in 1948. But the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia climaxed Sinclair's disillusionment with Moscow's Socialism, and he committed the unpardonable sin of saying so. So now Shostakovich curses him as does your *Literary Gazette*, which brands him a "Wall Street lackey."

SHOSTAKOVICH castigates John Steinbeck even more savagely than he does Sinclair. "From the writer who at one time could think," roars Dmitri, "has come a book, 'Bombs Down.' . . . He has performed a leap from the camp of progress and love of humanity into the camp of unabashed reaction, barbarism, and cannibalism."

As I read this I found it hard to imagine Steinbeck, who writes so tenderly not only of human beings but of all living things, even dreaming of visiting death on anybody and anything. So I wrote to his publisher for an explanation. Here is the reply I received from the Viking Press:

"Insofar as this has any relation to the truth the phrase 'Bombs Down' is evidently a reference to Steinbeck's

book 'Bombs Away,' the story of a bomber-team, which was written as a contribution to the war effort—at just about the time of Stalingrad — and published in 1942 for the benefit of the Army Air Forces Aid Society. If *Izvestia* has managed to distort this into a charge that Steinbeck advocates atom bombs on Russia it is as far fetched as any of the monstrosities they have produced. It is particularly ironic in view of Steinbeck's very tolerant 'Russian Journal' published in 1948."

Your theatre is helping to wage the war of hatred, too, Mr. Simonov. Back in 1932 Konstantin Stanislavsky wrote: "In our country the theatre has no right to lie." But now day after day you Soviet playwrights churn out play after play in which you thunder abuse against the West. Even Nikolau Pogodin, author of "Tempo," has succumbed to the passion of the day. I remember "Tempo" vividly, for I saw it several times in the Vachtangov Theatre in Moscow. The hero of the play is an American engineer named Carter, whose real-life prototype was Jack Calder, a Ford engineer engaged by your Government to supervise the construction of the Stalingrad tractor plant. Calder acquitted his task with such brilliance and speed that in appreciation of his services your Government paid him a high premium in American dollars. Now, of course, it would be cosmopolitanism and treason to mention Jack Calder's name in connection with the Stalingrad tractor plant. Later, without ever having been in America, knowing nothing about America, Pogodin comes along

with a play called "Missouri Waltz" as his own special offering to the "Hate America" crusade. Can you imagine Chekhov or Griboyedov or Gogol or Ostrovsky or any of the other Russian playwrights of the past doing this sort of thing?

That these theatre sermons are somewhat less than completely convincing I gather from your own *Literary Gazette*, which scolds playwrights for not being tough enough with America: "We should portray the enemy in a manner that would excite in the audience a feeling of hatred against him, actual and active."

Let me give you another instance of the lies your present campaign is leading you to utter, Mr. Simonov. At dinner in Teheran on the evening of November 30, 1943, Joseph Stalin in the course of his toast to President Roosevelt



—SRL Cover Drawing by Frances O'Brien [1945].
Konstantin Simonov—"immeasurable gulf deliberately dug."



—Burch in the Chicago Sun-Times.

“Extra—Extra—Read All About Me!”



Scott Long in the Minneapolis Tribune.

“Crocodile Tears from a Bear.”



—Justus in The Minneapolis Star.

“Written in Blood.”

said that without American production the Allies could not have won the war. Subsequently on May 27, 1945, the late Harry Hopkins had a conference with Stalin in the Kremlin. In his book “Roosevelt and Hopkins” Robert Sherwood quotes the following from Hopkins’s abstract of the conversation with Stalin: “Not only in this war,” the Generalissimo had said, “but the previous war had shown that without U. S. intervention Germany couldn’t have been defeated.”

But what are you “peace-lovers” in Russia saying now? You are boasting that you won the war singlehanded and that America and Britain had actually plotted to betray your heroic people to the enemy! In your *Literary Gazette* of last July 16 under the headline “Six-Legged Ambassadors of Wall Street” a certain Genandi Fish, supposedly a writer on science, makes the sensational charge that through its shipments of lend-lease supplies America conspired to smuggle into your country “Western” insects, weeds, and plant diseases and that only the “vigilance” of Soviet scientists frustrated this cunning effort of America to infest your agriculture with pests that your fields had never known.

Why, Mr. Simonov, did you wait until July 16, 1950, to blaze this sensational accusation in your paper? Why did Stalin never breathe a word about it to Truman, Hopkins, or Ambassador Harriman or at least hint at the plot to ruin Soviet agriculture in one of his letters to American or British correspondents? Why did Stalin consent to shipments of UNRRA foods after the lend-lease supplies had stopped despite his protests? Did he conspire with “Wall Street beasts” to bring new pests to your wheat fields, corn fields, sunflower fields?

Your purpose in printing this absurd untruth, which logically implies a libel against the Generalissimo, can

only be to kill the boundless admiration your people have always cherished for America and to supplant it with a fiery hatred of everything American. Your Generalissimo once told Soviet writers that they are “engineers of the soul.” Engineers indeed! Apostles of hatred and prevarication!

AN editorial in *Pravda* last May 23 boasted eloquently of the unmatched superiority of Russia’s health service and simultaneously denounced America’s as inferior to any in the whole world. *Pravda*’s editor wrote, “About forty million people in the United States live in regions that have no permanent medical service”—which means no doctor, no trained nurses, no hospitals. But I have in my library a book, “The United States of America,” published in Moscow in 1942 by the State Institute of the Soviet Encyclopedia. On page 253 appears the following statement: “In 1935 there was—in the USA—one doctor to every 800 population, but the distribution of medical personnel is unequal. Thus in South Carolina in 1929 there was one physician to every 431 inhabitants, in California one to 571, in New York one to every 621.”

Can the Soviet Union, with all the excellence of its health service, match this record? Besides, do you know of any physician in your country who deep in his heart does not cherish the hope—or did until your writers had blazed up your “hate America” campaign—to visit the medical schools at Johns Hopkins or Harvard or the Mayo Clinic for a postgraduate course in his specialty? I have known scores of such Russian doctors, including some of your most celebrated specialists. Some, especially in the Ukraine, even asked me whether there were foundations in America that would pay in part their expenses during their

sojourn in an American medical institution. None of them would dare say a word about it now, not with your *Literary Gazette* and *Pravda* ever on the alert to excoriate them as cosmopolitan and even traitors for imagining that there was anything in American medical science that could possibly be superior to or even as good as Muscovite medical science.

Let me remind you, Mr. Simonov, of something Dobrolubov wrote way back in 1858: “The distinguishing feature of a virile and active patriotism is precisely the fact that it precludes all international enmity, and a man who is inspired by such patriotism is ready to work for the whole of mankind.” You Soviet writers are bursting with patriotic sentiments. Your articles flame with protestations of your unending love for your *Rodina* (motherland). Indeed, never in all Russian or all human history have writers thundered so much about their patriotism. But one of the tenets of your Russian patriotism is zoological hatred of other nations and particularly of America, whom neither you nor your Generalissimo can forgive her unmatched industrial machine. How well Goebbels would understand your concept of patriotism and how loudly he would applaud it—Goebbels but not the Belinsky who from his deathbed in Salzbrunn wrote his letter to Gogol, mercilessly flaying him for becoming an “apostle of ignorance, a champion of obscurantism and Stygian darkness, a panegyrist of Tartar morals.”

The purpose of all your lies and fables about America, Mr. Simonov, can only be to rouse hatred in your people against a country which has always roused their imagination and which they have always admired. But I know that your people are too humane to be the haters you would make them into. They are, in fact, among

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Personal History. *Biography, usually one of literature's most alluring jewels, lost much of its sparkle with the passing of Lytton Strachey and his followers. In recent years the form has been kept from becoming completely lackluster by such women as Catherine Drinker Bowen, Marchette Chute, and Esther Forbes. Now happily comes a new British woman writer, Cecil Woodham-Smith, whose rare combination of scholarly and literary talent has resulted in the excellent biography of Florence Nightingale reviewed below. The American biographer David Loth claims a place among the best practitioners of the art with "The People's General," a vivid portrait of the romantic Lafayette. . . . An influential radio commentator (H. V. Kaltenborn), a former diplomat (James W. Gerard), and a fabulous newspaper sob sister (Florabel Muir) each tell their stories in highly personal ways in other books reviewed in the following pages.*



Cecil Woodham-Smith—"the woman whole."

Light on the Lady with the Lamp

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE. By Cecil Woodham-Smith. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. 382 pp. \$4.50.

By MARCHETTE CHUTE

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE is not an easy subject for a biography. As with that other ruthless genius, Joan of Arc, her life is clear enough in its details but the living woman has been smothered by the legend. No one has yet rescued Joan of Arc, but an English biographer has at last rescued Florence Nightingale.

Cecil Woodham-Smith has had no previous experience in writing biography, but she brought to the problem a combination of intense interest and brilliant common sense. She was given access to a great many private papers never before published, and she used them with tact and intelligence, supplementing this material with a thorough knowledge of the War Office, the Crimea, and the background of the Victorian Age. The result is that very rare thing in the field of biography, a completely satisfactory piece of work.

It is one of Mrs. Woodham-Smith's virtues that she does not underestimate the Victorians, who were much livelier and more unpredictable than their grandchildren have been willing to admit. In that sense Florence Nightingale was a true Victorian, and for once she has been set against her real background.

Another of this biographer's virtues is that she is in full sympathy with her remarkable subject but not overwhelmed by her, and her friendly, steady portrait sees the woman whole. She does not gloss over Miss Nightingale's occasional cruelty—the brutal myopia of genius—any more than she

underestimates her gallantry, her brilliant administrative powers, or her compassion. She even manages to convey Miss Nightingale's blunt, lively sense of humor, having something of the same quality herself.

Florence Nightingale was born into what her age would call elegant surroundings—her own idea of a small house was one with fifteen bedrooms. She was a pretty, lively, popular girl and on the surface she fitted charmingly into her background. In reality she was a moody, passionate human being who was being slowly choked by her cotton-wool existence. She was the true heir of her grandfather, who had fought for nearly half a century for the rights of Negroes and workers and Jews; but young Miss Nightingale was a lady and therefore damned to a life of "endless tweedling."

She nearly destroyed herself in a blind, underground struggle before she found her true vocation and when she had found it she nearly wrecked her family. Nursing was done by drunks not by gentlewomen, and the battle she fought with her mother and sister on the subject was the forerunner of a series of major conflicts.

Florence Nightingale spent all her life in warfare. She fought for reforms in nursing, in the War Office, and in the Government of India, conducting her campaigns with a kind of agonized patience and raging only in private. Her ideas were so simple and practical that they were deeply upsetting to the official mind, and in a sense her long life was the history of failure. Yet if she lost the battles she won the war, and when she died in 1910, ninety years old, the mental weather of England had changed completely.

Mrs. Woodham-Smith does not make the mistake of treating the Crimea as the climax of Florence Nightingale's life. In that sickening disaster the background was more dramatic and the issues more sharply defined, but the rest of the story is equally heroic. Nor does the pace of the narrative slacken, partly because of the relaxed skill of the storytelling and partly because the people involved are so interesting.

Mrs. Woodham-Smith has the art of a good novelist and she has brought the people of that crowded century back to life. There is Dr. John Hall opposing the use of chloroform because "the smart use of the knife" was an excellent stimulant to a dying soldier and Dr. Andrew Smith being comfortably jocose with what he conceived to be the weaker sex. There is the affronted Nightingale nurse who could endure the horrors of the Crimea but not an unbecoming cap—"There are some things, ma'am, one can't submit to." There is Sir George Lewis trying to placate Miss Nightingale with a Greek version of Humpty Dumpty and Dr. Sutherland, in temporary disgrace with her, inquiring anxiously, "Will she swear?" They are all here, even down to the pet owl who traveled in her pocket.

Like a good novel, the book is full of life; and dominating it all is the complex, brilliant, dedicated woman who fascinated both her friends and her foes. She will fascinate the reader also, now that she has been freed to come back as her real self, in her habit as she lived.

It would be difficult to praise "Florence Nightingale" too highly. It is a magnificent biography.

Marchette Chute is the author of "Shakespeare of London," "Geoffrey Chaucer of England," and other biographical works.