

Skobelev, Revolutionist

Although he may withdraw at any moment from the provisional government of Russia, the Minister of Labor Skobelev will remain the "strong man" of the revolution. The talents which have raised him from obscurity in the remote fortified town of Kars to the post of power at Petrograd are described in the Paris Temps as those of a born revolutionist. The organ of the Quai d'Orsay has followed the career of Skobelev ever since the upheavals of twelve years ago, when Nicholas II. narrowly lost his throne owing to this same Skobelev. The election of such a firebrand to the Duma filled the court circle with dismay; but the Armenians and the Caucasians stuck to their champion and the three efforts to unseat Skobelev failed miserably. He has been at different times an anarchist—in the Russian official sense—a Socialist, a radical and an agrarian communist. He may always be set down on the side of whatever revolution happens to be in progress, observes a writer in the French daily. One finds him aching for sympathy with labor, although his affiliations are with the discontented peasantry whose hunger for land he will strive to appease at any price.

The gifts of Skobelev divide themselves, according to a somewhat unfriendly study of him in the Socialist Rome Avanti, into two sorts—the spectacular and the solid. The spectacular gifts include oratory of the fervent and still graceful type, a wit that never fails and a most ingratiating mode of insinuating subversive ideas. He cherishes no hatred of the land-owners. He urges their expropriation in the friendliest spirit. In a revolutionary government noted for its able talkers, Skobelev is deemed the supreme orator. He has the logical persuasiveness of Miluykoff without that professor's dogmatic tone. He has all the passion of Kerensky without that lawyer's somewhat histrionic emotionalism. He has the genial manner of Luoff without the insipidity of the Prince, who never offends by denouncing anything or anybody.

The solid qualities of Skobelev, as distinguished from spectacular traits exploited in the press abroad, include capacity for the conduct of what to his critics is "intrigue," and an inexhaustible fertility in expedients to meet desperate situations. This makes him a menace to the various official cliques against which his revolutionary career has been one long struggle. He hates the military clique, despite the local tradition connecting his impoverished family with that of one of Russia's famous soldier heroes, and he hates the diplomatic clique, which, according to him, makes international relations the monopoly of a privileged profession. The resignations and removals in the diplomatic corps have been Skobelev's work, according to the Temps, and he is held responsible for the changes in the high commands at the front as well. He is emphatically, says the Gaulois, a magnetizer of men, although the Debats, having formed a pessimistic estimate of the power behind the revolution, insists that he misleads the provisional government, misleads the Duma, misleads most of all the executive committee of that soldiers' and workers' combination to which he stands for the incarnation of wisdom.

Skobelev works through his followers, just as in his student days at Vienna—not so many years ago—he got through the university by picking the brains of his fellows in class. He has the prehensile, acquisitive kind of mind that gets a new language in a few weeks, sees through a character in one swift glance and grasps the essential of a crisis before anyone else knows even the facts. In his old Kars days he stirred the populace to disorder and fled just in time to escape arrest. His various vocations of advocate, journalist, economist and teacher seem to have been so many cloaks for conspiracy, revolt and insurrection. The peculiar circumstances under which Skobelev grew to manhood, the persecution and exile of so many near and dear to him, the intimacy of his association with more or less oriented human types in the Caucasus—all these details, admits a French observer, must be allowed for. The net effect upon his character affords the Paris dailies an explanation of his swift changes from one policy to another. First we have him for a separate peace with Germany. Then he comes out on the other side. One day he enacts the decree allowing troops in the field to choose their officers. To-morrow he revokes it. In a word, says the Debats, Skobelev is unstable. He has come with an insufficient experience at the age of thirty-two to a supreme position in a great state.

Skobelev was detected in his teens as the ring-leader of a student revolt in a school of his native Caucasus. When the Cossacks of the region appeared, Skobelev, as the story goes, snatched one of the whips and belabored the commander of the forces with it. He had to flee and henceforth, to follow the history of his exploits in sheets at home like the Rabotchaya Gazeta and other organs of the emancipated proletariat, he wandered from one government to another, fomenting rebellion. It was a famous year for unrest among the student bodies, Skobelev being always on the spot when pandemonium reigned.

A realization of the personality of this extraordinary man, suspects the London Times, necessitates knowledge of what is known in Russia as the "intelligentsia." A writer in the Manchester Guardian says very much the same thing. Skobelev emerges from that great class, which has no parallel in other lands, which subordinates its interest in business, in professional life, in the arts and sciences, to the single pursuit of social reform. Skobelev must not be judged in the light of standards set by the political life of other lands. Even when he is dubbed an anarchist, the word is misleading because its literal translation conveys a misconception to the western mind of what Skobelev professes under that name. He may be an anarchist now, a revolutionary socialist next week, a land reformer in due time; but primarily Skobelev is of the "intelligentsia," conscious of a call to free Russia from her traditional chains.

He makes no concealment of his belief that democracy in the western sense is a sham, that France is a paradise of finance, that the central powers are the creation of the diplomacy which is among the things to be swept away. Skobelev, in short, regards the western world with something very like suspicion, just as the Russian peasant does. The Skobelev following, as the English understand his position, is mainly among the peasants, despite his prominence in the labor camp. His father was a peasant and he hails from Baku.

Correspondents of London dailies warn us that photographs of Skobelev in the illustrated papers are libels on the man. He is not stiff and heavy and stern, but light, smiling, pleasant, looking older than his years.

Those who study the character of Skobelev with special reference to the crisis he has set out to resolve, fear that his temperament is too alien to the "respectable" in Anglo-Saxon life to leave him much patience with conservatism. He belongs to the school of Gorky, and Gorky has learned to distrust anything that looks like conventionality in politics. As a writer in the Paris Matin says, the life of Skobelev is rich in the kind of incident out of which the Russians make their tales. He has tramped through the savage region of the Caucasus, pausing on his way for a drink at a well and then resuming his wanderings in the society of whatever gypsies he fell in with. Skobelev has no idea that people who are not tollers do not live in a paradise and sleep on beds of roses. His sympathies overflow for the kind of poor he knows—the beggar, the peasant in the field, the poor student living in a garret.—Current Opinion.

From Newsboy to Assistant Railway President in 13 Years

It isn't every young man, anxious to get a toe-hold on the bottom rung of the ladder of success, who can expect a John D. Rockefeller to reach down anonymously and give him a lift.

Brush, we read in the American Magazine, was born in Stillwater, Minnesota, where he received a common school education until, at the age of fourteen, he was forced to earn his own living and ambitiously struck out for Chicago. For three years his precarious occupation was selling newspapers and fighting with other city gamins leagued to protect their favorite corners. Sunday was his only play day, and every Sunday he would go out to the docks that line Lake Michigan and watch the big lake steamers wallowing in and out of port. The boats fascinated the boy, and he finally got an opportunity to ship as clerk on a passenger steamer. This led to a place as purser on one of the larger lake vessels. Then, as he is quoted in the magazine, came his opportunity, though it was not recognized as such at the time:

"One day I was standing at the purser's window when a thin, keen-eyed, elderly man stopped there and began asking me questions. He complained about the steamer, and I handled his complaints as smoothly and fairly as possible. Then he asked me about my work, where I lived, whether I liked my job, if I was an only child, and a lot of other personal questions.

"I hadn't the slightest idea who the man might be. I figured out that he was lonesome and wanted to talk with someone. So I just smiled and answered everything.

"Some time later I got a letter from the late James J. Hill, offering me a job. He said that he had been talking with John D. Rockefeller about the young men of the country, and that the oil man had said I was a promising youngster. Then, and then only, did I discover that the inquisitive passenger on the lake steamer had been John D. Rockefeller.

"Mr. Hill wrote that if I was willing to start at the bottom he would give me a job on the Great Northern Railroad, which I, of course, accepted, starting in as a shop apprentice, toggled up in overalls and jumpers, and plugging away at twenty cents an hour. It was there that I learned 'most everything' I know about the machinery of railroading. The time spent in that shop has been worth ten dollars an hour to me since."

It is not surprising to read that the erstwhile purser and Chicago newsboy forged ahead, from promotion to promotion, until, at twenty-seven, he was made assistant to the president of the Boston Sub-

urban Electric Company, then general manager, then vice-president, and eventually head of the Boston Elevated System, which carries 640,000,000 passengers annually—half as many people as ride on all steam railroads of the country.

The way Brush "does things" is illustrated by the way in which he averted a great strike in 1913. The men on the road were restless about wages, hours and other conditions of work. Conference succeeded conference to no purpose. Brush wearied of them.

"It was not his way of doing business. He buckled up his belt and plunged into the muddle. His first move was to call W. D. Mahon, head of the National Carmen's Union, into his office, and lock the door.

"Now, Mahon," he said, drawing up a chair, and leaning forward with his friendly smile, "we're here in my office. The doors are locked. There are no stenographers concealed anywhere. No dictographs. No one to listen. The curtains are drawn. We're alone. But before we can do anything I've got to know you and you've got to know me. You tell me all about yourself, and I'll tell you who I am and what I've done."

"And thus the labor leader and the frank, friendly railroad official drew back the curtains of reticence and suspicion and showed each other the goods that were within them. Mahon saw Brush the newsboy, and Brush the apprentice, as well as Brush the vice-president. Brush saw Mahon as a fellow man whose heart was bound up in the welfare of labor.

"Mahon found out that I was square," Brush said afterward, "and I found out that he was square. He was open and honest; so was I. We were both convinced that neither one was trying to play tricks on the other."

"For nineteen hours the two men, behind locked doors, debated the complex problems, each zealous for the interests he represented. At the end of that time the labor leader walked out with a mutual agreement in his hand. Not only was this agreement satisfactory to the company, but unions have called it one of the finest documents of its kind ever drawn up."

The qualities that stand out strongest in the amazing career of this "top-notch" at 39 are the qualities, we read, that Brush demands most emphatically of his men. Chief among them is initiative. Never call a man on the carpet for a piece of initiative, is one of his cardinal rules. "He may have done the wrong thing this time, but the next time, by using his head, he may save dollars and lives. Tell him he's a fool and he'll never take another chance."