



Beasts, Men and Gods

Ferdinand Ossendowski

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Ferdinand Ossendowski, a scientist and writer, chronicled his experiences during the Russian Revolution of the 1920's. He was caught up in the bloody overthrow by the Bolsheviks as they rampaged their way across Russia. He was a man of culture and perception, but he confesses that his scholarship and sophistication could not protect him from the solitude and dissociation from human society he was forced to endure on his flights from danger. Because of his scrupulous observations, the reader is not only able to understand the accuracy of his political assessments but the truth of his extraordinary trials. He admits that people of highly civilized status cannot give enough consideration to the situational instruction that men in primitive states find useful in the struggle for existence. Even memories of the events he faced throw him back into the fear and uncertainty he felt when he encountered them. In his expeditions he is sometimes a warrior and sometimes a doctor. To get where he is going he trades anything: horses for guns, maps for food, silken cords for bullets, rosaries for saddles. He witnesses the mutilated and half-burnt remains of military skirmishes. He documents his passages by caravan with fortune tellers, peasants, drunken soldiers, and priests. He beholds a land of sun-burnt prairies, diseased cattle and people, the pestilence of anthrax and smallpox, wild ponies, predatory birds feasting on dead bodies. This is a journey the reader will breathlessly undertake to feel the strength of personal accomplishment. Ossendowski writes, "Nature destroys the weak but helps the strong, awakening in the soul emotions which remain dormant under the urban conditions of modern life."

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