

pg. 2
Lady Astor Evaluates Russia
In Terms of What It Once Was

**Despotism and Tyranny of Present Régime Merely
Continue Old Phases—Opportunity Seen for
Establishment of Genuine Christianity**

Special from The Christian Science Monitor Bureau
LONDON—"We have been to a new world—a world turned upside down and a world brimming over with new ideas which are bound to have their effect on Western civilization as we know it," said Lady Astor in an exclusive interview with a representative of The Christian Science Monitor on her return from her recent fortnight's visit to Russia in company with Viscount Astor, Mr. G. Bernard Shaw and the Marquis of Lothian.

"To understand modern Russia," Lady Astor said, "you must constantly bear in mind old Russia, with its autocratic government, its periodical peasant risings, the revolution of 1905, attempt at free speech ending in Siberia, 80 per cent of its people unable to read or write, and a church hitched to authority, full of superstition and vain symbols . . . the whole time cut off from the rest of the civilized world. That was Russia in 1922. Remember all this and then you will marvel at what it has done.

"There is no doubt about the 'tyranny' whereby the new dispensation is being ushered in. The ruling caste is making a deliberate attempt to burn into the national consciousness dogmas which obliterate the individual personality and many of the things that we in the West hold most dear. But let Soviet Russia's critics get a proper perspective.

"It's no use simply applying the standards of the more or less comfortable classes in the home country. The dominance of the proletariat is not a mere phrase. The comparison must be with what went on before. Pre-war Russia was a country with 80 per cent of its population illiterate, a country endowed with plenty of natural riches, yet, as the World War showed us, the worst equipped in the world.

Despotism Not New
"This despotism may seem shocking to us. It doesn't seem so at all to the Russians, who have never known any other régime but a ruthless autocracy. We've got to remember that. And up to 1861 the mass of the peasantry were serfs. What I mean is that the Russian society must be judged not according to modern ideas at all but according to medieval conceptions.

"It's as if the vast semi-Asiatic continent were on the threshold of 'civilization' as we know it, and its leaders, seeing and knowing from bitter experience how much selfishness has come between man and man and marred social relations. It is as if it were looking well before leaping, insisting on a cast-iron present discipline for humanity's sake in the future.

"It's not pleasant, the sense of oppression which is in the air—every now and then even the foreign visitor gets the feeling of intimidation—but in Russia it's nothing new. Many of the present rulers, of course, were imprisoned for political offenses under the Tsarist régime. You might have thought that their conspicuous idealism would preserve

them from applying the selfsame methods of repression to their opponents.

"But no, they have no conception of tolerance. If you remonstrate with them for having learned nothing, as I did, you only get one answer. 'Ah, but you see this new order which we are building up is right, and just, and true, so the transgressor must be punished.' A typical medieval attitude!"

Religious Attitude Assessed
Asked what effect the repudiation of all that is understood by religion was having on the new generation of Russians, Lady Astor replied: "Russia doesn't seem to me to be godless. I cannot pretend to be happy about a society where those in authority are deliberately trying to dry up the springs of religion. At the same time I must say that the old 'religion' of Russia had to be destroyed if ever true Christianity were to make its way there.

"We in the West cannot conceive how hidebound and negative the religious tradition was in Russia. The old national church, the whole ecclesiastical power, was placed at the service of the Tsarist state to preserve the worldly privileges of the few, without a care for the appalling living conditions of the many.

"That Russian Orthodox Church did not, as the churches we know in Europe and America try to do, exert itself to supply any impetus whatsoever for social reform—quite the contrary. Do you wonder that the people respond readily to the anti-religion slogans?"

"As for the autocratic conception of social discipline which was such a notable feature of the Russian church as an institution, it has simply been taken into the secular field. The Communist Party is the church militant, the members of the Third Internationale are the prophets and priests.

"Medievalists, according to our ideas, standing on the threshold of Western civilization, as they feel themselves, the party elders recognize no deviation from the corpus of Marxian doctrine as interpreted by Lenin; the unbeliever is simply a heretic to be punished for his back-

sliding, a danger to the community who must be ruthlessly suppressed."
"Nevertheless," Lady Astor concluded, choosing her words carefully, "I see a change coming over this Russian society in the not very distant future which will make them ripe for the seed of a genuine Christian religion—which they have never known. There is a wonderful chance for the spread of the truth, and it is up to all of us who are striving for the betterment of humanity to help on that process."

Supervision of Children

Lady Astor was asked what she thought of the general appearance of the people and especially the children. "About the children? Well, it is not so much what they have done, but what they mean to do, or at least want to do, that impressed me. They are trying to clean up the children and take care of them from babyhood to old age. When you see the old villages, the overcrowding, you realize what a problem they have before them. There is something pitiful about Russia, and if you love children you have a great longing to help them. The schools were closed so we did not see them. Their camps are primitive and I gather still not too plentiful.

"The people look healthy. We saw very few old people. I believe in Russia it is a case of the survival of the fittest. We asked them what they did with the aged and infirm, but they said that they were taken care of. It is certainly no place for old people.

"There is a ruthlessness about the whole atmosphere, and you can't help wondering if mercy will return with justice. To our ideas there is neither mercy nor justice, but I believe they hope to work up to both in this new fashion of theirs.

Steady Grist of Propaganda

"We were there such a short time and really saw very little, but we saw enough to realize that Russia is not immediately concerned with making a world revolution. It has its hands full in managing its own revolution. It really fears attacks from without and with vivid memories of 1918-21, foreign intervention. It conducts propaganda all day long to its own people.

"They are taught of the alleged horrors of capitalism and capitalist countries. I saw, for example, a 'text' written up at a children's rest camp, 'We protest against Negro lynching in America.' I asked them what they would think if we put up the following notice in schools in America: 'Children protest against political prisoners in Russia being arrested and shot without trial.' In fact, I made what they call 'a scene.'

"Trade with Russia, treat it like

any other country, but don't try to interfere with its ways of doing things. I am certain that that is our best way of helping to light up some of the dark spots in Russia. It has much to learn from us, and we have something to learn from it. We in the West will never accept Communism as we see it in Russia, and Russia will never accept capitalism as it sees it in the West."