

# A HEROIC LEGEND

*How the Holy Mountains let  
out of their deep Caves the  
Mighty Heroes of Russia*

*A Modern Bylina taken down by N. MISHEYEV  
from an Old Peasant in the Extreme North of  
Russia, and translated by GLEB STRUVE and  
BERNARD PARES*

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## PREFACE

Is it true, as is sometimes suggested, that religion is now almost extinct in Russia? Those who have followed the text of Soviet legislation know what efforts have been made to achieve this result, but information of the very opposite kind comes to us from time to time showing that, as was to be expected, the religious sense has been quickened by persecution.

None of this evidence is more striking than that of the "heroic legend" (or *bylina*) which we now circulate. There have always been in Russia peasants, usually women, who have handed down by oral tradition the "heroic legends" of the old struggle of early Christian Russia of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries against the heathen nomads. There is a regular established cycle of such legends with well-defined characters: the Archangel Michael, St. George the Valiant (the patron saint of Russia), Ilya of Murom, the peasant's son (a kind of Russian Samson) and his mates in chivalry, the parson's son, the merchant's son, the son of the gentry and the representative of the turbulent town population, Vaska Buslayev—in other words, the whole of the Russian people.

Oral tradition has often proved stronger than any other, and in 1926, as narrated in the following note, an old peasant woman of eighty, after reciting to a purely peasant audience the last legend of the cycle, *Why the Heroes Have Vanished from Holy Russia*, went on to recite a new heroic legend of the fight against odds for religion at the present day. The legend is purely a peasant production, not only because it is in peasant

dialect, but because it breathes the whole spirit of the peasant mind and thought.

We may ask ourselves whether such a resurrection of the thought of the past in a similar form would be likely to happen in our own country.

BERNARD PARES.

## INTRODUCTION

Nor long before I left Soviet Russia in 1925, I happened to meet in an out-of-the-way village of a province of the extreme north an old peasant woman who knew by heart and recited thousands of verses of Russian heroic songs (*byliny*). In the Far North of Russia it was still possible, until recently, to find such peasant women, known as "reciters," who had a colossal memory and preserved piously the lays of the old Russian heroes, which had come down to them from their fathers and grandfathers.<sup>1</sup>

The woman I met was over eighty, but she still looked quite strong, held herself erect, and had a lively though somewhat severe expression in her eyes. She seemed to enjoy a great prestige in her village. The peasant with whom I stopped for the night spoke of her with great respect. "She even chides all sorts of commissaries that come our way, and her tongue is sharper than a knife." The same peasant informed me that old mother P. knew plenty of songs about ancient heroes. "Every night," he said, "the old people of the village spend in her cottage, listening to her. We can drop in, too, if you like." Naturally, I seized this rare opportunity of listening in the Communist realm to the songs of old Russia, and we went to mother P. In her large, clean cottage, which smelt of mint, I saw about twenty elderly peasants seated on benches along the walls. The hostess herself was sitting by a small window, in a wooden armchair.

<sup>1</sup>This is all the more striking because these heroic songs originated in the South, in the old Russia of Kiev.

A little to the right of her, above her head, in the corner, was hanging an icon of Our Lady lit by a reddish lamp.

She began to recite. Her recitative was wonderfully musical. The reciting went on for a long time, and she ended with the bylina, *Why the Heroes Have Vanished from Holy Russia*. When she stopped we all kept silent, moved as we were by the famous lay. Suddenly one of the old peasants sighed heavily and said: "Well, isn't it clear, my dears, why it is so hard to live nowadays in our Russia? You are pressed on all sides. Our heroes are no longer with us. They have sinned, just as we all, we accursed. Well, God has turned them to stone, petrified them, that is. Yet, I don't think they are dead. They are turned to stone. What do you think about it, old mother P.?"

"Certainly, they'll come to life," the old woman answered severely after a little pause. "They'll come to life," she repeated emphatically. "God is merciful. He will forgive, and Our Lady, if need be, will ask Her Son to forgive them. Most certainly they will come to life again," she repeated once more, this time raising her voice. "I think those heroes—our sustainers and intercessors—never did get turned to stone; they have simply been shut up in dark stone prisons. Of course, their boasting was a great sin, yet not a mortal one."

She fell silent and seemed to have changed. She was sitting upright—as if she had thrown off her shoulders a superfluous burden. She screwed up her eyes and looked up as if she had seen something behind us, so that one had even a longing to turn round. Then, suddenly, she made the sign of the cross, which she did not do before—and started reciting in her strong, reverent, clearly marked recitative.

Before long I was afraid even to stir. I forgot to take out my notebook, but I do not think they would

have allowed me to take down any notes—it would have seemed to them "sacrilege." They all sat rigid in their places.

The old woman began reciting a new variant of the bylina *Why the Heroes Have Vanished from Holy Russia*, and then, after a little pause, she pronounced, in a peculiarly penetrating voice, the five lines of a remarkable incantation. After another pause, she passed on to a bylina which was quite unfamiliar to me. Soon it became clear to me that she was not just reciting, but *creating* this new lay, perhaps for the first time.

The next day I had to leave the village, but I had time to go and see her and to write down, after her, the whole bylina. Knowing no shorthand, I had to write hastily, shortening some words and even phrases. I had some difficulty afterwards in restoring certain parts of the bylina.<sup>1</sup>

At her own wish I entitled the bylina *How the Holy Mountains Let Out of Their Deep Caves the Mighty Heroes of Russia*.

In order better to understand the contents and meaning of this bylina, it is necessary to know that the introduction to the Russian Iliad, as a cycle of heroic songs about Ilya (in Greek, Ilias),<sup>2</sup> is formed by the song about the Hero Svyatogor, who symbolises the elements. Christ, having cured Ilya, "the peasant's son," and endowed him with great strength, forbids him, among other things, "to fight the Hero Svyatogor, whom Mother Earth can hardly carry." Having met Svyatogor and, together with his steed, got into the giant's pocket, from which Svyatogor himself extricates him, Ilya, we are told, exchanges crosses with

<sup>1</sup> It was only in 1933 that I was able, quite accidentally, to get some of my papers from Soviet Russia. Among them were my notes of the bylina.

<sup>2</sup> A curious phonetic coincidence with Homer's *Iliad*—from Ilium or Troya.

him and thus becomes a "sworn brother" of the mighty hero.

N. MISHEYEV.

Where thy reason fails thee, ask of thy sense,  
Thy sense, good, quiet and wise,  
Ever silent from conversing with God,  
Strong and far-seeing, listening to the call of the heart,  
Thy guardian, thine intercessor before God.

I

WHEN on the Safat<sup>1</sup> River they had slaughtered the  
Tartar hosts,  
The glorious Russian heroes started boasting—  
Just because they left their sense  
And trusted only to their reason—  
That now it was time they fought the unearthly hosts.  
And a bright unearthly force appeared before them,  
Two heavenly warriors. And the heroes mistook  
them . . .  
Young Alesha, the first who had boasted, rushed forward,  
And he cut these two warriors in twain,  
But lo there were four of them, and no longer two.  
Under Dobrynya Nikitich's sharp sword they fell,  
The four warriors, but now eight rose up.  
After old Ilya of Murom had cut them down,  
And Vaska Buslayev had whistled,  
And Ivan Gostinov had hurled his spear,  
Four and sixty warriors arose.  
The heroes flung themselves on the unearthly host,  
Shoulder to shoulder they charged, like one,  
And they started hewing and cleaving that host,  
But that heavenly host went on growing and growing,  
And waging battle against the heroes.  
The heroes grew weary, retreating in fear,  
And they ran to the great holy mountains  
To seek the protection of their elder brother,

<sup>1</sup> A river in South Russia near Kiev, which was probably the scene of combats between early Christian Russia and the heathen nomads.

Their sworn brother Svyatogor himself,  
 The huge, ever-sleeping Svyatogor.  
 They woke up their brother,  
 And waking him they entreated him,  
 In their fear they entreated him, not uttering a word,  
 Putting Ilya the peasant's son,  
 Their ataman, in the forefront.  
 Svyatogor rubbed his eyes, those bottomless lakes ;  
 He gathered his eyebrows, those dreaming forests ;  
 He shook with his yawn the stagnant earth ;  
 And as he stretched himself, he touched a passing cloud ;  
 And he stared at Ilya as if he were some great marvel.  
 He knew him for Ilya with whom he had changed  
     crosses,  
 And he took to his heart the hero's bitter prayer,  
 And he seized the Russian heroes and their steeds with  
     them,  
 And he pushed them in his pockets, those deep, deep  
     caves,  
 And himself with a sigh he fell into a long, deep sleep.

II

AND from that deep sleep,  
 From that heavy, leaden sleep,  
 A great torment fell on the heroes,  
 A torment of hell and torture.  
 For they themselves are not asleep,  
 They cannot sleep, and they cannot see in the dark,  
 But everything they can hear and understand :  
 How Falsehood goes roving through Holy Russia,  
 Falsehood, the heathen, the infidel,  
 How she eats up the Orthodox people,  
 And shuts up the churches of God,  
 And kills the men of Russia.  
 "There is nothing on earth," says Falsehood, "that  
     is stronger than I ;  
 I am a match for any host,  
 Even Christ Himself, the King of Heaven."  
 Thus says Falsehood in her boasting,  
 Scoffing at the Russian people,  
 And wherever it lives on Mother Earth,  
 And wherever it roams, it is like an orphan.  
 And then old Ilya, Ilya the peasant's son,  
 Shouted aloud in the darkness.  
 A great cry, come straight from his heart,  
 And from his heart it passed into his grey-haired  
     head :  
 "Oh Thou Mother of God, the wet Mother Earth,  
 Wilt thou pardon thy younger sons,  
 The ancient heroes of Russia,  
 Who through their shameful boasting,  
 Still sit imprisoned in the dark stony mountain.

They have been sitting and sitting for long prickly  
ages,  
Long ages, sharp and splintered and prickly.  
Raise us from our sleep, Mother of God, the wet  
Mother Earth,  
Raise from his sleep thine eldest son,  
Svyatogor, the greatest of the great heroes !  
Give us our liberty, give us royal freedom,  
That we may serve in faith and in truth,  
In faith and in truth, the Holy Land of Russia,  
Our own Russian Orthodox people . . .  
Oh, thou, Mother of God, the wet Mother Earth,  
Hearken to the prayer of thy younger sons,  
The mighty Russian heroes.”

III

AND the heartrending cry of Ilya, Ilya the peasant's  
son,  
Went right through the stony mountains,  
And it rose above the passing cloud,  
And it flew up to the golden roof of heaven,  
And there it fell and nestled like a poor little lump,  
Like a poor little lump at the very throne of the Mother  
of God.  
And the Mother of God caught sight of this poor little  
lump,  
And she heard this heartrending cry,  
And the prayer of Ilya she took to her heart,  
She took it to her heart and sobbed bitterly,  
And to the throne of her son, Jesus the Saviour,  
By the azure steps with bowed head,  
With bowed head she mounted, with soft steps,  
And she entreats her Beloved Child,  
With her tears pouring down like a heavy rain,  
She entreats him to pardon the Russian heroes.  
And the Saviour himself hastens to answer the All  
Pure One.  
Christ himself speaks on His lofty throne :  
“ Oh Mother Mine Beloved, blessed among all women,  
Thou who intercedest before Me for every sinner great  
or small,  
Through Thee is forgiven the boasting of the heroes,  
The foolish Russian boasting of the heroes.”  
And the King of Heaven Himself gives the order  
To Michael the Archangel and George the Valiant  
To gather the heavenly hosts and powers,

At the trump of the Seraphim and the cry of the  
 Cherubim,  
 On the shrouds of the archangels and the wings of  
 the angels  
 To float down with Our Lady to the Holy Land of  
 Russia.  
 And numberless forces of mighty powers gathered  
 there,  
 And the trumps of the Seraphim broke out,  
 And the glad voices of the Cherubim burst forth,  
 And the archangels unfolded their robes,  
 And the angels spread forth their snow-white wings,  
 And bore up Our Heavenly Lady, the Mother of God,  
 And with a royal flight they passed through all the  
 seven heavens,  
 Till the Intercessor came down to that very Holy Land  
 of Russia.  
 And then speaks the Mother of God, the wet Mother  
 Earth:  
 "Ho now you, my steep mountains,  
 My lofty mountains, my strong mountains, my holy  
 mountains,  
 Part aside, make way, go asunder,  
 Let out my younger sons, the mighty Russian heroes.  
 They have been pardoned their sinful boasting,  
 That they would take the unearthly host in battle.  
 Wake ye up, my great mountains, from your long,  
 deep sleep.  
 Set free the Russian heroes,  
 The Holy Land of Russia is pining for them,  
 Holy Russia, my younger sister."

IV

And at that cry of the Mother of God,  
 At that call of the Mother, the wet Earth,  
 The stony mountains creaked and murmured and  
 groaned.  
 They began shaking and rocking,  
 They opened up, they parted, they came asunder,  
 And the greatest of the great heroes,  
 That hero, huge Svyatogor himself, awoke.  
 He opened his pockets, those dark caves,  
 And out of those caves profound  
 Rode forth the glorious and mighty heroes.  
 The heroes of Holy Russia, one after the other,  
 Ilya of Murom, of peasant birth,  
 Dobrynya Nikitich, the merchant's son,  
 Alesha Popovich, the parson's boy,  
 Ivan Gostinov, the merchant's son,  
 Vaska Buslayev from the free city of Novgorod.  
 They rode forth, doffed their helmets and crossed  
 themselves;  
 On all sides, on all four sides they bowed;  
 They tightened the girths of their good steeds, and  
 sat firm,  
 And by nightfall they came to the Safat River.  
 Planting their white tent by the river, they prayed,  
 And when they had prayed they laid them to sleep,  
 Laid them to sleep all except their Ataman,  
 That old Cossack, the peasant's son,  
 Their beloved Ilya of Murom, who cared for all.

Heroes' sleep is deeper than the ocean's sea,

Heroes' snore is heard a hundred versts around,  
 'Tis not a viper from under a log, 'tis the dark  
 night  
 That twines round Ilya with its soft whisper :  
 "Go to sleep, Ilya, lay thee down, lay thee down,  
 sleep is dearer than mother.  
 How without sleep canst thou wage battle and win  
 victory ?"  
 Ilya listens, he thinks his own thoughts, he laughs to  
 himself.  
 He twirls his grey moustache and smiles.  
 "Ah, thou night, little night, thou stony jail,  
 Did not Ilya sit behind thy bars,  
 And listen to thy songs, to thy charms,  
 So that old Ilya should go to sleep and forget all and  
 everything ?  
 Ilya the peasant's son has neither slept nor dozed,  
 And through thy songs he has heard the groan of  
 Russia.  
 He has heard and has called to her, and she has heard  
 him.  
 Ilya has stayed on guard for the peace of his mother  
 earth.  
 Ah, thou night, little night, thou stony jail,  
 Sweet are thy songs and they entice to sleep,  
 But if old Ilya falls asleep, then the end will come  
 To Orthodox Russia and to all her children."  
 And the dark night wrangled back with a fierce cold  
 wind.  
 The witch, she poured rain on Ilya from a hanging  
 cloud,  
 And, the snake, she set off on her journey, her far  
 road ;  
 And on God's side, on the East there showed the red  
 flowers,  
 And the bright gaze of dawn arose and played and  
 smiled on Ilya,

All blushing before the shining sun, before the trusty  
 soldier.

Ilya straightened himself up to his full hero's height,  
 He breathed out of his full breast,  
 He washed in the river, he bowed to Christ,  
 He bent down to his mother earth,  
 He stood up. "What is that noise, or am I mistaken ?"  
 He looked round, and he sees toward the Safat River  
 There is creeping a dark black cloud, threatening, ever  
 so great.  
 It is the host of Falsehood herself coming on, the  
 infidel host.  
 And old Ilya cries out with his resounding voice.  
 "Ho, where are ye, then, my captains, my sworn  
 brothers ?  
 Wake up, rise up, mount your swift steeds.  
 Come gallop to your Ataman, Ilya the peasant's son."  
 And the sturdy heroes woke up ;  
 The captains rose up at that mighty call.  
 They prayed to Christ, they mounted their good steeds,  
 And all gathered about their Ataman,  
 And Ilya Ivanovich, the peasant's son, spoke out :  
 "Ho there and hail to you, my good captains,  
 The mighty, Russian heroes.  
 The old Cossack, Ilya of Murom, will himself attack  
 Falsehood in front.  
 Thou, Dobrynya Nikitich, strike Falsehood from the  
 right.  
 Thou, Alesha, break her cursed power from the left.  
 And thou press her hard from the rear, Ivan Gostinov.  
 And thou, Vaska, from Novgorod,  
 Wherever thou seest thy free force is needed,  
 With all thy will, revelling and invincible,  
 There strike home on Falsehood,  
 Ay, strike home in thy youthful vigour with shouting  
 and whistling

That this Falsehood may take fright,  
 Take fright not so much of thy steel blade,  
 As of thy lusty shouting and whistling,  
 Lusty, free and revelling.”<sup>1</sup>  
 It was not a flight of falcons dashing at a red  
 beast,  
 It was the Russian heroes dashing at the host of False-  
 hood.  
 They began to hew and slaughter the army of Falsehood.  
 Not so much did the heroes hew it,  
 As the good steeds trampled it down.  
 As the steel blade of Ilya swings, a gap is seen.  
 The Muromets bore straight on the front of Falsehood.  
 There she stood all enormous,  
 Facing him with her one eye, standing lopsided,  
 Muzzle of hound instead of face,  
 And licks herself with her tongue a verst long.  
 The thousand-pound mace of Ilya went swinging.  
 His eyes grew dizzy, his foot stumbled.  
 To fight an empty space was beyond his power.  
 When he stood up, Falsehood was not there . . . yet  
 everywhere in the gaps  
 The black army stood full as full again.  
 . . . For thirty days, three hours and three minutes  
 The heroes fought in so deathly a battle.  
 Their sturdy shoulders flagged,  
 Their good steeds gave way,  
 Their swords of steel were blunted,  
 And Falsehood still came on to the attack.  
 Always she brought new hosts into the battle,  
 And he fell there, Ilya the peasant’s son,  
 He fell on his mother, the wet earth.  
 “Ho it is thou, Mother of God,  
 My Mother of God, wet mother earth,

<sup>1</sup> The formidable traditional whistling of a Russian regiment has outlasted the Revolution, and whistling plays a noteworthy part in Cossack songs.

Hearken now to Ilya, thy son,  
 Thy faithful son, the peasant boy.  
 Not to his eyes was it given to see,  
 Not to his ears was it given to hear,  
 ’Twas to his heart, as he turned round, that his soul  
 softly murmured,  
 That some force unearthly, not of heaven,  
 Not of heaven, but from the depths below,  
 Is standing by the side of Falsehood,  
 Is bidding Falsehood go on untiring with the battle.”  
 Old Ilya raised himself from the earth to his feet ;  
 He crossed himself with the cross of God, as it is  
 written ;  
 He started to call his captains, his comrades  
 To a last and secret council.  
 They ran up, all four, they stood around him,  
 Weary and faint, blackened and darkened.  
 No sooner Ilya spoke his word and sighed,  
 But he saw there were more of them, five in all.  
 Marvel of marvels, wonder of wonders.  
 He wanted to ask, but as he looked he knew.  
 ’Twas one of those warriors from whom he had run  
 to the stony mountains.  
 All the heroes knew him, and when they knew him  
 they hailed him.  
 It was their faithful brother, George the Valiant.  
 The heroes bowed their heads with burning shame.  
 To whom had they boasted, with whom had they  
 fought, of whom were they afraid ?  
 Forgetting their service to Orthodox Russia,  
 Where had they hidden themselves, these braves ?  
 For whom had they abandoned the Holy Land of  
 Russia ?

V

'Twas not the gentle morning breeze  
 Floating over the strong and lofty oaks,  
 Floating and rousing and raising  
 Their tops, which the dark night had bowed towards  
 the valley,  
 'Twas Saint George the Valiant, who approached,  
 Approached and raised the heads of the Russian  
 heroes,  
 Raised them, embraced them and kissed them,  
 Saint George kissed them with a smile.  
 It was not the lark, God's bird, in the sky,  
 Sending up in the morning to the heavens  
 His clear note, ever warm with the sun,  
 To greet the day of work and toil, the peasant day,  
 It was Saint George with his voice,  
 With his clear, angel note,  
 Laughing and gently comforting the Russian worker-  
 heroes :  
 " My brothers, never look at him who speaks of the  
 past."  
 And at that kiss of George their brother,  
 At his warm and cheering word of pardon,  
 The heroes rose to their full gigantic height ;  
 They spread and straightened their shoulders ever so  
 wide ;  
 They raised their invincible heads with their iron  
 helms ;  
 With their right hands they gripped their steel blades ;  
 And through their veins poured their ancient Russian  
 strength.

And they gazed and could not stop gazing at George  
 the Valiant,  
 At Saint George, champion of the Holy Land of Russia.  
 George's feet to the knees were cased in pure silver ;  
 George's arms to the elbow were cased in red gold ;  
 George's head was all covered with pearls ;  
 His hair was bright chestnut and all in curls ;  
 And all over George stars were sprinkled.  
 Young and vigorous, ineffably beautiful is Saint George,  
 And his eyes are alight with flames that come from his  
 burning heart,  
 From his burning heart, from his love for the Holy  
 Land of Russia.  
 And young Alesha, who was first to boast in the old  
 time, speaks thus :  
 " 'Tis for thee first to tell us, Saint George, our gracious  
 George,  
 How did we not see thee that time on the Safat River,  
 On the Safat River with the stars thick in the sky ?  
 How did we not see thee in thy pure silver and thy  
 red gold,  
 In thine ineffable beauty and with thine angel voice ?  
 Surely if we had seen thee, we should never have  
 quarrelled and fought with thee."  
 And Saint George answers with his angel voice :  
 " My sworn brother, young Alesha, mighty hero of  
 Russia,  
 To thee first is my lesson, and to the rest not a lesson  
 but friendly counsel !  
 The boastful word is ruin,  
 Self-praise is man's undoing.  
 It darkens the understanding which the Lord God has  
 given us.  
 And without that bright understanding, it is night, it  
 is dark in the heart,  
 And can one see much, Alesha, can one make things  
 out in the dark autumn night ? "

VI

AND the kindly word of Saint George went home to  
 the Russian heroes,  
 To the Russian heroes right into their burning hearts.  
 And they laid it to their hearts, and in their inmost  
 understanding they knew it,  
 That in all ages and times, in all the long ages,  
 None must ever boast or pride himself before anyone.  
 And no sooner had they laid it to their hearts,  
 Laid it to their hearts and in their inmost understanding  
 seen it,  
 But they saw by the side of Saint George the Valiant  
 Another warrior, bright, ever so bright, great and  
 mighty,  
 And when they saw him, they knew that him too they  
 had fought on the Safat River.  
 And when they knew him, all as one man dropped  
 on their knees,  
 All dropped on their knees, to wet mother earth, all  
 abased themselves.  
 The Russian heroes confessed their sin,  
 To Archangel Michael, Arch-General of the heavenly  
 powers, they abased themselves.  
 And Archangel Michael, the Arch-General of God,  
 spoke thus to them :  
 "Not to me servant of God, your fellow servant,  
 should ye bow,  
 But to the Lord God, to Christ Jesus, to His Most  
 Pure Mother,  
 To the Mother of God, our Intercessor, to Them  
 should ye bow.

Bow down and rise up, stand up, ye warriors, heroes  
 of old,  
 Seat yourselves on your swift and trusty steeds,  
 Begin the last battle, the deathly battle with Falsehood,  
 The deathly battle with Falsehood, for the defence of  
 the Holy Land of Russia.  
 Go round the pagan host of Falsehood on three sides,  
 And the fourth, the front, I myself will take with George  
 my sworn brother."  
 And the heroes rose heavily, and a new force was in  
 them.  
 Heavily had they pressed on the wet mother earth,  
 And they mounted their swift steeds and sat firm.  
 Their swift steeds with one leap made a hundred  
 versts,  
 A hundred versts they made, and surrounded the host  
 of Falsehood on three sides,  
 And the fourth, the front they left to Archangel Michael  
 and George.  
 Roars through the air, like the roar of wild bears, the  
 thousand-pound club of Ilya of Murom ;  
 Cuts through, like an axe on the trees, the steel blade  
 of Dobrynya Nikitich ;  
 Sings aloud and hews, like a scythe in the grass,  
 The sharp sabre of Alesha the parson's son ;  
 Hums on its way the long spear of Ivan Gostinov ;  
 And everywhere is heard the whistle and shout of  
 Vaska Buslayev.  
 On the front, toward the high tent  
 Of one-eyed Falsehood herself and her unknown  
 guardian,  
 Archangel Michael and George the Valiant  
 Are tirelessly making their way.  
 And see now a small space, bare, not great,—  
 Bare, not great, between the unearthly forces,  
 Between the powers of heaven and the underground  
 forces,—

Opens to the eye for the great battle, the more than  
human battle.  
And the leaping, youthful heart of George the Valiant  
was aflame,  
And like a sharp-eyed hawk, in front of Michael the  
Archangel.  
He threw himself on one-eyed Falsehood, who looked  
at him,  
Laughing looked at him, mocking and staring at  
him,  
And already at the tent of Falsehood George the  
Valiant  
Was lifting his sharp-edged lance in his left hand,  
George was swinging his steel blade,  
Was swinging it in his right hand to cut off the head  
of one-eyed Falsehood,  
When see . . . his silver-clad legs trembled,  
His gold-clad arms went numb,  
The heart of Saint George was freezing,  
And he fell dumb, as if crushed by a hammer,  
And his beauteous eyes were clouded,  
His ears were shrouded beneath his bright chestnut  
curls,  
George became like a dead stone, like beaten iron.  
George had seen at the side of Falsehood  
Christ Himself, the King of Heaven,  
Gazing at him with darkened eyes,  
Gazing in anger at George the Valiant . . .  
It was no whirlwind of storm, rushing from the sea  
of ocean,  
It was no thunder and lightning splitting the mighty  
oak to pieces,  
It was the Archangel Michael soaring like an eagle  
over Falsehood,  
And with his sword of fire cutting off her head.  
And then, come to himself, George the Valiant could  
see,

He could see how he whom he had taken for Christ,  
How that one began to change,  
How he became terrible, wild and fierce as a roaring  
lion,  
Loathsome, base and cunning like a viper,  
Foul, insolent and knavish as some unclean creature  
of the marsh.  
George the Valiant saw and knew that this was Anti-  
christ.  
Then the heathen host of Falsehood was routed and  
taken prisoner.  
The Russian heroes, the mighty men of old  
On all sides gathered round George the Valiant,  
From the three sides to the fourth they came,  
To the fourth they came surrounding Saint George,  
And at Antichrist, fierce, cunning and insolent,  
At that unearthly, underground power they looked in  
horror.  
“Brothers mine, mighty heroes of Russia,  
Too much for us is the strength of Antichrist, great  
and terrible and dark.”  
So said George the Valiant in a low whisper.  
“Too much for us—we cannot fight him to the victory ;  
We can pray, we can turn to Christ Jesus.  
May His will be done, as in heaven so on earth.”  
Then the heroes, like George, doffed their helmets and  
crossed themselves,  
With the orthodox cross they crossed themselves, they  
fell on their knees,  
They knelt down, they prayed, they pressed against  
their wet mother earth,  
For the rescue of Holy Russia from Antichrist they  
prayed.

VII

AND the prayer of the Russian heroes and of George  
the Valiant rose to the Mother of God,  
It rose to the Most Pure Mother of Christ the King  
of Heaven,  
And there the Mother of God begged her Beloved  
Child :  
“ Oh my Beloved Child, Saviour of the race of  
man,  
Tell me, make me know, has not the time come to  
cut off the head of that Antichrist,  
Is not the hour at hand for him to leave the Holy  
Land of Russia,  
To free the people of Orthodox Russia from their  
torments ?  
Is not the time, the moment come for the Russian  
people to do their work and labour,  
To do their work, to accomplish their labour,  
To cleanse themselves from all their sins,  
To set up God’s churches, and to thank their Lord  
God ? ”  
And Christ Jesus, the Very King of Heaven, makes  
answer :  
“ Oh My Beloved Mother, blessed among all  
women,  
Not yet is come the time to cut off the head of that  
Antichrist.  
That day and that hour are a great mystery not yet  
unfolded.  
The time has come for that Antichrist to leave the Holy  
Land of Russia,

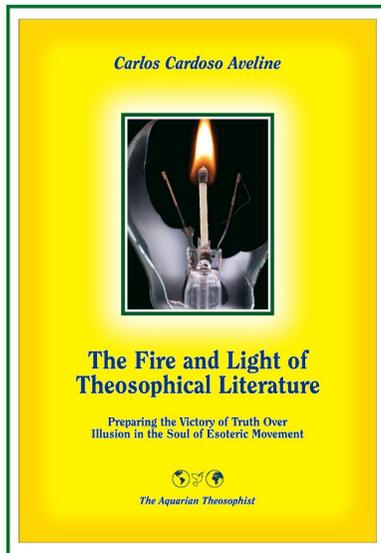
For the Orthodox Russian people to be set free from  
their torments,  
To do their work, to accomplish their labour, to cleanse  
themselves from their sins,  
To set up God’s churches, and to thank their Lord  
God.”  
And Christ the King of Heaven gave order  
To His Arch-General, Michael the Archangel,  
To drive the fierce Antichrist from the Holy Land of  
Russia.  
“ Brothers mine, mighty Russian heroes,  
Stand up from the wet earth,  
Rise on your quick feet from the wet earth and straighten  
yourselves,  
Straighten yourselves and cross yourselves, the great  
battle is beginning.  
Antichrist, the fierce, the insolent, the foul, is being  
driven from Holy Russia.”  
So speaks George the Valiant, and speaking he looks  
up to Heaven and smiles.  
The mighty heroes leapt to their quick feet,  
They leapt up, they straightened themselves, they  
crossed themselves,  
And they faced the great, the unheard of battle.  
They looked at Saint George, they pressed round their  
sworn brother.  
Fierce Antichrist, ever changing and changing,  
Became a black raven,  
And the length of that raven was a thousand versts,  
And across it from wing to wing was full two thou-  
sand.  
That Raven’s head is black, like an enormous  
mountain ;  
Its eyes are a fiery hell, all flaming and full of malice ;  
Its bill and claws are iron, sharp as sharp.  
That black raven holds in its grip the Holy Land of  
Russia,

It has covered it with its wings, it tears it with its  
claws, it pecks it with its beak,  
With its iron beak it pecks it, and drinks its hot blood.  
Holy Russia groans. The black raven rejoices.  
On the Eastern side, the sun's side, the heavens have  
rolled up,  
The heavens have rolled up, the Kingdom of God for  
a moment stands visible,  
For a moment stands visible, and the hearts of the  
Russian heroes light up.  
Their hearts light up, it has left with them an ineffable,  
an eternal joy.  
It was not the golden lightning, falling stern from that  
Kingdom of God,  
It was not its born brother, the thunder of heaven with  
its terrible stroke,  
It was the Archangel Michael, the mighty Arch-  
General,  
By God's command, by Christ's order going into battle  
with Antichrist.  
When he saw the Archangel, Antichrist the raven  
spread his black wings.  
He rose all enormous, dark with eyes of fire.  
With his darkness he covered the bright sun, he darkened  
the clear sky,  
He darkened the clear sky, and on the Archangel he  
fell like a forty thousand-pound stone,  
Like a stone he fell. With his black wings it seemed  
he overwhelmed him.  
Cold went the heart of the Russian heroes,  
They rushed to their sworn brother:  
"Tell us, tell us, Saint George,  
Tell us the whole very truth! Can it be?"  
Smiling, George the Valiant shook his pearly head.  
He reproached his brothers the Russian heroes,  
He reproached them with their little faith in Christ  
the Saviour.

He gave them his true, invincible word,  
That Antichrist, the wicked raven, will not return to  
Holy Russia,  
That to the Holy Land of Russia will come great joy,  
And to the Orthodox Russian people grace and comfort.

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Regarding the role of the esoteric movement in the ethical awakening of mankind during the 21st century, see the book “**The Fire and Light of Theosophical Literature**”, by Carlos Cardoso Aveline.



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