

BOOK REVIEW

A FEW MONTHS WITH THE BOERS – THE WAR REMINISCENCES OF A RUSSIAN NURSING SISTER

**by Sophia Izedinova, translated and edited by
C. Moody**

(Published by Perskor Publishers, 1979) Price: R9,90.

The discovery and translation of Sister Izedinova's book by Christopher Moody, Professor of Russian at the University of the Witwatersrand, is a valuable addition to our literature on the Anglo-Boer War, not only because it is virtually the only published work concerning the war written from the point of view of a Russian participant, but also because it is possibly the best account written by any of the foreign medical personnel who served with the Boers. It was published in Russia in 1903.

Interest in the plight of the Boers during the Second Anglo-Boer War (Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899 – 1902) ran high in most European countries and in America. (This is evident from the memorabilia displayed at the Kruger Museum in Pretoria). The Boer War was the principal news story in the Russian press. "At no time before or since have the Russian public been so well-informed on South Africa. Sympathy was whole-

heartedly on the side of the Boers."

Russia not only sent aid to the Boers in the form of military assistance – all volunteers, but also rendered valuable medical aid in the form of two ambulances with their full complement of personnel. The first ambulance was supplied and financed by the Russian Red Cross, the second, financed by public subscription in Russia, was staffed by Russian and Dutch personnel.

Sister Izedinova's aim with this book was to record her own impressions of South Africa; to convey her attitude towards the work of the Russo/Dutch ambulance and its personnel; to inform Russian readers of the causes and background of the war; and to portray some of the prominent figures on the Boer side.

Her descriptions of war conditions, prominent figures amongst the Boers, the way of life in Pretoria eighty years ago, the difficulties of rendering medical and nursing assistance under primitive conditions, the battles with typhus, typhoid and other serious diseases, the squabbles and petty differences amongst the personnel, the attitudes of the belligerents on both sides, and the bravery of the Boer women, all combine to make this book vividly alive and fascinating not only to any student of our history but particularly for South African nurses.