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The Moscow of Today---First Impressions

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(From Manchester "Guardian")

I WENT from the station at Moscow to the room which had been allotted to me. All hotels have been nationalized and are used as Government offices or apportioned as homes for ministerial employees and other workers. A number of great houses have also been commandeered and used in the same way. It is quite natural, therefore, that the Soviet, in whose disposal all accommodation rests, should have fixed a room for me to live in while in Moscow.

I had visited Moscow twice before, and was familiar with its appearance and life. My first impression, then, as I crossed the town was bound to be a vivid one. It was more—it was bewildering. I had expected to find evidences of great destruction and a crushed and cowed populace. I certainly did not find the Moscow of my last visit, but I found life going on in an ordinary common-place way, street markets flourishing, large numbers of people in the streets (the population has increased by 25 per cent.) tramcars running, with loads of people hanging on to any exercise that would give hand and foot hold, and on this first occasion no evidences of destruction. That came later, when I went freely about the city.

Then I discovered streets where the facades of the buildings were chipped by shot, windows pierced by bullets, the holes mended by plaques of glass,

in some cases with paper, and at the bottom of one of the boulevards a carrefour which was a mass of tumbled brick and ruin, while a row of tall houses on one side was nothing but a skeleton of gutted brick and stone work. This was the result of the Social Revolutionaries in June last year. But on the whole the destruction was very small when the huge size of the city and the scenes that have taken place there are taken into account.

Churches and monasteries are intact. The Basil Cathedral and the glorious Church of the Redeemer are as splendid as ever; so is the Troitzky Monastery and the Tretiakov Gallery. One thing strikes strangely. The old glitter of the shops is gone. Most of them are boarded up and give a queer, desolate appearance to the line of the streets. But in many cases this was voluntary, since there were no goods to sell. And others were closed by the Soviet when stocks ran low and profiteering of pestilential kind began in the remaining stocks. These were then commandeered and distributed from the Soviet shops, which are of all kinds and are found in every district. Their number is so large that queues do not exist except when certain goods—boots, stuffs for clothes—are sold on cards on days that have been previously notified and from specified shops. There are Soviet tea-houses and restaurants, but some private ones are still open at speculative rates. And a number of small trades

which it would not pay to nationalize at present are still in the hands of private persons.

In fact, the socialistic and individualistic forms of distribution go on side by side, since it is not the practice of the Soviet to embark on nationalization of anything until everything is ready for the complete change. Theatres and concert halls are fuller than ever the, workers now having the best chance in the distribution of tickets. Both the famous ballet and the still more famous Art Theatre have been left untouched, and for the ballet school special regulations have been made allowing promising aspirants to enter at an age much below the age legally fixed for beginning work. Concerts of excellent music are maintained, and the cost of entrance is small, and theatres for children are run gratuitously in seven different parts of the city every Sunday afternoon.

I missed the Alexander statue in the Kremlin and the Skobelev statue in front of the old Hotel de Ville, and was informed that they had been carefully dismantled, and would be set up again in a museum, and I noted the efforts of the Soviet in the direction of monuments. The Skobelev statue is replaced by a really imposing monument by the sculptor Andreef. It is a triangular obelisk mounted on a three-sided pedestal, with curved sides, fronted by a splendidly posed female figure with up-lifted and outstretched arm. At the

foot of the figure is a tiny rostrum from which Kamenev and Lunacharsky made speeches to the huge crowd below at the unveiling ceremony, which I walked to see. On the boulevards the Soviet has placed monuments of famous Russians, some meant to be permanent, others temporary.

It may be imagined that as I took in all this my astonishment grew. But one thing made that even greater. I mean the order and security which reigned in Moscow. I have crossed the town on foot at midnight without fear of molestation, accompanied only by a lady with whom I had been to a concert. And again and again I was told by those whose work took them out at all hours of day and night that the security is absolute. And there is no street lighting at night. There are police and armed military in the streets, but they are not greatly in evidence.

Open prostitution seems to have disappeared, and, though there are still beggars, the pest to which I was subjected in 1911 is greatly modified, and I understand that steps are to be taken to cause its complete disappearance.

"Moscow is a dead city," said to me a man in a town on the way to Kieff which I visited. That seems to me to be too strong a statement. There is plenty of movement, plenty of noise, but on the whole, life is greyer in tone, duller in flavor than in the Moscow which I knew a few years ago.

Evolution

From "The Freethinker."

EVOLUTION began as a formula and, with many, ends as a fiat. On the one hand, it is invoked with all the solemnity of a mediaeval magician commanding the presence of his attendant spirits. On the other hand, it is approached with a hushed reverence that is reminiscent of a Catholic devotee before his favorite shrine. It has acquired the characteristics of the "Kismet" of the Mohammedan, the Beelzebub of the pious Christian, and the inspiration of glory to the born soldier. It is used to dispel doubts and to awaken curiosity. It becomes a formula that may express comprehension or merely indicate vacuity. Decisions are pronounced in its name with all the impressiveness of a "Thus saith the Lord!" We are not even sure that some will not object that to talk about evolution in this light way is "irreverent," and should be avoided. For there are crowds of folk who can not separate profundity from solemnity, and who continually mistake a long face for the sure indication of a well-stored brain. The

truth is, of course, that what a man understands thoroughly he can deal with easily; that he laughs at a difficulty is not necessarily a sign that he fails to appreciate it—it may be a consequence of his having taken its measure. The chief reason why people will not laugh at religion is due to a perception of the fact that it will not stand it. The priest everywhere maintains his hold largely because of the narcotizing influence of ill-understood phrases, and in this he is matched by the pseudo-philosopher, whose pompous use of imperfectly appreciated formulae disguises from the crowd the mistiness of his own understanding.

The Ghost.

A glance over the uses made of the word "evolution" will well illustrate what has been said. These sometimes make one wonder what on earth the writer thinks "evolution" stands for, and at other times one feels sure that its prime function is to cover up mere want of comprehension. For example: in a recent issue of the Daily Express, Mr. Shaw Desmond, writing on the subject of the demand for equality, asks, What do people

mean by it? and, after discussing the probable meanings, remarks: "If it is a demand for a levelling of mankind down to the average, every good citizen will fight that, and he will have evolution with him, for all evolution is a levelling up." Now it would be quite unfair to pillory Mr. Desmond as being peculiar in this conception of evolution; he is one of a very large group, and this specimen is selected only because it is representative of a group, and because it has some very important bearings on social and religious as well as on scientific questions. And here we must, paradoxical as it may sound, be discursive in order to keep to the point. Primarily, this ascription of what one may call a moral element to evolution is no more than a carrying over into science of the Theistic spirit and temper. Quite naturally, the Theist was driven to find some ethical justification for what he said was the divine government of the universe. And he proceeded to argue that it was morally and intellectually admirable. From the Godite's point of view that was a sound position. The world was God's world; he made it; and we were ultimately compelled to judge the character of the workman by the quality of his work. But now comes the non-Theist, and he, although rejecting "God," and sub-

stituting the formula "evolution," frequently proceeds to claim for his formula all that the Theist had claimed for his. That also had to be shown to be moral, and noble, and just, etc. We don't marvel that the Christian often says to the Freethinker that he has a God. Substantially, some of them have. That is, they carry on with the same pseudo-scientific reasoning that is characteristic of apologetic Theism. They have given up God, but they cumber themselves with his ghost.

Adaptation.

Now evolution, we repeat, is not a fiat; it is a formula. It does not decree; it describes. It has nothing to do with morality as such, nor with progress as such, nor with levelling up, nor with a levelling down. It is no more than a special application of the principle of causation; and whether the working out of that principle has a moralizing, or an ennobling, or a progressive effect, is not "given" in the principle itself. Cosmic phenomena presents us with two things, difference and change. And the law of evolution is at attempt to express those differences and those changes in a more or less precise formula. It does for phenomena in general precisely what a particular scientific law does for its own special

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