

Bolshevist Horrors in Odessa

By the Rev. R. COURTIER-FORSTER

[FORMER BRITISH CHAPLAIN AT ODESSA AND THE BLACK SEA PORTS]

In a series of articles published in The London Times, Dec. 3-10, 1919, the Rev. R. Courtier-Forster gave a vivid picture of the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviki at Odessa during his stay in that city, crimes paralleled only in the persecution of Nero's time. The essential portions of these articles, here presented, paint an appalling picture of human degeneracy, and take on a fresh interest in view of the fact that Odessa has again fallen into the hands of the Reds.

DO English people really imagine that the published accounts of the appalling atrocities and brutal tyranny of the Bolshevist rule in Russia are an exaggeration? Before God I wish I could believe they are not true to the actual facts. Could I but find them untrue, I would speak for the Bolsheviks from end to end of England. Unhappily, I have spent nearly a year in Soviet Russia, and was in the hapless country over seven years before that.

While I was still British chaplain of Odessa the city was deluged with blood. When the Bolshevist elements, grafting on to their main support the 4,000 criminals released from the city jails, attempted to seize the town, people of education, regardless of social position, offered what armed resistance was in their power. Workmen, shop assistants, soldiers, professional men, and a handful of officers fought for liberty through the streets of the great port for three days and nights against the bloody despotism of the Bolsheviks. Tramcars were overturned to make barricades, trenches dug in the streets, machine guns placed in the upper windows of houses to mow the thoroughfares with fire. The place became an inferno. The Bolsheviki were victorious. On capturing the Odessa Railway Station, which had been defended by a few officers and a number of anti-Bolshevist soldiers, the Bolsheviks bayoneted to death the nineteen wounded and helpless men laid on the waiting room floor to await Red Cross succor.

Scores of other men who fell wounded in the streets also became victims to the triumphant Bolshevist criminals. The ma-

jority of these wretched sufferers completely disappeared. Inquiries at the hospitals and prisons revealed the fact that they were not there, and no trace of them was to be found. A fortnight later there was a terrible storm on the Black Sea, and the bodies of the missing men were washed up on the rocks of Odessa breakwater and along the shore; they had been taken out to sea in small boats, stones tied to their feet, and then dropped over alive into deep water. Hundreds of others were captured and taken on board the *Almaz* and the *Sinope*, the largest cruisers of the Black Sea Fleet. Here they became victims of unthinkable tortures.

VICTIMS ROASTED ALIVE

On the *Sinope* General Chormichoff and some other personal friends of my own were fastened one by one with iron chains to planks of wood and pushed slowly, inch by inch, into the ship's furnaces and roasted alive. Others were tied to winches, the winches turned until the men were torn in two alive. Others were taken to the boilers and scalded with boiling steam; they were then moved to another part of the ship and ventilating fans set revolving that currents of cold air might blow on the scalds and increase the agony of the torture. The full names of seventeen of the *Sinope* victims were given me in writing by members of their families or their personal friends. These were lost later when my rooms were raided, my papers seized, and I myself arrested and thrown into prison.

The house in the Catherine Square, in which I was first in captivity, afterward

became the Bolsheviks' House of Torture in which hundreds of victims were done to death. The shrieks of the people being tortured to death or having splinters of wood driven under the quick of their nails were so agonizing that personal friends of my own living more than a hundred yards away in the Voroutsoffsky Pereoluk were obliged to fasten their double windows to prevent the cries of anguish penetrating into the house. The horror of the surviving citizens was so great that the Bolsheviks kept motor lorries thundering up and down the street to drown the screams of agony wrung from their dying victims.

This House of Torture remains as much as possible in the condition in which the Bolsheviks left it, and is now shown to those who care to inspect its gruesome and blood-bespattered rooms.

There are people who maintain that, with theatres open and electric trams running, anarchy does not exist, and that life in Soviet Russia is both secure and pleasant. I did not find it so. There is a halting place for the electric cars at the corner of Kanatnaya and Grecheskaya. Returning from the town at 11:30 one morning I encountered a frightened group at this point. Inquiry revealed the fact that the Reds had just murdered two unprotected and defenceless women waiting for the tram, to go into the city shopping. Their crime was that both clothes and manners showed them to be "Bourjouie." Also in the Kanatnaya one morning a working woman was shot for the sport of the thing while running across the road to purchase a bottle of milk for her children. Her body was lying by the curb as I came by, the bottle smashed, and milk and blood streaming down the gutter. The house door stood open, her two little children crying with grief and terror at the entrance.

TREATMENT OF WOMEN

Week by week the newspapers published articles for and against the nationalization of women. In South Russia the proposal did not become a legal measure, but in Odessa bands of Bolsheviks seized women and girls and carried them off to the Port, the timber yards and the Alexandrovsky Park for

their own purposes. Women used in this way were found in the mornings either dead or mad or in a dying condition. Those found still alive were shot. One of the most awful of my own personal experiences of the New Civilization was hearing at night from my bedroom windows the frantic shrieks of women being raped to death in the park opposite—screams of shrill terror and despair repeated at intervals until they became nothing but hoarse cries of agony like the death calls of a dying animal. This happened not once, or twice, but many times. Never to the day of my death shall I forget the horror of those dreadful shrieks of tortured women, and one's own utter powerlessness to aid the victims or punish the Bolshevik devils in their bestial orgies.

To be decently clothed and washed was a crime in the eyes of the Bolshevik proletariat. Both men and women were stopped in the streets of Odessa, robbed of their boots, stripped of their clothes and sent home naked through the frost and snow. So many hundreds of people were treated in this manner under the Soviet rule, that the satirical paper of South Russia, the Scourge, brought out a full-page cartoon representing one of the chief streets of the city with a naked man and woman departing hand in hand up the road while a group of unkempt Bolsheviks with men's trousers and women's underclothes fluttering on their arms were seen running in the opposite direction. Beneath was the satirical observation, "In Odessa the World Finds Paradise Anew." For this reflection on the glorious New Civilization of the Soviets, the windows of the Scourge offices were smashed and the paper fined.

By this time the devastating corruption of the Holy Revolution had so spread that I saw open acts of indecency being committed in broad daylight in the parks and public gardens. These are but a few experiences from the mass of events crowded into my life in Soviet Russia.

That any professing Christian of any denomination in the whole globe should feel or express sympathy with the Bolsheviks of Russia, can only be due either

to lack of accurate information or to deliberate deception by clever propaganda. The paucity of first-hand information as to what is really happening in Soviet Russia has enabled the Bolsheviks to conceal the ghastly persecution of the Christians which is being carried out with the utmost ferocity.

DESTROYING CHRISTIANITY

It is repeatedly said "Bolshevism is solely concerned with economics. It has nothing to do with religion." This is absolutely untrue. The horrors of heathen Rome and the episodes of the Coliseum have been brilliantly imitated and excelled by the Reds in Russia.

The first objective of Bolshevism is the complete elimination of every form of Christianity from the world and the substitution of a worldwide atheism. Of course this will be denied, as everything else which is inconvenient is denied. The fact remains. The ideals of Christianity are diametrically opposed to the brutal practices of Bolshevism, therefore Christianity is recognized as its most dangerous foe, and is treated accordingly.

It was the martyrdom of the two Metropolitan and the assassination of so many Bishops and the killing of various Christian ministers of religion, regardless of denomination or school of thought, that proved the undoing of the Scourge [newspaper]. Russian Orthodox clergy, Protestant Lutheran pastors, Roman Catholic priests were tortured and done to death with the same light-hearted indiscriminate in the name of toleration and freedom. Then it was that the Scourge, seeing the last remnants of liberty ground under the heel of a tyranny more brutal in its methods than a mediaeval torture chamber, published another full-page cartoon representing Moses descending from the burning mount, bringing in his arms the tables of the Ten Commandments to humanity, and being stoned to death by a mob of workmen's and soldiers' deputies.

Marriages were tumultuously interrupted by bands of propagandists, determined to compel the people to abandon Christian marriage and accept the new civil contract which has been introduced.

My own man servant was obliged to drive into the country to be married at a wayside church, where the wedding party might pass unobserved.

The Bolsheviks have attempted to bring about the abolition of Sunday as the weekly day of rest on account of its age-long association with the Resurrection of Christ. The virulence of the Red hatred of everything Christian seeks to substitute Monday for the old hallowed day. In the Spring of 1918 the attempt was temporarily crowned with success. The last Sunday in April was peremptorily ordered to be erased from the calendar as a rest day. Works, factories, and shops were commanded to carry on their business as on other days of the week. The streets of Odessa were thronged with crowds of truculent, jubilating Reds making a great parade of work. The following Wednesday, May 1, was substituted for the condemned Sunday, and duly observed as the festival of the Holy Revolution. On this day all workshops, houses of business, and factories were strictly forbidden to work; even bread was not allowed to be baked. I had the greatest difficulty in obtaining anything to eat.

PERSECUTIONS INCREASE

The brutal persecution of the Church increased. After the torture and martyrdom of many priests and several Bishops, a demonstration of protest was made by the Christians of Odessa. The Archbishop of Kherson and the Bishop of Nikolaiev took part in the procession. I marched with the other demonstrators. Two hundred Christian soldiers in uniform presented themselves at the cathedral and requested permission to carry the banners. Forty thousand of the faithful assembled. An unsuccessful attempt was made by the Reds to wreck the solemn march.

As the procession moved down one of the main thoroughfares I inquired of a group of sullen Bolshevik sailors from the Black Sea Fleet why they no longer uncovered their heads as the Archbishop's procession passed. The answer was given with morose rage, "We would kill all the clergy in the procession, but

we do not wish to even soil our hands with the blood of such vermin as Christ's priests."

In many places the persecution of the Church is carried out with terrible fury. Outrages and affronts were offered to the Christians on every hand. At the women's hotel at Odessa University the Ikon was torn down from the wall of the common room amid a wild scene of ribald jesting and jeers, and the ubiquitous Red Flag was triumphantly hung over the place reserved for the sacred picture. In one part of my Chaplaincy alone, sixty priests were driven from their parishes as a result of the anti-Christian propaganda.

BLOOD-SOAKED TYRANTS

The persecution developed with unexampled ferocity. In the monastery near Kotlass, all the monks and the Prior were shot. In Perm Archbishop Andronik was buried alive. This ghastly fate caused such horror among the cowed and terror-stricken peasants that the heroic Vassili, Archbishop of Tchernigov, greatly daring, made the journey to Moscow to make representations respecting the tragedy of Archbishop Andronik. It was a splendid venture gloriously made, but the Archbishop could look for no mercy from the blood-soaked tyrants who have made "Freedom of Mind" a byword for the most despotic tyranny the world has ever seen. The history of the journey will live in the annals of the Russian Church forever. Archbishop Vassili shared the martyrdom of his brother. With his two companions he was hacked to pieces.

The long list of Christians martyred at the hand of the Bolsheviki has grown to a volume of names. The saintly Archbishop Feofan found death only through an agony of refined torture. He was reduced to a dying condition and then dipped through a hole bored in the

frozen river and drowned in the Kama. Fifty priests were also tortured with every fiendish cruelty, and then done to death.

When the town of Yuriev (Dorpat) was taken an orgy of Christian-slaying took place. They who look for mercy, or pity, or justice from the Bolsheviki look in vain. The unhappy and venerable Bishop Platon was seized at midnight in his house, and, clad only in his night apparel, dragged with insults from his bed. Barefoot, the Bishop and 17 companions were driven with unspeakable brutality to the cellars of the house and hacked to pieces with axes for the cause of glorious "freedom of mind" and the enlightenment of a benighted world, too obtuse to appreciate the benefits of the New Civilization conferred upon it by the Bolshevik proletariat.

ORGY OF SLAUGHTER

After the ghastly massacres at Dorpat and Walk I was shown photographs of the martyred ministers of religion lying in the snow; Russian Orthodox clergy, Protestant Lutheran pastors, Roman Catholic priests, all done to death with the utmost impartiality in the outraged name of "liberty." Never has the world seen a more ghastly and cynical travesty of the great term. The martyrs for Christ had their eyes torn from their heads; their noses were slashed off with knives and their cheeks gouged out with bayonets.

When the history of the Bolshevik persecution to eradicate Christianity from Russia comes to be written, the Christian world will stand aghast at the crimes committed in the attempt to stamp out the love of Christ from the heart of the Russian nation. Lenin and Trotzky may well chuckle from within the recesses of the polluted Christian churches, as of the Kremlin, as they make peace overtures to a duped world.

