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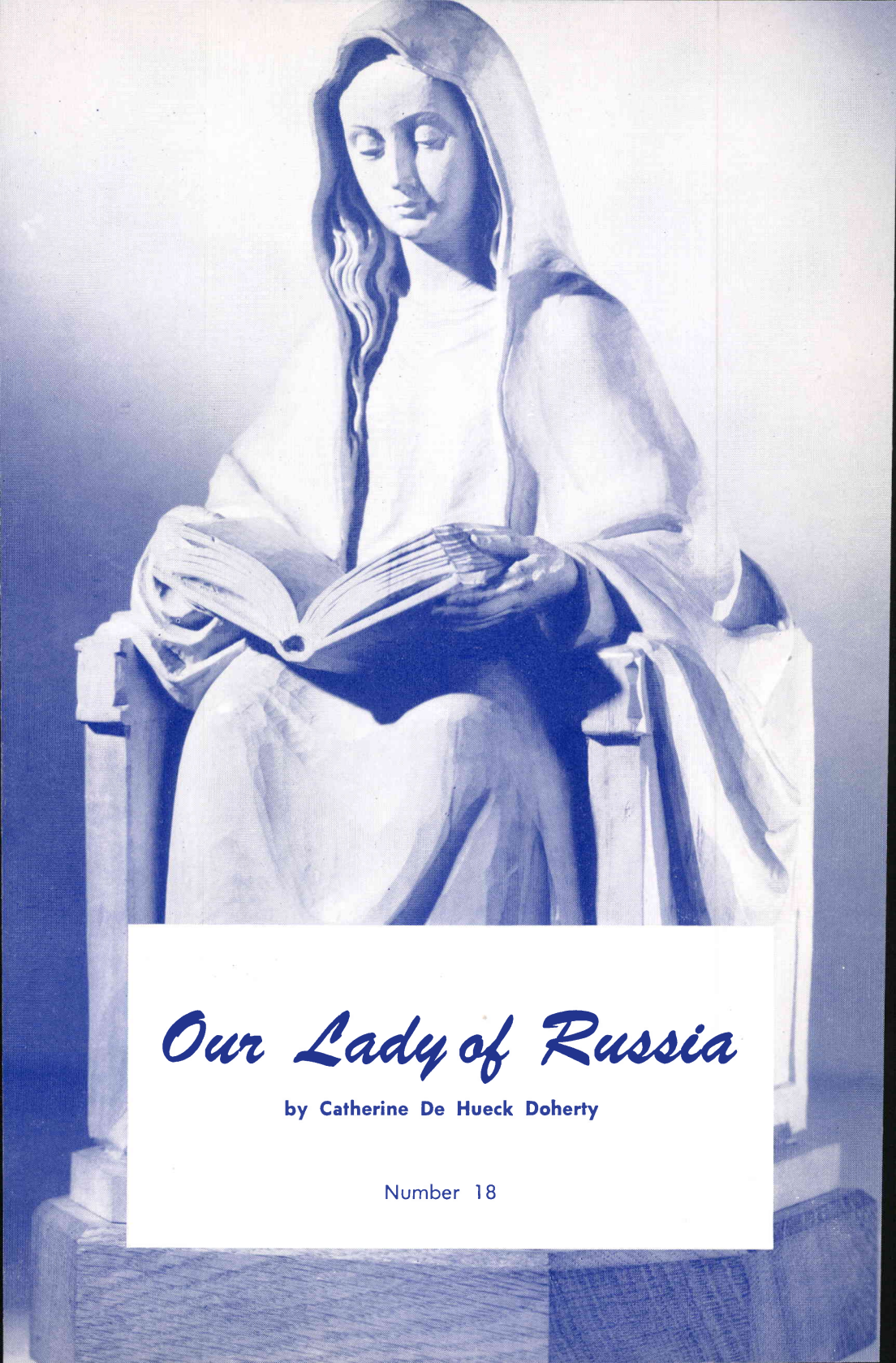
Catherine De Hueck Doherty

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Our Lady of Russia

by Catherine De Hueck Doherty

Number 18

ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

A trip to Fatima inspired Catherine De Hueck Doherty to do something about the average American's lack of understanding of the Russian people. *My Russian Yesterdays* (Bruce, 1950), from which this selection is taken, was the result. In a series of revealing vignettes, the former Russian baroness and dynamic champion of social justice portrays the pre-Red Russia of her girlhood, indicating especially the deep and abiding faith of the common people.

Catherine De Hueck is a famous name in the records of the American apostolate. Born in Russia in 1900, Mrs. Doherty came to Canada, then to the United States, where she found her true vocation in Catholic social action, establishing Friendship House for the care of the poor. Now living at Combermere, Canada, she is still actively engaged in supervising the Friendship Houses while she writes books and articles.

In 1943 she married Eddie Doherty, who has written an absorbing biography of her, *Tumbleweed* (1948). Mrs. Doherty's own books include *Friendship House* (1946), *Dear Bishop* (1947), *Dear Seminarian* (1950), and *Dear Sister* (1953).

(published with ecclesiastical approval)

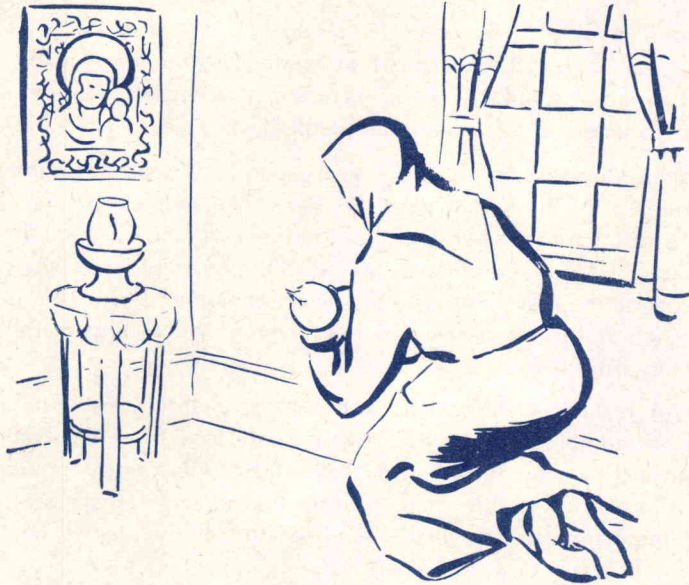
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OUR LADY OF RUSSIA

by Catherine De Hueck Doherty



The devotion to the Bogoroditza, which, in Russian, means "She who gave birth to God," came to its vastness, it is said, in the heart of a beautiful Russian princess, St. Olga, who, in the ninth century, journeyed far across the sea to the golden city of Constantinople-by-the-Bosphorus to be baptized.

Be that as it may. One thing is certain. When the Borgoroditza came, with her Son, His Father, and her Spouse, she came to stay, and to rule the Russian hearts unto the end of time. Many are the countries that have been officially dedicated to her; but only in Russia have all the people made her their very own mother, dedicating themselves to her.

The Russian's love for her grew with the growth of the nations. Its history can be read in the litany of titles given her. For wherever the Russians went she seemed to go ahead of them, appearing miraculously, now in this plain, now in that city or stronghold, showering them with blessings. . . . And each time some solitary artist in some hidden monastery would record these happenings with an ikon of her.

Thus . . . the Holy Virgin of Kazan . . . the Blessed Mother of Czestochowa . . . the Bogoroditza of Kiév . . . Tver . . . Novgorod. Behind each ikon is a story that would rival the miracles of Our Lady of Fatima, or of Lourdes.

OUR LADY'S SHRINES

Like a gossamer fabric, shining, light, but infinitely strong, **She who gave birth to God** covered every nook, every corner, of the Russian land. She covered the people and their lives. Some day historians and artists will discover this, and reveal to the world the rosary of Russian shrines dedicated just to her, because in that immense land there is no city so big, no hamlet so small, as not to have some landmark, some shrine, or some ikon erected to her, the beloved of the people.

It was the Bogoroditza who got every part of Russia acquainted with all the other parts in the old days. Russians, like the rest of her children the world over, turn to her for most of the favors they want from her Son. In return for the immense values they receive from her, and in recognition of their sinfulness and unworthiness, and with warm, deep gratitude, or in further petition to her, they go on a pilgrimage to one of her many shrines.

They go fasting, barefooted, simply clad, chanting her litanies and praising her name. They are well aware of the power of the fasting and the penance they offer through her to the Most Holy Trinity, power given by God Himself, to enable men to untie the hands of His mercy and to appease the hands of His justice. One of the many litanies chanted to her is as follows:

Hail Mary, mother of God, virgin and mother, morning star, perfect vessel.

Hail Mary, mother of God, holy temple in which God Himself was conceived.

Hail Mary, mother of God, chaste and pure dove.

Hail Mary, mother of God, ever effulgent light; from whom proceedeth the Sun of Justice.

Hail Mary, mother of God, who didst enclose in thy sacred womb the One who cannot be encompassed.

Hail Mary, mother of God. With the shepherds we sing the praises of God; and with the angels, the song of thanksgiving: Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will.

Hail Mary, mother of God, through thee came to us the Conqueror, the triumphant Vanquisher of hell.

Hail Mary, mother of God, through thee blossoms the splendor of the Resurrection.

Hail Mary, mother of God; thou hast saved every faithful Christian.

Hail Mary, mother of God; who can praise thee worthily, O blessed, O glorious Virgin Mary?

To each of these invocations the answer is: "We salute thee, mother of God!"

Through these endless, constant pilgrimages, men, women, and children of all social strata and conditions came together, praising her name, learning to love her and her Son, learning to love one another.

Long ago and far away in the dimness of centuries gone by, she was given the title, **Mother of the Body of Christ**. This was but another way of expressing the sublime doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which the West lost soon after the Reformation. But Russia, which the Reformation passed by, never lost it. How could she? Her heavenly Mother would not let simple, devout children stray away from the very essence of their faith.

You see the many facets of this faith reflected in Russian literature -- through Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and, if the truth be told, even through the present-day writers.

The hunger for justice is the most characteristic trait of the Russian. In his eternal quest for the integration of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, he may wander even into the heresy of Communism. But, mark well, he will not stay there long, as God reckons time. How could he -- who even now loves his Mother so well?

THE RUSSIAN IKON

In every Russian home there are many ikons. But the Virgin's ikon always hangs in the eastern corner of the bedroom. And a gently flickering light burns before it, night and day, through the years. It is here that the life of the family begins and ends.

It is to the Bogoroditza that the bridegroom brings his bride. Together they kneel before her gentle face. They ask her benediction on their marital love. Thy beg her to make it fruitful in the Lord, her Son.

It is to her they pray again, when their love is consummated in the flesh. With the candid manner of childlike trust, they thank her for the infinite blessings of giving -- maybe -- life to a new soul, which then and there they dedicate to her and her divine Son.

It is before this ikon that the mother prays during childbirth. It is here that, soon after birth, the child will be brought for a blessing. It is here the child will kneel and pray, when he is old enough, all his little prayers.

Family councils will be held before this ikon. And even death will pay it honor, for it will hear the last whisper of father, mother, or child. The Bogoroditza is the center of the life of this household . . . of every household of the land. That's why her ikon hangs in so intimate a place.

THE ROSARY OF MARY

The Rosary is known in Russia. But it is considered an extremely holy and high form of prayer to her. Only nuns and monks and a few saintly lay people are allowed to say it, the latter only with the permission of their spiritual directors.

An old and revered custom was to remember Mary in one's will. Czars and commoners, princes and paupers, have willed their best to her in money or precious stones, in silver or gold. That is why most of the well-known ikons in Russian churches were so richly decorated. Each stone, each silver bit, represented either thanks for favors received, or petition for favors.

Those who could not give gold or silver or jewels brought her the works of their hands. Her shrines, in small chapels, on special altars in the bigger churches or in monasteries or convents, were usually decorated with exquisitely embroidered silks and linens that had taken years to make. Fruits and plants were also sometimes seen at her shrine, gifts from grateful farmers.

The old Russian greeting starts with: "May the peace of God be with you," but the farewell is Mary's: "May the blue mantle of our Lady cover you with its gracious folds, and keep you safe."

She permeates the Liturgy. She fills its many ectenes. She walks through the Mass. She is invoked at the **Panihida**, the prayer for the dead. She is always present in the **Moleben**, the prayer of petition.

Numberless are the songs about her, liturgical and national. It is her ikon that blesses the child. Parental blessings for all occasions are a must in Russian life. Father or mother blesses the child with the ikon, for school, for sickness, for marriage, in the beginning of a search for a job, in any endeavor, in any crisis.

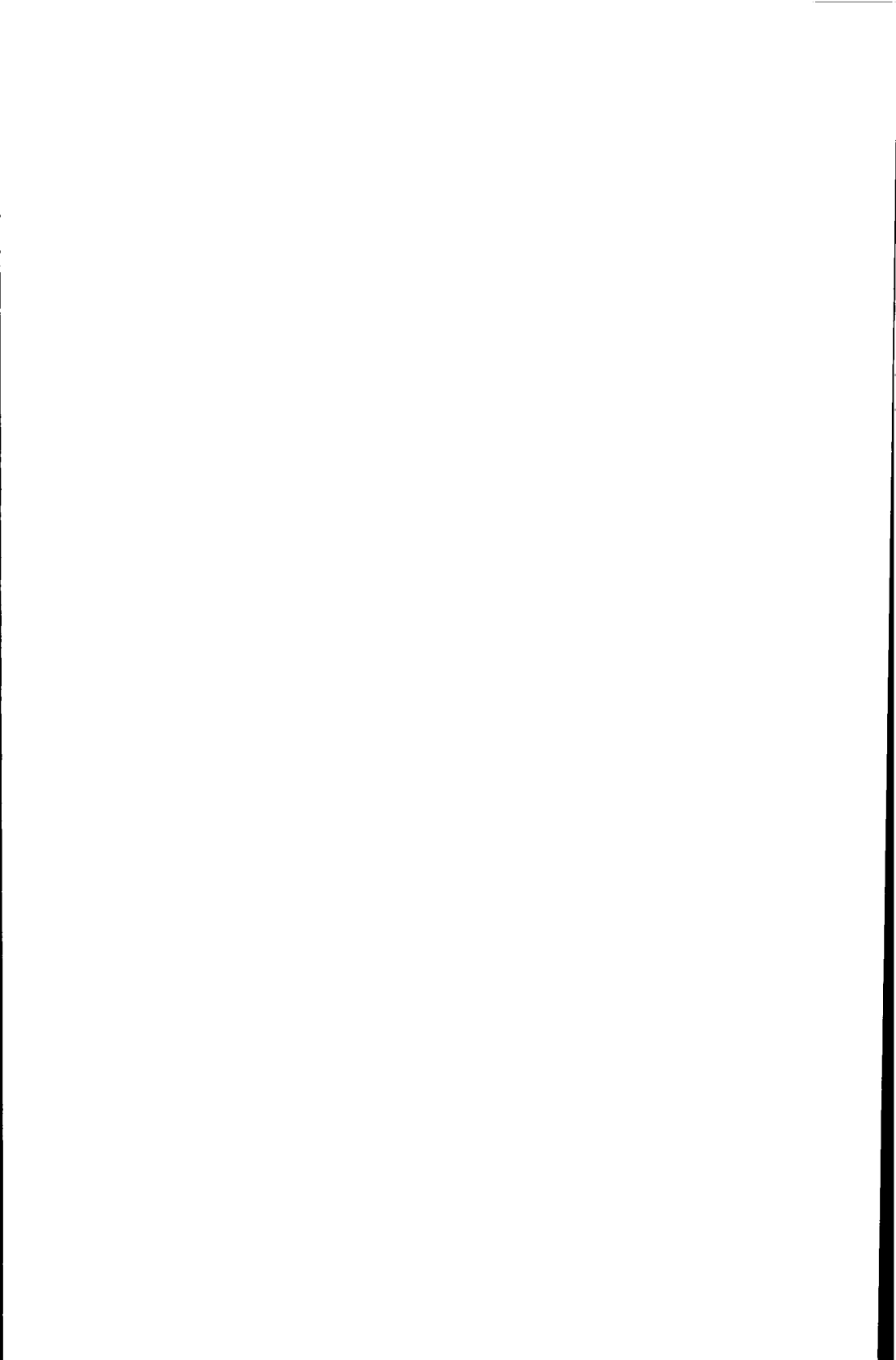
THE RUSSIAN "AVE"

The **Ave** is the prayer the Russians love best. It contains only the angel's greeting. The second part, the "Holy Mary, mother of God . . ." is omitted . . . **Bogoroditza, deva Raduisa. Blagodatnaia Maria, gospod s tobouyou. Blagoslovena ti vi jengah blagosloven plod chreva tvoego . . . Amin.**

Yes, She who gave birth to God . . . loves Russia . . . and is beloved by Russia. It is to her that all must pray. May she cover the Russians with the blue mantle of her love and bring them safely, in its gracious folds, back to the house of their fathers. . . .

I, a Russian, pray to her daily for that end. I pray to her under her best known title, Spouse of the Holy Ghost and Mother of the Father's Word. . . .

Will you, friends of America, join me in that Prayer?



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