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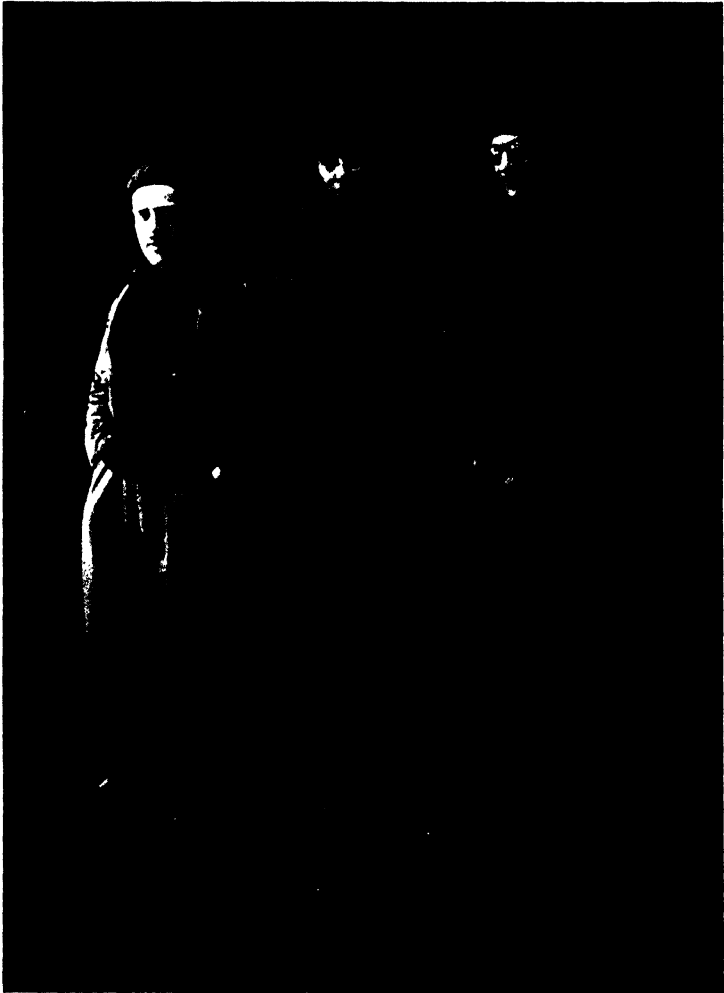
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LIFE IN RUSSIA





OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVES OF BRITISH CULTURE,  
ARCHANGEL, 1942

George Reavey: Barry Cornwell: John Lawrence

# LIFE IN RUSSIA

by

JOHN LAWRENCE

---

Tell the truth about the Soviet Union.  
Russia is not perfect. Nothing in this  
world is perfect. There are many  
things I would like to see different.  
But if you tell the complete story I  
shall be satisfied.

*Stalin*

LONDON

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## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THE critics and, still more, the public have given a friendly reception to this modest book, and a second impression is called for. It is now two years since "Life in Russia" was written. Wartime memories are receding and living is becoming a little easier, but the basic conditions of every-day life in Russia have not changed.

The drought of 1946, which brought parts of Russia to the verge of famine, has been followed by a bumper harvest in 1947. So rationing of food and clothing was abolished in December, 1947, and this measure has been accompanied by an important currency reform. Under the new system the difference between controlled prices and "commercial" prices has disappeared, so that, for the first time, it is possible to convert rouble prices into £ s. d. without misleading the reader. I have worked out in a new appendix, which will be found on page 242, the effect of these far-reaching changes on a typical family budget. The abolition of bread rationing will help Russian housekeepers, but everyone who cares to study the tables of prices on pp. 242-3 will see that most families will still have to go slow on everything but the basic necessities.

Rationing by price has taken the place of rationing by commodities, if you care to put it that way. The system of payment by results continues, and this means that the well-to-do will go on living better than their humbler neighbours, but I see no evidence for the view taken by some commentators that the gap between rich and poor has increased. The purpose of the Soviet currency reform is to combat post-war inflation, and to achieve this end the Soviet Government has adopted measures which are comparable with those taken by other Governments for the same purpose.

Since this is not a political book I have spared the reader my views on politics, as far as this is possible in a book about Russia. Some reviewers have concluded from this that I have no views about the fundamental issues raised by the Soviet system. I have in fact strong views, which I may perhaps put before the

public on some other occasion, but they are not relevant in the present context.

The international horizon has darkened immeasurably since this book was written, and this has made contacts between Soviet citizens and foreigners even more difficult than they were already. Permission to visit the Soviet Union is not readily granted and resident foreigners are as a rule confined to Moscow and Leningrad. Soviet relations with the West were never a subject for complacency, but during the war there was an undeniable improvement which was marked by a cautious widening of the Soviet intellectual horizon. Now the tide is flowing strongly the other way. The keynote of official propaganda has become an ugly cultural chauvinism, which may be explained by increasing tension with the West but can hardly be excused. "Kowtowing" to western culture is severely frowned on, and distinguished writers of unquestioned patriotism have been reprimanded for work which in another country would have earned the applause of the enlightened public.

The prospect before us may well become bleaker still before this edition reaches the public, and the reader should know that in current controversies I am firmly on the side of Western democracy. I believe, however, that we shall not treat our Soviet neighbours with wisdom unless we understand how the world looks from their point of view.

*January, 1948.*

J.W.L.

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE purpose of this book is not political, except in the sense that human understanding of the Russians may help to resolve some of the problems that vex mankind. I have tried rather to answer those questions about everyday life with which everyone returning from the Soviet Union is bombarded for months on end. I offer no nostrum for curing the diseases of the age, but the reader may justly complain if he does not find in this book some of those commonplace things that give life its taste in any age or country.

The following pages tell little of the course of the war or of the heroic battles of the Red Army and the equally heroic partisans. I leave this noble theme to those who have seen the Soviet forces in action, and above all to those who took part in the fight; it is in their ranks that the future Tolstoy may be found.

My humbler theme is the kitchen front, the queue and the domestic struggle of harassed people whose lives were often knocked sideways by the war. I have hid nothing that I saw from the reader and, if there is squalor as well as a kindly humanity and humour in the life of the Soviet Union at war, I must ask the reader to consider what British life would be like if the war had continued for fifteen years. The ordeals which the Russian people have gone through since 1914 are in fact more like one long war with one or two short armistices.

Nowadays a book may be printed a year after it is written. Warned by the fate of predecessors I have refrained from prophecy. I had indeed hoped that the progress of reconstruction would have made much of this book out of date before it appeared, but a bad harvest and other factors have held recovery back and there is little that I would describe differently if I were writing to-day. One day a reign of plenty will make the conditions described in this book into a historical curiosity, but for the present that hope must be deferred.

On page 172 I make a prophecy by implication in stating that Mr. Paltsev is "a rising man." This at least would seem to be

correct, for on 18th October, 1946, he became a member of the Praesidium of the new and important Council for Collective Farm Affairs. On page 98 I express considerable scepticism about the possibility of a real revival of the Orthodox Church. A year later I feel less certain.

It is a great pleasure to say how much my friends have helped me in writing this book. Without the suggestion of Sylvia Blennerhassett I should never have put pen to paper. Reginald Bishop, Maia Bunn, Roger Burford and George Reavey have read the MS. and saved me from various mistakes and possible misunderstandings, as have other friends too numerous to mention. Kay Oakman advised me on feminine affairs and provided some valuable contributions of her own. Olga Chkiantz has typed the whole MS. and Jacynth Ellerton has helped in every many ways as well as drawing the map on the end plates. But my greatest debt is to Charles and Laetitia Gifford; not only have they supplied Chapter XII and invaluable material for the description of the vicissitudes of nomadic farmers on page 200 ff, and for the note on the value of the rouble, but they have read and criticised the whole work, thereby putting me on the track of many improvements.

London, 18th January, 1947.

J.W.L.

P.S.—Since some of my friends have expressed doubts about the “horse factory” story on page 228, I take this opportunity of saying that the expression used in Russian was *konnaya fabrika*, not *konny zavod*! Likewise in the story on page 61 the word used was *uvazhat*, not *ukhazhyvat*.—J.W.L.

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## CHAPTER I

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

*"Why can't we do it more often?"*

WE left Dundee on the fourth of April, 1942, for Murmansk by the 10,000-ton merchant ship S.S. "Jutland." The M. of I. party consisted of George Reavey, Barry Cornwell and myself. We had been well briefed about the troubles that lay ahead, but we were young and enthusiastic, so that this only put us on our mettle. Profiting from nearly three years' experience of war, our party was equipped with everything that a model press department should have, from a photographic library to paper clips.

With us on the "Jutland" were four R.A.F. officers, an American sea captain from the Maritime Commission with his assistant, and two Russian meteorologists, who were on their way home after a short visit to Britain. The Russians had some confidential papers with them, and one of them always had to be in the cabin guarding them, so that they only came out one at a time. It took some time to break the ice.

We spent about a fortnight waiting about at various rendezvous and it was late in April before we finally left Iceland in a convoy of about thirty merchant ships heavily protected by escorts, both visible and invisible.

Fortunately as it turned out, but to their own great annoyance, the Russians were taken off our ship at Iceland, just when we were beginning to make friends.

Being a bad sailor, I had not looked forward to the voyage, but it turned out to be one of the pleasantest interludes of the war. There was no responsibility, and plenty to do. I worked eight hours a day learning Russian, and we spent the rest of the time eating our meals and playing various deck games which we invented.

The Russians were intrigued by our variety of deck cricket, played with a home-made wooden ball, which they were just

beginning to learn when we parted. And they were astonished at the way all the passengers worked quite hard at chipping the rust off the ship; like all crafts, this is an amusing occupation while one is learning to do it, and it provided a good deal of exercise, since the ship had got so rusty in places that one had to use a heavy sledgehammer. Fired by our example, our Russian friends also tried their hand at chipping, but they could not stand the pace. The Russians are in general physically powerful and energetic, but sedentary workers seldom take exercise as a regular part of their life, so that once they are past early youth most of them get flabbier than their English opposite numbers who are hardened by outdoor pursuits.

From Iceland the convoy went steadily north, in calm weather and sunshine. The air was bracing but not so cold as might be expected. The days grew longer, and as the sun's rays became more and more horizontal, the sea and sky took on a strange whiteness, which it is worth the journey to the Arctic to see once in one's life.

At sea we were fed on the best meat, unlimited butter and whisky out of bond. We thrived on this diet and all became fit, which served us in good stead later on, but the Russians said it tasted flat. One day one of them saw a jar of pickled onions on the table; he gave a cry of joy and filled his glass with the vinegar. He drank it at one draught. I had never been on a merchant ship before and had a picture of merchant seamen as traditionally foul-mouthed and rather aggressive. We did indeed find that at sea every other word was a swear word, but any hopes of acquiring fresh vocabulary were dashed, since not more than three or four expressions were in use, and these were not said in the menacing tone which one expects; indeed, I have seldom seen such good manners as the sailors showed not only to passengers, but to each other. It was almost like Tommy Handley's "After you, Cecil," "After you, Claude."

The Russian icebreaker "Krassin" was in line immediately behind us. She had a flat bottom, which was no doubt functionally necessary but caused her to roll horribly. We celebrated May Day by exchanging messages with her, and in the evening shot down a German aeroplane which incautiously came out of the clouds just over us and was blown to pieces in an amateurish attempt to dive-bomb an escorting cruiser about three hundred

yards from us. We all cheered wildly and became convinced that the dangers of aerial attack were grossly over-rated. But by this time we were well in the danger zone, and the more powerful units of our escort could not be risked further. So they left us just when we began to want them.

We knew that the Germans were keeping track of our position, because an aircraft called "George" by everyone flew continuously round and round out of range of our guns; this was before the days of Cam ships, and there was nothing to be done.

May 2nd was a day of continual alarm, and we were advised to keep our lifebelts on. It was still quite light outside at midnight, but we were all on the point of going to bed, though of course keeping our clothes on, when a very loud bang from immediately overhead showed that the alarm had more in it this time. I dashed into my cabin and started putting on my fur coat and hat, and had just put the nicest pair of gloves I ever had down on the chair when the floor began to go up and down and I found myself thrown backwards and forwards in the cabin. I do not remember hearing any explosion, but there was a second or two to wonder if this moment was one's last and to decide that it was no good worrying.

When the vibration ceased I found myself standing up completely unhurt and with not even my spectacles broken. But the cabin had been reduced to rubble, and my gloves had disappeared. The other passengers were lying in heaps outside, and when I asked them whether they were all right, it was some time before they replied. Coming out of the cabin, I found the stern of the ship had been blown off up to about two yards from where I stood. The ship was settling rapidly by the stern, and it was clear we should have to take to the boats.

The boat drill had been perfunctory, and when I went to the previous rendezvous no one was there. So it took some time to find the right place, and eventually I had to shin down a rope into the lifeboat instead of descending with proper dignity by the rope ladder, which was put in quite a different place. All this time I kept on tripping up as I ran, or rather walked, for, stupidly enough, I had little imagination of the calamities that might occur and was in no particular hurry. It was only after several stumbles that I noticed that the explosion had blown

about a square foot out of my coat and that this was dragging on the ground. (See frontispiece.)

At one moment there was a cry that a man was trapped in the stern of the ship, so three of us went back to look. By this time the ship was heavily down by the stern, and I had to force myself to go every step of the way. We shouted and got one answer, but no more. Not seeing what further to do, and supposing that the shout might have come from someone in the sea, we returned to our boats with rather bad consciences. But just at that moment the American sea captain, whose cabin had been further astern than mine, came out of the debris slightly battered and in his stockinged feet. He had been in bed when the explosion occurred, and had found himself at the end below the water line and with the debris of two decks on top of him, but with the bulkhead between him and the sea. He had fought his way out along the line of a pipe and came out none the worse. He had been too busy to answer our shouts, but his first remark to me was, "Can you lend me a pair of boots?"

We and two other 10,000-ton ships were sunk by a torpedo bomber which was then shot down itself. I saw the plane blazing upon the water, and just beyond it a big ship go up in flames. She had been carrying aviation spirit, and her end seemed like the striking of a gigantic match; only six of the crew survived. I hope never again to see that special tint of orange.

Two of the Jutland's boats had got off expeditiously in spite of some panicking by the Lascars. But in our boat everyone seemed inert; one's mind does funny things in an emergency if one is not fortified by drill, and I must confess that I had quite forgotten that we were carrying three hundred tons of explosives which might have sent us all to kingdom-come at any moment. It did seem clear, however, that the ship was going to sink very soon and that if we did not get away we should be sucked under. But the crew did next to nothing. The oars lie on the thwarts of the lifeboats and are corded up in bundles like asparagus; each boat is provided with a knife for cutting the cord, but our knife had rusted and none of the mariners was taking any action. So George Reavey produced a sharp knife with which he cut the cord, and the Ministry of

Information staff, assisted by one or two sailors, who seemed less dazed than the rest, pulled the oars out from beneath the other members of the crew who had sat upon them and did not think it necessary to get up or to move a couple of wounded men who had been put lying across the oars.

Having got the oars out, the crew put us to row three on one side and one on the other. When this proved unsatisfactory the arrangement was changed to two on one side as against three on the other. Unfortunately I was one of the two, and as my rowing has been learnt on rivers and not at sea, my first efforts propelled us as much backwards as forwards.

However, eventually we drew clear and had a fine sight of our ship plunging to the depths with its bows in the air, just as one has seen on the films. The tanks we were carrying to Russia broke from their moorings at this moment and we could hear them crashing from deck to deck. Some people said they saw a figure waving frantically from the deck and are convinced that one of the American passengers had got left behind. However this may be, the poor fellow was never seen again.

Apart from this, we all survived, though there were twenty-five men on the stern of the ship when half of it was blown off. Some of the gunners were wounded and blown into the water, but were picked up, and when last seen looked as if they would be all right. It is sometimes claimed that one touch of Arctic water is lethal. This may be so in winter, but at this time of year we found that even wounded men could survive several minutes in the water followed by further exposure in an open boat.

The wind was cold and I found my gloveless fingers got very chilled from rowing, but I did not feel in danger of frostbite, and, wrapped up in furs, one was quite comfortable. Being in an open boat about half-way between the North Cape and Spitzbergen, one was anxious to know more of our further intentions and prospects. It was no use saying anything till after the ship had sunk, but when that was over I ventured to ask what seemed to me the normal question: "What is the programme now?" But everyone was still so dazed that I got no enlightenment about which of the ships of the convoy we were trying to reach. However, we did not have to wait long, for within the hour H.M. anti-submarine trawler "Vizelma"

took us on board. One of the gunners who was in another boat kept singing: "Why can't we do it more often—Just what we're doing to-night?"

The "Vizelma" was a modern trawler built just before the war and converted immediately to war work. The crew were all deep-sea fishermen, and the officers were Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates who, eighteen months before, had known nothing of the sea. On this occasion their job was to act as rescue ship and to pick up survivors. The captain, John Angelbeck, had the unmistakable air of a rugger man from Brasenose College. He took Reavey and me into his own cabin, where we were in clover, for the captain of a modern trawler has a room to himself which is well furnished and the size of a fair-sized drawing room.

The officers dressed and looked exactly like undergraduates on a rather tough holiday in the Alps and concealed very successfully any ill-effects of their hard and lonely life. There was a short moment of alarm when we drew alongside a destroyer to put off the wounded men, and a German bomber sighted us. She must have had no bombs left, for nothing happened. But the thought of another shipwreck was unpleasant. On board the "Vizelma" we were given naval rum and lime, as much as we wanted. This was the drink the occasion required, and we all began to enjoy life vastly with our new companions.

We were welcome guests, for with us was Ronnie, the cabin boy, who had cooked for us—not particularly well, but he did his best. Apparently this was the first time that the "Vizelma" had ever had a cook on board. With the perpetual daylight and continual danger of attack, most people scarcely slept for several days, and did not seem to need sleep.

The crew of the trawler were a more hard-bitten lot than the men on the "Jutland," but their swearing vocabulary was equally limited. I made some slightly rueful joke about our being supposed to be diplomats, whereon the helmsman turned and said: "You may have been diplomats once, but you're — survivors now." There is only one word which sailors use in such contexts.

Next day we ran into several fields of pack-ice, and I climbed up to the crow's nest to watch the proceedings. With ice

around, sea and sky become even whiter than is usual in the Arctic. Sitting in the crow's nest in a small ship is the same sort of pleasure as riding on the swings at a fair. After a month at sea, seasickness can leave one entirely, and even the generous hospitality of our hosts on the last night into Murmansk caused no ill-effects, though, the weather being exceedingly rough and the occasion hilarious, I woke up next morning in a pool of whisky and drambuie. There were no further attacks, but it was good to see a Soviet fighter escort as we entered the Murmansk fjord.

The convoy was anchored some distance away from the town, and we were faced with the prospect of several days' delay; the landing formalities, too, were likely to prove troublesome, for Reavey's passport was lost in the shipwreck with all the equipment that we had so carefully brought with us; only one diplomatic bag, though weighted in the regulation manner in order that it should sink, in fact floated and was picked up by Ronnie the cabin boy. We solved the problem of Reavey's passport by getting Lieutenant Angelbeck to write out, with all official formalities, a statement that he had on the second of May, 1942, in the vicinity of Bear Island, picked George Reavey, Esquire, of the British Embassy, Kuibyshev, out of the sea. Should these lines come to the notice of the Soviet officials, who so kindly facilitated our journey, I hope they will accept these belated thanks; but I did not at the time think it necessary to draw their attention to this irregularity in our documentation.

With some difficulty we got on a trawler that was to go up to Murmansk, and insisted on going ashore to telephone to the local branch of the British military mission. The major in charge came straight down to the docks, and we walked out with him without any further formalities, thereby confounding those who had prophesied that we should spend days, if not weeks, waiting to land.

### *Russia from the North*

For the night we were put in the Arctic Hotel, where one's imagination of icy sheets and eiderdowns of snow did not come true, and I got a lukewarm bath in which I washed myself and those clothes that were not required for immediate wear. I had put on two sets of underclothes before being torpedoed, but



was not wearing a collar; it was a full month before I acquired a collar of my own.

When one is torpedoed, a grateful country gives one, upon request, a pair of gym shoes and a suit of warm underclothes. We were also able to raise a sack, in which we put all the possessions that we were not actually wearing at any moment. There were already eleven hundred survivors at Murmansk, so that it was impossible to raise so much as a toothbrush from our own people, and nothing was to be had in shops.

The "Edinburgh" had just been sunk, and the tale of convoy disasters was beginning. Later in the summer almost a whole convoy was destroyed. Some sailors staying at the hotel had suffered crippling disfigurement from frostbite.

Murmansk was a straggling half-built place already seriously damaged by bombs, though far worse damage was to come. There are scarcely any trees, and in May the ground was still snow covered, but the winter is not very cold, for the gulf stream flowing round the North Cape makes Murmansk a warm-water port. Food was very short, because Murmansk, which has to import nearly all its supplies, lies at the end of what was then a very overworked railway, but we heard of nothing approaching starvation. (N.B.—In this book I shall only use the word "starvation" for a degree of hunger that kills or incapacitates for work. Lesser shortages, however severe, I call "hunger.") As foreigners at the hotel we had the same meal every time. It consisted of a sort of Wiener Schnitzel cooked with some herb which gave it a taste I have never met before or since.

Next day, as luck would have it, there was a train for Moscow, so we were put on board it with ample supplies of tinned food, including luxuries still (1947) unobtainable in London, but with no crockery. As each tin was opened a council of war decided whether it should become drinking cup, teapot or shaving mug.

At that time there was no luxury travel on this line, and all carriages had wooden seats, not unlike continental third-class carriages, with no partitions between the compartments. There were various racks to sleep on, and we were given mattresses, but the other travellers did without. The train was crowded but not unduly so, with some local passengers and some going through to Archangel.

This railway journey was the best possible introduction to the

Soviet Union. The crowd on a Russian railway train makes you feel at home at once. Everyone came and talked to us, and gave their views about the second front, about the Allies, and about everything else. I could understand a good deal of Russian by that time, but could not speak much, and I remember getting into deep water when a shrewd bearded person, who had received some kind of secondary education at Archangel before the revolution, asked me to explain how there could be rationing in Britain since, on my own admission, shops were privately-owned. But I learnt most from a little boy called Vitalik, who liked the paper toys I made him and who carefully corrected all my mistakes in Russian.

As the railway runs south, one soon gets beyond the tree line; first, stunted birches appear and then, as the birches get taller, they begin to be interspersed with pines. At Soroka one turns east along a new railway which was not at that time shown on maps. At intervals along the line we saw new villages; I understand that these were built mainly by forced labour which is housed in special camps with a palisade round each and watch-towers with sentries. The land was virgin forest a few years ago, and it takes heavy work to make it productive. One of the traditional methods of agriculture, which was used in this area till at least the end of the 19th century, is to clear and burn a patch of forest in the spring so that the ash manures the ground, and then to plant in the autumn. For a few years this gives good crops, and when the soil is exhausted the peasants move on to another patch.

The railway strikes the main Moscow-Archangel line at Kholmogorsk, known as Colmogro to our Elizabethan ancestors, for whom it was an important base for the trade with Russia. Thence the line goes north to Archangel, along the northern Dvina. Unfortunately one arrives on the wrong side of the river, which was then in spate; the ice had just broken up, and the Dvina was impassable to the ordinary ferries on account of the young icebergs which Russian rivers carry down at this season. The prospect of spending several days with nowhere to stay was depressing, but a captain in the Red Navy, who was also travelling the same way, noticed our plight, and commandeered a river steamer.

In Archangel not only are the houses made of wood, but the

pavements and even the streets are of timber. There was no visible A.R.P., but some British friends assured us that, if there was an incendiary raid, fire-fighting services would appear as if by magic. When we saw it, the place was looking run down, but the style of timber architecture is pleasant and with a little paint could be made to look cheerful. On the outskirts there are some fine old timber houses in a classical style, which no doubt belonged to the tradesmen of Archangel and their hangers-on. They are now used as ordinary tenement houses. Archangel is much hotter in summer and colder in winter than Murmansk, and after the Arctic it was nice to have two or three hours' darkness every night for a change.

At this latitude pine and birch grow to their full size, and there is a fine waterfront on the Dvina, which is far broader than the Thames at Westminster.

An International Club for the foreign seamen had just been started. It gave cinema shows with an English commentary, and there was a reading room and dances in the evening. Our men danced with the Russian girls, but at that time very few Russian men seemed to come to the club.

We spent a week at Archangel, resting and waiting for passes to go to Moscow. We stayed at the Intourist Hotel, where the food was very adequate and was at that moment on the upgrade, as the restaurant manager of one of the leading hotels had just been sent up to reorganise the catering.

The winter had been a very hard one, and Archangel, like Murmansk, was at the end of long communications and so had to go short. There was, as usual, a market where the peasants brought in food which they sold for high prices, but the food situation was difficult, and the people looked devitalised and miserable. One saw them working slowly and listlessly in the timber yards.

Having a little time to spare, our first thought was to see what we could buy. The shops were almost empty, but we all invested in quite nice red ties with white spots. There was only one pattern. Unfortunately I had no collar and so could not wear my tie. I then tried to get something to practise my Russian on. After a bit of ferreting, all I could find was a little book with three short stories by Tolstoy, and an old copy of a periodical called "The Literature of Uzbekistan." So I tackled

the latter, and the first Russian work which I ever read all through without the help of a crib or dictionary, for no dictionary was to be had, was a treatise on the phonetics of the new Uzbek alphabet. The translations of Uzbek ballads into Russian were out of the ordinary run and kindled an interest in Soviet Asia which has remained.

Our chief success in shopping was to secure the photograph which forms the frontispiece of this book. It took about a week for us to get our passes to proceed to Moscow, which was not unreasonable, as Reavey had no proper papers. The journey to Moscow took two days, on an "International" train; the carriages for first-class passengers were *wagons lits* of the familiar continental type built for the Czarist government before the last war, and decorated in the *art nouveau* style of the period. They are quite comfortable and show no signs of wearing out. There was no restaurant car, and we lived on tinned food. Luxury travel in the Soviet Union is comparatively uninteresting, because the travellers are not so much thrown together. The companion I shared my cabin with was a Red Army airman, who produced a special kind of vodka, consisting of ninety per cent. alcohol. It was quite drinkable, but one liqueur glass goes a long way. He soon settled down to sleep after drinking at least half a pint of this stuff, but woke up fresh as a daisy next morning.

As far as Vologda the railway passes through an endless forest of birch and Christmas trees, with no natural features to break the monotony, until just outside Vologda there is an old brick monastery with bulging domes just like the illustrations to Russian fairy tales. At this time Vologda was a clearing centre for Leningrad evacuees. Besides these, we saw at the railway station a group of about twenty poorly-dressed people sitting on the ground under armed guard and apparently waiting for transport. After this the country becomes more open, the forest is variegated with stretches of arable land, villages become more frequent, and there begin to be different kinds of trees.

We arrived at Moscow about seven o'clock in the morning, about twelve hours before we were expected, and there was no one to meet us. We had no possessions but considerable luggage, as the military mission in Archangel had entrusted us with various packages for Moscow. No one took much interest in our fate, and we felt very lonely. There were no porters, so

we carried the luggage ourselves to the outside of the station, with no definite plan, but hoping vaguely that something would turn up. We knew the address of the Military Mission, which was where we were trying to get, and Reavey assured us that Pushkin's heroine Tatiana had lived in the same street; but we had no idea where it was. At this moment one of those rare miracles occurred, and a man came up with a handcart on which he offered to take our luggage for a substantial fee. Fortunately it was only about twenty minutes' walk from the station, and we arrived at breakfast-time to be greeted by the two officers on duty, who were Edward Crankshaw, the author, who afterwards wrote "Russia and Britain"—one of the best short books about Russia—and Arthur Birse, who won a well-earned C.B.E. for translating at the Moscow and Teheran conferences.

They were astonished to see us arrive so early under our own steam, particularly as the Russians were only just beginning to get accustomed to the presence of allied foreigners, and several of our people had recently been detained for enquiry at the station.

We were put to stay at the National Hotel, and spent the next month trying to get respectable clothes in which to present ourselves at Kuibyshev, where the Embassy and Diplomatic Corps then were.

It was already the second half of May, and the trees soon began to come out, but it was still cold and wet, so that I often had to wear my fur coat for the first few days. The torpedo hole provided a very good conversational opening.

The first hot day I woke up to see out of my window a barrage balloon being led across the square just as if it was a tame elephant by a squad of stalwart Russian A.T.S. wearing khaki breeches and boots, but no stockings.

After the North, Moscow seemed a gay and vigorous metropolis; the people were better fed and more energetic, and there seemed to be lots of pretty girls wearing gay cotton dresses. But the improvement was only relative, for the first war winter had been very difficult. Food was short, though not down to a starvation level, and there had been very little heating in the houses. A large part of the administration had been evacuated,

though Stalin had always remained in the Kremlin, and at one time there had been much confusion and some looting.

There was scarcely anything to buy in the shops, for the production of goods for civilian consumption had practically ceased on the outbreak of war. Moscow shop windows are often whitewashed, and the goods on show in the windows are generally dummies; this is said to be an old custom but it makes the streets look lifeless.

I remember one day seeing in a shop some old-fashioned-looking white peaked caps, just like the ones you see in pictures of Russia in the last century. There is often an indefinable Edwardian air about the clothes of some of the older people, and indeed some of them are, in fact, best suits of an older era, carefully darned, patched and cherished for great occasions. In a shop, called the *Dynamo*, which specialised in the sale of sports goods, we got some running shorts and vests which did instead of summer underclothes. But nothing else could be got without special permission. We put in applications to the Department whose job it was to satisfy the needs of foreigners, and after a good deal of arguing and some delay they promised to let us have suits specially made and other necessary clothes at the leading department store, the "Mostorg."

Having secured the initial permission, we had to call at the Mostorg day after day before anything was actually done. The lady who received us at the desk hated us the first time we came, but gradually relented as she became more accustomed every morning, and in the end used to greet us with a beaming smile. We each got a shirt with two collars and several pairs of cotton socks and a pair of shoes, as well as our suits. They were all quite presentable and not particularly expensive, but none of them had much wear in them. The suits were made in a special tailoring department which we visited several times. They were quite well cut, but there were only two possible patterns of material, so that two of us had to have exactly the same suit. The trousers were lined with bright green brocade which was supposed to keep the crease. My suit lasted for three years and still has some wear left, but it lost its shape and had to be pressed after the slightest shower of rain. It was a special concession to make these suits for us, and Soviet citizens were at this time expected to go on wearing whatever clothes

they had had before the war. The same applied to crockery and other goods. It was not unusual to hear people say: "I am afraid my teapot is broken and I must give you tea out of a saucepan."

All production had been turned over to war needs.

In spite of this, people's appearance had improved noticeably since 1935, when I had been in Moscow before. At that time the dinginess and dreariness were indescribable, though there was already a feeling of hope in the air. It was then quite usual to see people wearing winter coats made of ordinary cowhide, with the hair showing the pattern of the cow's colour. I did not see anything so odd as this during the war.

At first sight the centre of Moscow seemed to have been transformed from a city of narrow lanes and old-fashioned buildings into a city of concrete buildings with very broad streets, and vast expanses of asphalt suitable for May-day parades, but rather lacking in cosiness. All the trees along the famous garden ring had been cut down, but the Moscow Soviet seemed to have repented of this and was now encouraging trees. On further acquaintance I discovered that much old architecture remained, and I became attached to the traditional Moscow stucco; there are some noble buildings of the late 18th and early 19th centuries in a simple classical style, which resembles the English styles of the same period. The big palaces, which have been taken over for public offices, are often well kept up, but many lesser buildings have degenerated into tenements, which are sometimes in shocking repair. There is a humble, old-fashioned type of Moscow house covered with stucco, which has no architectural pretensions and is nearly always dilapidated. The art critics have not yet diagnosed these houses or put them into pigeon holes. They pass unnoticed, but their simple proportions can look beautiful when they catch the sun in the last hour of daylight.

I tried to get some books to improve my Russian, but found it very difficult to obtain new books, and there were no suitable grammars or dictionaries. At that time I did not know the second-hand bookshops where one could get standard Russian authors fairly easily for about a hundred roubles a volume (say £1 purchasing value).

Some of the theatres had been evacuated, but others remained

and there were some good things on. I liked best a new comedy called "Davnym Davno" about a girl partisan in the 1812 war, which was written in polished verse and was rather on the lines of Sheridan and Goldsmith. It would certainly be successful in London if well translated.

One day we went to the circus. The first part of the performance was much like other circuses and seemed to me rather good, but I was assured that one can see better at the Coliseum. The second half was a reconstruction of a scene of partisan warfare constructed round some trick motor-cycle riders. It was rather dull. When we arrived I got into the wrong row by accident, so I stepped over the back of the seats into the next row, but a little boy who saw me do it ticked me off, shouting: "Citizen, that's not cultured!" I explained to him that I was English and that in our country one was allowed to do this.

It was impossible to begin work in earnest until we got to Kuibyshev, where I was to be formally presented to Mr. Lozovsky, who was in charge of the Sovinformburo as well as supervising the conduct of Far-Eastern affairs in the Soviet Foreign Office. But we took the chance of looking round in Moscow and making what preliminary contacts were possible. All my letters of introduction had floated and were saved; they were legible but the signatures had run and the story of our torpedoing helped to break the ice.

The Germans had at one time been as near to the centre of Moscow as Wimbledon is to the centre of London; the city was no longer a front-line town, but the enemy was still uncomfortably near, and all supplies for the front had to come through Moscow. It was impossible to give food supplies high priority, and the people of Moscow had to go short.

There was a great contrast throughout the war between conditions in town and in country. During the war the Russian peasants nearly always had enough to eat from their own produce, except sugar and salt. But they were pretty short of everything else, and in particular could not get enough paraffin to keep their lights going. Many of them had to sit all through the long winter evenings in darkness; quite near Moscow, when supplies of such things were better than in remote districts, I



remember how electricity failed one evening and left us with nothing but a small oil lamp rather like a nightlight as the only illumination in the house.

### *Kuibyshev*

As soon as we were respectably clothed, we got on to an aeroplane and flew to Kuibyshev, which lies on the easternmost bend of the Volga with a view westward towards the Zhiguli Hills in the distance. The town has a magnificent position upon a two-hundred-foot high bank sloping down to the Volga, which is over a mile broad, but unfortunately it is one of the worst-run cities in the Soviet Union and is always getting into trouble, in the papers, for the remissness of its town council. It is a pity that so many foreigners should have derived their impressions of the Soviet Union from such a place.

The paving and lighting of the streets was abominable, and on the outskirts people lived in shacks, which looked as if nothing had been done to them since the Middle Ages. But there were compensations. Those members of the diplomatic corps who were not overburdened with official duties sometimes preferred Kuibyshev to Moscow; provided one could take half a day off, there was lots of fun to be had skiing and skating in winter and on the river in summer. Unfortunately our party were too busy to get benefit from this until the next year.

One crossed the Volga in the summer by a ferry steamer; it was often a scrimmage to get on to this steamer, which went at very irregular intervals. The incapacity of Russians to form an orderly queue results in a free for all, which often shocks foreigners. A hundred years ago the great Russian thinker, Alexander Herzen, who knew and loved England, where he lived in exile for many years, was equally astonished at British lack of ability to form queues; he attributed it to our incurable individualism.

On the other side of the Volga there was a fine bathing beach, and just before we arrived an edict had been given out that everyone was to have bathing dresses. There are no nudist Russians in the sense of people who disapprove of bathing dresses, but the absence thereof is taken calmly. However, it was felt that the standard of appearance must be kept up in the war-time capital. All the same the new edict produced

some odd results; I remember one man coming out in a boat with us wearing his wife's knickers.

In Russia bathing is associated with washing, much more than it is in the West, and it is not unusual to see a respectable citizen, or still more often a citizeness, go into the water and take off all or nearly all her clothes, give them a good wash, and then come out to get body and clothes dry. Nobody thinks this odd or pays any special attention.

Almost immediately after arriving at Kuibyshev I was taken to see M. Lozovsky, who turned out to be a distinguished-looking elderly gentleman with a well-trimmed beard, who might have been one of Rembrandt's Rabbis if it were not for his unmistakably French look. Born in 1878, he joined the revolutionary movement in 1901 and was arrested after the 1905 Revolution. In 1909 he escaped to Paris and acquired a love of France, becoming Secretary of the Hatters' Trade Union and the Bakers' Co-operative. He returned to Russia in June, 1917, and was for long Secretary of the "Profintern," the Red International of Trade Unions. After one interview with him it became clear that we were going to be busy, and from then on I worked twelve hours a day till it became dangerous to go any nearer breaking point. While we were at sea it had been agreed with the Soviet Government that we were to publish a newspaper in Russian, which was to be called "The British Ally." I had never had anything to do with a newspaper before, and wartime conditions in Russia made the task harder. But on the other hand no paper had ever been published before in Russian, and the appetite for news was enormous. This book is not intended to describe the activities of H.M. Embassy during the time I was Press Attaché, but I may say that the work went better than I expected it to when I took the job on, though not nearly so well as might have been desirable, and indeed natural, if the background of Anglo-Soviet relations had been better. As it was, we went out with realistic notions and did not find things quite as bad as we expected.

The Soviet authorities gave us at once very good paper for our newsprint, and they gave us a printer, too; they found in Victor Fin an excellent Soviet editor to work alongside his British colleagues. It was largely thanks to him that we always had harmonious co-operation between Soviet and British staff.

*The only trouble was that we had no editorial office, and for a time it looked as if the publication of "The British Ally" might be held up by this indefinitely. Then one day I went round to the "Grand Hotel" and, putting on my most persuasive manner, told the manager that I was fed up with living at the British Embassy; could he possibly find me a room in the hotel. This request was so unusual that the manager did what I wanted. For several nights I slept in the hotel at room No. 9 and used it as an editorial office in the day time. Very soon the hotel got used to us and began to take a great pride in being the birthplace of such a distinguished journal. One night a rat ran across my bare chest; it was hot and I was wearing no pyjamas. Next morning I tried to explain what had happened in my still very imperfect Russian; I got it a bit wrong, and the puzzled hotel people said with perfect politeness: "Which gentleman did you say was crawling about on your bed?" Soon after that I went back to sleeping at the Embassy, but on the basis of the good relations already established with the hotel we succeeded in getting other rooms out of them for our office as the paper developed.*

As so often in the Soviet Union, the best house in Kuibyshev had been given to the local children as the Palace of Pioneers. During the evacuation this house was assigned to us as an Embassy, and we all enjoyed seeing the paintings of Russian fairy tales from Pushkin round the walls of our mess room. The house had been built by some rich man about forty years ago and was admirably provided with a large hall and staircase and excellent reception rooms looking out across the Volga. There was also a large basement where the staff lived and cooking went on, but we were never able to understand how there could have been enough bedrooms for any but the smallest family. Lack of bedrooms was a common feature in the town houses of rich Russians, but it made the building very unsuitable for a crowded Embassy, and we had to sleep in dormitories, which was rather trying after the first six months.

At this time Kuibyshev was overcrowded with evacuees from Moscow. I never heard of any serious rows, but the Muscovites gave themselves airs and treated the locals as raw provincials, even inventing a special word for them—the "aidatiki." Some Tartar words have crept into the local dialect, and a Middle

Volga peasant says "Aidate" for "Let us go." This is basically the same word as the Turkish "Haidi," which anyone who has been in Turkey or Greece will recognise as the Turkish word for "Go away," but it sounds funny to a Moscow ear.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century the Middle Volga was a Tartar district, but since then the Tartars and other tribes have been swamped in a sea of Russians, except for the region of Kazan up the river from Kuibyshev, where there is a Tartar republic.

The word Tartar is often used very loosely to include all the Moslems of the Soviet Union, but it is better to confine the word to those tribes who speak Turkish dialects, such as the Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis, Crimean Tartars and Kazan Tartars. These peoples differ greatly in stage of civilisation and racial type, but they are drawn together by religion and by a close kinship of language.

At Kuibyshev one saw a fair number of the Kazan Tartars, who look like ordinary Russians and lack the Mongolian features of the Central Asiatic tribes. Their faces are flatter and their cheekbones higher than those of Western Russians, but the same can be said of most Volga peasants. One of the outdoor men at the Embassy was a Tartar called "Umer" or "Omar"; he was six foot four and the strongest man I have ever known, but very gentle and rather timid in his ways. He was a skilled carpenter and, if he had to take notes, preferred to jot them down in his own language and in the old Arabic alphabet rather than in the newer Russianised letters now in use.

Kuibyshev is quite near the edge of the Central Asian desert, the country that used to be called the Kirghiz Steppe from the fact that the Kirghiz, who now live much further east, formerly inhabited this part. It is now called Kazakhstan, but the people are still sometimes erroneously called Kirghiz. They often used to come into Kuibyshev with their camels. They are a Mongolian, yellow-skinned type, with faces that look much flatter than the Chinese. I used to think they looked very wild and rather unhappy in the towns. In the winter they harness their camels to sledges, and it is quite usual to see a couple of camels with fur rugs on their backs drawing sledges down the main street of Kuibyshev. In the summer we even had sandstorms from the Kirghiz Steppe, which were very unpleasant.

The Volga is over a mile broad at Kuibyshev, and in a normal year river steamers take one to the villages both up and down stream. There are some pleasant spots, and the woods are much more attractive to an English eye than those near Moscow. Broad-leaved trees predominate, and in addition to the everlasting birch there are oaks and limes in profusion. When the snow melts, the river rises and floods the meadows across the river, cutting off communication with the large village of Rozhdestvenskoye. As the floods subside, the road, which is partly dirt track and partly cobbles, becomes passable again and joins on to the terminus of the ferry. Unfortunately, at this point there is a slope of about thirty feet of sand down to the water's edge. Nothing has ever been done to make the road up at this point, and incredible numbers of man-hours are wasted every day in the summer trying to push lorries and carts up the sandy slope. If these lines should come to the notice of the Kuibyshev City Soviet, I suggest that they gain a good mark for once in a way by making up this short but important piece of road.

It is never easy to strike up acquaintanceships with Soviet citizens, and it was particularly difficult in this Kuibyshev period. If the reader has patience to follow this book to the end he will see indications that the difficulty is not so great as is popularly supposed, but that is no reason for ignoring the very real barriers. Political suspicion is without doubt the main cause, and there has been a great deterioration in personal relations with foreigners since the treason trials of 1937-38 and the terror which accompanied them. But other factors, too, are at work; here are some of them.

One: The shortage of everything made it even harder for most Russians to entertain us than it was for us to entertain them. Anyone who has lived in Britain during the war will understand this difficulty.

Two: The overcrowding of Kuibyshev with evacuees and other housing difficulties forced many Russians to live in conditions of squalor which they would not have liked guests to see.

Three: The differences of manners and mutual shyness between Russians and foreigners made it difficult to break the ice. Russian manners are often different from ours, and the

lack of mutual knowledge often leads to both sides taking offence where none is intended.

Four: Official discouragement from the Soviet side. At this period relations between the Soviet Union and the outside world were only just beginning to recover from the shocks administered by the 1937 and 1938 treason trials and the agreement with Germany in 1939. No one quite knew where he stood about entering into relations with foreigners, and there were well-authenticated cases of Soviet citizens being forbidden to meet foreigners or a particular foreigner without, so far as one can see, any good reason. I am not including in this category cases of Russians, who were employed on secret work and were expressly forbidden to meet all foreigners. It is certainly an exaggeration to say that all acquaintanceship with foreigners was forbidden at this period, and there was a great difference between how different people got on. For instance, the N.C.O.s in the Embassy never seemed to lack female society, whereas the diplomatic staff were much less successful. It may have been our own fault, but I think the main reason was that Russians accepted the N.C.O.s as normal, unpretentious people, whereas they expected us poor diplomats to give ourselves airs and always to expect the best. A family who would cheerfully invite a N.C.O. to a glass of tea in their one dingy room would have been ashamed to let a foreign diplomat see how they were living.

All the same by degrees one began to make acquaintances. I remember one day being asked to lunch at one-thirty by an author, and only parting from him at half-past five in the morning. The first twelve hours of the conversation, which never flagged, were extremely entertaining.

If you want to make friends with Russians, the first essential is to learn their language, and many of the people who complained about the difficulty of making friends had never bothered to learn Russian.

As I have said, there are important differences of manners; for one thing, Russians do not regard appointments the way we do, so that it is no good getting incensed if they don't arrive when you expect them. There is a certain type of foreigner who, if he makes friends with a Russian—it's generally a girl—assumes almost automatically that, if she does not turn up for

two or three days at the rendezvous, she has been spirited away by the O.G.P.U. or the N.K.V.D., as it is now called. But very often she will turn up again later just as if nothing had happened. The hypothesis that perhaps the girl is just fed up with him seldom occurs to anyone.

And it is easy for foreigners to hurt Russian feelings without meaning to, for they are formal when we are informal, and vice versa. Russians will feel insulted if you call on them casually dressed or do not wear your smartest clothes at a reception, and it is bad manners to drink without proposing a toast or to help yourself to bread with your fingers; you should use a fork.

One of the best things about Kuibyshev was the theatres. While it was the wartime capital, the Moscow Opera and Ballet first troupe were evacuated there and carried on in the excellent local theatre. There was also a dramatic theatre which performed Scribe's "Glass of Water," some modern Soviet plays, an excellent production of "Romeo and Juliet," which lasted until half-past one in the morning, and the "old-fashioned" Russian vaudeville, "Lev Gurich Sinichkin." This is a musical comedy of about a hundred years ago, and is a classic of its own kind, much as Gilbert and Sullivan is with us. The Muscovites, with their high standards, turned their noses up at the "aidatik" local theatre; it may not have been up to the standard of the Moscow Arts Theatre, but it was good enough for me. There was also, as in most Soviet towns, an operetta theatre, which one went to less often because it was very cold in winter. The Russians are very fond of operetta and everyone knows the classical French and Austrian operettas, such as the "Gypsy Baron" and "Mademoiselle Nitouche." I have never heard of this last being done in England, but it would certainly be successful here. There is also the beginnings of a Soviet school of operetta. The best of these is the "Tobacco Captain" by Aduév, which was first put on at Kuibyshev in the winter of 1943.

### *In Moscow Again*

In the winter of 1942-43 I got up to Moscow twice for short visits. Things had settled down to rather a grim winter routine: houses of the well-to-do, including the hotels, where foreigners stayed, were chilly, and most other houses were cold. Food was getting shorter than in the summer; the basic ration



TURKOMAN DEPUTIES IN MOSCOW





remained unchanged, but it was harder to get extras; the city as a whole was well above the starvation line, but one heard of tragic isolated cases where people died through the indirect effects of malnutrition. People's nerves were strained, and some odd tales were going round. The story of the spring-heeled Jacks had reappeared. These were mysterious figures with springs on their boots who would leap at one bound right across the street and rob you or perhaps merely terrify you. Sometimes people looking out of an upper-storey window said they saw mysterious faces bob up for one moment. I was told that this story reappeared whenever people's nerves were on edge. But not all robbers were phantoms, and it was not safe to go down dark streets late at night.

In the spring life became better again, and in the course of the summer it was possible to move the "British Ally" office up to Moscow, and in August the whole of the diplomatic corps came up too.

Next winter was much better, and as the war went on conditions of life steadily improved. I have often heard Russians contrast this war with the last, when they started all right but ended with starvation. This time it was the other way on. They struck rock bottom the first winter, and the heroism with which they endured the first year was rewarded by a steady improvement throughout the rest of the war. In the 1914 war Russia was still cultivated under the mediaeval strip system of individual holdings, so that when the men went away the land often remained untilled, causing untold suffering from the first, and in the end widespread starvation. This time under the collective farm system it was possible to pool labour and keep the land under cultivation. Indeed, the problem of feeding the towns was not so much a problem of production but, as with us, of transport and priorities.

In the towns, 1943 was already better than 1942, but the real improvement came next year with the pushing of the front back from Moscow and the opening of the commercial shops.

There was a good deal in common between Moscow and London in wartime; the same problems caused restrictions in both cases, and these created a similar pattern of life, only, of course, in Moscow everything took a more extreme form. It was as if the war had been going on for much longer, and the

houses had been getting shabbier, the roofs leakier, and shoes wearing out all the time.

In London we complained about needing permits to buy anything special. But in Moscow a permit was needed for almost everything, unless one was prepared to pay the open market prices. There was less broken glass in the Moscow windows, but the difficulty of getting it mended was at least as great. The London telephone was disorganised by the blitz, and then by shortage of men and materials. The Moscow telephone ran down, too, and in at least one case funny things happened to the exchanges. In the early autumn of 1941 a man from the telephone office called on a friend of mine and began to remove the telephone. My friend objected, but the telephone man said: "It won't be much use to you now." It turned out that the whole exchange was being removed from Moscow to provide an improved telephone service at Kuibyshev during the evacuation. My friend insisted, however, on keeping his receiver, even if disconnected, in the hope that one day the exchange would return.

Like London, Moscow has in normal times buses, trolley buses and trams as well as the famous underground. The Metro is barely ten years old, and not enough lines have been built yet, but it is a great blessing to all Muscovites and works thoroughly efficiently. Great care has been taken with the architecture of the stations, which are built out of the best and rarest building materials from all over the Soviet Union; each station is an original design, and in general the Metro is one of the best examples of Soviet architecture. It is very popular but so crowded that it is sometimes a bit of a fight to get on the train, even more so than in wartime London. The etiquette when you get near the station at which you want to get out is to ask the person in front of you whether he is getting out at the next station. If not, he makes room for you to get by, and you slowly edge yourself to the front.

For most districts the trams are the main way of getting about. They are crowded and people often hang on outside. There is a fine for getting off at the wrong end, and one has to fight one's way through from back to front before getting off, but pregnant women are allowed to get on and off at the front. Trolleys never stopped running, but buses were only just coming

back into use at the end of the war. Earlier, no petrol for buses could be spared from the front. Both buses and trolleys are comfortable single-deckers. Queues used to form for the trolley buses; when one arrived there would be a free fight to get on, after which those left behind formed another patient queue.

Before the war there were plenty of taxis, but these were all taken off the streets to save petrol until the last few months of the war, when a few came back; they did not stay in cab ranks or cruise, and they could only be used in return for special coupons issued to certain higher categories of workers. The way of ordering was to ring up the garage. We as foreigners were not issued with taxi coupons, as our own Embassies were supposed to provide us with transport.

Suburban trains were very crowded, particularly at the weekends, with people going to and from their allotments. One Monday morning a young Red Army man and his mother were travelling with a large case. They tried to get out at their station, which was some stops before Moscow, but it proved quite impossible to push through the crowd with the case. At the next station they had the bright idea of pushing the case through the window, but even without luggage they were unable to get through to the door before the train went on, so that the case was left behind on the platform. Eventually they had to get out where everyone else did—at Moscow.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE FOUR SEASONS

THE Russian autumn sets in early after a harvest season that is usually short. The end of August is already autumn, but the weather can be sunny and delightful up to the middle of October. The September sun can be soft and lovely, but rain and frost soon set in, converting the country into a quagmire. At this season wheeled traffic off the rare metalled roads is well-nigh impossible, and many villages are isolated till the hard frosts in November or December open the "winter road." There can be clear bright days at every time of the year, but the typical autumn day is compounded of rain, mud and sleet. Traditionally the snow melts three times before winter sets in.

The rivers freeze over in November, and the cold weather reaches a peak about the end of January, after which the sun gradually gets warmer. If one is properly dressed and the house is warm, the Russian winter is not as bad as it sounds, though it is too long. The hard frosts make the air clear and bright and invigorating, not unlike Switzerland in winter, except that the sun is not so strong. In Moscow or further north one gets sun-starved during the winter, in spite of the bright clear days, but at Stalingrad the February sun already has a good deal of warmth, and in Baku and the Caucasus there can be Mediterranean sunshine.

The curious thing about the Russian climate is that the colder the winters, the easier they are to bear, provided always one is properly equipped against them. Autumn sore throats and colds vanish with the first day of hard frost. As you go further east the cold winter and the heat of summer are more intense, and the climate becomes drier. A damp cold such as prevails on the Baltic shores or sometimes in Moscow is like London weather at its worst, only more so.

In the winter the slightest breath of wind seems to cut through one's clothing like a knife, but fortunately most of Russia is extraordinarily free from wind, and the further east

one goes the less wind there is, on the whole. Everyone who has lived in Siberia speaks well of the dry, cold, windless winter. I spent two days in January at Sverdlovsk in the Urals, with a temperature of over seventy degrees Fahrenheit of frost. The inhabitants seemed to thrive, and I found it healthy and invigorating in spite of two banquets a day. Provided one kept moving and wore one's warmest clothes, one felt thoroughly well, but after standing about for even two or three minutes, an icy chill began to creep up one's legs.

At Kuibyshev, where the climate is less extreme, the coldest day we had was just over sixty degrees Fahrenheit of frost. In the afternoon some of us went for a walk across the Volga, where there was a barely perceptible breeze. I put on fur-lined boots and an extra warm second pair of gloves in addition to my usual precautions; this kept one's body and legs quite warm, but my nose, which is prominent, began to freeze on account of the cold air breathed in through it. To cure this I had to begin breathing in rather carefully through my teeth, while breathing out through my nose to warm it. I also took off one of my outer gloves to rub my nose, but by the time I had restored the circulation in that organ, my hand was beginning to freeze, so I had to put on the outer glove, shove the whole business into my pocket and keep wiggling my fingers until the circulation came back. The great cold had precipitated all the moisture in the air, so that everything looked very clear and the sky seemed almost dead white. After less than an hour of breathing this cold air it was as if one had done a long day's work out of doors.

The worst day at Kuibyshev was when there was a blizzard and cutting snow blew into one's face. I only had to walk the inside of half a mile to my office, and then back, but it was quite as much as one felt inclined to do.

Life adapts itself to winter on the whole very successfully in normal times; the streets and pavements are covered with caked snow or ice for several months on end, except in central Moscow; the children are out of doors all day on skis or skates, which are their normal method of getting about. This is very good for them and certainly accounts for some of their vigour.

At Kuibyshev there was a skating rink near our Embassy, which was well frequented both by Russians and foreigners; only a small minority had figure skates or attempted to cut

their threes and eights, let alone dance, though there were just a few skilled performers. Most people had straight skates of the ice-hockey type and just went round and round as on a roller-skating rink. There was another rink at which ice hockey was played. The children learn to be handy on skates from a very early age and find it hard to understand that in England there is not enough frost for skating all the winter. I am not good at skating, but began to think that I was making some progress until a little girl about five years old shouted out to me one day from the bank: "Uncle, I can skate better than you can." (In Russia, as in Scandinavia, all grown-ups are uncles and aunts to all children.)

Skiing in a flat country is rather tame after Switzerland, but is good fun if one regards it as the best way of going for a walk in the winter, and it is always possible to find slopes to practise one's turns on; I even succeeded in falling hard enough to get concussion of the brain. The greater cold makes the snow something quite different from the soft, damp, icing-sugar snow that we know in England. Russian snow is of the hard, dry, powdered variety, which is, of course, much better for skiing. When the temperature sinks below about forty-five degrees Fahrenheit of frost, something seems to happen to the snow, so that skiing is no good. But even if it were not so, the danger from frostbite would prevent one either skating or skiing.

Stories of the extreme Russian temperatures sometimes make one forget that the ordinary winter day in Moscow is only between five and thirty degrees Fahrenheit of frost. I found this range very pleasant, but it is trying when the thermometer falls below forty degrees of frost, and horrible when it thaws.

Russian skis are lighter than ours and the bindings are simpler. There would be no use for the best Swiss bindings in a flat country. Indeed, the children often ski quite happily and surprisingly well on a pair of old planks tied on to their felt boots with string.

Few grown-ups continue to ski or skate after student age; one day two of us were skiing on our way out of Kuibyshev, when a little boy shouted out: "Look at the boys!"—and then in obvious astonishment: "But they're not boys, they're grown-ups!"

It was a coldish day and we kept moving briskly till lunch

time. We had a sandwich lunch and walked about to keep warm as we ate it, and put our skiing gloves to stand on our ski sticks, as one does in Switzerland. When we came to put them on again they were as hard as boards, and we never got our hands warm again that afternoon. Of course the thing to do is to put the gloves in one's pocket when one has to take them off.

It is a miracle how the Russian Army survived during the winter, and there is no question that they were extremely hardy, but part of the explanation is their knowledge of local conditions and all the tricks of the trade. Captured German winter equipment looked much less businesslike than the Russian equivalent.

In March the midday sun begins to thaw the snow, but it freezes hard at night. At the end of the month the rooks come back and in a few days the real thaw begins. For several days the streets are deep in slush, the ice on the rivers breaks up, streams overflow their banks, and vast areas are covered with flood water. At this season it can be hot in the day, but there is a great danger of late frosts. May is generally cold and windy. The pussy willows may be out in March at Kuibyshev and rank grass pushes up as soon as the floods subside, but the trees are too wise to risk frost; at last, about 20th May in the Moscow region, all the trees come out as if they had received an order, first the birch, and then the larch, with all the other trees very close on their heels. This sudden burst of fresh green almost compensates for the long-drawn-out pleasures of an English spring. By now the flood waters have at last begun to subside and the peasants can get to their fields.

The short summer is a period of furious toil for the peasants and their women; they call it the season of suffering. To the townsman summer is a yearly chance for relaxation and an out-of-doors life. In normal times every Muscovite who can tries to find a dacha, or country cottage somewhere near Moscow, where he parks his wife and family all through the good weather and goes down himself as often as possible. By the summer of 1944, life was already becoming normal enough for nearly all the available dachas to be taken. I was too busy myself to think of such relaxation until the beginning of August, when it was already impossible to find anything suitable. The



next year I went off with some Russian friends in April to house-hunt. After two Sundays of intensive searching (one just walks up to any house and asks whether there are rooms to let), we took a ground floor with five fair-sized rooms and a kitchen—we had the use of the garden and an allotment to grow our own vegetables, but the landlord supplied very little furniture. The rent was partly paid in kind, so that it is impossible to give an equivalent figure in English money. This was considered a particularly good dacha, and most Russian families would be content with something much smaller. But while the weather is warm everyone stays out of doors most of the time, so that it does not matter much being cramped.

Having been brought up on a hill, I never could get accustomed to the flatness of most Russian landscapes, but wherever there is a river, the west bank is higher than the east, and the ground forms very pretty vistas, not unlike the paintings of the Norwich School.

Dachas are generally by a river, and there is plenty of fun, with bathing and boating and picking wild strawberries, berries and mushrooms. One Sunday we were invited to a birthday party at a friend's dacha two or three miles away from ours; we were given the run of the strawberry beds for the afternoon. They had run to seed during the war and the fruit had become rather small, but the taste was very like an English strawberry. Dachas, like other peasants' cottages, are arranged in broad rows about a hundred yards apart, with a plot of land round each cottage. There are generally no paved roads, but when the weather is dry one drives over the grass.

People grow flowers in the gardens and plant fruit trees, but they have not yet got to the same stage of making the place pretty as we have in England. There is nothing in Russia like the flowering shrubs which make our suburban front gardens so beautiful in the spring, and Russian outhouses are very often placed so as to disfigure the prettiest aspects. But all this is changing. The family I took my dacha from were simple peasants, but going up in the world. The parents had good jobs on a collective farm away from Moscow, and left the grown-up children to look after the house. One of the daughters was studying at some sort of technical college in Moscow, and went up every day by train. They had formerly lived in a less good

house, and had only built their new house just before the war. Indeed, it was not finished when the war broke out, and there were no stoves in most of the rooms, so that they all had to huddle together into one or two rooms for the winter.

Each year they were making the garden nicer, and it looks as if this particular village will be a very pleasant resort in another few years.

At one time we had trouble from children stealing the lilac from the garden, so we went along to the local militia office or police station, as we should call it. The atmosphere was very like what one would find in a country police station anywhere else, and copious notes were made about our complaint. The police apologised for not being able to keep the village in better order, but explained that they were understaffed. All the same, within the hour a talkative moustached police officer came to call. He promised to keep an eye on the place, and to tell the parents of any offending children to keep them in order. If they failed he would fine the parents two hundred roubles. We had no more trouble.

This policeman was a famous character, and many stories were told about his detective skill. In the first winter of the war, a certain family had one of their sucking-pigs stolen, which was at that time a serious calamity. To all appearances the police were unable to trace the culprits, but after about four months, when the pig would have been ready for slaughter, the policeman came along and said:

"If I find your pig will you invite me to dinner?"

The answer was: "Yes, of course."

"Then I suppose we shall have pork for dinner?"

"Yes."

"All right."

Within an hour the policeman had returned with the pig, having known where it was all the time, but considering it juster that the thieves should have the trouble and expense of feeding it.

The summer is generally hotter than an English summer, but there are frequent thunderstorms. After each storm, ways become mire and local communications may be interrupted. In most of the war years the Moscow summers were as rainy and chilly as the worst English summer. In September those

who have hired dachas stream back to the town, followed by many of the landlords, who shut their houses up for the winter and crowd into Moscow. The crowded and difficult suburban journey is, in winter conditions, sometimes a greater deterrent than the living conditions in Moscow itself.

But many people who have local work prefer to live on their dachas all through the winter if the building is constructed to withstand the cold and if fuel for heating is available. For instance, some authors stayed in their dachas all through the war. In peacetime people will sometimes take a "winter dacha" for skiing at the week ends, but in wartime this was impracticable, if only because the heating would have been impossible. One could always get firewood at a high price on the open market, but only the well-to-do could afford to do this in a big way. Near Moscow there are, of course, trees everywhere, but permission must be obtained to cut them; permission was given to one woman I knew to cut two fairly large fir trees in her garden because she had three sons on active service, but she had to fell the trees and get them sawn up at her own expense. Labour can always be had at a price, but in this case the lady was able to get the work done much below the open market rate by enlisting the help of some soldiers from a nearby camp, who did the work in their spare time. This arrangement was quite lawful.

All in all the Russian climate breeds healthy men. Winter and summer are pleasant; spring is a moment rather than a season, autumn is dreary. Winter is too long and summer too short, so that field work must be completed in a few hectic weeks; Russians are therefore accustomed to sudden bursts of violent energy followed by long months of taking things quietly and sleeping on the stove.

CHAPTER III  
CLOTHES

*My Love in her attire doth show her wit,  
It doth so well become her :  
For every season she has dressings fit,  
For Winter, Spring and Summer.*

DAVISON'S "POETICAL RHAPSODY" (1602).

IN the autumn Russian winter clothes come out and the streets begin to look more drab, for it is impossible to be warm and smart at the same time without spending a lot of money. Everybody in Russia seems to be able to get enough warm clothes to wear in winter. I have known one or two cases of people who came perilously near being without a warm coat or winter footwear, but somehow the problem always seemed to be solved before the cold weather set in.

The cheapest form of winter wear for men and women alike is a dark-coloured, short overcoat made of wadded cotton wool. This is warm and light but ugly. It gets wet easily but this does not matter as much as one would expect, because so soon as winter sets in properly, there is a perpetual hard frost and no rain. On their feet poorer Russians wear the traditional felt boots, which are very warm and comfortable once you get accustomed to them, but they do not keep out the wet when the thaw sets in. Socks are not worn with them, but the feet are wrapped round with rags, which are disposed very cleverly. The poorer women wear shawls on their heads, and the men wadded caps, with flaps to cover the ears. Those who can afford it like to have a coat of sheepskin or fur, and a fur hat. These often get grubby and they take up a great deal of extra space in crowded trains, but when there is enough good fur to go round the streets of Moscow in winter will present a gay spectacle. Office workers in the town do not generally wear felt boots, but ordinary shoes with goloshes, which keep one warm and make it easier not to slip on the snow. My winter clothes were bought

in London and represented the British shopkeeper's idea of what is suitable (see frontispiece). The hat, made of seal's fur, turned out to be so ridiculous by Russian notions that I had to scrap it and get another. The boots were too stiff and heavy for ordinary use. For ordinary winter wear in the towns, fur boots are nothing but a nuisance and goloshes are all one needs. But I was very glad to buy from a colleague a pair of long, soft fur boots, which were invaluable for country expeditions on the rare extremely cold days. My coat was quite suitable except that it did not button up closely at the neck, allowing the cold air to get in and making a scarf necessary all the time.

The babies are always tightly swaddled, which is probably necessary in a climate where to kick off the coverings might result in a fatal chill. But it is amusing to see babies carried around in the streets. They are put on a small eiderdown, one corner being folded up over their feet, the other lying behind the head. The rest of the eiderdown is then rolled tightly around the baby and secured by a string wound round the cocoon and tied at the neck. Sometimes a ribbon is tied around the neck and the whole outfit finished off with a large bow tied under the baby's chin. But the result is to make the baby completely immobile. Only its eyes can move and these roll wildly round as the child lies in its mother's arms. Foreigners who have babies in Moscow and are lucky enough to be able to secure a Russian nurse have to defer to this custom of swaddling a child. One Australian member of the foreign colony, whose wife had had a baby in Moscow, and who had gone visiting with his wife and child, was observed to be carrying the baby upside down; he was carrying the roll which contained his offspring conveniently under his arm and did not notice which way up it was.

Knowing their climate, Russians keep to their warm wraps till spring is well advanced. Then one day, just as the trees come out, there is a wonderful change from fur hats and shawls, wadded coats and felt boots, to no hats, bright cotton dresses and no stockings. Every woman looks ten years younger and the children pick the first flowers and weave them into garlands in their hair.

In the Summer many men wear cotton shirts without collars, dark trousers and canvas shoes without socks. Often they

omit the shirt and wear only a sleeveless cotton vest with their trousers. The men who are better off, if they are not in uniform, wear white linen suits. The traditional Russian embroidered shirt is rare in Moscow but fairly common in the provinces.

Shoes are of poor quality and hard to get; under the fourth five-year plan it is intended to produce by 1950 rather more than one pair of footwear and three pairs of stockings or socks a year for each member of the population.

Russian women are, thank God! as interested in their appearance as women always are, but the material means have been lacking for an emulation of Paris fashions. Indeed, there is no definite standard of fashion and people wear what they have till it wears out, so that the crowds look motley. Colour and fancifulness are the qualities most sought after by young women; they tend to make frills compensate for indifferent cutting, and they wear coloured ankle socks with their court shoes. Flat heeled, "sensible" shoes are most unpopular with the girls; they like shoes as brightly coloured and with heels as high as possible. Hats are rare and there are few women in Moscow who can carry off a smart hat; the penalty for failure is to be followed round by jeering children. In the summer women like to wear printed cotton dresses modelled on the charming Russian peasant style.

Russians are acutely sensitive to foreign sneers at their clothes, and the women often refuse invitations from foreigners if they think they have not the right clothes.

The "society lady" exists in Soviet Russia only in an embryo form, but there are young women who contrive to do extraordinarily little work and to spend most of their resources on having a good time. It only requires more economic elbow room for them to vie in elegance with our own young ladies. After all, good taste in clothes is mainly a question of time and money. The Russian girls are keen to learn and, if their taste is unsure, that is mainly from lack of practice. The wives of generals and other bigwigs are already learning how to dress well.

There are private dressmakers in Moscow and various State dressmaking establishments, but isolation from the West has perhaps had a worse effect on this branch of culture than on any other.

The clothes of our English girls excited lively curiosity; one Russian girl said superciliously that one of our mackintoshes "must be wartime material." Kay Oakman had a raincoat, which was well covered with buttons, tabs and flaps of all kinds; small boys followed her in a wondering crowd until one plucked up courage to ask what army she belonged to.

There are manicure shops in all centres and the "parik-macher," or hairdresser, plays as great a part in feminine life as here, but the standard of taste is deplorable. I never could regard with equanimity the uncared-for appearance of the Russian girls' hair, but on returning to my own country I found that the coiffures of 1939 had become sadly unkempt in 1945. I am told that the trouble is that, for all their visits to the hairdresser, the Russian girls never brush their hair; some of them believe that if they did it would fall out. Soviet perms are said to be drastic. Fashions in hair styles, as in clothes, often come to Russia two or three years late and one is less conscious of a common style. I had not realised how much our aesthetic life owed to the small group which kept yearly fashions in line.

Russian girls use make-up and lipstick; they are particular about shades, but the lipstick is far from kissproof. Kay Oakman writes: "Cosmetics are in very short supply and of very poor quality. Face powder is pale, thick and cheap. Lipsticks are rarely obtainable and most unsatisfactory in quality. The theatrical people are quite well supplied with cosmetics but the ordinary Russian girl is not. Hence the passion for nail varnish, which was made available all through the war. Russian teachers sometimes ask for payment in cosmetics instead of money, and there was a type of girl who associated with foreigners as much for these things as for food and clothes."

In January, 1945, the first fashion show since the beginning of the war was held in Moscow. This is how Kay Oakman describes it:—

"The show was to be an exhibition of models designed for subsequent mass-production. Each republic of the Soviet Union had been invited to submit garments for competition. All had been arranged on stands and tables for preliminary inspection by invited guests, who were in the main leading personalities, heads of dress-making ateliers, etc. The most

popular models were then to be exhibited, worn by mannequins, at a further showing.

"The garments submitted varied, often very strikingly, according to their place of origin. The most up-to-date, to our eyes, came from the Baltic republics and from Riga and Tallin in particular. Leningrad sent some very smart styles, but as they were usually rather ornate and heavily embroidered, recalling the splendour of St. Petersburg, they were in the main unsuitable for mass production. It was easy to see when particular designers had managed to see recent copies of such magazines as *Vogue* and *Harpers*. Extravagant fashions just reported from Paris had been copied, but rather timidly, so that their dashing smartness had been lost, and the resultant effect was as a rule not popular.

"Designs submitted by the eastern republics showed a dress sense suited to a distinctive climate and different customs. In general they were of thin materials and very voluminous. I even saw one or two yashmaks among them.

"The most successful to my mind were the dresses designed on traditional Russian lines but modified according to modern ideas. The pinafore frock, a short version of the dress worn by Russian women for centuries, looked very pretty with simple, gay embroidery on the straps.

"Children's clothes had been much influenced by American styles, and we found that several leading personalities in this world of Russian fashion had been to America. Our guide was herself an American Jewess of Russian origin.

"Men's clothes were the most out of date in style. Almost all the suits were made with a jacket gathered across the back at waist level. Materials in general were poor and we found that an effort had been made to produce garments which could be suitably carried out in surplus uniform material."

Evening dress is now compulsory at the big official receptions and all the highly placed ladies had new evening dresses made towards the end of the war. I have been told that they suffered a disappointment with which everyone can sympathise when Mrs. Churchill, on her visit to the Soviet Union, wore nothing but Red Cross uniform, so that there was no occasion for a display of evening dress.

Like most people, the Russians are conservative in their



notions of what is suitable attire and they think some of our clothes very strange. For instance, a woman wearing slacks in the town creates almost a public disturbance. But at dachas all conventions go by the board; well-dressed girls will very often produce a pair of slacks; even so this always rouses the village children to derision.

Shorts are unknown except for children, and the sight on the films of British troops in the desert up to the rank of General Montgomery wearing shorts always brought the house down.

Some years ago a lady of my acquaintance incautiously put on a pair of slacks while staying at a sanatorium in a rural part of the South of Russia. This created such an uproar in the community that the local Committee of the Communist Party discussed the incident at their next meeting. They reached the eminently sensible decision that the propriety of wearing slacks depended on the figure of the wearer. Perhaps some of our own watch committees may find this a useful precedent.



SUMMER FASHIONS, 1945





CHAPTER IV  
VILLAGES

*In the deep of our land, 'tis said, a village from out of the woods,*

*Emerged on the great main-road 'twixt two great solitudes.  
Through forestry right and left, black verst and verst of pine  
From village to village runs the road's long wide base line.  
Clearance and clearance breaks the else-unconquered growth  
Of pine and all that breeds and broods there, leaving loth  
Man's inch of masterdom—spot of life, spirit of fire—  
To star the dark and dread, lest right and rule expire  
Throughout the monstrous wild, a-hungered to resume  
Its ancient sway, suck back the world into its womb.*

—FROM ROBERT BROWNING'S "IVAN IVANOVITCH."

MOST Russians still live in villages, and most town dwellers still have some place which they call "my village," either because they were born there or because it is their parents' home. Up till very recent years men from certain villages would go off to work in the towns for most of the year but would return home regularly for the harvest when their labour was urgently needed. In case of necessity, as for instance during the war, a man or woman who has been many years in the town will go back to his or her village to live.

The first village which I got to know was Rozhdestvenskoye, near Kuibyshev. It had several thousand inhabitants and maintained reasonable prosperity through its nearness to a good market at Kuibyshev. As in all villages of the northern forest, the houses were of wood. They stood farther apart than our cottages do; space is of no value and a big village sprawls on endlessly. The houses are arranged in broad rows about a hundred yards apart and each has a garden, but there are no made-up roads. The general style of architecture is not very different from the wooden houses of Scandinavia and Northern Europe generally, but the Russians go in for rather pretty wood

carving round the doors and windows. If this was properly painted up, it would look very cheerful. The roofs are often of sheet iron painted red.

I never got inside a peasant house in the Kuibyshev days, but I could see that each of them had more than one room in addition to an entrance porch, which often served also as a pleasant summer room, and that the owners liked to have lace curtains at the windows and if possible the equivalent of an *aspidistra*. Later I learnt how to get into conversation with the peasants, who are as friendly as everyone is in Russia, but at this time they seemed rather remote and unapproachable.

Practically all country dwellers in the Soviet Union work for a State Farm, for a subsidiary farm attached to a factory or for a Collective Farm, which is much the commonest. The word "farm" may be misleading to western ears; these different types of farm are simply different ways of organising the economic life of a village and for some purposes "village" would be a more exact word than farm. A State Farm is a farm which belongs to the State, and is run by a management appointed from above; it is generally a specialised undertaking such as a stud farm, a hop farm or an experimental station. The Director of the only State Farm I visited had previously been an official of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade.

Important factories have whole villages attached to them as subsidiary farms, which are run as part of the factory and help to supplement the workers' food.

A collective farm or *Kolkhoz* is simply the economic aspect of an ordinary Russian village. Every villager who is engaged in agriculture normally belongs to the *Kolkhoz*, which operates as a producers' co-op, running its own affairs so long as it fulfils its obligations to the State. The chairman is elected by the members without, as far as I know, much interference from outside. The President is powerful and respected and always seems well-to-do; he is generally assisted by an "*agronom*" with some technical training in agriculture. The collective farm is bound to deliver a certain proportion of its produce to the State at controlled prices and to the Motor Tractor Station in return for its services; the residue is the property of the members who decide whether to divide it among themselves or to sell it to the towns. Often they make a contract with a factory to supply it

with food in exchange for other goods they need. Quite apart from the collective production of the farm each household has its own garden with, say, an acre of land, which the owners can use just as they like, consuming or selling the produce according to their circumstances. The members are paid by the collective on a piecework system. During the war collective farms were encouraged to make extra deliveries to the State; this was in some ways the equivalent of our drive for war savings.

The prosperity of each village depends partly on the quality of the land, partly on the efficiency with which it manages itself and partly on the accessibility of markets. I visited one collective village near Moscow which had been very poor till the end of the 1920's. It was one of the first villages to constitute itself a collective farm and was now quite prosperous—being connected with Moscow by road, rail and canal. It had been overrun by the Germans for a few days in 1941, but had escaped fairly lightly. One of the houses was a crèche for the children; this had not much equipment, but the children were properly looked after and kept out of danger. It must be remembered that in 19th century Russia, as in our own Middle Ages, it was by no means unheard of for small children to be eaten by pigs while their mothers were at work.

All the collective farms which I visited were near big towns and therefore close to their markets; they made a pleasant impression and it is evident that much of the opposition roused by the forcible collectivisation of the early 30's has died down now that the solid advantages of this system have become clear. The forcible collectivisation and the deportation of the "kulaks" in the early thirties have, however, left some bitter memories.

It is important to remember that most villages are much further from their markets than those which foreigners are likely to visit. I cannot speak of conditions in these distant spots, which used to be called "deaf corners." I have been assured that there exists a village which is organised in its economic aspect as a collective farm but is in other respects nothing but an Old Believer monastery (cf. p. 99).

Rozhdestvenskoye, like most other villages, was organised as a collective farm, but there was also a vodka factory which

provided alternative employment. One day I secured a lift on a cart from a slightly tipsy Siberian soldier who had been invalided out of the army because of his wounds and was working in the vodka factory. I learnt that the workers each supplied a certain amount of grain for distilling and that their wages were partly paid in vodka.

This is not so sinister as it sounds, for in the wartime shortage of goods, money had lost most of its value and vodka was as near to an accepted currency as anything else. The wounded soldier asked me about life in Britain and refused to accept my polite evasions about each country having its own advantages; he insisted that everyone knew that life was "gayer" in England. It is a hoary error that the Soviet Government has concealed from its own people that the standard of life is higher in the West. Everyone in the Soviet Union knows that we are richer, but there is much ignorance about other aspects of our life. On this occasion my companion went on to ask about India; for a moment he was impressed to learn that there were 2,000,000 men in the Indian army, but then he remembered the Indian population figures and asked why there were so few. I am afraid he did not think much of my explanations.

One day, on the way back from this village, I noticed on the ferry a typical Volga peasant girl, with round red cheeks and a handkerchief round her head. I began to speculate that probably she had never been further than the five miles to Kuibyshev in her life, and wondered what notions she and the millions like her could have about the outside world. Then I noticed that she was wearing a watch and showing it off to her admiring friends. When they asked her where she had got it, she replied: "In Brest." And it turned out that she had served for several years in the merchant navy and this was one of the purchases she had made on shore.

My experience of Russian villages is almost all confined to the forest zone where the land is generally bad. Unfortunately I have scarcely seen the richer villages of the black earth steppe in the South. I have heard that among the Kuban Cossacks, in the Northern Caucasus region, there is an altogether more opulent mode of life and that every girl has three or four silk dresses.

In the countryside most roads are just cart tracks. A car

can be driven over them fairly well when the ground is hard, but after rain or in a thaw they become impassable. In winter the beaten snow makes a fairly good surface, and for this reason winter has always been the season for fairs. The rivers freeze hard enough to carry traffic all through the winter.

Once a thunderstorm came on while I was driving my car along a country track near Moscow; the car sank to the axles and I had to walk three miles in sticky mud to a State Hop Farm which was the nearest place for help. The director at once sent out his tractor to pull us back with chains onto the highway. As I was leaving Russia by train for Poland in the autumn of 1945, I saw trainloads of light lorries fitted with caterpillars on the way to the devastated regions of Byelorussia. They looked just what is needed for the villages at the present state of road development.

In the war, most of the able-bodied men were away, and farm machinery and implements were hard to renew, there was little fuel for the tractors and many horses and carts were taken for the army, so that the work had to be done by the women and by the old and very young men, with little help from machinery and an acute shortage of draft animals. If these were conditions in territory which the enemy never reached, the state of affairs was infinitely worse in occupied or even in liberated areas. But somehow food production was maintained, and there was a rough and ready distribution which ensured that there was no local famine, though conditions in some towns came perilously near the starvation line at certain moments. During the siege of Leningrad there was, of course, mass starvation, but that was due to military, not to agricultural causes.

One day I gave a lift in my car to two elderly ladies who were carrying heavy bundles. One of them turned out to be the president of a small collective farm. She asked us into her house; it had three or four clean rooms, fairly well furnished in an old-fashioned cottage style. The pretty twenty-one year old daughter brought us rich milk to drink, which had been scalded so that the cream clotted on top, and it tasted like a creamy milk pudding. The girl longed to get away to the town; there were thirty-nine unmarried girls in the village but only one young man who was not at the front—"odin bobyor"



or "one beaver" was her expression. The country girls marry young, and though she was pretty and her family well to do, she was already in danger of being left on the shelf. Demobilisation is bringing the men back, but there are many gaps in their ranks and many whose health is permanently impaired.

## CHAPTER V

### HOUSES

Most people in the Soviet Union still live on the land. There is an acute problem of providing the villages with services and amenities but the people know how to make their own houses and it is only a question of taking trouble to provide enough house room.

In the Ukraine, and south of the forest belt generally, there is a shortage of timber and the houses are built of whitewashed mud. In the North and Centre timber is as common as water and Russian skill with the axe is the key to housemaking and to much besides. Robert Browning's description is the best:—

*"They tell me your carpenters," quoth I to my friend the Russ,  
"Make a simple hatchet serve as a tool box serves with us.*

*Arm but each man with his axe, 'tis a hammer and saw and  
plane*

*And chisel and—what know I else? We should imitate in  
vain*

*The mastery wherewithal, by a flourish of just the adze,  
He cleaves, clamps dovetails in—no need of our nails and  
brads—*

*The manageable pine; 'Tis said he could shave himself  
With the axe—so all adroit, now a giant and now an elf,  
Does he work and play at once."*

But in the cities there is acute overcrowding. Even in normal times there was a strong tendency for the population to grow faster than houses could be built and the war has made this much worse. Conditions differ greatly from place to place. The extreme cases were in the Ural towns during the evacuation, where people had to sleep as tight as they could be packed. This was part of the price paid by the Soviet people for the successful evacuation of their factories.

Moscow has always attracted population, because it is the capital, so that housing conditions are now very congested. It

is difficult for new arrivals to get any accommodation at all, and the majority of families live in one room. There are some good modern buildings, but not nearly enough of them; many people live in very sordid conditions, but it is remarkable how clean and self-respecting most of them emerge.

Very often one finds a block of flats constructed on the basis of three or four rooms, with bathroom and kitchen, for each family; but in the prevailing circumstances it is inevitable that a separate family often gets shoved into each room, so that several families have to share the kitchen and bathroom. Privacy is thus out of the question, but it does not seem to be missed. Most people get on well enough together on a basis of give and take, but there always seems to be one black sheep who leaves the kitchen dirty and stores potatoes in the bath. One family insisted on keeping a cock and hen in the kitchen to the great annoyance of the other inhabitants of that flat.

This congestion of Soviet town life leads naturally to a sort of Bohemianism which suits the Russian character. People are accustomed to "dossing down" almost anywhere, and you frequently find that someone who has stayed late with friends will have spent the night curled up in a chair or on a sofa. They seem to sleep sounder like that than most of us would be able to. Once, when I had a large party in my flat, I found that it was obviously my social duty to give up my bed to quite large numbers of guests (all of the same sex) who slept together quite happily, while I did my best on a rather short sofa.

There are no meal times in Russia and as long as they eat once in the day, Russians do not seem to feel hungry. At first I suffered agonies while waiting for meals, but after about a year I became accustomed to it and can now adapt myself to any number of meals in the twenty-four hours, provided it averages out all right over a few days.

Russian government offices work long hours; they start late and work on into the night. It is useless, for instance, to ring up the Soviet Foreign Office until about half past twelve; I was told that Stalin himself worked late because the reports from the front came in in the evening and that this set the rhythm of the day. But somehow I suspect that the real reason why Russian civil servants keep late hours is that they like it.

There is no uniform standard of housing. At the top of

the scale of living there are people like the late Alexis Tolstoy, the most famous author of his day. He drew royalties from the sale of his books and the performance of his plays, and had a very handsome income. The taxation such a person pays is much lower than our surtax, and it does not seem odd that this should be so. It is felt that he has earned his money by public service, and most people see no reason why the State should take it away from him in taxation. Alexis Tolstoy had a town house and a country house, with good furniture and old pictures, and could entertain throughout the war. He always had the best food and drink as well as some of the best conversation. He had a car with a chauffeur and in his country house or dacha he had quite a large garden and a gardener. Before his death he was planning to extend his garden down a steep bank to an attractive brook. His country house was a two-storied wooden building with several bedrooms, ample reception rooms and all conveniences.

At official receptions he used to appear in an immaculate tailcoat made in Savile Row.

Tolstoy had in some respects a unique position, but other well-to-do writers lived pretty well in a quieter way throughout the war. A typical leading writer might be expected to have, say, a decent three-roomed flat in Moscow, with rather heavy old-fashioned furniture, and a dacha at Peredelkino, where the Union of Soviet Writers has a sort of residential estate on which writers can have their country cottages. These are well-built, roomy and tolerably comfortable, but many improvements in the way of central heating and plumbing remain to be installed in most of the dachas. The road to this particular settlement was always in good condition, partly because it also led to the spot where a number of other important people had their dachas.

Humbler professional workers live in one room, which may be quite cosy but is nearly always dingy. In the absence of paint and of materials it is impossible for most of them to have any definite scheme of colour or furnishing. Many rooms are so small that the bed, which is nearly always spotlessly clean, dominates the room; the Russians, like most peasant peoples, love lace pillow slips. I have seen filthy rooms, but it has always been to me a wonder how clean the Russians generally keep

their clothes, their houses and their bodies with so little soap and hot water. The excellent public baths certainly help.

Like all people just emerging from poverty, the Russians love solidly-built furniture and elaborate solid objects such as brass inkstands. Their chairs are about as comfortable as our 17th century chairs. There has been much good furniture in Russia, and in Embassies and hotels good furniture made of Karelian birch in the Empire style can still be seen, but since the Revolution much of the better furniture has found its way into stoves or on to scrap heaps. Most of the beautifully embroidered towels and cloths, which used to be common in well-to-do houses, have been sold in order to buy extra food at the commission shops, where they are often bought by foreigners. Beautiful curtains have sometimes been cut up for clothes. None the less, the tradition of good embroidery still exists, and if a Russian woman knows how to use her needle, she does charming bright embroidery in the traditional style.

Cooking was a major wartime problem. A great deal of cooking is done on electric hotplates called "plitkas." During the war it was illegal to use electricity for cooking or heating, and there was supposed to be a strict rationing of electricity. But I never heard of anyone who was in the long run prevented from using his plitka for necessary cooking, though whole blocks of flats were sometimes cut right off for a matter of weeks if they used too much electricity. As in most countries during a shortage, there were many dodges about which the least said the better.

Gas was always an uncertain starter during the war, and wood was very expensive on the open market, so that it would sometimes have been impossible to cook at all but for the plitkas in the corner of the room. Sometimes the gas pressure was only sufficient for cooking in the small hours of the morning and the women would stay up to cook a hot meal in the middle of the night.

All well-to-do people have some domestic help, and as a matter of fact it is much easier to find servants in Moscow than it is in London. The money wage is not high but the employer has to feed his servants and clothe them too, or at any rate to help them out with clothing. The ordinary type of servant is

a maid-of-all-work in the literal sense of the word; she cooks, shops, cleans, darns and does your laundry. It is a great advantage if you can provide decent accommodation, but Russian maids are prepared to doss down in any nook or corner if there is nowhere else. They are sometimes erratic but always rise to an emergency, especially if there are "important guests."

After living in the Metropole Hotel for about a year, I engaged a cook in the hope that I would be able to do some mild entertaining, which was impossible on the hotel ration. At this time, and afterwards in my own flat, I had a number of different cooks. One was an aged Polish lady with a sweet disposition who cooked beautifully but could not stand up to the work. She was also earning extra money as a night watchman, but the rats began to multiply exceedingly. It turned out that she was feeding them; she said she was sorry for them because they looked so thin and unhappy, and besides, she was afraid they would nibble her toes if they were too hungry. She was succeeded by the wife of a Czarist general, who unfortunately had to leave after one day to look after a sick grandchild. So I took on a tall, elderly, Jewish woman called Sofya Abramovna.

She came from a very poor working-class family and it was a wonder how she had brought her children up. The youngest was still at school and it was obvious from her clothes that there was scarcely sixpence to spare in the home. She was very clean and very honest and had the simplest ideas of cooking. She fed me on regular, Russian, working-class food which consisted mainly of excellent soups and mushy kasha, which is a sort of porridge made of cereals, and corresponds to "polenta" in Italian working-class diet. There are several kinds of kasha and she made them all well. I found them tasty and nourishing and very easy to digest. It was winter and there was no fruit, but I am sure that in summer she would have made me endless "kisel." This is a dish made out of fruit juice thickened with cornflour or potato flour and can be mawkish and tasteless or delicious according to how it is made.

Sofya Abramovna had lived all her life in Moscow, except when at the beginning of the war she and her youngest daughter were evacuated to the southern Urals, where they nearly died of hardship. She attributed their survival to the knowledge of

nutritional values she had gained by attending public lectures on vitamins and the like. When I fell ill she insisted on feeding me with shredded raw carrots, and when I had finally to take to bed for a day or two, she brought me soup in a plate that was always too full. I protested frequently that I was afraid of spilling it on the bedclothes, but all she said was: "Ivan Alexandrovitch (all my Russian friends called me 'Ivan Alexandrovitch' because my name is John and my father was called Alexander)—Ivan Alexandrovitch" she would say, "The Russian nature is broad and I want to feed you up."

The only place for her to cook was an electric hotplate in the corner of the room, and I had hardly any cooking utensils. But Russian cooks are accustomed to overcoming such difficulties.

As she was cooking my dinner I would go on working, and the following sort of desultory conversation would take place.

"Ivan Alexandrovitch, what sort of people are the Indians?"

"Well, Sofya Abramovna, they are brown people, like Uzbeks only darker, but they have faces like you and me—not at all like the Chinese."

A long pause.

"Ivan Alexandrovitch, how many Indians are there?"

"Well, Sofya Abramovna, it's lucky you've asked me that question, because here's a book written in Russian which tells you the answer to all these questions."

And I gave her the factual and statistical handbook on India published by the Institute of World Politics and World Economics.

She was delighted with this, so I let her take it home. After a few days, having read it all through, she asked a lot of supplementary questions. So I showed her the illustrations in some of the books about India that I always kept in my room. I happen to be descended from Sir Henry Lawrence of Lucknow; the Russians have, of course, never heard of him, but the idea of a famous ruler of the East appealed to their sense of the romantic and I was often asked questions about India. After a little practice I worked out a six-minute lecture on Indian history in Russian, which seemed to interest people.

Sofya Abramovna had read a good deal and had a passionate interest in the theatre, though she had not seen many plays.

Whenever I went to a play I had to be sure that I knew who had acted all the chief parts.

I was sorry to let Sofya Abramovna go, but her cooking was not up to the standard necessary for even the quietest entertaining. She had several successors, all of whom used to gossip to me endlessly about everybody and everything. I used to listen out of half an ear while I was doing something else, and was rather puzzled by frequent statements about the "respect" with which different members of the community regarded each other. It was some time before I realised that in the language of Moscow servants "to respect" is "to sleep with."

Well-to-do people with children generally have a "nyanya"—the word requires no translation. It is easier to find a nyanya in Moscow than it is to get a nurse in post-war London, but you have to feed and clothe her just like any other servant. The Russian nyanyas are a pleasant old-fashioned type and I expect they look after the children well and give them affection, but they do not as a rule have any special training.

During the war there was a type of woman who was prepared to work as a servant while her husband was away at the front, but she would tell you with pride how she had kept her own house before. The relations of Russians to their servants are generally more friendly and informal than in pre-war Britain, but you do meet people who adopt a tone of social superiority where servants in general are concerned, though I doubt whether they would dare to do so with their own servants.

Russians like to keep their houses very warm in winter, like the Americans, but during the war fuel was very short. Modern blocks of flats in Russia are generally heated by ordinary central heating, which works well in peace-time but was inadequate during the war. I have never seen gas used for heating; electricity too is mainly used for light and cooking, though of course an electric hotplate does help to warm the room.

In peace-time, Moscow is heated by coal from the Donetz basin, and the loss of this supply created a serious problem. The need was partly made good by a development of the Moscow coal basin, which unfortunately produces a less suitable type of coal; moreover, these mines too were overrun by the Germans for a short period during the advance on Moscow, and it was only possible to get them going again with difficulty and



at the cost of great hardship to the workers. The main source of heating was wood, which was not satisfactory for use in most of the central heating systems which were constructed for coal. Wood supplies remained short throughout the war. They were supposed to be secured through the "labour front"; a system of conscription by which the girls were liable to be sent off during the summer for work in a timber camp. The conditions were hard, but on the whole healthy, and the prospective victims reacted to it in very much the way English girls reacted to the prospect of being directed into munition factories.

The traditional Russian way of heating is the wood-burning brick stove. You can see the same kind of thing in Scandinavia or Northern Germany; it is the size of a fairly big wardrobe, and once you get it properly hot and close the flue, it will keep the room warm all day; it is more economical than our open fires, but it takes more wood than most people could get during the difficult part of the war. Many Russians solved the problem by putting in a "vremyanka," or temporary stove, made of bricks and about two feet square. It requires a flue out of the window and nothing more. It is very economical in fuel and gives good heat for its size, but of course it spoils the amenity of the room and you are not allowed to have one if you live in a smart street, because the flues sticking out of the windows would lower the tone. I know a mother with two children who was forbidden to instal a "vremyanka," although the heating of the house was out of order. The family somehow survived the winter by keeping the kitchen door open and getting a little heat that way.

At Kuibyshev our Embassy was on a system of "district heating," by which surplus steam from the power station is used to heat several blocks of buildings together. The Russians have been notable pioneers in this interesting method of fuel economy, but during the war it was not possible to heat all the buildings. When our Embassy was left cold, it was darkly suspected that a very important organisation which came just before us on the circuit had diverted our heat to themselves.

The *British Ally* had an office in the Grand Hotel at Kuibyshev; it was well heated, and six or seven of the staff used to come and sleep in the room throughout the winter. This was strictly against all rules and I was not supposed to know.

We gave two of the staff who were living together a present of a cubic metre of firewood at Christmas. This should have lasted them with proper economy through the worst of the winter, but in less than a fortnight I found that they had burnt it all and were sleeping on the office floor with the rest. This was my first lesson in Russian improvidence.

Habits of thrift and taking thought for the morrow have never gained a strong hold on Russian society, though some of the non conformist sects, which appeal strongly to one side of the Russian character, have shown all the Protestant virtues. And to-day the ordinary man sees very little purpose in individual thrift, and likes to enjoy himself while the going is good.

The right to acquire private property in one's own house is safeguarded by the Stalin Constitution. In the country many people do in fact own their houses; in the towns flat dwellers cannot, of course, own the building in which they live, but the rights of occupiers are protected by the law. The five-year plan for the years 1946-1950 provides for the sale of individual dwelling-houses to workers on the basis of long-term credit from the state, in order to "organise permanent cadres for industry"—in other words, to diminish labour turnover. The plan further provides for using the "savings of workers and intellectuals for the construction of their own houses."\* Only 4,000,000 sq. m. of prefabricated dwelling houses are to be constructed.

But housing has not, it would seem, received first priority in the new five-year plan. If so, the crowded conditions described in this book will remain for a good many years, but the difficulties of heating and many of the incidental problems of house-keeping should disappear quickly.

\* (Speech of Nikolai Voznesensky, Chairman of State Planning Commission, to Supreme Soviet of U.S.S.R. on 16th March, 1946.)

CHAPTER VI  
SHOPPING AND FOOD

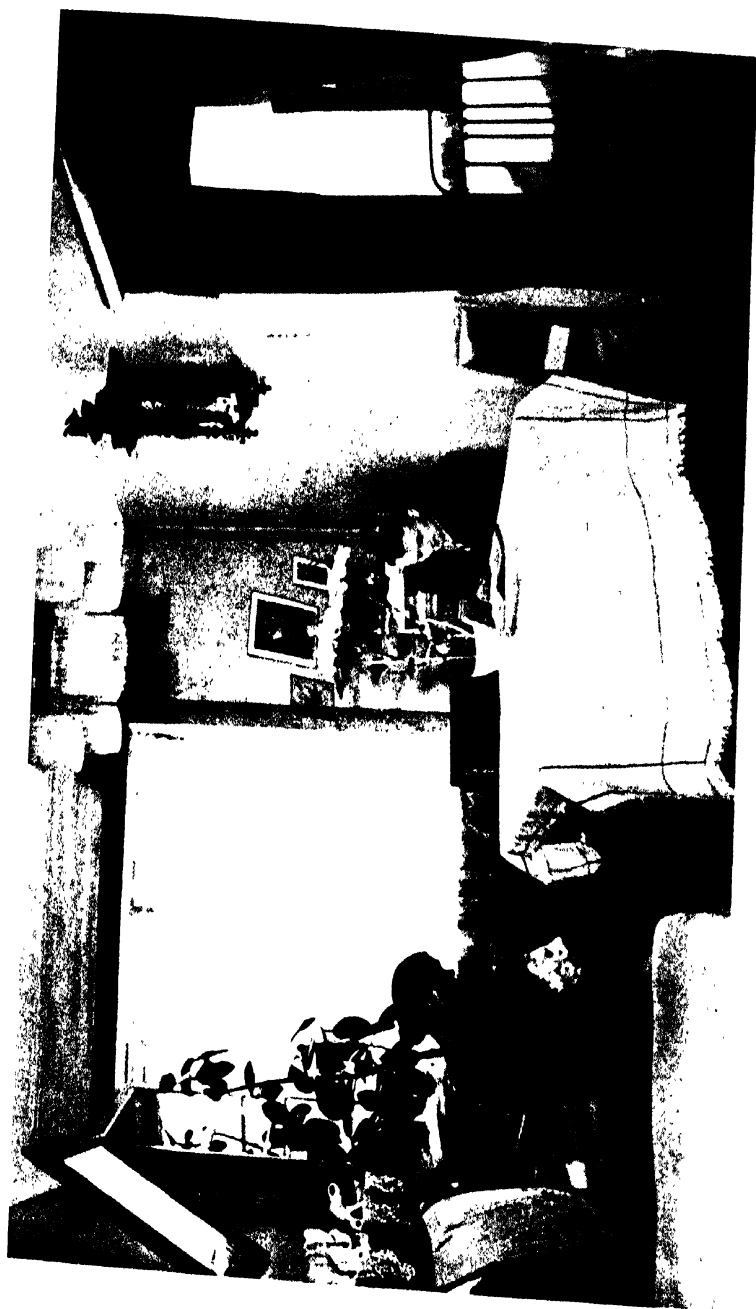
*"History somehow seems to miss  
Interesting things like this."*—PUNCH.

FOR the last few years before the war there was no food rationing in the Soviet Union. But, of course, rationing had to be reimposed very soon after the outbreak of war. The rationing system was different from ours and is often misunderstood.

In the first place, in the countryside there was no restriction on the consumption of locally-produced food. In the towns everyone was rationed, but there was no standard ration which applied to all. What one got depended on the work one was doing. Those who were doing more valuable work got more, and those who were past work or engaged in housekeeping all the time received a very small ration. There was nothing like our "points" system, but it was legal to buy extra food, including rationed food, in the open market; the prices were high, many times higher than the prices of uncontrolled foods in England, but everybody used the open market to some extent.

There are canteens at factories and other places of work, and every important organisation is obliged to set up a "Workers' Supply Department" (O.R.S.) to supplement the ration and to help with clothes. The efficiency of the O.R.S. differs widely with different organisations. At one important factory I found the workers in the canteen eating adequate helpings of meat and mashed potatoes off oilcloth-topped tables. Some other canteens were less good.

The amount of the ration varied from time to time, but at the end of 1945 the picture was something like this: the higher category of workers, that is, miners, skilled workers over a certain level of skill, including, for instance, motor drivers and the more responsible professional workers, received a ration of a little over ten pounds of bread a week, that is, about five ordinary English loaves, half of it rye bread and half of it wheat. The quality of bread varies, but on the whole, even



A TEXTILE WORKER AND HIS WIFE AT HOME



in wartime, the Russian bread is more nourishing than what we get. It forms the staple food of most of the people, and keeps them in remarkably good health.

In addition to this the highest category worker would get about fourteen ounces of butter and other fats every week, one and a half pounds of meat and one and a half pounds of cereals, which he uses for making "kasha," a sort of porridge which plays a very important part in Russian food. He would get about a quarter of a pound of sugar.

The rations were generally available punctually, and at moderate prices, but eggs or fish were often substituted for the meat ration. I heard of someone who had sixty-four eggs in one issue in place of her meat ration, which was getting badly into arrears.

There is a lower category of industrial worker and a lower category of office worker, whose rations were roughly four-fifths of the first category. At the lower end of the scale were the dependents—that is, housewives, old people and anyone who is out of work. These received a pound of bread a day, a quarter of a pound of fats each week, and a pretty low ration of everything else.

At first sight, the higher category ration looks pretty good, and the dependents' very meagre. But in point of fact a dependent is normally by definition a dependent upon someone else, and what happens is that the family rations are shared out, so that the husband in work does not get quite so much as it seems, and the grandmother is rather better off. The position of old people with no relatives to support them, and too old to work, was sometimes very hard. They had to make do on the dependents' ration.

Drawing rations was done in much the same way as in England. Everyone was attached to a particular shop or shops where you had to stand in the queue or get someone to go for you. What shop you were registered with depended upon your work and not on the customer's choice. As foreigners we had a special diplomatic shop, and so did the staff of the Moscow Opera and Ballet; officers of the Red Army were attached to one of the biggest and best shops in Moscow. It made all the difference if you were registered at a good shop

and entitled to buy up to a high "limit," for not all customers were entitled to make the same purchases.

There was no system of rationing for clothes, or for goods other than food, comparable with our system of clothes rationing, but the same result was achieved in another way. The amount of goods you could buy, and in some cases the discount at which you buy them, was fixed according to the work you were doing. Further, it was usual for the employer to supply the employees with at least some clothes, so that your standard of dress depended upon the organisation you worked for, as well as on the work you did. I tried to make the Press Department of H.M. Embassy a model employer but it was not always easy to explain to the Treasury and the various controls just why particular coats and shoes must be released for our staff.

Russian queues are longer and move more slowly as a rule than ours do, and Russian officialdom has the vices of bureaucracy in a very special degree; as a result of this it takes a long time to get anything done, and the dependents are generally very busy standing in queues and drawing the supplies for the household. In addition to this, they have to do any buying on the open market.

These markets, which exist everywhere, are ordinary open air markets with stalls, such as one can see in most countries in the world, and anyone is allowed to trade there. You can sell the produce of your own work for whatever you can get. For instance, if you grow vegetables on your allotment, you can sell them for the best price you can get, so long as you and your family have done all the work. But if you employed somebody else to work for you, and then sold the produce for a profit, this would be "exploitation" and you would be in very serious trouble if you were found out.

Similarly, if you buy some other person's produce for resale—that is, if you act as a middleman—you are guilty of speculation, which is one of the most heinous crimes in the Soviet calendar. By the strict letter of the law it is forbidden to exchange products (as opposed to selling) at the markets; but a good deal of bartering does, in fact, go on, and the police sometimes wink at it.

The Soviet attitude to law enforcement is not quite the same

as ours. In Britain, when a law is passed, its enforcement is normally quite effective, and if not the matter is considered a public scandal. But this was not always the case, and it is little more than a century ago that theft and other crimes against property were of such frequent occurrence that, with the existing primitive police force, detection was chancy and many criminals got away with it. The law replied by imposing fearful penalties on those who were caught in the hope that this would deter the rest. Something like that is happening in Russia to-day. It is impossible to detect and punish everyone who exchanges a loaf of bread, bought at a cheap price off the ration, for milk which is selling at a high price in the open market. But when they are caught, speculators or black market operators are punished with exemplary severity.

One gets the impression that the Soviet administrative machine is still chopping and changing a good deal in its levels of punishment for particular crimes. When I began to know enough to practise my Russian on public notices, I found one in the Moscow underground carriages stating—I quote from memory—that the penalty for pulling the alarm cord without proper cause was “A *minimum* imprisonment for three years, unless the action has not, by its nature, already incurred a severer penalty.”

A Russian friend told me that this was a new regulation, but clearly necessary, since until a comparatively short time ago there had been no penalty whatever for pulling the alarm cord, and both robbers and practical jokers had taken advantage of this.

It is possible to get most kinds of foods at the market; the commonest commodities are bread, milk, butter, vegetables, potatoes and the like, but good quality meat is also obtainable. Beginning in the spring of 1944 the “commercial shops” began to reopen. These are state-owned department stores, the biggest of which is officially known as the Mostorg, but is often called by its old name “Muir and Mirrlees.” This shop was founded by a Scottish family before the revolution, and is not the only case of a shop that has been taken over by the state but is still familiarly called by the name of its former owner. The Mostorg was never completely shut during the



war, but when we arrived there was next to nothing for sale. Anything that was offered was snapped up immediately.

The policy of diverting practically all factory production to war needs got the country through the military crisis of 1941 to 1942, but in its turn produced problems which required an urgent remedy; not merely did clothes and household necessities begin to wear out, thereby causing greater hardship than even the courageous Russian people can stand indefinitely, but the food shortage became seriously aggravated. There was always enough food in the country to have enabled the towns to live much better than they in fact did, but the peasants did not feel the need to undertake long and difficult journeys to town to sell their products in exchange for a pocketful of roubles with which nothing could be bought. This is a well-known type of crisis which occurs whenever there is a famine of goods. A situation was developing with very large potential purchasing power in the hands of the general public, and in particular of the peasants, but with no way of bringing this purchasing power into circulation; prices of uncontrolled goods soared and the peasants saw still less object in bringing food into market. These were the makings of an inflationary situation.

The government solved both problems simultaneously by putting a limited supply of goods on sale at the commercial shops at prices fixed by the ordinary process of supply and demand, that is to say, at commercial prices. This is what is meant by calling these shops "commercial." At first the prices were fantastic by our standards, but the shops were overcrowded from the first day. The buyers were of all types, sometimes army officers and their wives, and sometimes other sections of the well-to-do, but there were also many peasants who had made a lot of money out of selling food to the town but were short of everything else.

As soon as the first wave of buying was over, the prices were reduced, and they continued to fall till the present moment (early 1947). Nowadays everyone uses the commercial shops to some extent, though of course well-to-do people are able to use them more. Until September, 1946, Army officers, and

others whose work was considered important, received a discount of up to about thirty per cent.

"Commercial restaurants" were opened soon after the "commercial shops." During the earlier part of the war, the only place where one could entertain friends in a restaurant was the Aragvi Caucasian restaurant. For this a pass was necessary, but all foreigners were automatically eligible. At this restaurant a good spread could be had for as many people as one wanted to ask, but for the usual high prices. The meal started with rich Russian hors d'oeuvres, fresh caviar, smoked salmon and the like, washed down with large quantities of vodka. This was almost a meal in itself, but was invariably followed, unless special arrangements were made, by the Caucasian dish "shashlik," which consists of lumps of mutton and onion grilled on a skewer; this was washed down with wine. After this feast one always felt, to say the least of it, the worse for wear the next day. The food was wholesome enough, though a bit heavy and monotonous, but the drink was apt to be of indifferent quality and left bad after-effects. The service was rather slow, otherwise quite efficient, and included gypsy singing for an extra fee.

In peacetime drink is cheap and plentiful in Russia. The popular drinks are vodka, beer and, in the country, kvass. Wine is made in the south, but is not a popular drink in central Russia, though it was easily obtained upon request and very cheaply. Vodka is fundamentally the same drink as schnapps or the Scandinavian aquavit. If you can imagine gin without the juniper berry flavouring, that would be something very like vodka. It is not as a rule stronger than gin or whisky but it is drunk neat and has a powerful effect until you get used to it, especially if you sip it. No Russian, nor indeed any sane person, drinks vodka on an empty stomach.

The proper time to drink vodka is before or at the beginning of a meal. You gulp a whole liqueur glass down at one swallow and then eat a "zakuska," the Russian hors d'oeuvre. Zakuski are generally rather fat morsels of caviar, salted herring, or some similar sandwich. They form an important part of all but the simplest Russian meals and they go very well with vodka.

If you get bored with vodka in its native state, you can make

a "nastoika," or buy one. This is simply vodka with some added flavouring; the simplest I know, and one of the best, is made by putting the skin of a tangerine in half a litre of vodka and leaving it for a few days. The resulting drink is pleasantly aromatic and softer than ordinary vodka. It's a nice change but one would get tired of it. Another good nastoika is made by putting a few wild strawberries into vodka, but there are endless possibilities of that kind. A common drink which I consider horrible is "zubrovka," made by putting an aromatic herb called "buffalo grass" into vodka. But the most disgusting drink I have ever tasted in my life is vermouth-vodka. This bright green liquid is a compound of wormwood and vodka. It tastes like the worst ink mixed with furniture polish, only more bitter. I am told that it has valuable medicinal qualities, which are in inverse ratio to the agreeableness of the taste.

Russian beer is of the lager type and is an excellent frothy drink when it is quite fresh but after about a week it goes off and becomes scarcely drinkable. Kvass is a peculiar Russian drink, made from fermented bread, flavoured with various fruits. It is a country drink and not found much in the towns. Those that know it well say it is delicious, particularly on a hot day, but so far I have not struck any kvass that is very attractive.

Wine in the Soviet Union comes from the Caucasus, the Crimea or Central Asia. There are no vintages to compare with the best French but good Soviet wine is on a level with good Italian. The Caucasian wines are rather dry and acid but can be excellent of their kind. The Crimean wines are heavier and suffer from the attempt to imitate European vintages. The best Soviet wines are those which fly under their own colours, such as Kakhetinskoye, or Bishti, which comes from Samarkand, or Tsinandali. Most of these are in both white and red varieties. Soviet champagne is made in Central Asia, and indeed in all the winegrowing regions, and is very drinkable. The Georgians are the leading drinkers and connoisseurs of wine, and consume enormous quantities from the cradle up. Reasonably good brandy is made in Armenia and Georgia.

Unspeakable whisky is brewed and matured in one year in the Urals; but unless you want both to be drunk and to have

a bad hangover, never mix vodka and whisky in the same evening. The best plan is to pass on from vodka to wine as early as possible, but after this you must keep right off vodka for the rest of the evening.

Vodka is the staple drink of Central Russia and was very hard to get at one time: it fetched a thousand roubles (two months' salary for many workers) for one bottle. Later the price fell, and half a litre could be got in the commercial shops for less than one hundred roubles. One friend of mine had his flat blitzed during the rather abortive bombing of Moscow in 1941 and for about six months he had to give up all his vodka ration to get his flat repaired. At that time it would have been impossible to secure official priority for such repairs but it was legal to get the workmen to do the repairs in their spare time. They would not as a rule work for money, but for goods; vodka and cigarettes were the standard currency. This man, being a responsible worker, had quite a good vodka ration, but the ordinary person had a very small one.

As I have said already, from the summer of 1944 other commercial restaurants began to open. The most celebrated of these was the Moskva or Moscow Hotel. This is a well-appointed new building of many floors, standing between the Kremlin and the Council of People's Commissars. Foreigners are not as a rule put to live in this hotel, which is reserved for important Soviet citizens visiting Moscow. The restaurant, which was opened to the general public, served good meals at astronomical prices, but if one went there after supper for the dancing, it was possible to get through the evening on two or three pounds a head. The place was always crowded, particularly with Red Army officers on leave or in Moscow for short visits. By degrees many other commercial restaurants were opened and by the summer of 1945 it was possible to have a good meal with drinks for about the same price as in a London restaurant in wartime. If the Moskva aimed at being like the Berkeley, except that one could wear what clothes one liked, some of the other restaurants were like some of our more popular large restaurants, but the tables were less crowded. There is nothing like our intimate Soho restaurants, but it is always possible to get a small private room for a party.

In the summer of 1945 special Russian dishes were beginning

to appear. I remember one enormous feast consisting entirely of crayfish boiled with herbs; this was washed down with Caucasian white wine. The crayfish, which were brought on boiling hot in a bowl, were delicious.

The war was not a good time for gastronomic studies, but the Russian reaction to shortages itself gives a certain insight into their food habits. The average Russian despises margarine, which he scarcely knows. If he can get only a very little butter he uses it for cooking. The Russians were very thankful for the supplies of American tinned food sent during the war, but like ourselves they could not stand the fat American bacon which, I am sorry to say, was known as "Roosevelt's smile." It shows how high President Roosevelt stood with the Soviet people that their affection for him was not affected even by this.

Soviet production of tinned food has not been on a very big scale hitherto, but some of the fish products are better than anything I know from the west. Crab meat comes from the Pacific, and is, I believe, the same as the Japanese crab meat which used to be sold in America. There is good condensed milk. The children were at one stage fed on soya milk. This was not popular and one little boy was heard to say: "I wish all those soya cows would die."

Excellent black bread is the main food of most Russians, but soups too play a very important part. Russian soup is not so much an appetising preliminary as the main ingredient in a meal; so Russians put the best of what they have into their soups which are delicious. There is nothing I like so much as the taste of salted cucumbers in a Russian soup. These are eaten fresh in season but kept through the winter by pickling. The way to pickle them is to cut off the tips at each end and put them in brine, to which is added a little garlic and a little dill. The best of all, to my mind, are those which are slightly salted so as to keep for a few weeks but not through the whole winter. Dill is used as a flavouring for almost everything. I cannot understand why this delicious herb is not more used in England.

The Russians eat a great many kinds of mushroom and edible fungi which we would reject as toadstools. They pickle them in vinegar for the winter. By tradition, pickled vegetables

are very important in Russian food and they are good, especially pickled tomatoes.

After bread and potatoes the most important thing in the Russian diet is cabbage. This goes into delicious cabbage soup, and is used for various other dishes. One of the best is "kulebaka," a sort of small cabbage pie. For some reason the Russian cabbages have much more taste than ours. My expert advisers tell me that it is just a question of cooking.

The Russians like to eat a good deal of fish, both fresh and salt, but they take this mainly at the "zakuska" or "hors d'oeuvre" stage of the meal. Meat was difficult to get during the war. Fruit was very scarce in the Moscow region because all the fruit trees had been killed in the terrible frosts in 1940. At the end of the war tangerines from the Caucasus began to appear.

The Russians are great tea drinkers, but they drink it without milk, out of a glass, and they call it "chai." You will find that wherever tea is called "chai"—for instance, in the Levant and Middle East—it is drunk out of a glass. In countries where it is called "tea," or "thé," it is drunk out of a cup. In Poland, which lies between the two zones, tea is called "herbata."

The Russians do not drink unsweetened tea. If sugar is short they nibble a corner with each mouthful or hold the lump of sugar between their teeth while they drink. Instead of sugar, they sometimes take jam or chocolate with their tea. Chocolate was a great luxury in wartime Russia but, when you could get it, the quality was far better than wartime British chocolate.

A samovar is, of course, just an old-fashioned tea urn, that is, a permanent reserve of hot water so that fresh tea can be made at any moment. It looks as if ordinary teapots were driving samovars out, and at one time new houses were constructed without the small flue which is needed to let the charcoal fumes of the samovar escape. However, there is now a tendency to go back to samovars and I believe that the newest flats have samovar flues.

If in Moscow you wanted to have a quick one without a meal, there was a "kokteil kholl" in Gorki Street, where you could stand in a queue till they gave you a vile vodka cocktail.

I have heard of people going back to the end of the queue again and again until they are drunk or sick, but on the whole one saw few drunken people during the war.

Distilling was a Government monopoly, even in Tsarist days, but the peasants used to make their own brew, called "samogonka," like the Irish potheen. I never tasted this, but I expect it still goes on.

Second-hand goods are sold in the "commission shops"—a species of state pawnshop, useful to everyone when short of money. You take there anything you have to sell and receive the cash as soon as the sale is effected, less a commission of 15 per cent. to cover retail costs. If you are prepared to take the trouble, you can, of course, sell your things privately without going to the shop, and many people do so.

At the commission shops you can buy second-hand clothes, furs, jewels, crockery, oriental textiles, knick-knacks and curios. The prices are fixed by supply and demand and come down as the commercial shop prices come down.

Quite a quantity of foreign goods have come into circulation in various ways. I can think of many cases of people, in what we would call the professional classes, who, through working abroad or having foreign friends, were able to buy before the war quite large supplies of foreign clothes, wireless sets, and so forth. This is quite lawful and many people lived during the war by selling off their possessions at fancy prices, either privately or through the commission shops.

The clothes, crockery, furniture, etc., which came onto the market in this way helped to supply people with necessary replacements in the early stages of the war when, as already stated, Soviet production of consumer goods had practically ceased. Later on the supply of second-hand goods in circulation was increased by goods captured from the enemy and brought back from abroad by members of the Red Army. Rumania was the first important source of foreign goods. After the commercial shops were opened in 1944, the second-hand market became less important, but it will long remain a necessity to Soviet economy.

Bookshops form a special category of their own. In wartime you had to be quick off the mark to get new books, but second-hand books were always to be had. New books are very cheap,

for it is the State policy to make the printed word cheap; but the price of second-hand books is fixed by supply and demand and, the demand being greater than the supply, prices are high. Old editions of the standard Russian classics are quite easy to find, but it takes a good deal of hunting to find some of the very interesting authors of the first twenty-five years of this century.

There are many shops and stalls selling flowers, mostly artificial. In the summer the peasants brought in wild flowers, mostly short-lived cornflowers, scabious and the like, which sold easily for several roubles a bunch.

Advertising does not play the extreme part that it does in capitalist countries, and one is free from the unscrupulous attempts of some western advertisers to exploit human failings and anxieties. But none the less, placards exhort you to subscribe to war loan, and one of the best advertising spaces in Moscow is occupied by an enormous picture telling you to insure your life while there is yet time.

Advertisements in the newspapers are mainly from factories trying to obtain special types of worker, but theatres, cinemas and public lectures are advertised just as they are in Britain.

In the Soviet Union there are no small tradesmen; the prohibition on speculation and on employing labour makes it impossible to keep a small shop. It is open to a group of craftsmen to go into partnership as an *artel*, which is a simple form of producers' co-op traditional in Russia. There are, for instance, many artels of watchmakers. Skilled workers often earn extra money in their spare time, but on the whole the little man does not flourish as an economic unit and the Soviet Union is the poorer thereby.



## CHAPTER VII

### BLAT

*"Life is just one damned thing after another."*

—VICTORIAN PROVERB.

LONDONERS who have been through the war will be able to understand life in Moscow much better than pre-war Britons. In Moscow there is the same baffling problem of getting anything done, whether it is finding somewhere to live, trying to get a broken window mended, or just to telephone. There are the same crowded trains, and the same waste of time standing in queues. Indeed, the best way to understand some things about the Soviet Union is to realise that the country has, in a sense, been at war for a very long time. The 1914 war passed without a break into the revolution and the civil war. There was a slight respite from 1923-1928, but from then on the first five-year plan, the collectivisation of agriculture and the impending shadow of the present war imposed near-war conditions.

The Russians are like a people who have been fighting for thirty years and it is not surprising that the queues moved more slowly and that the paint was coming off houses in Moscow even more than in London. Throughout all this time the Russians have been buoyed up by their hopes for the future. Several times these hopes have been cruelly deferred, sometimes for internal reasons, but also as a result of external pressure and menaces for which the ordinary Russian was in no way to blame.

There is a special technique of living in the Soviet Union under war or near-war conditions. The Russians call this technique "Blat," a word which includes everything from the know-how of getting things done to practices which may come very near to corruption.

In Soviet Russia there is no corruption in high places whatsoever, so far as I have heard, which is indeed remarkable when one considers the unenviable reputation for corruption of the Tsarist bureaucracy. But Blat is everywhere.

Blat is what the French call "le Systeme D." It involves knowing the right people for getting things done, and it involves giving one's quid pro quo. I was in a position to exercise "blat" in a very simple and innocent form by giving people copies of the *British Ally*. The demand for our paper was always wildly beyond the supply, and it was surprising how obliging people would be if you promised to give them a copy.

I hope I am giving away no secrets when I say that on one occasion an Allied Mission asked us as a favour to arrange a special subscripton to a person who was able to carry out certain mechanical repairs, but refused to do so until he had been given the *British Ally*.

Then there is a very important class of people in Moscow called "Upravdom." These are like concierges, but they have wider functions. They are in charge of the heating, lighting and incidental problems of a whole block of flats or, in some cases several blocks, and are popularly believed to be in touch with the N.K.V.D. They are by their profession an unpopular race, and during the bombing of London in 1940 it was a popular joke to say: "Why do the Germans bother to drop bombs on London, when, if they dropped five thousand Moscow Upravdoms by parachute, they could destroy the city much quicker?"

But I think public opinion is a little hard on the poor upravdoms. They get no thanks whatever they do. On the whole, I found them as competent as one could reasonably expect in the circumstances, and, if they sometimes indulge in doubtful practices, this was on the whole kept within reasonable limits and might sometimes even be in the public interest. Your upravdom can make your life a burden, but he or she—for it generally seems to be a woman—can do much to make your lot easier.

She has to exercise a good deal of discretion about just when to stand by the letter of the regulations. For instance, during the war many people had to put in temporary stoves to keep the place heated at all. These stoves needed flues and if all upravdoms had insisted on the letter of the Moscow Building Act, or whatever regulations there were, it would have been practically impossible for many of these stoves to operate. There was neither labour nor materials available to construct

proper flues, so many of the stoves were connected with the gas flue system. This sometimes worked well enough, particularly when no one was living overhead; but gas flues are not always constructed to take smoke, and I remember once coming into a flat which was completely smoked out, because the people below had been letting their smoke into the gas flue. The Upravdom was called at once and good-humouredly told the neighbours below never to do it again.

Blat works in all sorts of other ways; for instance, transport is just as difficult in the Soviet Union, or more so, than it is here. It is not easy to get the use of a motor lorry, even for the most necessary purpose, by taking the matter through the proper channels. But if you are in a position to do a favour to the owner of a lorry, you can get your quid pro quo. To bribe the lorry driver with vodka to do your job, instead of what he is supposed to do, is beyond the bounds of blat and is sheer corruption. But, of course, such things do happen.

The director of a factory or the head of any other organisation has to exercise drive and initiative to get anything done; but being in a public position he has to use a good deal of discretion about how far it is proper to go. All the same a director who has no Blat is not a very good director.

## CHAPTER VIII

### POLITICS

THE position of an individual or of an organisation depends for practical purposes both upon the priority accorded to the work the man or organisation does, and upon what. There are, of course, big differences in standards of living between different people, but this does not cause much heart-searching. It does not occur to Russians that an explanation is needed; but if you asked an intelligent Russian, he would probably answer something like this:—

“The Communist Party and the Soviet Government are working towards Communism, and when we get there everyone will work according to his ability and receive according to his need. But as realists we recognise that this state of affairs is a long way ahead. In the meantime we are living under Socialism, which means that everyone must work according to his ability and receive according to his *work*. “He that does not work, neither shall he eat” is one of the principles of the Stalin constitution. It stands to reason that some people’s work is very much more valuable than that of others; for instance, a great scientist or the director of the factory named after Stalin, or a general in the Red Army, or one of our leading writers, has done more for society than the ordinary worker, and it is right that he should receive more. The essential thing, to our minds, is that he had made his money in the service of society and not by exploitation or speculation.”

Here the reader will probably want to ask:

“But what do you mean by exploitation?”

“I mean simply that he gets paid for his own work and not for other people’s. Before the revolution, a factory owner paid his workers as little as he could, and sold the result of their work for as much as he could get, thereby enriching himself from the work of others. Nowadays the director of the same factory will be paid well if his factory works well, and of course he will tend to be paid better if his factory begins to work better. But he is not allowed to make anything for himself

out of the work that the factory hands do. If they themselves work well their wages will be put up—we are great believers in piece work—and people like Stakhanov, who invent new methods of work, get not merely a good financial reward, but an honourable place in society.”

“Well then, what about speculation?”

“Speculation is the merchant’s or middleman’s way of making money. These people used to buy things cheap and then sell them to the public for as much as they could get. Under the Soviet system the retail distributors make no profit for themselves; they just add enough margin to their cost prices to cover the operating costs, including, of course, their own salaries. The commercial shops may seem to you an apparent exception to this rule, but they were a wartime measure, and the high prices they charge are really comparable to your purchase taxes. At any rate, if you buy anything at the commercial shops, you can be sure that any profit goes to public uses. The directors and employees of the commercial shops are all public employees working for a salary.”

“That may be all very well from a practical point of view, but how does it square with all this talk about a classless society? Aren’t all the people who draw the higher salaries and have the other advantages turning themselves into a new governing class?”

This point would surprise and puzzle our Soviet friend, but when it was explained to him what Anglo-Saxons are driving at when asking this question, he would probably reply:

“No, of course not. Leaving aside the strict meaning of the word “class,” I suppose you mean any hereditary group of people who pass on a special position in society from one generation to another. But just look at the sort of people who rise to the top in the Soviet Union. Most of them started as workers or peasants, and have risen by their own hard work and ability. For us the essential point is that in the Soviet Union all incomes are earned incomes. The Americans talk about “from log cabin to White House,” and I should imagine the little wooden house that Stalin lived in when he was a child must be something like a log cabin. That’s the way most of our leading people started, though of course there are a good many people of intellectual origin among them too, such as

Molotov, whose real name is Scriabin, like the composer who was one of his relatives. Actually, in the intellectual professions such as science, literature and the theatre, you would find that quite a high proportion of our best workers still come from families of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, and this is quite natural because a man's education starts in his home, and these people have had the advantage of being brought up to think and to enquire from their earliest years. Yes, and many of their fathers knew people in important positions and were able to give their sons a good start, though of course it is up to them whether they are able to use this start or not. Under the Soviet system this still goes on, and I feel sure that the children of our generals and scientists and factory directors will have a good start in life. After all, that is one of the things that fathers always work for, and it probably makes them do their work better. There is no danger of this tending to crystallise into a new class structure for at least thirty years, because there are always so many new people needed in responsible positions that the people who have the luck to be the children of successful fathers are swamped by the rest. And let me remind you that even these few will not hold their positions unless they justify themselves continually by good work. In the Soviet Union we are ruthless about moving people down if they do not justify themselves. If in another generation we find a tendency for a new class structure to arise, we shall have plenty of time to deal with the problem then."

That is the sort of answer that Russians will give you if you press them, but the subject does not ordinarily arise in conversation, not necessarily because anyone is afraid of discussing it, but because it is unimportant to Russian minds. For them the matter is already settled.

Indeed, it is remarkable how few political discussions take place in Russia nowadays. Long repression of political speculation would appear to have killed interest. One is often tackled about the latest turn in Anglo-Soviet relations, as interpreted by "Pravda," and there used to be a lot of heckling about the second front. But practically no one discusses the interpretation or application of Marxism; apparently it is considered an esoteric matter best left to the powers that be; anyone with education has studied some Marxism at school, but

most people find the subject rather dull—about as dull as English schoolboys would find Divinity if the Bible was written in the style of Karl Marx.

The type of Marxism most frequently met in intellectual conversations in the West would, I think, be condemned as Pokrovskian.

Pokrovsky, whose histories were the standard Soviet textbooks for over 15 years, was posthumously condemned in 1934 as an "anti-Marxist" writer. Put shortly, the argument against him is that if everything depends upon mass movements and conflicts of economic interest, which work out according to logical and foreseeable principles, nothing is left for the individual to do, so why should one make a special effort? This may be simplifying too much, but the Soviet authorities are always concerned to inspire their people to the maximum effort.

Only a few have read deeply in Marx, Engels and Lenin. The average educated Soviet citizen gets his Marxism very largely from the Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This is a standard book which gives the received Stalinist view of events, and is compulsory reading in all Party courses and higher education. One chapter was written by Stalin himself.

During the war, there was little public discussion of public issues, and I never heard anyone suggest that such discussion would be desirable. People seemed to take it for granted that the Government knew better than the ordinary man what should be done, and they did not expect to be consulted.

There are plenty of public meetings, but these are scarcely discussions in our sense of the word. They explain the policy of the Government without eliciting any very noticeable suggestions or criticisms from the public. Policy-forming discussion is carried on in the Central Committee of the Communist Party, a body of 128 men all told, which works largely through sub-committees and reports to the politburo—a body of fourteen men all told whose decisions on policy are supreme under Stalin.

The press also refrains from discussion of public issues which are still sub judice. It explains the policy once it has been decided on, and it is useful in criticising public bodies or officials which do not come up to scratch. It also occasionally throws its

columns open to suggestions about some administrative problem such as the working of village soviets.

But if there is little freedom in the expression of opinion, there is freedom from the fear of unemployment and this is surely one of the necessary ingredients in the feeling of personal freedom.

What has been said above refers mainly to internal policy. While the foreign policy of the Soviet Union is no more subject to internal discussion than its home policy, the foreign policy of other governments is the subject of frequent comment, but there are no debates about this, either, in the sense that one writer will take one view about, say, British policy and another will take the opposite view.

It is not easy to know what the quality of political discussion in the Central Committee of the Party is like, because the Russians make a mystery of all Party affairs. I do not even know for certain whether matters of policy are sometimes effectively discussed at a lower level than the Central Committee, though my Communist friends assure me that long discussions take place at all party meetings. I prefer not to speak of what I have not heard. It is difficult to see how the policy-forming organs of the Party are to be replenished without training in the art of discussion, for efficient political deliberation requires practice.

The foregoing will probably strike the reader as rather odd. The average Soviet citizens would certainly regard our arrangements as equally odd. For instance, some British engineers once tried to explain to some Soviet acquaintances what our constitutional opposition was. The Russians, who were plainly mystified, said: "Do you really mean that in your country you deliberately allow people to try to stop the Government doing what the Government knows ought to be done?"

I once got into a long argument with a very intelligent young Soviet intellectual who had never been abroad. I tried to explain, not merely the British constitution, but how things actually happened here, and I began to think that I was making some progress with my friend, who showed deep interest and asked very shrewd questions. Then, at about three o'clock in the morning, he looked me in the eye and said: "You British are wonderful people. Look what you have done with this con-



stitution of yours. But don't you think it would be better if only you could forget it all and all get together behind one party?"

This view is shared both by the man in the street and by intellectuals. Simple people who have never heard of western constitutional government do not see without outside prompting why the ordinary man should set his opinion up against the Government's. Intellectuals reach the same conclusion in a different way. They conclude, no doubt rightly, that the historical origins of the Party system and public discussion in the western democracies is conflict of interest, mainly economic, between different classes round whom the parties crystallised. They conclude from this that a classless society such as the Soviet Union, can have no need for this kind of discussion.

Sociologists continue to spill much ink about these problems, but it seems to me that Soviet thinkers have simply confused origin with function. Their historical explanation may well be correct, but the reason why we are attached to the practice of public discussion of all important issues, is that in our experience it produces better results.

The Russians have an intense human interest in foreign countries but little background to understand them by. Like most foreigners they vaguely imagine the British Isles to be wrapped in perpetual fog and rain, but have no living picture of what these islands are like to live in.

They have on the whole an admiration for the "English" national character—to them all Britons are English. They imagine us to be adventurous, practical, deeply patriotic and to have a sense of humour akin to their own, and they regard us with admiration as the classical land of tradition. They hope that we are human and are prepared to take us to their hearts if we are, but they have heard much of English reserve and do not know whether to take the concealment of emotion for coldness. Our polite reticence seems to them a sign of trickiness, and, briefly, they do not know where they stand with us. They expect us to be more formal than we are and often take our informality for rudeness.

Their picture of British life is mainly Dickensian and they have no conception of recent changes. In general they know that the West is the most technically advanced part of the world

and that this is reflected in a higher standard of living, but they have little idea of our modern social structure. For instance, they scarcely realise that our social services exist. They have a lively interest in our political institutions, which they neither understand nor envy. A typical point of view is: "There must be something in a political system which has brought the people of a small island to such a great position in the world." Many Russians admire our political maturity. I have been asked more than once how it is that we combine so much political stability with liberty for the individual, but this is not a typical point of view.

When we showed an exhibition of Britain at War in Kuibyshev, pictures of the King and Queen mixing as ordinary people with the troops and workers excited interest. In another part of the Soviet Union some friendly soldiers told me: "It seems that your King is quite different from our Tsar," but there was no suggestion that monarchy is a desirable institution.

Russians are interested in the Dominions and understand the difference between a Dominion and a Colony better than most foreigners do, but they imagine in a vague way that the Colonies and India are the scene of terrible oppression.

Britain is for them the classical land of the industrial revolution, and they consider us in the forefront of technical progress and inventiveness, but they believe the Americans to have a monopoly of efficient mass production. Looking at the map, they can scarcely realise the scale of British industry or the productivity of British labour.

Russian intellectuals have a warm feeling for France as the mother of so much that is best in our civilisation, but simple people do not appreciate sufficiently the greatness of France.

Southern and Eastern lands are romantic and unreal to the Russians.

The average Russian has an almost passionate desire for friendship with all peoples. He believes that the Russians are the greatest of all peoples, and he has a Messianic hope that Russia will show salvation to the world, but he is too conscious of his own deficiencies for this hope to be a belief and he is too human to want to make the Russians into a *Herrenvolk*, even if his Government encouraged such a tendency, which it does not.

I have said very little so far about the O.G.P.U. or N.K.V.D., as it is now called, because it does not enter into everyday life to the extent that is sometimes supposed. I was not in Moscow during the terror of 1937-38, but there is no doubt that at that time enormous numbers of innocent people were arrested and sent to distant destinations, or shot. It was afterwards publicly admitted that mistakes had been made, and Stalin himself has stated that nothing of the kind must be allowed to happen again.

The Russian police are divided into two sections--the ordinary civil police or militia, and the political police; both are under the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, which is known as the N.K.V.D. and has taken the place of the O.G.P.U. The militia, who are not called police, because the Tsarist "politseiski" was unpopular and oppressive, do point duty and deal with ordinary crimes. They are reasonably efficient and not unpopular, but get little respect.

During the war there were many girls in the militia, particularly on point duty. They looked much more feminine than our policewomen and were none the less efficient.

The political police of the N.K.V.D. are quite a different business. They are sometimes uniformed and sometimes not. People are certainly frightened of them, but I doubt whether the ordinary peasant or factory worker is much more aware of them than the average Londoner is of Scotland Yard. Pains are taken to recruit a good type, and I have nearly always heard favourable reports of the higher personnel of the N.K.V.D. Indeed, the officers I have come across myself do not, on the whole, make a bad impression.

In what follows I am dismissing from my mind, so far as possible, all indirect evidence and am going only on what I have been told by victims of the N.K.V.D. I have talked to a number of people who have served terms in concentration camps and have one friend, a foreigner now outside the Soviet Union, but who spent three years in prison and in labour camps. He was eventually released after admission that his arrest had been a mistake, and was offered good work if he remained in the Soviet Union. Not unnaturally, he preferred to return to his own country.

I have also known Russians who worked at one time or

another in capacities connected with the N.K.V.D. prison camps.

The N.K.V.D. have great power and are subject to no constitutional safeguards. The principle on which they act is that it is better that nine innocent men should suffer than that one guilty man should escape. Russians accept this without repining, and I have more than once heard former victims say: "When the wood is cut, the chips fly." They shrug their shoulders and say: "I was one of the chips."

Often the people who get arrested by the N.K.V.D. are the helpless victims of the faults of Soviet bureaucracy. Much suffering and loss of life is caused by sheer childish incompetence, but I have not heard of sadistic cruelty.

The following incident is characteristic: On a certain public work in the North of Russia newly-arrived convicts, who had been for some time in prison on a lowering diet, began to die like flies. A certain engineer, himself a convict, who had been put in charge of part of the project, took the matter up with the camp commandant and then with a very high official of the N.K.V.D., who at once saw the point, and ordered that in future these new arrivals should be put on lighter work and given extra rations for the first month. One is reminded of the incredible mistakes made by our own 18th century bureaucracy. For instance, when in 1756 Parliament made a grant to the Foundling Hospital, a condition was attached that all children brought there should be accepted. In consequence more children were brought than there was provision for, so that two-thirds of them died. It would be easy to multiply instances of this kind, but this does not prove that our ancestors were more cruel than we are. If by now we have learnt better, the Russians, too, are learning.

Conditions in the camps in North Russia are very hard but, so far as I have heard, not inhuman. The buildings are very cold in winter, and the work is hard. But in normal times those who are lucky enough not to be the victim of some fearful administrative error seem to be healthy enough.

The Poles who were sent to these camps in such large numbers during the war went in peculiarly tragic circumstances. Not only did the mere fact of war greatly increase the hardships to be endured; for instance, the food supply was at best

indifferent. But, being foreigners and not always able to speak Russian, the Poles did not know their way round and may have suffered where the average Russian would have known how to arrange things. In other words, they had no local Blat.

The foreign colony is, of course, watched more closely than the rest of the community, and this partly accounts for the obsession with the N.K.V.D. displayed by some writers about the Soviet Union. The system is detestable in itself, but the intention of those who control it is on the whole humane, and many of the current stories are exaggerated. For instance, it is not true that all foreigners in Moscow are followed wherever they go. I have no doubt that a general check is made and I have a shrewd idea how the system works; but normally speaking, if you walk out into the street and come back four hours later, it would appear that the N.K.V.D. do not know where you have been. But frequent visits to the same address would certainly become known.

I remember once interpreting between an English lawyer and a high Soviet judicial official, who expressed interest in English law, which he claimed to have studied. From a historical point of view, he thought that the Habeas Corpus Act had been beneficial, but that it was not applicable to modern conditions. When the executive had been the king, there was great danger that the executive would exercise its power unjustly or capriciously, so that the subject required protection such as that provided by the Habeas Corpus Act. But when the executive represented the people, particularly in a state such as the Soviet Union, where class conflicts did not exist, there was no further use for special measures to protect the subject, for the executive of a truly democratic country had no reason to oppress the subject.

This opinion was obviously given in good faith, but here again function is not necessarily the same as origin. No doubt it is true that British constitutional safeguards were introduced to protect the subject against oppression by an executive whose interests did not necessarily coincide with those of the subject. But we continue to maintain these safeguards because we find there are still good practical reasons for doing so. I never met anyone in the Soviet Union who realised that the admitted mistakes of the N.K.V.D. might be in part due to the lack of

constitutional safeguards. It is sound administrative practice to define and prescribe the limits of police power very carefully, and to enforce the rules very scrupulously. There was nothing in the history of Tsarism to make the Russians realise this, and it was not to be expected that constitutional safeguards should be introduced in the chaotic earlier years of the revolution. But the Soviet régime is now as firmly established as any régime in the world, and it is high time the matter was attended to.

On the whole, a good type has been recruited into the upper ranks of the N.K.V.D., and I feel sure they would work a new dispensation just as zealously as the old.

CHAPTER IX  
EDUCATION, FAMILY AND RELIGION

*Kindergarten and School*

UNTIL 1944 Soviet children went to school at eight, but the age has now been reduced to seven. There are kindergartens for the younger children and crèches for the babies. These always seem to be in charge of people who are fond of the children and understand them, but, just as in Britain, there are not nearly enough crèches and kindergartens, and it would be wrong to suppose that most children go to them.

The kindergartens are much the same as in other countries. The children get washed and looked after and put to rest at the right time, and they are taught singing and dancing, games and simple recitations. They always seem to enjoy this, but they do not sing more melodiously than children of the same age in other countries. These places are clean but not unreasonably antiseptic.

The moral education of the children is taken very seriously and they are brought up to believe that all good things come from Communism. The slogan, "We thank Stalin for our happy childhood" is everywhere. In fact, the current moral notions are to our minds crammed down the children's throats a little too much, but not so much as in English Victorian schools and nurseries.

The school leaving age is subject to various exceptions and special rules, just as it is in this country, and I have never discovered to my own satisfaction what the minimum schooling is. But, barring accidents, such as those caused by the war, the great majority of children in the Soviet Union receive elementary education in the three R's and a smattering of something more.

In many villages there is only four years' schooling, but this does not necessarily mean that the children's education stops at that; they often go on to a boarding school at a bigger centre.

Most children receive some secondary education, and very large numbers receive the full ten years' education which finishes at seventeen. Those that leave school early receive further instruction at the technical schools attached to factories. Soviet children are on the whole keener to learn than ours; under Tsarism learning was hard to come by, and they still think it is a privilege to be allowed to learn.

Much time is given to science and equally much to poetry and literature. The teaching varies in quality. The standard is certainly not higher, and perhaps lower, than in our elementary and secondary schools, but the remarkable thing is how much teaching there is. When it was decided, after the revolution, to educate the whole population, there was naturally an acute shortage of teachers. Nothing but the keenness of all concerned has made so much progress possible. Outsiders without any particular training were often pressed into the teaching profession, and the best pupils often stayed on as teachers or even taught young children while they themselves were learning. There are now many teachers' training colleges which turn out a fully-qualified product. But the supply has not yet caught up with the demand, and the Soviet Union consequently suffers from too large classes even more than we do in Britain. There is also a great shortage of school buildings, and one often finds, for instance, that the younger children are taught in the mornings and the older ones in the afternoons. This means a heavy strain upon the teachers, and, since it is impossible to organise proper breaks on such a time-table, it must tend to make the children listless. The older children often go to school in the morning and work for wages in the afternoon. School books and writing materials were so short during the war that some schools were reduced to learning by rote.

Since 1944 boys and girls have been taught separately whenever possible, but they meet together for play and recreation. This change is universally approved by both teachers and parents. Various reasons are given for it, but perhaps the most important is that it makes for better discipline.

In the early years of Soviet rule many revolutionaries expected



to build a new heaven and a new earth. The older generation tended to be against the Bolsheviks, who therefore relied on the young, and did everything they could to break the power of parents over their children. The family was regarded as a bourgeois institution, hostile to the revolution, and marriage was thought to concern no one but the husband and wife. In school, too, the encouragement of the younger generation sometimes went to fantastic lengths and children would solemnly sit in judgment upon their teachers.

But as the revolution settled down into a permanent state system the need for discipline was felt ever more strongly, and Soviet schoolchildren are to-day expected to obey their teachers at least as much as in other countries and are taught the same standards of school-time behaviour. The authority of the parents, too, is being built up. Neither parents nor schoolmasters are allowed to beat the children, but there are other ways of making their authority effective.

As far as I have observed, the result is that Soviet children behave in school very like our children. This is welcomed by the parents as much as by anyone else, for the young communists who wanted to overthrow the family in 1923 are now respectable parents of children who are growing up, and they do not see why they should not be treated with the respect usually shown to parents.

### *Family*

Family relations in the Soviet Union nowadays are not so different as one might suppose from family relations in Britain. Boys and girls dream of romantic love and like to read love stories. The ideal set before young people, both by the state and by public opinion, is to marry and live faithfully and to bring up a family. It is considered good if man and wife can hold through life to their first choice, but allowance is made for the frailty of human nature, and if two people cannot get on together public opinion does not condemn them for separating.

The state at first preserved an attitude of *laissez-faire* neutrality, but has now begun to take a hand. Since 1944 it has been impossible to get a divorce without going to court, and the fees for divorce are substantial, though not high enough to

deter anyone who is determined. The discretion left to the courts appears to be very wide. One was told at first that it was quite difficult to persuade the judge to grant a divorce. But perhaps the most effective practical discouragement lay in the provision that anyone seeking a divorce must publish his intention in the local newspaper. In Moscow there was only one paper which accepted such announcements, and it limited itself to three a day, so that there was a long waiting list. In the autumn of 1945 there was already a tendency to think that after more than a year of rigorous application, the law might soon be applied more leniently.

Russians have a great sense of decorum, and there is no love-making in public; but Soviet citizens do not attach any importance to the possession of marriage lines, and it is up to any couple to decide whether to call themselves man and wife or not. On one occasion a girl will refer to a man as her husband, and later she may deny that she is married; nobody worries, and it is all her own affair. The sex-starved people so common in our own puritanical society are not to be found, but there are certainly neurotic people of other kinds in Russia. To do justice to some of the extraordinary life-stories I have been told would need the qualities of Chekhov and Edgar Allan Poe combined. After making all allowances for Russian communicativeness and any possible vagaries of the Russian temperament, one does come across a fair percentage of psychological casualties. I leave it to wiser heads than mine to say what part of this is due to overcrowding and to the hardships and uncertainty of a revolutionary period.

Taking the good with the bad the Soviet code of sexual ethics has probably not worked out too badly in terms of human happiness. The Russians are excellent parents, but it is sad to see so many children with step-parents, and everyone seems agreed that in the past things have been too lax and require tightening up.

During the war there were not many street-walker prostitutes, though there were plenty of girls who made their living out of men without forfeiting their amateur status. There are exceptions to all rules, but very few Russian girls will enter into a light liaison with a man for material reasons, without at least

a modicum of sentiment on both sides, and the man has to play up to this. Abortion is now forbidden under severe penalties and is correspondingly expensive, but it is very prevalent; contraceptives are hard to come by.

The Metropole, where most of the foreigners were assigned rooms, has always had a bad reputation, and respectable girls sometimes refuse invitations to go there in the evening from a man whom they are glad to meet elsewhere.

Homosexuality is rare, except in some of the Oriental parts of the Soviet Union, where it is traditional.

Kay Oakman writes as follows about the economic position of women:—

“Women in Russia do much heavy work. They were, for instance, taking up redundant tramlines and repairing roads. With the first fall of snow whole armies of Russian women appear in the streets with picks and shovels in a vain endeavour to keep them clear of the snow which packs down hard, sometimes to a depth of nearly a foot, as is seen in the spring when the thaws come to the help of these Amazons. Admittedly, Russian women are much tougher than ours or than American women. They are short and very sturdy, but it seems to me that women in Russia are allowed to do nearly all the hard graft, while being not in the least exempted from the normal housekeeping chores of women.

“But I think the position of women may alter now that the war is over, partly because there will be more men to work in the factories and to do the heavy labour mentioned, and partly because the Russian authorities realise the necessity for women in the home. This is shown by their recent decision to separate the education of boys from girls. It is a fact that women in Russia to-day are very deficient in the art of home-making. Very few women can sew well enough to make their own clothes. Comparatively few can knit. When any of the English girls, obliged to wait somewhere, took out their knitting to occupy the time, they were immediately surrounded by groups of marvelling Russians. The very old women can knit, but not the young ones.

This is one side of the question. Another side is the opportunity for the woman with more than average ability to take

up a profession on terms nearer to equality with men than would be usual in a Western country.

### *Religion*

“Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science.”—*Science and the Modern World*. A. N. WHITEHEAD.

Religion is rigidly excluded from the schools, though there is no longer any atheistic propaganda. Religion plays very little part in the lives of the intelligentsia, but there is still much simple faith among poorer people, particularly in the countryside. Before the Revolution Russia had more churches than were needed; the majority are now closed—if they are interesting they are made into museums, and, if not, they are used as storehouses or allowed to fall down. Not long ago I took a distinguished Soviet visitor to Westminster Abbey. His first question was: “What is this place used for?” and he seemed surprised to learn that it was still a church. A certain number of churches, however, do remain open; and they are crowded. If you go into a church on a week-day when people are at work, the congregation is sure to consist of a few old men and women, just as in Britain. On a Sunday, or on one of the great Feasts of the Church, you will find both sexes and even a predominance of younger people.

The Russian church services, which are very beautiful in a liturgical way, are conducted in old-fashioned Russian (not old Slavonic), which is only half intelligible to the uninstructed. But most people seem to know more or less what is going on, and there is always a deep feeling of fervour. Very often there are beggars at the door; in one provincial town I saw very mediaeval-looking beggars chanting prayers for one’s salvation in return for a moderate fee.

The attitude of the intelligentsia to the Russian Orthodox Church is the result of a long history. The Eastern Church differs in some important respects from the Catholic and Protestant churches of the West. It is a church of faith more than of works, whose supreme aim has been to retain Christianity as nearly as possible unchanged in the form which it took after the great Councils of the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Its task is to prepare men’s souls for salvation, rather than

to improve this wicked world, which is perhaps past praying for. Everything centres round the Church service, which preserves certain features from very early Christian days.

Such a church had no part in the intellectual ferment, which has continually renovated the life of Christianity in the West from the days of the mediaeval schoolmen down to the religious thinkers of the present age. The Orthodox Church was always Erastian, accepting without query the supremacy of State over Church, so that there was no serious opposition when Peter the Great abolished the Patriarch and in effect converted the Church into a department of State. But the State became reactionary and the Church, thus finding itself an instrument of reaction, had not the moral strength to escape from this position until the Revolution.

The old Russian intelligentsia found it difficult to be on terms with their church, and tended to be violently and dogmatically atheistic. It is not surprising if they have become more so since the revolution. It is very difficult to judge how much religion remains among the peasants and working class. The leaders of the Church will tell you, with every appearance of sincerity, that the Revolution, by taking the Church out of the palaces, has brought it nearer the people. The Russian Church still exercises its appeal over the pious, and also sometimes over people who disclaim all religion, but feel that the beauty of the liturgy and the church traditions are something that belongs to them in a peculiar way as Russians.

Here is a description of an Easter midnight service taken from one of my letters home:—

“The curfew was suspended for Easter Eve, so George Stuyck and I went to the midnight service at one of the Moscow churches. Our prejudices are opposite in the matter of religion but we both got the same impressions.

“When we arrived at a quarter past twelve, there was a crowd filling up the whole street outside; one could hear very little of the service but the crowd seemed to understand what was going on and joined in the singing every now and then; money was being passed up continually from hand to hand to pay for candles; no one seemed to contemplate that it might go astray.

“After elbowing for about an hour and a quarter we got

SCHOOLCHILDREN  
AND TEACHERS



BUILDING A NEW SCHOOL IN LIBERATED TERRITORY





inside the church; it was crammed so that we could scarcely move. The door was open and the church was tall but it was stiflingly hot and soon a steady flow of drops began to fall from condensation on the ceiling.

“Stuyck was struck with the spotless cleanliness of the church and congregation, which is in marked contrast with what he remembers from his childhood in Odessa.

“The congregation contained about 30 per cent. of men and included all ages, but the majority were from 20 to 40; this is a young country, but I would say they were a bit younger than the average crowd. Other people who went to services seem to have struck rather more old people, but everyone agrees that there were lots of young people as well. There were a few Red Army men, including officers.

“In spite of its immense length the service was followed with rapt attention by everyone except those who were scuffling at the door to get in or out.

“At certain moments a wave of emotion seemed to sweep the church and the congregation joined in with fervour in what seemed to be the better known passages in the service. We could understand very little of the Old Russian, but there was something compelling about it all and certain moments in the service have an unexpected, almost wild beauty.

“To me the faces looked peaceful and intent; Stuyck would say that some of them reflected superstitious fanaticism.

“After the climax of the service, when the priest announces that ‘Christ is risen,’ a pastoral letter from the Acting Patriarch was read. This called Stalin ‘Our leader’ without mentioning his name, and concluded by invoking God’s aid in the defeat of the enemy. We left at about three o’clock, only half way through the service.

“There was ostentatiously nothing about Easter in the papers the next day. All the same there was a definite holiday feeling about Easter day and the streets were more crowded than usual.

“In our church the choir consisted entirely of women with a male choir master.”



One day a friend and I were being driven round Tiflis in an Intourist car. We stopped the car beside a church and walked in. An old priest was conducting the service. The congregation consisted of two old women, one wounded Red Army man, and twelve children between the ages of 8 and 12 years. One of the women explained that the children were in the habit of coming quite frequently to the church. The intourist guide who accompanied us was at pains to tell us that the children visited the church from curiosity, but the children, pressed to explain their presence, crossed themselves and said they liked coming to the church, having been introduced to it by their grandmothers. I think this is typical; the first Soviet generation, in the towns at least, is predominantly irreligious, but the children are often taken to church by their grandparents; the authorities give no encouragement, but do not interfere.

The war has brought a fair number of people to feel the need for religion, and there have been more baptisms in the war years than at any time since the Revolution. One young girl whose pagan name was Venus was baptised and changed her name to the Christian "Vera." But it is an exaggeration to speak of a revival of faith. Indeed, it is hard to see how the Orthodox Church can be revived as such. If it seeks to be a power in the lives of men it must have that intellectual basis which satisfies contemporary people, and it must become a church of works as well as of faith. But the State gives it no opportunity of taking part in social work, and an intellectual redefinition of its fundamental position would be so contrary to all the traditions of the orthodox church as to convert it into something entirely different.

So far, there is no sign of any particular intellectual tendency in the Orthodox Church, unless one counts its evident wish to be on good relations with the Church of England, and the interest taken by the higher clergy in the life and activity of that church. Besides, intellectual activity presupposes printing and public discussion, whereas the Russian Church is unable to obtain paper and priorities for such purposes; the journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is now published regularly, is a meagre chronicle which does not discuss fundamental issues, and when in 1945 the Church obtained permission

to publish an "Orthodox Church Calendar" this turned out to contain no illuminating discussion of contemporary issues and was, moreover, sold at the price of sixty roubles a copy, a price which suggests that the paper had to be bought on the open market and not at controlled prices.

I have never succeeded in making Orthodox ecclesiastics show the slightest interest in any Christian sects other than their own and the Church of England. But there are, of course, other important religions to be considered. There are about twenty million Moslems, three million Jews, quite large Roman Catholic communities (mainly Lithuanians and Poles), Lutheran Protestants in Esthonia and Latvia, many Baptists and other nonconformist Protestant sects (including one founded by the late Lord Radstock), the Russian Old Believers and Schismatics and a host of splinter sects. Indeed, one side of the Russian character has always tended towards a sort of Protestant non-conformity, and communism sometimes makes its greatest appeal to this side. The Baptists and other Protestant sects continue to exist, and there is a small but devout community of Seventh Day Adventists, but I never came across them myself.

The Old Believers and Schismatics are 17th century secessions from the Orthodox church. I heard many interesting descriptions of their primeval ideas of purity. A friend of mine once stayed with a family in an Old Believer village. They were self-respecting people, and they treated her well, but kept their lives quite separate. Once my friend inadvertently ate from one of their plates; the landlady seized the plate and threw it upon the ground as a thing defiled, and my friend had to pay for a new one.

I knew a number of people who were of Old Believer origin, but under the stress of contemporary life had broken with their traditional faith. They seemed a good type of people.

I spent some time travelling round Moslem parts of the Soviet Union, and it seems to be generally agreed that in the period when religion was actively persecuted, Islam escaped more lightly than Christianity. I did not go into any mosques, but I was told and believe that many of them are open and that the priests officiate freely. But I did not get the impression that Islam had any great hold on the people. It may well be

that after a longer stay one would modify this view, but I give it for what it is worth.

I knew a great many Jews but not a single one who had any interest in religion. No doubt, there is a type of ghetto Jew, from the old-fashioned Jewish communities in the Ukraine, who takes his religion seriously, but the intellectuals are atheists. They seem to feel that their faith has caused all their calamities by making them different, and they therefore turn on religion with unexpected bitterness.

No Bibles have been printed in Russia since the Revolution, and until recently they could not normally be obtained even in second-hand bookshops. But just as I was leaving in September, 1945, old Bibles did begin to come on sale in one of the Moscow shops. In Old Slavonic, a language about as different from Russian as Middle English is from modern English, the Bible cost about a month's wages for a cook. In Russian it cost three or four times as much. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the Bible is very little known, though some intellectuals hold the Song of Solomon in high regard. One young lady had been reading an historical novel about Joseph in Egypt. She told me the whole story with great enjoyment, as if it was the latest novelty, and was rather impressed when I said that in our country everyone was taught these stories.

The practice of religion, on the other hand, is freely permitted; seminaries for priests have been opened for the first time since the Revolution, and the Patriarch of Moscow has been given suitable quarters in the former German Embassy. The doings of the Russian Church receive publicity abroad but very little publicity in their own country.

Religion is not publicly attacked but it is strictly excluded from schools and universities. The only form of what could possibly be called anti-religious propaganda is the public lectures which are organised in all big towns on elementary natural science. The subject-matter is always marshalled in such a way as to suggest a materialistic explanation of the universe. Young Soviet citizens often assume, in the rather naïve manner of the 1880's, that since Darwin it has been conclusively shown that the universe holds no riddle. But they do not always stick to their guns if it is suggested that the matter still lies open.

Christmas trees mean as much to Russian children as they do to ours. In peacetime they light them up with candles and hang them with toys just as we do. Every kindergarten and every school for small children has its Christmas tree, and parents do their best to arrange something at home too. And then there are the public Christmas trees in the Central House of the Trade Unions every year, where there is a regular children's party which goes on for weeks on end.

Some of the nicest Christmas trees I have seen were in homes for orphans. These homes are excellently run and everything is done to make up to the children what they miss in home life. At one home which I knew, the director, who was adored by the children, was said to neglect the teaching in favour of creating a home atmosphere. He was removed and given a different job—quite an important one—and replaced by an able man of the regular schoolmaster type, who perhaps leaned too far in the opposite direction.

Soviet Christmas trees are, of course, not produced for Christmas but for the New Year, and everything is done to make the children forget their religious associations. Once I heard some tiny children at an orphanage dance round the Christmas tree singing a sweet little song about the Christmas tree and how it had come from the collective farm and other pious Communist sentiments.

### *Pioneers*

When the children reach school age they join the pioneers, a sort of boy-scout, girl-guide organisation, which is one of the best things in the Soviet Union. In normal times the children go off to camp for a while in the summer, very much as our children go to a scout camp, and it seems to be great fun. During the early war years it was impossible to organise camps, but at the end of the war they began to revive on a small scale. The children had extra food in camp, and their mothers were delighted to see them go. In each town there are "houses of the pioneers" and in the big towns there is always a central "palace of pioneers," where the children go out of school hours for informal instruction in whatever happens to interest them, and for collective activities such as plays, dancing, music and recitations. One of the best houses of the town is always set

aside for this purpose. In Tiflis it is the former palace of the Tsar's Viceroy in the Caucasus; in Kuibyshev it is the building we had for our Embassy during the evacuation, and in Leningrad it is the famous Anichkin palace.

I am not sure how far all the children are effectively drawn into the activities of the houses of pioneers, even in the towns, and I can scarcely think that there is a very effective network in the countryside. But certainly enormous numbers of children do benefit. Each group has regular times to attend, and by making the staff work hard many successive relays of children get their turn in the week.

At the Central Palaces of Pioneers one seems to get picked children and they are certainly a bright lot. When foreign visitors come, they often put on an impromptu concert. They have none of the shyness and awkwardness of our children when called upon to appear in public, and put all their souls into what they are doing. Sometimes one must listen to boring piano duets of the kind that are put on at school concerts, but on the whole the proceedings are pretty lively. Often there are English items specially for an English visitor's benefit, sometimes rather recondite ones which puzzle some of the guests. At one place we had some 17th century English music by a composer of whom only one of us had heard. At Leningrad a girl of about fifteen recited in a Russian version the Elizabethan patriotic ballad about Mary Ambree. It begins:

"When captains courageous, whom death could not daunte,  
Did march to the siege of the city of Gaunt,  
They mustered their soldiers by two and by three.  
And the foremost in battle was Mary Ambree."

I shall never forget the intense fire with which the little girl delivered the lines where Mary Ambree rejects the Spanish General's offer of marriage. I give the English original which puts the matter in a coarser light than the more refined Russian translation:—

"The Prince of Great Parma heard of her renowne  
Who long had advanced for England's fair crowne;  
He wooed her and sued her his mistress to be,  
And offered rich presents to Mary Ambree.

But this virtuous mayden despised them all;  
'T'll ne'er sell my honour for purple nor pall,  
A mayden of England, sir, never will bee  
The whore of a monarch,' quoth Mary Ambree."

Once I paid a surprise visit to a provincial palace of pioneers and was taken round all the classes. The geography class had outline maps of the British Dominions upon the walls, and the children were learning about them. There was a mountaineering group (this was in the Caucasus) who told me about some of the expeditions they had made: it seemed quite good going for children of their age. But the star turn of the morning was a little boy of eleven who was due to give a short lecture to his comrades on the different types of warship. As we could not stay for his performance he was trotted out for us separately. He was a beautifully scrubbed, bright-eyed, rather sallow, little boy wearing a sailor suit, whose father was in the Black Sea Fleet. It must have been a dreadful ordeal for him to be confronted with two strange foreigners, but he started off quite happily in Georgian, which was his native language. But we did not understand this, and when it was explained to him, he paused for a moment, looked a little disconcerted, and started off again in Russian. He gave an admirably clear and accurate account of the various types of warship and their uses. This was a very necessary piece of education, for Russians understand very little of the sea. For myself, I never could make any Russian understand the difference between a cruiser and a battleship, though there are perfectly good words for both in Russian.

Once I attended a meeting of the "history club" at the Moscow Palace of Pioneers. There were eight or nine boys and girls of about fourteen or fifteen and they were very keen. Their particular job had been to go round looking at all the public statues in Moscow, and to find out about the people they represented. The children enjoyed it, and one learnt a lot from hearing them talk. Afterwards I cross-examined them about what they had read, and asked them to tell me what I should read myself about the period of Ivan the Terrible and his immediate successors. The answer, given by a small boy, was as follows:—

"Of course the best general account is in Klyuchevsky but this is now rather out of date; if you want to go into more detail, you would have to read Solovyov and of course you must look up the original correspondence between Ivan and Prince Kurbsky. The latest view of Soviet historians is in Vipper's book."

I asked what they thought about the great historical plays written about this period by Pushkin and by the two Alexis Tolstoys. They recommended them as literature, but cautioned me about using them as historical sources, though they added that Alexei Nikolayevitch Tolstoy's two plays about Ivan the Terrible, which were then only just out, represented the modern Soviet view.

The conception they had been given of history was not very different from what an up-to-date teacher would give in England. Economic factors and class conflicts were stressed, but it would be hard to say that they were overstressed. The children spoke with pride of the "Development of our Muscovite State." The continuity of the Soviet régime with the Russian past is always assumed nowadays, and rightly so, for it is impossible to understand much of what goes on in the Soviet Union unless you know something about Russian history as a whole.

### *Universities*

After leaving school a large proportion of the children go on to higher education. This may take various forms. There are 30 universities run more or less on Western lines, having about 50,000 students. Still larger numbers go to the Industrial Institutes and other technical colleges, which, though they do not give degrees, educate their students up to what we should consider a good University standard. Doctors and teachers are trained in medical institutes and pedagogical institutes, organised separately from the universities. Already in 1940 there were 782 "Higher Educational Institutions" with 564,000 students. It is now planned to train 150,000 new "specialists" up to University standard every year. The word "specialists" includes for this purpose most of what we should call the liberal professions.

In 1940 there were 152 institutions training industrial students. The "Industrial Institutes" probably turn out more

of the future rulers of Russia than any other organisation. The Urals Industrial Institute at Sverdlovsk is, for practical purposes, a residential university of engineering comparable in size with Oxford or Cambridge. I liked what I saw of the students and their teachers. The people of the Urals and Siberia are somehow tougher and more outspoken than the Muscovites; it is rather like the difference between London and the North. There is nothing like our college system, but the students live in big blocks with communal dining rooms and common rooms. The Institute has an excellent theatre, reading room and library. During the war there were naturally more girls than boys. They slept in rather crowded dormitories, but not at all bad by local standards of housing. The girls take much the same subjects as the boys, and include a number who are studying heavy engineering. I don't think this is due to any difference in feminine nature, but simply to the fact that in the Soviet Union the need for trained people is so great that there is no time for sex prejudice. If a girl is a qualified heavy engineer, she gets the job and keeps it, whereas here one suspects that she would be unemployed in the first slump.

The courses in the Humanities at Universities are not very different from our own, except that the examinations are more frequent and generally, if not always, oral. This appears to be a thoroughly inefficient system; in Britain we are over-examined, but the Russians are under-examined. They know nothing of our systems of external examiners and complicated marking. Until very recently schools used to engage in "socialist emulation" with each other, but it was asking too much of human nature not to expect the masters to give all their children top marks so as to win the competition. For this excellent reason the system has now been abolished.

Latin is not taught at schools, but anyone taking a University degree in the Humanities, for example, in History or in Foreign Languages, now has to take Latin up to roughly our own School Certificate standard. A small but increasing number of students is taking degrees in Latin and Greek.

The Universities maintain a fairly high standard in the humanities, higher perhaps than the average American University, but lower, in most faculties, than Oxford or Harvard.



There may be a tendency to cover too much ground in the courses; for instance, if you take a degree in modern western literature, you are supposed to have read most of the classics of all European languages from the Middle Ages until now. But it is evidently possible to get past on rather a sketchy knowledge of most of the field, if you know part of it well. I found that these overworked students were supposed to study obscure works in English like *Colin Clout*, but that they know little of English poetry other than a very few internationally famous poets. I lost no opportunity of suggesting that the "Oxford Book of English Verse" should be substituted for *Colin Clout* in the curriculum.

One of the best things about Soviet Universities is that it is quite possible for an older person to take a degree, and that this helps him to better work. It is hard work to take a degree in addition to earning one's living, but it is surprising how many people do it.

The tremendous number of Russian boys and girls receiving higher education is the best indication of the aim which the Soviet Union has set itself. This programme of training has high priority in Soviet plans and there can be little doubt that the Soviet Government intends to achieve a rate of all-round progress never yet conceived. I feel little doubt that it is within their power to carry out all they intend in this matter and to do so far sooner than could be expected by those who judge solely by what has been done in the past.

The young men and women who come out of the Soviet "Institutes of Higher Education" are, as a rule, well grounded in their speciality, alert, public-spirited and modest. If their horizon is narrower, they are less bewildered than our own young people. They have renewed my belief in the future of the Russian people when officialdom and red tape brought me near to despair. The younger generation is unsophisticated and has much to learn, but it is open minded and, so long as this is so, it will continue to learn.

## CHAPTER X

### AMUSEMENTS

SOVIET people have much the same taste in amusements as we do, but their recreation, like ours, was sadly cut during the war.

Football has a big following, but the Russians think it strange that we play it in winter. They cannot understand why the ground is not too hard and why we do not slip up on the ice. In Russia, summer is the football season, and matches take place in the late afternoon when the heat is less. There are no football pools and not much betting upon matches, but in normal times there are horse races, with a State operated Tote, which helps to bring in revenue to the State. Of course there are no bookies.

At the end of the war horse-racing was already beginning again in Moscow. There is also a State lottery, but the main outlet for the gambling instinct is, oddly enough, the war loan. One is encouraged to subscribe generously to the State loans. In war loans open to subscription by individuals (as opposed to organisations such as collective farms) no interest was paid, but lucky numbers won prizes, such as a fur coat, a bicycle or something else equally desirable. Nearly everyone thought that the chance of a prize was worth far more than interest. After all, the interest would be only a small sum and Russians in war time are not interested in small sums.

Most parks in the Soviet Union are called "Parks of Culture and Rest." When a park is shut, I have seen notices up to say: "Park not working." They have trees and flower beds and benches like other parks, and in Moscow skating rinks and places to hire skis, parachute towers and many of the amusements of a fun fair. The chairplane causes wild delight. The loudspeakers blare unceasingly and many of the trees bear large portraits of leading members of the Soviet Government. Personally, I prefer the parks attached to some of the old palaces of the nobility near Moscow, such as the park and palace of Ostankino, which has been converted with superb showmanship into a museum of serfdom. It sends a shudder

down one's back to realise how many thousand serfs the Sheremetiev family had and what their powers over them were; they had their own theatre with serf dancers and singers, the palace was built by serf architects and even the family portraits were painted by serf artists, but the general standard of taste was as mediocre as one would expect from people who relied on serfs for half the best things in life.

Chess is perhaps the national Russian game. It is played with great seriousness by both sexes and all classes and important matches are fully reported in the press and closely followed by the public. A championship match will fill a large concert hall in Moscow with an eager and well-informed audience, ranging from small boys to distinguished "Grossmeisters" of the game. Every Park of Culture and Rest has its "Chess Hall," a large bare room furnished only with tables, chairs and chess boards. These are usually full of a clientele as varied as that of the Metro, playing in a most un-Russian silence, while spectators move from board to board, breathing down the players' necks and crowding round an interesting match. At least two members of the Moscow ballet are married to leading Russian chess players and one of them arranged for the Moscow champion to give a simultaneous exhibition against members of the opera and ballet companies. He conceded two draws, one to a ballerina.

People play at cards, but the games seem simpler than ours, and I have never seen anyone play bridge, or for that matter, whist. Once, on a railway journey, I was asked by some Red Army officers to make up a four at *preference*. I had previously imagined that this game was only played by respectable old ladies in Russian country houses a hundred years ago.

Cricket is unknown to them, and is not distinguished from croquet.

In the summer there is a good deal of swimming, and this is one of the few sports which Russians of all ages do for fun. Your Russian always seems to have the idea that in taking up a sport he must equip himself to be a better citizen. Very often this sentiment amounts to nothing more than, so to speak, saying grace before meals, but the Russians have not the idea that sports are something for all ages and for everyone

except the halt, the maimed and the blind, just because it is fun to be out of doors and to exercise physical skill.

As our Embassy flanked the river some of us thought it would be a good idea to take a boat out in the evenings. We found that we should have to join a rowing club in order to have access to boats at all. When the difficulties of joining were overcome we found we had to take the sport very seriously indeed. We were obliged to join crews and to train seriously—usually at a very early hour. Fortunately I became ill after the first practice.

Perhaps the Russians are too near the age when excessive physical work is the lot of nearly everyone. They get a great deal of enjoyment out of life, but they have no word for *fun*. One Russian intellectual was puzzled and delighted at Mr. Churchill's indication in "My Early Years," that politics was "great fun."

There is tennis in the big towns, but the general standard of play is still low. Volley ball is widely played.

The cinema is popular and people like the same kind of films as we do, but there are not enough cinemas to go round and cinema-going is not such a regular part of life. The reader has probably seen some of the best Soviet films and they are as good as any in the world, but there are many less important films which do not come here. Perhaps the biggest difference is that in Russia there is no system of "stars." There are well-known actors and actresses, of course, but people go to see a film rather than a "star."

Generally speaking, Soviet actresses have none of the "glamour" in the technical sense which is part of the stock in trade of actresses in capitalist countries. The Soviet stage has produced many people of great charm in private life, but they seem to have less sense of their own social importance than an English actress of the same standing would have. I have always considered beautiful actresses far above ordinary mortals such as myself, but in Russia I found that sometimes even the leading ballerinas considered that the Editor-in-Chief of a newspaper was a more important person than themselves. I found the experience rather disconcerting.

The foregoing is based on observation in Russia proper and may not apply to other parts of the Soviet Union. I am glad

to record that in Uzbekistan, for instance, the leading actresses have *glamour* in our sense.

Russia, with a population say four times that of the United Kingdom, has about the same number of cinemas. Some of the best cinemas in Moscow are well-appointed and efficient, but most Soviet cinemas are rather dingy, sometimes dirty, and suffer severely from bad projection and insufficient illumination. For instance, the night scenes in *Desert Victory*—incidentally, a great eye-opener to the Soviet public—were scarcely visible at all, and I have heard of people walking out in the middle because they could see nothing.

During the war, all private owners of receiving sets had to hand them in, so that wireless listening was confined to loud speakers at street corners, in clubs, etc., and wired wireless in private rooms. In 1945 these receivers, which had been carefully put away, were returned to the private owners. The sets were generally in good condition and comparatively few of them had been mislaid. Russians like to listen to foreign stations and nearly all the sets are short wave. They were quite easy to get before the war and are owned by all sorts of people.

Nevertheless, wired wireless and public loud-speakers prevail, so that there is no fireside touch about the Soviet radio, and much of it is more like a public meeting than a broadcast. They broadcast less utter rubbish than the B.B.C., but are, to my mind, less enterprising. There are plenty of good concerts but the repertory is overweighted with Russian classical music; there are endless concerts of folksongs of Russia and the other countries of the Soviet Union, and of allied countries, including our own. "Annie Laurie" and "The Miller of Dee" stick particularly in my memory. These concerts are excellent but too frequent. During the war there were lots of military marches and there is always operetta music, roughly filling in the place of the B.B.C. Theatre Orchestra or Fred Hartley.

There is scarcely anything like the B.B.C.'s feature programmes and in general the Soviet Radio is technically uninventive. But there are some first-class readings from literature—for instance, passages from *War and Peace*, were read by the greatest actors of the Soviet Union. The place of "talks" in British programmes is often filled by a newspaper article

which is simply read out to one. Radio personality scarcely exists except in Levitan, the Stuart Hibberd of Russia.

But children's programmes are more enterprising and Lev Kassil's "Children's Round Table" is as popular as anything the B.B.C. does, and deservedly so. The Russians have some excellent children's writers, all of whom know our English children's literature from "Alice in Wonderland" on. Good broadcasts of "Winnie the Pooh" and "Uncle Remus" have been given. And technically, too, the children's programmes are more inventive than the rest. One broadcast of Gogol's short story, "A night in May," was like one of the very best B.B.C. feature programmes.

During the war there was no programme planning and it was impossible to find out what was going to be broadcast. The radio officials described their method as "putting on the most important news first," and indeed the Soviet wireless does generally make important announcements first, and anyone who listens systematically can pick up much interesting news which is excluded from the papers through lack of space.

The Soviet régime has never given broadcasting high priority, so that the equipment and wiring are rather primitive. At one period of the war it sometimes happened that a Tchaikovsky concert from the wired wireless was thrown in as an extra, so to speak, in the midst of a telephone conversation.

The theatre, on the other hand, is on a much higher plane than anything that exists in any other country. The Government has always given high priority to drama as a means of popular education, and is fast developing a network of theatres all over the country. Even before the revolution the standards of production in the best Russian theatres were the highest in the world, and more care was taken with every phase of the art.

The number of good theatres has been multiplied many times over, and in Moscow alone one could go to a different play almost every night of the year and always see something new and worth while. The theatres are heavily subsidised, which makes it possible to have large castes and to spend whatever time is necessary on rehearsal, as well as having several plays running simultaneously at each theatre. The methods of production are nowadays traditional, and I fancy there are few

new dodges to be learnt from the Soviet theatre, but the mechanical and electrical equipment would be the envy of our producers and the quality of the productions is something far above what we are accustomed to. I do not say that the best Soviet productions are better than the Old Vic production of Henry IV Part 2, but they are quite as good and there are many more of them. And this not only in Moscow and Leningrad but in the most distant capitals of the Union Republics. I have seen performances at Tashkent and in Armenia which were quite up to this standard; we all enjoyed them without understanding a word of the language.

The demand for seats far exceeds the supply and in 1945 it was just about as difficult to get into a theatre in Moscow as it was in London. It was easy to find the theatre from the stream of people in the street asking each new arrival if he had a spare ticket. Lonely foreigners sometimes take an extra ticket on purpose.

The highbrow theatres of Moscow and Leningrad perform the world's classics of all countries and all ages, and are prepared to spend any amount of time studying the production of a new piece. Modern Soviet plays are not on the whole particularly good, but there have been one or two good plays during the war. *Davnym Davno* (see p. 25) is an excellent play, and there have been thrillers such as *Engineer Sergeev*, an exciting reconstruction of the heroic story of the destruction of the Dnieper Dam.

Here are some English plays which have been performed in Moscow during the war:—

Shakespeare: *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*.

Sheridan: *The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna*.

Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Priestley: *The Inspector Came*.

Shaw: *Pygmalion*.

Dickens: *The Pickwick Club*.

This last is one of the greatest successes of the Moscow Arts Theatre and makes perhaps the best play of any adapted novel. The production is excellent and very much in the English spirit, except for the law court scene and the Christmas at Dingley Dell, both of which defeated the Russian producers.

Sam Weller, too, is rather disappointing—Russian producers do not yet seem to understand the Cockney type; for instance, Eliza Dolittle in *Pygmalion* did not come out as a cockney girl, though the part was played by one of the leading actresses.

The Moscow producers were incessant in their demand for new English plays and there is no doubt that more would have been put on if we had been able to produce more good war plays of a suitable kind. There have been fewer American plays, but Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, and *Watch on the Rhine* were very successful.

Besides the highbrow theatres there are variety theatres with entertainment more or less on the lines of our revues, but these do not on the whole attract so much talent as the corresponding production in Britain. The reason is, no doubt, that the State has given priority to the highbrow theatres and actors therefore feel that there is a greater reward in that field. The best of the broadbrow shows are probably the ensembles of the Red Army and Red Navy; and shows such as Piatnitski's choir, which presents national songs and dances, are extremely vigorous and sometimes colourful. One sees some excellent dancing, particularly male dancing, in the traditional Russian style in high boots, and there is some first-class singing, not I think better than the best English choirs but as good in its way.

I regard the State Choir, conducted by Sveshnikov, as the most musical. An ear accustomed to English part singing can find the settings used by some of the other Russian choirs a little dull.

The Russian opera is one of the most magnificent in the world; it performs mainly the Russian operas, which are too little known in the west. In addition to *Boris Godounov*—unfortunately not playing at the moment—and *Prince Igor*, there are some very enjoyable operas by Tchaikovsky and many other good ones by Glinka, Rimski Korsakov, Dargomyzhsky and others. The singing is not, on the whole, outstanding, but the productions are sometimes very good. I am not one of the very musical (or should I say very inartistic?) people who can sit through a long opera however dull the action and however ugly the scenery, provided only that the singers can sing and the orchestra can play. The great point about Russian operas is that they are performed as musical dramas; they can be



enjoyed as a play and an attempt is made at least to give the audiences something worth while to look at. Not all the productions of the Bolshoi Theatre are equally successful, but the standard is in this respect above our Western opera.

There are no modern operas at present in the repertoire, but Prokofiev has written a new opera to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which I have heard in a truncated concert performance. It seemed fairly good. There was much recitative of an original and interesting kind.

The younger sister of opera is operetta, and the aim of the authorities is to set up an operetta theatre in every city. In Soviet life the operetta fills part of the place left vacant by the absence of good jazz. The best operetta and light ballet theatres, like the Stanislavsky theatre in Moscow, are very good, but there are still some dreary operettas in the provinces. The mainstay of the repertoire is, of course, the classical French operetta of Offenbach and Co., and the Viennese school. Soviet operetta is only just getting under way, but in Aduyev the Soviet Union has a talented libretto writer, and there are several composers of light music who should be successful in this genre. The Russians do not know *The Beggar's Opera*, or rather they know the bastard German adaptation, and they do not know Gilbert and Sullivan. In these there is a chance for a Soviet producer to make a big reputation.

In writing about the Russian ballet I am sure to shock some readers; if I criticise I shall be accused of blasphemy, but if I praise without qualification I shall be told that I am several decades out of date.

The Russian ballet in the Soviet Union is first-class in its own particular line, but both style and repertory are limited. When Diaghilev reformed the ballet about forty years ago, he found Tsarist Russia too narrow a frame and took his new ideas to the west. This new ballet, created by Diaghilev and his circle, is what most of us call the Russian ballet. There was, and still is, a conservative party which considered Diaghilev's innovations anathema and wanted nothing but a continuation of the classical ballet in the form crystallised by Petipa and Tchaikovsky. At the Revolution the conservatives were in Russia but Diaghilev was abroad. The conservatives of the ballet thus had the field to themselves, and felt it their duty

through the revolutionary years to preserve the great tradition. And we must be thankful to them that they did so, for on any showing the classical ballet is the beginning of wisdom. So if you go to the ballet in Russia you will spend a whole evening seeing one four-act ballet with music by Tchaikovsky if you are lucky, or by somebody else if you are not. Modern ballets are cut to the same measure, regardless of Diaghilev's discovery that the best length for a ballet is about three quarters of an hour, about the length of a symphony. You will see a better corps de ballet in Russia than you have seen before, and dancers who dance their particular parts perhaps a tiny bit better than the greatest western ballerinas, so many of whom are themselves Russian. But the standards of decor are lower; for instance, the decoration for recent productions of the *Sleeping Beauty* and *Raymonda* would be rejected by the London ballet audience. But in their own line the Russians are unequalled. Recent performances of *Giselle*, particularly when Ulanova was dancing, were perhaps the most wonderful ballet performances I have ever seen.

The Diaghilev ballets are scarcely known, though Leningrad intellectuals may have seen *Petroushka* and the *Firebird*; *Les Sylphides*, the earliest and perhaps the greatest of Fokin's ballets, is done in a sort of First Folio edition, which leaves out some of the most beautiful finishing touches, and when I saw it the lighting was rather bad. The dancing was good, but on this occasion not so good as the best I have seen at Covent Garden. Soviet ballerinas are very light and quick and have good balance, but they are not so expressive as the best dancers of the west; I have seen no one who uses her arms, let alone her fingers, like Baronova. The dancers act quite well, but this does not play so important a part in the classical ballet as it does in our western, post-Diaghilev ballet, so that the Soviet Union does not have such interesting male dancers as Massine and the best international dancers of the West.

I did not like most of the newer ballets that I saw, but there is one, *Crimson Sails*, which a few of us consider a masterpiece, though the majority of Moscow ballet goers would not agree. It was first produced on the 30th December, 1942, and is based on a famous story by the Russian writer Grinevsky or "Green." The scene is an imaginary sea port where a little girl dream

of a boat with crimson sails and of a tall sea captain, and the plot is a beautiful mixture of human and fantastic. The choreography is solidly based on the classical style, but it develops that style to express dramatic situations beyond the scope of the older choreographers. New movements are invented to express new situations and the whole moves with a swing and gaiety comparable to a good Diaghilev ballet. The scenery by Williams (the name comes from an American grandfather) is up to the best Diaghilev standard.

I am told that in recent Moscow performances this ballet is being assimilated to the common run, but the fact that it exists shows what the Soviet ballet could become if it were freed from the shackles of the past. If, however, you side with the conservatives in the 40-year-old controversy about Diaghilev, you will not feel the need for any such change.

Besides the ballet there are many native forms of dancing in the Soviet Union. The native Russian boot dances and the Caucasian dances have been, so to speak, tamed and they now form part of the regular armoury of the choreographer throughout the world. But the wonderful and varied oriental dances of Russian Turkestan are only just beginning to make their way on to the conventional stage. I am deeply impressed with what I have seen and have come to think that the impact of the European sense of form and architecture on the old Asiatic folk dances may be creating a beautiful new form of ballet in the Eastern parts of the Soviet Union.

In painting, "realism" is the established policy, and this means realism in the Victorian sense. Not merely is Picasso condemned, but even our most effective and popular posters, such as those of the L.P.T.B., are considered by the Union of Soviet Artists to deviate from the correct line. One is asked: "But how can the people understand this?"

The official taste is that of the intelligent working men who have come to the top of Soviet life. Taste in painting comes to most people later than taste in literature or music, because it is easy to get hold of a book and not very difficult to go to concerts, but to acquire a liking for good painting one must go specially and many times to the very few places on earth where good pictures are shown. There is no arguing about taste, but my personal view is that Soviet official taste in litera-

ture is sound but unsophisticated; it canonises nothing unworthy but it misses something. The official taste in music is already more limited; and in painting and sculpture the artist is asked to work to the wrong specification. There is some good impressionist work being done in oils, but the best artists have gone in for applied arts like theatre scenery and book decoration, where they evidently find themselves less cramped. Some of the children's books are delightful.

Russians are great readers, but they are historically much nearer to illiteracy than our own people. Books are harder to get and a new book is more of an event. Russians read slowly and methodically all through and remember more of what they read than the last two generations in the West have remembered. All printing is in the hands of the Government, which only prints what it thinks will do the people good. Practically all the classics of all countries are obtainable, some more easily than others, but modern works are scrutinised carefully for policy before they can be translated. Soviet taste in modern literature is conditioned by what is available in Russian.

By no means all Soviet citizens are ready readers, and it is not unusual to see someone reading the newspaper aloud to a group of listeners. Newspapers were hard to get during the war and were carefully read. The average reader, after reading the Sovinformbureau communiqué and glancing at the headlines, turned first to the foreign news on the back page. This he read all through, looking for meaning between the lines and noting the position of each item on the page. Next he would turn to the front page for more war news or home front news, after which he would look at the two middle pages, which gave more background to the news on the front page. The Soviet papers give no crime stories and very little "human interest" material; much space is given to exhortation of the public. The style of writing is generally verbose and often flat.

Periodicals of various kinds were much sought after; they are all rather highbrow, the most popular being *Ogonyok*, which is about as serious as *Time and Tide*.

Adventure stories are popular and detective stories are read with delight by all who know enough English and can procure copies. A book called *The Mystery of Dr. Burago* was very popular during the war, and there are indications of an attempt

to develop a Soviet school of detective novels; this will certainly be expected to fulfil a social purpose. "Tripe" is not printed in the Soviet Union, but of course there is the same demand for it as everywhere else.

At school the children learn to know their own literature, and a spontaneous taste for the more popular Russian classics, such as Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Krylov's fables and parts of Lermontov, is almost universal.

Shakespeare is read in modern Russian and is not made a subject of examination; not many of his plays are known by most Russians, but he strikes home. Dickens and Kipling, Mark Twain and Jack London are favourite reading of young and old, and Byron has the usual *succes d'estime*. Priestley is the best known among contemporaries. Others of our English writers, too, are well known, but on the whole Russian knowledge of English literature is as patchy as knowledge of foreign literature always is throughout the world.

French authors are read almost as much as English. The favourites are Victor Hugo, Balzac and Maupassant.

The reading habits described above are common to a very wide public, and it has been the constant endeavour of the Soviet régime to raise the cultural level of the masses. But of course there is, too, a smaller public of better educated people whose reading is sometimes very wide.

## CHAPTER XI

### DOCTORS

BEING in charge of a fair-sized staff, I saw a good deal of illness one way or another, and I would as soon be in the hands of a good Soviet doctor as of any in the world. The best is no commoner in Russia than it is in England, but when a Soviet doctor has reached the top of his profession, it is nearly always by ability rather than by charlatanry. I never heard of anything to correspond with the titled frauds of Harley Street. Incidentally, A. J. Cronin's *The Citadel* is a best seller in Russia.

When we arrived in Murmansk there was an offensive going on and some of our naval doctors were helping in the hospitals. They told me that their Soviet colleagues were efficient and had an amazing book knowledge of all diseases and their treatment, but that their methods were rather stereotyped. If the textbooks prescribed so many days for each phase of a treatment, they kept more rigidly to that than British doctors would have done.

In general it was agreed by everyone that Soviet doctors and nurses worked with great self-sacrifice and endurance throughout the war, particularly in emergencies. And the general standard of medical treatment was high, to judge from what visiting doctors said.

But one or two oddities among the doctors stick in one's mind. One doctor was convinced that everyone had malaria, and was puzzled what to do with me when I stubbornly refused to have any malarial symptoms. Another man invariably told every patient that he was overtired and needed a good holiday. This was always true and the doctor was a popular man; but a holiday was not always possible.

The organisation of medicine in the Soviet Union is in essentials not very different from what we shall have under the new Act here. There is something like the panel system, which covers the whole population, but in addition to their work in the public hospitals and for their panel patients doctors are

allowed to take private patients and earn good money from doing so. People take just as much care about choosing a doctor as we do, and a man with a big reputation will have patients from all over the Soviet Union.

There are large numbers of women doctors and the public shows no particular preference between the sexes one way or the other. Women doctors have, as a class, made good and are not self-conscious about their position. Many of them are gynaecologists and children's specialists.

Large numbers of doctors were, of course, called up during the war, and this left the civilians rather short, but I think that in the towns anyone in real need was always able to find a doctor. In the countryside there were certainly cases where no doctor was available.

In the Soviet Union medical training is concentrated in special medical schools, which are outside the universities, and very large numbers of doctors have been trained. The training takes five years and students often specialise in one branch, for instance, children's diseases. Graduates are liable to be directed to remote parts of the Soviet Union after qualifying. Before the Revolution, Russia had already some of the best doctors in the world, but there were not enough to go round, and in many country districts the doctor's place was taken by a "feldsher" or medical orderly. These people had generally retired from the army and did their best to cope with what was really a country doctor's practice. The supply of doctors has not yet equalled demand, and the feldsher still exists. But so far as I know the feldsher's predecessor—the znakharka, or wise woman—is now extinct. Mackenzie Wallace and Maurice Baring describe how, in the last generation before the Revolution, scientific doctoring was replacing the znakharkas. Mackenzie Wallace rudely calls them "witch doctors," but Maurice Baring uses the more urbane expression "wise women" or "men," for they were not always old women. They seem to have performed some remarkable cures and may well have had some remedies that have escaped the notice of medical science, but they often made mistakes and were lavish in their use of powerful and dangerous drugs when they could get hold of them.

The people were at first very suspicious of doctors who "just

cut you up," but already in Maurice Baring's day the doctors' waiting rooms were full to overflowing. I saw no traces of the old prejudice against doctors and hospitals. Indeed, quite simple Russians sometimes know more about doctors and doctoring than one would expect.

Soviet hospitals were very full during the war, and I remember seeing the broad and warm corridors of one of the best civilian hospitals in Moscow crowded to overflowing. An English girl on my staff who was taken mortally ill was given a little room to herself. She was operated on by one of the best surgeons with great skill, but too late to save her life. The hospital staff gave her the most affectionate care, but there seemed to be no sense of continuity in organisation, and she had a fresh nurse every day. I think this was typical of Soviet hospitals. The skill in operating and care in essential cleanliness is as high as anywhere in the world, but the training of nurses is more perfunctory than with us and the organisation less uniform, though sometimes more human.

A friend of mine who was taken seriously ill in Moscow some years ago and had to undergo a major operation spoke well of the hospital he was in. He said that you were left alone when you wanted to be left alone, and that there was no waking the patients up just when they wanted to sleep; if you wanted to be washed they came and washed you, but otherwise you were left to be dirty, within reason. When the patients got well enough to walk about they all used to go from ward to ward showing off their scars, and my friend, who spoke no Russian, afterwards discovered that there had been great disappointment that the Englishman did not go round to show his.

If I was to have a fairly sharp illness which did not involve prolonged weakness or nervous exhaustion, I would rather go to a good Soviet hospital. But if my case required long and careful nursing I would rather take my chance in Britain.

The only superstition which I have met in Russian hospitals is that nobody must be allowed inside the door unless he is wearing white overalls. These are supplied at the entrance. Once we showed a film of Mrs. Churchill inspecting an English hospital. The audience, instead of being impressed with the efficiency of the arrangements, was shocked that she was allowed in without a white "khalat." When I first went to the Soviet



Union ten years ago I was shown a workers' resthouse, which seemed an attractive place. By way of showing my interest I asked to see the kitchen. This created consternation, and I began to think I was on the verge of discovering the seamy side of Soviet life. However, after hurried consultations, I was ushered into a special room where we all had to put on these white overalls. The kitchen turned out to be almost as clean as a surgical ward, and the food was the most appetising I saw on that visit. Being poor, I was a third category tourist, and longed to ask whether I could stay and dine.

Once, in a military hospital which seemed to be excellently run, I was introduced to one of the nurses, who turned out to be the wife of Marshal Koniev. There was no need for her to work but she preferred to do something.

The price paid for victory by the Red Army was fully as terrible as one imagines. Every family in the country seems to have suffered; in every street you see men without arms and legs. The supply of artificial limbs is hopelessly inadequate and nearly everyone has to manage with crutches. But men and women are brave and stoical and keep their courage wonderfully; all seem determined to lead a normal life.

One of the worst injuries inflicted by anti-personnel mines is damage to the sexual organs. It seems incredible, but Russian plastic surgery has developed methods by which a new penis can be created through a long and painful series of operations, by grafting from other parts of the body, so that the men can eventually lead normal lives and have children. I have spoken to people who have seen the results of these operations and there seems to be no doubt about the facts.

Soviet doctors do not on the whole go in for psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. I believe that most of the existing schools of psychology are considered unsatisfactory from the Marxist point of view, but if the régime believed that great practical results could be obtained from an application of psychology, they would no doubt develop their own Soviet school. Probably the chief reason why psychotherapy has been so little developed in the Soviet Union is that it is uneconomic in the use of trained manpower. A psychologist is a highly-skilled person who has to spend a great deal of time on each individual case, whereas an ordinary doctor or surgeon of equal ability can cure far

more patients in the time. If a country is short of trained manpower, it is easy to see that it will choose to have more doctors trained rather than more psychologists.

Chemists' shops are of course publicly owned and work more or less as they do in Britain. There are even homoeopathic chemists. You can get simple remedies and sometimes even powerful drugs without a prescription, but anything in short supply requires a prescription. During the war many drugs were only available for priority use. The civilian population had of course low priority. There was sometimes a shortage of anaesthetics, and the suffering must have been horrible.

The medical supplies sent by the Red Cross and Mrs. Churchill's fund were very useful, and the figures of what was sent were all published in the papers. But apart from what we published in our own *British Ally* and the publicity attending Mrs. Churchill's visit to the U.S.S.R., there was nothing in the nature of a write-up.

No doubt most of the medical material sent was of the usual good quality, but I have been told that there was some badly defective material in some of the consignments.

We as foreigners were always given good priority in obtaining drugs and special treatment, and I should like to record my gratitude for this. Towards the end of the war a special shop was started in Moscow for the sale of vitamins, and there was a mild publicity campaign to acquaint the public with the need for protective foods and vitamins. Little boys used to buy the vitamins as sweets.

Penicillin is now manufactured in the Soviet Union, an achievement which has received much publicity.

Russia is a northern country and approximately the same diseases are prevalent there as in Britain. Influenza and colds take the same forms, but it seems to be easier to catch cold in Russia than it is here. If you go out without your overcoat on what seems quite a warm day in early spring, the little boys will shout at you: "Mister, you've got no coat on! You'll catch cold!" And the grown-ups will shake their heads gravely. Two or three days later you wake up with a sore throat and everyone says, "I told you so."

I spent most of one summer day bathing in the Volga without feeling cold, but three days later I had a horribly stiff neck,

to the great triumph of my Russian friends, who said it was madness to stay in so long. In Russia, Jack Frost seems to be always just round the corner, even on a hot day.

The country is too far north for cholera, but typhoid and typhus are always waiting to pounce. After the Revolution there was a terrible epidemic of typhus, and it is remarkable that there has been no more than small and sporadic outbreaks during this war. The authorities have carried on relentless and successful warfare against lice. Soldiers are compelled to shave their heads on active service, and it is a serious offence to have lice without reporting for delousing. When necessary the heads of schoolchildren are also shaved as a precaution; the mothers of the little girls are sometimes furious.

In the summer there are a good many fly-borne stomach infections, which are lowering and may even knock you out for several days. The cure for this is better sanitation and garbage disposal, and refrigerators. In the meantime, sulpha drugs work well if you can get them.

During the war there was a great increase in tuberculosis, evidently due to bad housing and wartime hardships generally.

A fair sprinkling of pock-marked faces remind one that until fairly recently vaccination was often neglected.

Most Russians have wonderful teeth, but when they decay the dentists have recourse to wholesale extraction and generally give their patients dentures of stainless steel. The few that can get them prize gold teeth as a beauty; Kay Oakman once stood next to a very handsome Red Army officer, who smiled to show a complete set of gold teeth.

Constipation is scarcely known. I have been told and believe that the good teeth and the absence of constipation are due to the black rye bread.

Children's diseases, such as mumps, whooping cough and chicken pox, are not as a rule isolated, so that foreigners tend to catch any which they have hitherto escaped. I had mumps on V.E. Day.

Malaria is endemic in some parts of the Caucasus and Central Asia and is fairly common in parts of European Russia.

CHAPTER XII  
HAVING A BABY

*"Russia is not a country for women."*

—A FOREIGN DIPLOMAT

[I am deeply indebted to Laetitia Gifford for permission to publish the following account of her experiences. The reader will be happy to learn that Patrick Gifford, whose early troubles are here described, is now well and flourishing.]

"I WAS in Moscow under the care of Russian doctors during the whole of my pregnancy, and when my son was born at the end of May, 1945, we were ten days in a Russian maternity home. He was less than a month old when he nearly died of double pneumonia, and a week later he was found to have whooping cough as well. I had had it when he was born, but had thought it was just a cough and he had caught it from me; the pneumonia was a 'complication.' He was four weeks in hospital and except for the first few days I lived there in the same room, feeding and helping to nurse him; and from then until we left the Soviet Union at the beginning of October, our Russian doctor kept a watchful eye upon us both. An eventful year had provided more opportunities than I wished to see how the elaborate Soviet system for the care of mother and child could work in practice.

"I have no medical qualifications and had never had a baby before, but I have been a patient in three British nursing homes and one L.C.C. fever hospital and have worked in several British voluntary hospitals, so I do have some yardstick by which to measure my experiences in Moscow. I have no first-hand knowledge of conditions in other parts of the Soviet Union. Like most things in the Soviet Union, maternity and child welfare services are untouched by mediocrity, but luckily the good seems to be concentrated where it really matters and the shortcomings (or so I found) do little worse than afford comic relief.

"The general organisation of these services is simple and sensible, and consists of maternity clinics ('women's consultation') for the care of the mother during pregnancy, maternity homes

where the babies are born, and child welfare clinics ('children's consultation') to see that babies are properly looked after when they have left the maternity home. There are also local children's hospitals catering for babies up to three years old. As soon as a woman is pregnant she is supposed to go to her local maternity clinic, which arranges for her to be looked over by the doctor there at regular intervals until the baby is due. Two months before this she will have received a visit from a sister attached to the local child welfare clinic to make sure that she has the necessary things for the baby. The maternity home where the baby is born is responsible for informing the child welfare clinic when it goes home, and the sister from the clinic (already an old acquaintance) calls to dress the baby's navel and to give any advice which may be needed. She goes daily until the navel is healed and then leaves with the mother a list of the times when the clinic is open and advises the mother to pay weekly visits with the baby. A doctor from the clinic also calls as soon as possible to verify that everything is going on all right. Each clinic is responsible for the children under two in its area, and has a staff of several doctors and nurses; but except in emergencies they stick to their own patients.

"A mother is allowed by law thirty-five days of leave with full pay before the birth and forty-two days after, with fourteen more should there be twins or complications. She is also entitled to double rations and three litres of milk a week from the sixth month of pregnancy until four months after the birth at thirty kopeks for 200 grammes.

"From conversations with other patients in the maternity home and with doctors I have the impression that this law is really observed, which is by no means the case with all Soviet regulations.

"The organisation described caters for all Soviet citizens. I did not, however, get caught up into its machinery until I went to the maternity home. Before then 'Burobin,' the department of the Soviet Foreign Office which deals with all domestic requirements of foreigners, had arranged for me to be looked after by the Polyclinic for Scientific Workers. The status of this institution requires a word of explanation.

"In Moscow all citizens are entitled to free medical care and are attached to polyclinics for diagnosis and treatment which

does not entail 'hospitalisation.' Everybody living in the area is entitled to the services of the local polyclinic. In addition, a man's work may admit him and his family to a polyclinic from which the general public is excluded. The treatment afforded by these 'occupational' polyclinics is usually much superior to that given by the local ones, and the more important the occupation the better the polyclinic is likely to be. While the same rules hold good for the care of mothers and children (the best maternity home in Moscow is that run for employees and their families from the Kremlin), the standard of the ordinary local maternity and child welfare clinics and homes never sinks to the level of the local polyclinics for adults and in fact remains remarkably high. Scientific workers are important people in the Soviet Union and their polyclinic is such a good one that the Diplomatic Corps is sent there where it may be observed sitting cooly outside doors labelled with the class of its disease.

"I was under the care of Professor Kolosov, the head gynaecologist there, an amiable, elderly, bearded, Chekhovian character with a competent mouse of a lady assistant called Sladkova. Though my health gave them no chance to display their skill, I visited them regularly during pregnancy and they arranged for such minor troubles as an aching tooth and a rheumatic shoulder to be dealt with by other departments of the polyclinic. Once, when I had had 'flu in the interval between visits, but considered that I both was and looked fully recovered, Kolosov startled me by exclaiming: 'You have been ill,' in accusing tones as I entered the room, and I have little doubt that he and Sladkova could have handled any difficulties quite competently. But I never got used to the apparently universal Soviet gynaecological habit of wearing a rubber glove all the time even if writing or answering the telephone and apparently only rinsing it under the cold tap before examining a patient. The same glove seems to be used all day, but whether it is ever properly disinfected I do not know.

"The atmosphere at the polyclinic was pleasantly cosy. Kolosov made no bones about being interested in foreigners (he received part of his medical education in Germany before the Revolution and can read French, German and English; he now sees the *Daily Worker* and the *Illustrated London News*

regularly at his club); and when, as sometimes happened, my case history had been mislaid, he asked me how old Mrs. Churchill was, or where I bought my hat, and he was a mine of Russian country lore on the lines of 'February fill-dyke.' I explained that I understood Russian better if it was not spoken too fast, and so he always addressed me in a slow, clear bellow which must have made every word of our irrelevant conversation clearly audible to the patient queue outside. They might reasonably have stormed the room, for almost all were privileged persons who were not supposed to wait in queues at all; to book an appointment was a proof of low status, and those who did so nearly always had longest to wait. But they took the delay in good part, and any hard feelings were easily assuaged by the loan of a *Sphere* or *Vogue*. *Vogue* indeed was popular everywhere, and the sight of a copy made the sister in the artificial sunlight department, where my shoulder was being treated, very glad to learn that there were five more visits to come. I was not allowed to leave it over the week-end because, as the doctor in charge explained, there was no safe in which valuable papers could be kept at night.

"Towards the end of my time I asked whether I could have my baby at the Grauerman Maternity Home, which was quite near both my office and our flat, and which is run by Professor Arkhangelsky, of whom we had heard good reports. I have since discovered that Professor Arkhangelsky's reputation stands a good deal higher with Soviet citizens than that of his home, but neither the baby nor I came to any harm while we were there. Kolosov approved my choice and arranged for me to pay a preliminary visit to the Professor, and I waited in his room at the home while he dealt with the usual *trivia*, which in the Soviet Union can apparently only be decided by the highly skilled and already overworked: where wood was to be stored for the winter, which ambulance driver was to be on duty, and how to renew somebody's food cards. He confirmed that I could go to his home, and after a short examination (carried out in a room where five or six other people were lying ready for examination) he wrote me out a chit to admit me in due course. I asked what I should bring with me and was told: 'Nothing but your passport.'

"This turned out to be all too true. When the time came I

went round to the home about 7.30 one evening, armed with Arkhangelsky's letter, and was immediately admitted. My watch and wedding ring were the first things taken away and given to my husband for safe keeping; but as I got further into the home I shed more clothes and filled in innumerable forms, until I finally found myself wearing nothing but my vest and answering questions about the number of rooms in our flat, the amount of V.D. in the family, the illnesses I had had, the education I had received (I proudly went down as 'higher') and the state of my head (confirmed by a quick look with the nit comb). I was then asked why I had waited until the great age of thirty-three before having a baby; and before I could think of a convincing reply I had been stripped of my remaining possessions (which were all given to my husband to take home), given a shower bath, fitted out in a nightgown from a steriliser, and ushered into the delivery room.

"This was a big, tiled, well-lighted room with about a dozen hard, high couches round the wall, two of which were already occupied by ladies in a much more advanced state of labour than I was. A doctor sat at a table in the middle of the room, whiling away the hours when she was not delivering by filling in more forms (it was there that the names and patronymics of my father and mother were recorded) and keeping an eye on what was happening. After I had been there for about half an hour she came over and suggested quite accurately that I would probably be happier elsewhere for a bit, and I climbed down from my couch and was taken into a dark little ward with about ten other beds in it. I lay down on one and realised that all the others were occupied and that, despite the fact that everybody was having a good deal of intermittent pain, there was a continuous murmur of conversation. I soon found that my neighbour was the wife of a hero of the Soviet Union, and in between her pains and mine she told me how he had won his decoration at Stalingrad and that he was now a major although still very young. In return I was asked the usual questions about how long I had been in the Soviet Union, why I came, and what I thought of it.

"After a little while I realised that I was probably ready to return to the delivery room, and I called out to the doctor, who told me to come back. There I lay for some time on a new



couch, while my next-door-neighbour was encouraged to greater efforts by being told: 'What—you a big strong girl of twenty-seven! Why, there's a woman of thirty-three.' I watched her baby born from a range of about one yard, and half-an-hour later she was able to see the arrival of my son.

"No anaesthetic was given to anybody in the delivery room while I was there, nor did I see any apparatus for administering it. I was told that if surgery was necessary it was carried out elsewhere and that an anaesthetic was then given. I subsequently met a woman in my ward who had had a forceps delivery without an anaesthetic.

"After the arrival of my baby I was shown him close and asked to check the identity labels before they were tied on to him. ('We are very accurate people,' they said proudly.) One of the doctors then went off to telephone to my husband and told him the weight of the baby and that all was well; she returned and gave me his messages. I then lay in the delivery room for two hours (they are frightened of causing a haemorrhage by an earlier move), getting very cold, since I was only covered by a sheet. I complained to one of the doctors, who replied that everybody felt like that, 'Look at your neighbour,' but did nothing about it. I feel sure that by some tangle of red tape no blankets were available in the delivery room. I and the woman who had given birth just before me cheered up when we heard a great row break out as a senior doctor on an early morning round discovered two old charwomen brewing tea in our sacred and sterile precincts. We had hopes of getting a cup; but just then two rickety stretchers appeared and we were lugged up three floors by four sweating old women to each stretcher, who cursed the Moscow power station which had failed to provide electricity, and my legs which were too long to go round the corners.

"I was lucky that my baby was born on a quiet night, so that the pressure on accommodation was not too great, and I was able to go straight into a ward instead of spending an uncomfortable day or two in the corridor. There were nine beds in my ward, which was rather too small to hold them comfortably. The hospital had just been done up and the ward was very spick and span with new paint and a polished floor. This was the source of constant trouble as something was always getting

spilt upon it and the guilty patient was then reproached with the enormous cost which had just been incurred in having it repolished. The beds were of iron but they felt much harder, for the mattresses were very thin and the sheets were of poor quality unbleached cotton and crumpled very easily. All linen for the patients or the beds came out of a steriliser, but was apparently expected to last the patient through her normal stay of a week, although by making a fuss it was possible to get some of it changed more often.

"The weather was quite warm but the window was hardly ever open, for there was always somebody with a bare breast who said that something dreadful would happen if a breath of fresh air came near it. There was a lot of trouble about a draught which the patients under the window said was killing them. After a carpenter had failed to fix it, Arkhangelsky himself was invoked, and eventually an old ward maid stumped in with a piece of paper which she glued over the crack, and that was the end of that.

"The medical attention seemed a good deal better than the accommodation, although perhaps too specialised. The doctors in the delivery room apparently did nothing else but deliver. The three on duty on the night that my baby was born were all women and all fairly young; as they seemed to work quickly and confidently I was quite content to be in their hands. When the mothers arrived in the ward they were looked after by three bright young women doctors, who took it in turns to be on duty day and night, while the babies were under the care of two children's specialists, both intelligent and competent Jewesses, one in charge of normal babies and one of small babies. They came round the wards each day and told every woman how her child was progressing and decided its régime. I was also visited by a senior woman doctor, Professor Arkhangelsky and another male doctor (who was I think the Assistant Director) just to check up that everything was all right.

"There were various sisters, always one on duty in general charge of treatment in the ward and others dealing with special duties, such as food, linen, etc. The babies were looked after by another set of sisters who seemed very efficient and showed endless patience in establishing breast feeding. Finally

there were the 'Nanas,' friendly peasant women who carried food round, made beds (in theory), cleaned the wards, and did all sorts of odd jobs but never touched a patient.

"There seemed to be three sets of everybody and, while I am not certain how the night duties were allocated, a doctor or nurse would work all day Monday and then not again till Thursday. This was inconvenient from the patient's point of view, as there is little continuity and it is often necessary for the patient to tell the doctor or nurse what happened the previous day, or what schedule of feeds a baby is on.

"The greatest care was taken to avoid any infection and such washing as had to be done was carried out with permanganate of potash and sterile wool held by a sister in forceps. Mothers were made to wash their hands before feeding their babies, and a Nana walked round the ward with a bucket in one hand and a jug in the other, from which she poured a trickle of water over the patient's extended hands. It needed a certain amount of cajoling to get her to wait while I brushed my teeth and I was the only patient to do so. No other washing was possible until one was well enough to walk down the passage to a cold tap. There were no screens and all treatments were carried out in full view of the rest of the ward, who often watched and commented.

"I thought that the food was good; it was certainly better than what I ate in an L.C.C. hospital in 1942 and seemed more imaginative than what I saw going round St. Thomas's before the war. Breakfast was a large piece of excellent pale<sup>o</sup> brown or white bread, a small pat of butter, six lumps of sugar or three chocolates (the sugar ration for the day), a small piece of cheese and sometimes a spoonful of condensed milk, and as much tea as anybody could drink. Lunch always included a big plate of *shchi* (cabbage soup), another big piece of black bread and a potato dish, or a stew and once pancakes and *smetana* (sour cream). Supper included a cup of milk every other night and a plate of *tvorog* (curds), a milk pudding or another potato dish. Unlimited tea flowed all the time. All food was piping hot and if it arrived at the wrong time (as often happened), it was taken away and kept hot. All the other patients grumbled ceaselessly and spent much time and thought organising a supply of extras to be sent in to them by their

families. They did not have to give up their ration cards for food supplied by the hospital.

"No visitors were allowed, ostensibly because of the danger of infection being brought in but also, I think, because the wards were so small that nine husbands could not have been squeezed in. Lack of visitors was compensated by a telephone between every two beds which could be, and was, used between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. The patients in the corridor, however, were very cut off. Food, flowers, letters, etc., could be sent in, but books and newspapers were forbidden for fear of infection, and a sister inspected our lockers every day for contraband; but although several books were circulating in the ward, none of them was ever found.

"The usual stay in the home was seven complete days if everything was normal, but if a patient ran a temperature or her baby was underweight she would be kept until the temperature had subsided or the baby was fully established. If the mother was well and anxious to return home, but the baby was still weakly, it was sent to its local children's hospital and the mother would go and feed it there. A patient who was going to be discharged in seven days was usually allowed out of bed to walk round the ward in a dressing gown after five complete days. There was great congestion in the hospital and beds were erected in every available inch of space, including landings and corridors.

"Normal babies are fed every three hours from 6 a.m. till midnight and underweight babies every two hours. The sisters in charge of the small babies disliked the two hourly régime very much and pointed out that the babies were never really hungry and did not get enough sleep, but they were overruled by the doctors. Babies were brought to the wards on a trolley holding two dozen and a distant roar could be heard as it left the nursery: the roar grew louder as the trolley approached and then, with a thunder of feet, sisters burst into the ward with armfuls of babies which they dealt round the beds. Each baby had a label round its neck with a number which corresponded to its mother's bed. Once two babies got muddled; one mother took it as a great joke, but the other pointed out that greater accuracy from the hospital staff was called for.

"As I was in the ward for more than a week I saw sixteen

other patients and they all fed their babies themselves. Temporary difficulties about milk were got over by the baby being fed in the nursery on human milk. It was assumed that every woman would feed her own baby and there seemed to be very little choice. I have since been told by the doctor from the Children's Welfare Clinic that cases of mothers being unable to feed their babies are rather rare, but that when this occurs the Clinic arranges for them to receive human milk which it collects from donors and it also makes cow's milk available very cheaply. This is usually American dried milk reconstituted but I was not able to tell from the taste that it was not fresh milk. No prepared babies' foods are available in the Soviet Union and unless obtained through a Child Welfare Clinic the price of cow's milk would be more than most people could afford. Mothers who can feed their babies are expected to do so: the few who are unwilling are reasoned with by the doctors at the clinic and almost always successfully. On the other hand, a Russian friend of mine showed great surprise when I told her that I intended to feed my baby myself and said almost reprovingly: 'Artists never do.' I have the impression that a certain amount of use is still made of wet nurses, although this is no longer considered 'kulturny.'

"Babies are kept very tightly wrapped up in the maternity hospital, as indeed they are in their own homes. They wore a little cotton shirt, a napkin, a large square of cotton material which came over their heads like a nun's coif, a blanket which enveloped them like a papoose and a cotton quilt wrapped round everything else. As my baby was rather small he also had a wad of cotton wool over his head. From the time that he was born until he was undressed to put on his own clothes to come home I never saw his hands, feet or ears, and the hospital - much disapproved of our British baby clothes and Shetland shawls, which they thought far too thin.

"The relations between patients and staff in the Maternity Home were amusing to anybody with experience of British hospitals, where the staff still has the upper hand and practises a certain amount of secrecy about temperatures and treatments. Here a patient's symptoms and treatment were looked upon as the property of the whole ward, who would often advise a patient to disregard the treatment prescribed. My mental

picture of Slav women as patient and uncomplaining has not survived these ten days. I first lost confidence in it in the delivery room, where five of my companions kept up a continuous racket of 'oi, oi, oi,' and paid no attention to the occasional expostulations of the doctors; I later heard them boasting to an admiring audience that they had been heard in the street.' A young mother, it seems, is expected as well as privileged to be 'nervna' (temperamental, highly strung) and even 'psikh' (psycho-anything-you-like, unbalanced) and is under no obligation to try to conceal it. My companions assumed that anything that went wrong, from babies losing weight to windows fitting badly, was the fault of the staff; and when one of them felt 'nervna' she would ring the bell and say fiercely: 'I want to see the doctor on duty,' and usually the doctor arrived. On one occasion a mother noticed that her baby had a wet napkin when it was brought to her for its 9 p.m. feed. She said nothing about it at the time, but at 11.30 p.m. she felt 'nervna' and summoned the doctor and gave her hell. The doctor accepted the rebuke meekly and agreed that the hospital was very wicked in allowing such a thing to happen, and then sent for the sister in charge of the babies and passed on the complaint. The sister put up a fight and pointed out that she had forty babies under her care who could each be wet twenty times a day. Various Nanas crowded in to see what the trouble was about, the patients sat up in bed and cheered the protagonists on, and at midnight, when the rumpus was still in full swing, all the babies arrived again to be fed and yelled in unison. Next day the owner of the wet baby had very little milk and a pain. She wept because she knew her baby would die (but cheered up a little when the telephone was connected) and when the pain was bad was encouraged by the rest of the ward to cry out: 'Cry out, Tamara, cry out loudly, it will help you.' This sort of scene happened most days and once I was caught laughing. They bore me no malice, but wanted to know how English women would behave in hospital. Would they be disciplined? They went on to explain that they were all very, very highly strung and that where their children were concerned they were like lionesses. I believe that I was the only patient in that ward who felt, or anyway who showed, the smallest gratitude for what was on the whole good and

thoughtful treatment, and when I thanked the sister from the babies' ward she looked amazed.

"The patients in my ward came from all walks of life. There was a house painter; a doctor who was the daughter of a well-known actor; a schoolteacher who was apt to begin long monologues with 'As our Gorki says,' a student translator in English (unfortunately she found me impossible to understand); and several housewives. I think that I received exactly the same treatment as any Russian woman sent to that hospital by her Local Maternity Clinic, but both staff and patients were worried that as a foreigner I might feel lonely and took great trouble in explaining things to me. The student of English was put into my ward without spending any time in the corridor, possibly because it was thought that she would be helpful to me, and one of the telephone operators who spoke good French and a little English came to see me when off duty and used to ring me up every morning. My main difficulty was that of getting enough sleep, for Russians appear to be able to do without it, or at least, to rely on catnaps of a few minutes at a time. The first feed of the day was at 6 a.m., but long before that the patients were talking hard and conversation continued with but few breaks until well after midnight. I have since read Maurice Baring's description of his journey down the Volga in *What I saw in Russia*, and realise how accurate it is.

"After I had been in the hospital for ten days I was still running a slight temperature every evening (whooping cough, as was discovered long afterwards), which made the authorities very unwilling to let me go home. However, after a good deal of discussion, one of the senior doctors said that as she could find nothing wrong I would be better at home, but she would come and visit me in her spare time to make sure that everything was all right. On the afternoon that I was due to go home, thermometers were dealt round the ward, and, as usual, a kind of roll-call was held in which we replied to our names with our temperatures. Mine had gone up with excitement, and when I answered 'Thirty-eight' there was a hush and then the main exponent of *Schadenfreude* in the ward said: 'Oh, they'll never let you out like that.' However, the sister said: 'Nonsense, I expect the thermometer is wrong,' took my temperature again and said: 'As I thought, thirty-seven. Now what

shall I write down?' 'Thirty-seven,' chorussed the rest of the ward, and I signed a receipt for my baby, was given a piece of paper with his birth weight and length, and the clothes which my husband had brought; the baby and I were dressed and we were released.

"The day after I got home a sister came from the local Child Welfare Clinic, looked at the baby, inspected the room which he inhabited and was generally helpful and friendly. The next day the doctor from the Clinic (Rakhil Borisovna Vilenskaya) came and overhauled the baby, and after that the sister came every day until his navel was healed. Rakhil Borisovna is an elderly Jewess (I have since discovered that almost all children's doctors in Moscow are), friendly, competent and downright. The sister is a 'character,' obviously used to dealing with recalcitrant mothers who resent advice, and full of an earthy sort of wisdom. I have reason to be grateful to them both.

"The doctor gave me a prescription for a 'Baby's outfit' from the chemist. This cost 30 roubles and consisted of a thermometer, two rubber teats, two pipettes, a large square of muslin, a square of mackintosh, two gauze bandages, a packet of boric acid powder, another of permanganate of potash crystals and a tube of vaseline, all very well packed in a wooden box. She asked if I needed napkins and would have given me a chit for those too; they are usually made of unbleached cotton and are not very absorbent.

"When the baby was a fortnight old I took him to the Clinic to be weighed. It is in a ramshackle old building and has little paint or frills, but it is very clean and seems adequately equipped. In theory it deals only with healthy children, and mothers are told that if they think that a child is ill they should telephone the doctor and she will come to the house.

"I continued to take the baby regularly to the Clinic until I left Moscow for the country. While we were away he developed a cough and I brought him back to see Rakhil Borisovna at the Clinic and she diagnosed 'grippe.' She thought that he would be better in hospital and went to ring up the Children's Section of the First Moscow Medical Institute to see if they could take him. While she was telephoning he suddenly collapsed and stopped breathing, and she came racing down the corridor and revived him with artificial respiration.



As it was then clear that he was extremely ill she arranged for him to go at once to the local children's hospital, situated across a courtyard from the Clinic; and within half an hour he had been carried across, examined by the doctor on duty, who diagnosed double pneumonia ('It will be hard for the child') and put to bed in the pneumonia ward.

"This hospital, the 'Savyolovsky,' is a small one of sixty beds for children under three years old from the Frunze *raion* (district). It is housed in an old building, but it is quite well planned and very clean. Cots, linen, etc., all seemed quite adequate and the dispensary was fairly well stocked with the more usual drugs. (They had, in addition, enough penicillin for the first twenty-four hours, but asked if we could get more). Other drugs were obtainable from the main Moscow chemist (Apteka No. 1), but the doctor said frankly that it would be easier to get them if we took her prescriptions there in person and threw our foreign weight about. In fact, we succeeded in getting everything for which she asked, including a 'Glaxo' preparation, which the chemist first forgot he had in stock and then produced in triumph. Having caused a good deal of trouble at the chemist's, I was touched to be asked by the assistant, to whom in my impatience and anxiety I had been most brusque, what was the matter, and how old was the child, and to be assured that she felt certain that everything would be all right.

"There were three doctors attached to the 'Savyolovsky'—an elderly Jewess, a youngish Jewess and a Russian woman of about thirty. They were all on duty at some time during my baby's stay there, and if they had not been competent and determined I think he would certainly have died, for he frequently collapsed and stopped breathing, as often as twelve times in twenty-four hours. I also saw three different sisters in his ward, who were friendly and kind, but practically untrained by British standards. It was only some time later that I was able to appreciate one, who replied to my enquiry how he was that morning: 'Very bad. He died seven times during the night. Now the doctor says he is very *nervny*.' (Her half-baked interpretation of the doctor's comment that she thought his spasms were nervous in origin.)

"Besides straining the resources of the hospital to their limit.

transport, graze at night: in the early mornings a cow led by an old crone used to appear and browse, but at sunrise both would vanish.

"This hospital appeared to be very well equipped, both in the wards and in the laboratory, Roentgen room, artificial sunlight room, etc. Much of the equipment was American, but some was British (sunlight lamps) and Canadian Red Cross (overalls); everything was referred to as an 'American present,' and there was some surprise when I pointed out that 'Slough, England' (on one of the lamps) was not in the U.S.A.

"The head of the hospital, an elderly Professor Molchanov, is now little more than a figurehead and he seldom appears. His staff look upon him with an amused respect and are proud that he has studied abroad and attended conferences in most European countries, and behind his back call him 'the Englishman,' because of his supposed pomposity. After my baby was out of danger, Molchanov was brought by Professor Dombrovskaya to admire her and the chief doctor's progress. They exchanged furious winks when he said prosily: 'Yes, he is better, but his condition is still serious, very serious,' and they explained crossly to me afterwards that he had been a great man in his prime.

"The real head of the hospital is Professor Dombrovskaya. She is an enormous woman of about fifty, extremely competent and humorous, obviously a name to conjure with in the Soviet paediatric world. Besides working at the hospital she visits the various *raion* children's hospitals as a consultant and spends one day a week on research work. Like most Soviet professional women, she is married and she has a son. She has recently been awarded an Order of the Red Banner.

"The head doctor under Dombrovskaya was a red-haired Crimean Jewess of forty-five called Byela Benediktovna Krechmer, and to her more than to any other individual was the baby's recovery due. She was in charge of administration in the hospital and made all the arrangements for me to live there. At one time, as a result of fatigue and worry, there was some danger of my milk failing and Krechmer showed great resource in providing me with suitable food, lending me cooking utensils from the 'Professorski Kabinet' (the Professorial office), in which she would prepare me food herself, and generally maintaining morale. She obviously made up her mind that if there

was anything which she could do to pull the baby through she would do it. ('He so wants to live,' she exclaimed just after she had restored breathing after a bad attack). She hardly left the hospital day or night for about a week, put off her leave till he was out of danger, was untiring in thinking of possible new treatments, and eventually diagnosed his and my whooping cough, which was such a puzzling feature of the case. At one stage she dived down his throat with a rubber catheter and sucked up pneumococcal phlegm into her own mouth, quoting Richard Coeur de Lion as a precedent for such methods. The rest of the treatment really consisted of preventing his dying in a 'blue attack' of asphyxiation. Oxygen was always available in a convenient 'cushion' and artificial respiration (which had to be resorted to frequently) was efficiently carried out by the doctors. Penicillin (100,000 units), obtained from the American Embassy, had been given in the 'Savyolovsky' Hospital, and in the Institute he received by mouth various sulfa drugs, first sulgin, then sulfadiazin. Three blood transfusions of 50, 55 and 60 c.c. were carried out, and he was also given 40 c.c. of glucose subcutaneously; on five occasions 5 c.c. of my blood was given intramuscularly, as I had just recovered from whooping cough. Lobeline and cordiamine were given together by injection as heart stimulants, and he also received injections of nicotinic acid.

"It was perhaps typical of the dramatic methods of Russian doctoring that after Krechmer had restored the baby to life innumerable times by artificial respiration, she failed to diagnose an attack of wind, and he nearly died because there was not room for his diaphragm to function. Dombrovskaya discovered this after Krechmer had sent for her in despair, and she thoroughly pulled her lieutenant's leg in consequence. When it was clear that he was going to live, Krechmer gazed long at him and said: 'He looks like an English lord. He lies in bed like a baron.' She can read and understand English, French and German and has, like so many Russians, read most of Scott, but she has difficulty in speaking any language but Russian. Like Dombrovskaya she is married, her husband being the director of a criminal lunatic asylum. They have one little girl of seven.

"There were four other doctors doing general work in the

hospital, of whom three were women, and a number of specialists dealing with X-rays, blood transfusions, etc. They were mostly quite efficient and the woman in charge of blood transfusions very good indeed; but one or two of the younger doctors were probably no more experienced or trained than a competent British sister. 'Bedside manner' was not always their strongest point, and one rather frightened young man, who was deputising for another doctor, said: 'I don't understand why this baby is alive. He is *much* bluer than another baby we had and it died last Sunday.' Another doctor enraged my husband by always answering to his enquiries quite truthfully: 'Very bad.' It was almost a relief to talk to the old peasant women who acted as ward maids, for they would say: 'He'll get better. You see, I've never been wrong yet,' adding the escape clause: 'We must accept what God sends.'

"The nurses were a very mixed lot and ranged from raw country girls to a very refined lady who insisted on talking French and who told me that she was really an economist but that the hospital hours suited her. Three of the nurses were extremely clever at dealing with small babies—from instinct, I think, rather than training—and the senior sister, who was excellent, obviously had a very strong vocation, but when she was not available most of the skilled nursing was done by the doctors. I believe that the majority of the nurses had done a two-year course, but the standard reached was very low. The authorities were aware of this and one of the doctors complained: 'Our sisters are bad; all the best have been taken for the Red Army.'

"There was also a serious lack of continuity as the nurses worked twenty-four hours at a stretch and then had forty-eight hours off, so instructions had to be continually repeated. I kept a record of feeds and treatments for my baby but I doubt if the doctors, who wrote up the case histories conscientiously every day, got anything like so much information about their other patients.

"Mothers were expected to help nurse very sick babies and arrangements were made for them to live in the hospital; without them it is difficult to see how serious cases, which needed watching all the time, could have been cared for. I watched my baby all day and the hospital provided a sister to sit up

with him in his and my room at night. The first night that she sat with him she opened a bottle of caffeine which stood on the table as an emergency stimulant for the baby and took a good gulp to keep herself awake. After that we saw to it that black coffee was sent in. There were several occasions when she was ill and then the authorities gratefully accepted the help of some of my friends who came and acted as night nurses, watching the baby and ringing the bell (which often gave them an electric shock) for the sister from the ward in case of need. A doctor was on duty every night and came within a couple of minutes when needed.

"Mothers living in the hospital were fed in a dining room; but as I was unable to leave my baby, and also possibly because I was being treated as a distinguished foreigner, my food was brought to me. When I first arrived the question of feeding me was discussed and Krechmer said that the hospital would do it. One of the other doctors said: 'What about food cards?' but was silenced with 'What about allies?' (from Krechmer). I offered to produce my ration book but this was refused, and my husband was told not to bring in extra food except fruit and sweets, as they would provide enough. They certainly did; mainly, I believe, as a result of Krechmer's intervention in the kitchen. I was extremely well-fed, indeed overfed, with large quantities of milk, *smetana*, *tvorog* and other milky foods, a great deal of butter and plenty of green salads, which were then rather expensive in the open market. One of my difficulties was to dispose of the huge quantities of bread which arrived, without being caught by Krechmer and treated for failing appetite.

"State medicine had not resulted in any soul-destroying routine in that hospital. Babies got fed and treatments were carried out but nothing ever happened at the same time two days running or within an hour of when it was supposed to. One evening I was taken by the sister in charge of the bigger children to see her ward. It was then 10 p.m. and about twenty boys and girls ranging in age from perhaps eight to twelve were talking, singing, pillow-fighting and obviously enjoying themselves enormously. In the middle of this babel a Nana with a lot of apparatus was patiently waiting to give a boy an enema when he had finished his pillow-fight. The sister did not seem

to think that this was at all unusual; nor did the night nurse consider that there was anything strange in the arrival in our room at midnight of a young man who said he was the 'master' come to mend the electric plug. The only point on which everybody was extremely 'akuratny' was the wearing of white overalls. Nobody was allowed into a ward without one, and when the hall porter appeared at my door in the middle of the night and asked for a match he was immediately routed by the night nurse, who said in tones of horror: 'Why have you no overalls? Go away.'

"Conversation never ceased, no matter how busy or tired people might be. One night I looked out of my door at about 1 a.m. and saw at the far end of the passage two nurses wrapped in blankets, nearing the end of their twenty-four hour shifts and half asleep, but with their lips still moving in talk.

"After about three weeks my baby was discharged from hospital, and Krechmer, who had already been to the flat with my husband and arranged which room was to be the nursery, came to see him every day for about ten days. She worked in close touch with Rakhil Borisovna, in whose charge he now officially was and who also visited us daily. Although he was then convalescent, Professor Dombrovskaya came to see him once more with Krechmer. After a cosy chat, during which she said that she hoped I would not give people in England too bad an account of Russian doctoring, she sent me off to wash my hands before feeding the baby. When I came back I found Dombrovskaya saying 'Goo, goo, goo' in a voice which came from her boots, while Krechmer held him up to be tickled under the chin with a gigantic forefinger.

"I made no direct payment to the Polyclinic for Scientific Workers, the Maternity Home, the Welfare Clinic or the Children's Hospital. I raised the matter each time and always received the same answer: all these services are free and there is no machinery for collecting payment. Later I received a bill from 'Burobin' (which had arranged for the diplomatic corps to be treated by the Polyclinic for Scientific Workers) for my visits to Kolosov, but I do not know whether any part of this fee was passed on to the Polyclinic.

"We have never been quite able to decide how far the baby would have received the same care and attention if we had been

Soviet citizens. Medically, his case was a remarkable one, for very few children get whooping cough so young and fewer still survive it, and the determined fight he put up may have aroused interest and sympathy. Possibly also the doubts at the 'Savyolovsky' Hospital about the pneumonia diagnosis attracted Dombrovskaya's attention. On the other hand, our diplomatic status almost certainly made it easier for me to be given a room to myself and to have my friends in when necessary to nurse him at night. But all the babies in the small children's ward seemed extremely well looked after and when one of the pneumonia cases died the whole staff was plunged in gloom. One of the mothers asked my husband what he thought of the Institute, and when he replied that he thought it very good indeed she said: 'Yes, I suppose it's not bad; anyway there isn't anything better.' A Russian friend is even more cynical and maintains that, as I was a foreigner and obviously very 'nervna,' the doctors decided that they had to save that particular baby; but that if I had been a Russian they would have thought: 'Oh, well, she can always have another.' Personally I doubt all this; it is very possible that as foreigners we received exceptionally good treatment in many ways, but the impression remains that in the Soviet Union the children's doctors do a highly competent job and receive remarkably little thanks for it.

"When I returned to England I took my baby to a specialist on the staff of the Great Ormonde Street Children's Hospital. He assured me that he had made a complete recovery and that he must have been extremely well cared for to have survived. The only aftermath of his illness is a tendency for his mother to spit over her shoulder, Russian fashion, to keep off evil spirits, when assuring enquirers that he is now quite well."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RUSSIAN CHARACTER

"There's nought so queer as folks."—OLD ENGLISH PROVERB.

"The English are a social people but not sociable like the Russians. Their social organisation only works because their impact on each other is superficial. They glide about cannoning off each other like billiard balls. They can calculate each other's reactions accurately because they hardly ever impinge. But Russians make real contacts. It's as hopeless to organise them socially as to play billiards with bullseyes."

—HUBERT BUTLER.

THE reader will probably have gathered that fundamentally the Russians are more like ourselves than might be supposed, but that there are differences which Anglo-Saxons find perplexing and which make it harder for the two peoples to understand each other. With Russians one mood succeeds another with startling rapidity, and the mood of the moment is given full expression as long as it lasts, but no longer.

People will often tell you that the Russians are completely malleable and can be forced into almost any shape. I do not think that anyone who has been in charge of Russian staff would put it that way. The famous Russian "malleability" is really an infinite responsiveness. The Russians are intensely and directly interested in other human beings. They lack the wall of reserve which makes every Anglo-Saxon individual into an island of his own, and they respond with warmth and enthusiasm to almost anything that comes with conviction from another human being. This responsiveness makes the Russians quick in the uptake where the humour of other countries is concerned, and they are by nature perhaps the nearest of all foreigners to our English sense of humour. It is the humour and humanity of Shakespeare that has appealed to them in the past, for before Boris Pasternak's marvellous renderings, most of Shakespeare's poetry evaporated in translation. In Russian production of English plays the funny parts are worked up; for



instance, Juliet's nurse is played very broadly. Sheridan's *Duenna* is given as an operetta with new music, and the element of farce is brought out much more strongly than in the production at the Lyric, Hammersmith, some years ago. It is humour in the wider sense that makes Dickens and Kipling so popular in Russia. Bernard Shaw was rather a flop so long as only his serious plays were known. It is his humour far more than his social ideas which have made his reputation in Russia. *Three Men in a Boat* and *Charley's Aunt* are as popular with the Russians as they are with us; there is an endless market for that branch of our national humour.

Russian jokes always seem funny to us but there are some English jokes which the Russians find beyond them. Once I was attacked by a very human high official of the Communist Party and a girl of the intelligentsia. They said to me: "We cannot understand your 'angliiski yumor.' Just listen to this: A man comes into a restaurant and orders his dinner. At the end he pours the apple tart over his hair. The waiter rushes up and says: 'But that's the apple tart, sir!' to which he replies 'Oh, dear, I thought it was gooseberry fool,' Now what's funny in that?" I laughed but I couldn't explain.

Maurice Baring says that the Slav is "first and foremost peaceable, malleable, ductile and plastic, and consequently distinguished by agility of mind, by a capacity for imitation and assimilation, and a corresponding lack of originality and initiative." Aphorisms such as this are always one-sided, and Baring goes on at once to admit as much. For when the mood is on them, Russians can show plenty of initiative and will-power. Tenacity of endurance they have all the time, but most Russians achieve positive energy in spasmodic bursts only.

The Russian peasant is accustomed to a tremendous sudden effort during the very short harvest season, but after this he will go to sleep on the stove through half the autumn and winter. The factory worker and office worker, too, makes a sudden tremendous effort, if there is an emergency, but he likes to go into a daydream for long periods between. It is difficult to compare, but I doubt whether in the end the Russian worker puts as much elbow-grease into his work in the course of a year as the plodding Briton does.

When they are convinced of the necessity for an effort in the public good, the Russians work with more than human fury. Maurice Baring, writing before the revolution, puts it like this:

“A striking instance of this is the behaviour of peasants in a crisis, such as the putting out of a fire, when it is spreading, with the aid of a high wind, through a village. I have assisted at several such scenes. The energy displayed in saving what is possible, in destroying what is necessary to destroy in order to check and limit the spread of the flames, is fantastic, almost superhuman. I have never seen such energy, such dogged persistence and inspired courage, because it must be borne in mind that the fight is an unequal one: the fire is often on a large scale; the fire engines are small and inadequate. Everything depends on human energy. And what is peculiarly striking is that the Russians, who often lack individual initiative, have in a high degree that power of co-operative energy. They work altogether naturally without feeling the need of any special leader. I remember a striking instance of this kind in the Russo-Japanese war, in the retreat from Ta-Shi-Chao, when the retreat of a vast number of transport was effected without any supervising control; it seemed to go in perfect order automatically. Colonel Gaedke, the German war expert, who was a witness of this, told me at the time that he considered this automatic co-operation very remarkable, and he doubted whether German soldiers would be capable of similar behaviour in similar circumstances.”

The same kind of sudden energy and automatic co-operation was seen thousands of times, at moments of need, during the war against Hitler.

The Soviet régime has always built up its drives for production by publicity for the exceptional effort. Great social prestige as well as material benefits attend the record-breaker, whether this is an individual, a whole factory or a collective farm. I suppose the Bolsheviks know their own business, but I sometimes wonder whether they would not get better results by giving more publicity to less spectacular improvements in work by the ordinary little man, spread over the whole year rather than in sudden bursts. “Little drops of water, little grains of sand . . .” is a doctrine not much regarded in Russia.

Russian discipline, too, is of the same spasmodic kind. I can only speak from experience of office discipline, but I expect the same applies to the army and to factories. Either there is rigid iron discipline, which is always understood and accepted by the victims, or there is no discipline at all.

Sometimes the Russian character seems to be human nature with the checks and limits removed. The Greek maxim, μηδὲν ἄγαν "nothing in excess," has no meaning for Russians. They go the whole hog or they do nothing and they are seldom deterred by the consequences of an extreme application of whatever doctrine they embrace for the time being. At its best this leads them to superhuman achievement but at their worst they will "start from false premises and pursue them to their conclusion with the relentless logic of the lunatic asylum."

The casualness of Russian administrators and bureaucrats, when they do not see the immediate problem in human terms, is beyond belief. Once the Russians envisage you as a human being they will be kinder than anyone in the world, but while you remain an anonymous case they will behave with the callous indifference of red tape. In Russia it is hard to find the statistical humanity of the British Civil Servant, who will work his eyes out because the tuberculosis rate for Wales is going up and it is his business to stop it. I do not want to overstate this point, and I feel sure that Mr. Stalin and his chief lieutenants excel precisely in this power of seeing a mass of statistics in human terms, but I do not think it comes natural to the Russians as a whole.

Now that cars and petrol are increasing after the war, and drivers remain inexperienced, there are many motor accidents. The Russian attitude to an accident is unexpected. A large crowd gathers and generates a feeling of intense drama. The driver of the car which is supposed to be in the wrong probably tries to make a getaway. The crowd sieze him, threaten him and abuse him, while the victim of the accident may be lying on the ground, where no one pays much attention to him. One night I was driving back into Moscow when I saw the usual crowd collected by the roadside. They signalled to me to draw in, which of course I did, but they seemed surprised, for no previous drivers had been ready to stop. After a little gesticu-

lation it turned out that two wounded people were lying on the grass bleeding away. We were asked to take them to hospital. They were put in the car but there was no guide to show where the hospital was. One of the victims was a brave man, the secretary of the local party committee. His face seemed torn to ribbons, but he retained consciousness, was able to speak and directed me where to drive. The other was a girl with a broken leg, who was losing blood. I was afraid that they would faint or die before we reached the hospital. When we got to the place indicated, I went in and knocked up a sleepy man. He said that it was a clinic which did not work at night, that there was nobody there, nothing that he could do and no suggestion that he could make. I asked him where the nearest hospital was, and he named a place which I had never heard of and which seemed to be about twenty miles away. At that I lost my temper, cursed him for all I was worth, and was within an ace of hitting him. The man meekly replied: "Well, I suppose you'd better try the military hospital next door." He showed me where this was, and I drove in. Here, too, there was red tape, for the nurses on duty would not apply the simplest first aid until the doctor told them to. However, this did not take long, and the two people were carried in. As the girl with the broken leg was carried in, a macabre-looking man with three teeth and the stump of a leg hopped about gaily, waving his stump in the air, and saying: "There, you see, she's broken her leg; they'd much better cut it off; make a nice clean job of it! No nonsense—there you are!" pointing at his own stump.

I insisted on giving my name and address to the major in charge; his first instinct was to arrest me because I must obviously be guilty of the accident, but I soon made him understand the position. The Russians will go to great lengths to avoid contact with the law. If it were not for the possibility of becoming involved in a case, I am sure there would be no difficulty in stopping cars to help after accidents.

The contrast between bureaucratic callousness and wonderful personal kindness is one reason why some people will tell you that the Russians are fiends of cruelty while others tell you they are the kindest people on earth. But there is another side to this. I cannot do better than quote Maurice Baring again:—

“The very fact that he had been hardened by his struggle for existence under desperate conditions has taught the Russian to sympathise with the sorrows and sufferings of his fellow creatures. Hence his kindness, his sympathy for the afflicted, the desolate and the oppressed, which strikes everybody who has come into close contact with the Russian people. On the other hand, in the face of obstacles, not a natural hardness, but a stoicism which the bitterness of the struggle has taught him, gets the upper hand. And he applies to an adversary, an enemy, or to any person who has been found guilty of transgressing his code of laws, a brutal treatment with the same inflexibility with which he would be ready to undergo it, should he be found guilty of an offence calling for a similar punishment. Hence the calm with which a Russian peasant will inflict a tremendous beating—even to death, if it be deemed necessary—on a horse-stealer, which equals the stoicism with which he would himself undergo the beating had he been detected in the crime and condemned to the same punishment. This insensibility, this desperate stoicism, has made people open their eyes when writers, speaking from personal experience have affirmed that the Russian peasant is essentially humane and more humane than other Europeans of the same class. Examples of brutality, whether in real life or in fiction, naturally strike the imagination and stick in the mind more easily than ‘little unremembered acts of kindness and love’ whose very point is that they are unremembered.

“But whereas these qualities exist side by side, the milder predominates. It is his normal state, and acts of brutality are generally the result of exceptional circumstances. That is to say, the Russian peasant may be said to be naturally a good-natured being, humane and compassionate, but capable of enduring or inflicting suffering should the circumstances demand it, with unruffled calm. It would be a great mistake to think of him as a being who in his normal state, and in his everyday life, without any rhyme or reason, is constantly swaying between extremes of unaccountable kindness and unaccountable brutality. He is naturally humane, and naturally peaceful and disinclined to fight. To bring his hardness and ruder qualities into play, exceptional circum-

stances are needed, not to mention drink. Even under the influence of drink he is as a rule inclined to be good-natured; but if drinks be combined with a pressure of further exceptional circumstances, say an act of punishment or revenge, he will then be capable of committing wild excesses.

"Personally, in my experience of the Russian peasantry I have never witnessed on their part any single example of brutality, whereas I have come across hundreds of instances of their good nature and kindness."

Baring records "the almost miraculous energy displayed by the Russian sailors" during the Messina earthquake, and adds that one English witness was struck by two things: "The tenderness one Russian sailor displayed to the wounded and sick, how he nursed and attended the women and children; and the ruthless, calm manner in which he disposed of looters and robbers as so much vermin."

The other side to the absence of statistical humanity is an extra development of humanity in personal relations. This is closely akin to Russian realism. The Russians have few illusions about the universe, about human nature or about themselves. They accept human nature, with its limitations and imperfections and its strange vagaries, as part of the data of life; they see themselves and other human beings more in the round than most of us do, and it is harder to shock them. One feels that Western European human nature has been subjected to a process of tidying up and putting into shape for many centuries. Puritanism, for instance, set tangible standards of conduct and thought; people saw clearly what they thought they ought to be, and the effort to live as they should became deeply involved with a pretence that men and women are otherwise than they are.

Thus external standards were set and these acted as a rigid framework to society. This is the "cement of hypocrisy" which is lacking in Russia.

The Russians have in all essentials the same moral standards as ourselves, but they are less shocked by the inconsistencies of our imperfect human nature. They realise that a man may have conflicting emotions, which get the upper hand in rapid succession, and they did not affect an external consistency where there is no internal coherence.

At the climax of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, the most famous and most popular novel in the Russian language, the hero says to the heroine:—

“Listen to me and don't be angry; a young girl replaces her light daydreams with other dreams more than once, just as a tree changes its leaves every spring. Evidently Heaven has decreed it thus. You will fall in love again.”

But, for all their realism, the Russians are great perfectionists, and when it comes to an argument they do not like admitting that half a loaf is better than no bread.

Russians generally have strong emotions, or rather they are not afraid of their emotions, so that this side of their nature becomes fully developed. They are honest to themselves about their feelings. Russians tell more lies than we do, but they are not hypocritical, and when they are found out they admit they are wrong. The public confessions in treason trials do not seem so strange to the Russians as they seem to us. The same thing shows itself in comparatively trivial cases too. Once I had to sack a woman for an attack of wild indiscipline and capriciousness, combined with systematic mischief-making. The same thing might happen in an English office, but anyone capable of behaving so badly would, I think, violently deny the facts and assert that it was all a plant. In this case the girl, who was not a bad sort, quietly admitted all that I said against her and went without a word.

Russians seldom simper, they make statements about fundamental moral questions without being self-conscious. A Russian will say to you quite naturally: “You are a good man” (or the opposite); or they may say: “I think I am bad,” without in the least playing for effect. If they like you, they say so quite simply. It is painful to see Chekhov performed in London because our actors and actresses, feeling embarrassed at some of the things they have to say, try to turn them with a society giggle or some other sophisticated trick, as if they were English people making fools of themselves instead of Russians behaving without constraint. Our producers will have to study how Chekhov is staged in Moscow.

When you have lived in Russia for a while you realise how early in life our children begin learning to hide their emotions. Russian children have no coyness about expressing their affection to any grown-up who is kind to them, and little shyness

about performing in public. I always enjoy the performances put on for guests at orphanages and pioneer palaces, not only because the turns are often good, but mainly because the children get such enjoyment from throwing themselves wholeheartedly into music or dancing or recitation.

Old people in Russia get a great deal of pleasure out of life when circumstances give them half a chance. Their Russian realism prevents them repining for what they miss, and their Russian responsiveness brings them enjoyment of the sunset glow. So Russian grandmothers are the best in the world, better even than our own. They have so much experience of life and so much sweetness in their natures; the Russian church played a great part in making the characters of these lovable old people, and I have one English friend who thinks that the present atheistic generation will not grow old in the same way. He thinks there will soon be no more "babushkas"; I hope he is wrong.

The Russians often speak of their "broad nature," and indeed there is something Elizabethan about them. They are more like Shakespeare's English before Puritanism got hold of us. If we have disciplined ourselves in recent centuries more than is good for human nature, the Russians have erred in the opposite direction. But this is perhaps more a question of stages of development than a racial difference. The Russian non-conforming sects have always had a strong hold on one side of the Russian nature, and most of them tend to puritanical self-discipline. The Communist Party is the latest and most powerful aspect of this tendency, and it is doing for the Russian character something of what the puritan revolution did for the English character.

But there are two important differences in the emotional set-up of Christian puritanism and Communist puritanism. In the first place sexual purity stands very high in the Christian puritan standard of values. The good Communist, too, is expected to set an example in his sexual life, but this is never pushed to the point where the striving for physical purity creates an emotional barrier between human beings and may even prevent Christian fellowship. On the other hand, the Communist tries to excise from human nature all those religious emotions which form the deeper life of those who experience them.



## CHAPTER XIV

### RUSSIAN CITIES

#### *Leningrad*

My first visit to Leningrad during the war was about the first of July, 1944, not very long after the final lifting of the siege. Starvation was a stage long past, but there were still notices in the streets saying which side was safest during an artillery bombardment. The superficial damage to houses was much less than in London, but if you went inside them you would find that very many houses had a room or two wrecked by shell-fire. A shell is much smaller than a bomb, and does not destroy a whole building, but bombing and shelling together killed eight thousand people and injured twenty-eight thousand during two and a half years. The people of Leningrad were connoisseurs of shells, and were delighted to hear that we were bombarding the Germans with one-ton shells in the Normandy operation. This seemed to them incredibly large.

But shelling was among the least of their hardships. Hunger and cold killed several hundred thousand people during the winter of 1941-1942. Before the war the population of Leningrad was 3,100,000, of which 600,000 were evacuated during the worst period of the siege. In 1945 there were about 1,500,000 people left, and evacuees were returning at the rate of from 2,000 to 2,500 a day. The worst period of the siege was from the 25th November to the 25th December, 1941, at which time the bread ration was 250 grammes a day for workers and 125 grammes for non-workers (that is, one not very large slice). Thirty per cent. of this bread consisted of cellulose and there was no other food whatever.

After that conditions began to improve slowly, especially after the ice road was opened over Lake Ladoga, and a small fat ration was issued in January, 1942. That very hard winter killed many people from cold, but it saved the town because the ice became hard enough to take transport earlier than usual. All wooden houses were burnt for fuel, and a great deal of

furniture. A friend of mine, who had a flat in Leningrad, happened to be away during the war; after the siege her neighbour wrote to explain that the flat was safe but that she had burnt all the furniture. Another friend was sent for by the City Soviet to undertake some special work; there was no public transport, and he had to reply that he would never be able to walk to Smolny, where the City Soviet was. A car was sent for him, but he was scarcely able to walk into the room. When asked what he would need in order to undertake the work, he answered: "You will have to feed me," and was given a small addition to his diet.

I expected on going to Leningrad that it would be painful for the people to speak about their sufferings, and that having been through such terrible experiences they might pardonably despise the rest of the world. But in fact they were very ready to talk about the siege and perhaps it did them good to get it off their chests. Their own sufferings had increased their sensitiveness and sympathy with other people's troubles; I have never known a place where one was asked so many sympathetic and understanding questions about the London blitz.

Leningrad is the most beautiful of the very big cities that I have seen. It lies upon a reclaimed marsh at the mouth of a very large river, so that magnificent broad stretches of water and beautiful canals form the framework for its architecture. The centre of the city was built at the period when European domestic architecture in the classical style was at its best. The earliest buildings are of the early 18th century, but first-class classical architecture continued to be built down to the middle of the 19th century.

Russian architecture was touched by Victorianism later than our own and never acquired this disease in such a virulent form. I sometimes think that bad European movements in art, such as Victorianism and the Art Nouveau, are not pernicious to Russia, for such influences arrive in Russia transmuted by distance and may even prove an inspiration.

The Winter Palace and Hermitage were struck by shells, but the damage is not serious. All the important exhibits were evacuated or sent to places of safety, and are now on show again.

When we were there the white nights were almost over, but

it was never completely dark at night. At about midnight the air seemed to turn into a dark translucent blue, through which the buildings were still visible across the Neva. None of the trees in the parks had been used for firewood, but many were damaged by shell-fire. I noticed that trees grow very slowly at this latitude.

On this and other visits I made several excursions into the countryside, through the kind assistance of the City Soviet who put transport at the disposal of our party in spite of the very difficult conditions.

Leningrad is a big city and is not overcrowded as the Soviet Union goes, but none the less it is planned to double the area without appreciably increasing the population. You drive out to the south along the meridian of the Pulkovo observatory, past the famous Kirov (Putilov) works, which continued to produce munitions throughout the siege. They were within a mile or two of the front line, and continually under shell-fire; workers died of starvation and cold every day. Further south, in the open fields, you come to the new building of the City Soviet, which has been boldly constructed outside the present boundaries, but in the centre of the proposed expansion. This building had been under shell-fire and was not in use.

Further south again there are many miles of deserted land; the villages were destroyed in the fighting and the people were killed, evacuated or carried into captivity by the Germans. The land is still mined and it will be some time before it can be brought back into cultivation.

The Imperial palaces outside Leningrad have suffered severely, but great trouble is being taken with their restoration and much of the architecture is of a kind that can be restored effectively provided sufficient care is taken.

I have twice talked with those in charge and been shown the card indexes of detailed drawings which are being compiled. Some of the loss is irreparable, and is the result of the enemy's deliberate vandalism. But in a few years the Imperial Palaces will attract as big crowds as ever. The "Greek Baths," built by Charles Cameron at Pushkino (formerly Tsarskoe Selo), are, to my mind, one of the masterpieces of their style. They are substantially undamaged, though they suffered some desecration at the hands of the Spanish Blue Division. All the best of

the treasures were evacuated from the palaces at Pushkino and unused rolls of the original silk used for the wall hangings are preserved. A great deal of Rococo gilt work has been damaged, but much remains and care is being taken with the restoration of the rest, for which purpose a special school has been started. It should be remembered that in certain lines the Russians are the best restorers in the world. Old ikons have generally been repainted several times in their existence; I have seen examples where the restorers had not only removed each layer of painting, but had transferred it intact to a new surface so that you could see, side by side on the same wall, the work of many different centuries taken from the same piece of wood.

The parks of the imperial palaces are well preserved and many of the sculptures which adorn them were buried and are being found. Others were carried off by the Germans, but they will be searched for diligently, and there is some hope that the majority of them may eventually return. Peter the Great's beautiful little palace of Monplaisir at Peterhof is virtually intact.

The Great Palace at Peterhof was completely gutted by fire, and the interior is past restoration. This is probably the most serious loss. The outside of the palace is very badly knocked about, but is capable of restoration. The famous fountains are to be restored, but much depends on how much of the statuary can be recovered.

Leningrad is house-proud as no other Russian city is, and it was extraordinary to see how much tidying up had been done already. This pride in their native city certainly helped to get the people through the siege. The general standard of behaviour was magnificent throughout, and there were no scenes of disorder such as those which marked the otherwise heroic defence of Moscow in the autumn of 1941. Those who went through the siege of Leningrad have an unmistakable pride in the ordeal they have survived, and there was in 1945 a touch of rivalry and conflict between them and some of the returning evacuees.

Leningrad is more European than any other place in the Soviet Union, not only in its architecture, but in the character of the people and their cultural background. As a Western European, I felt nearer to them in outlook than to the people

of Central Russia. I do not say that one outlook is better than the other, but these affinities are facts which influence events.

### *Sverdlovsk*

In January, 1945, a good-will delegation from Parliament arrived in the Soviet Union. I was invited to travel with the party to help with interpreting and other arrangements. In this way I had the good fortune to visit many places which I should otherwise have missed.

Our first journey was to Sverdlovsk, on the Trans-Siberian line, just across the Urals. The journey, which took two days and three nights, was by the special train which the Soviet Government had very kindly put at the disposal of the delegation. It is hard to imagine a more enjoyable form of travel. We each had a comfortable sleeping compartment, there was a restaurant car and a bathroom car. The man in charge of the bath told me that he generally did the run Minsk to Vladivostok. The restaurant car had unlimited quantities of excellent food and drink, and the attendants made it their purpose in life to make us overeat as often as possible. As we were treated to two banquets a day whenever we were off the train, it was rather hard to do justice to the fare. But I think that all of us became fitter as well as fatter.

The staff of the train took up one or two whole coaches, as the size of our party fluctuated. The delegation spent well over a month on this train and got to know their Soviet fellow-travellers well. All of us felt keen regret when the time came to leave these moving billets.

When Russians and English people really get to know each other, they get on, but superficial contacts of the kind that occur, for instance, when Allied armies of occupation meet, do not always make for understanding. An examination of the course of events in this particular case may cast some light on the problems involved, and I hope that in such a good cause our Soviet friends will forgive me for an open discussion of these very personal problems. Our delegation, which was an all-party one, consisted of Messrs. Walter Elliot (Chairman), Tom Fraser, P. W. Jewson, Stephen King-Hall, R. E. Manningham-Buller, John Parker, Charles Ponsonby and Wilfrid Roberts. from the House of Commons, and Lords Lovat and Faringdon.

After the party left Baku only five members of the House of Commons and Lord Faringdon remained. The secretary of the party was Tom Brimelow, the very able third secretary of our Embassy in Moscow, who has a first-class knowledge of Russian. Unfortunately, he became ill before the Asiatic part of the journey, so that I had to take his place after Stalingrad. Colonel Charles Ponsonby's good-looking daughter Lavinia, was a member of my staff and was seconded to accompany her father and help with the organisation of the delegation. She also acted as an excellent representative of British womanhood, playing her full part on both formal and informal occasions.

The Russian authorities had seconded Mr. Pavlov, from the Secretariat of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, and Mr. Trukhanovsky from the Soviet Foreign Office. Mr. Pavlov had as his junior assistant Mr. Monin, a student of history, now working on the secretariat of the Supreme Soviet. Miss Lyudmila Morozova, from the staff of Intourist, who translated for the party, had the most difficult task of anyone.

In addition, Doctors Vilensky and Kirillov came with us everywhere in case Soviet hospitality should prove excessive. They were both first-class doctors and very charming men, who did much to make the delegation successful.

The Soviet authorities made it clear from the start that they were going to put themselves out to ensure that the delegation saw whatever they wanted to see. I am afraid our delegates may not have made a very happy impression at first on the Soviet officials who accompanied them. We were undisciplined, could not make up our minds, were always thinking of fresh and difficult demands to make upon our Soviet hosts, and must have seemed distressingly frivolous, and not always correctly dressed according to Soviet notions. I hope that in public we behaved as was required, but of course, after each official visit was over, we all behaved like schoolboys on a holiday. Can you imagine ten grown-up Englishmen, whether M.P.s or not, doing anything different? The Russians, on the other hand, behaved with extreme correctness as the representatives of their country in the presence of distinguished foreigners. If they thought us silly, some of our party may have thought them cold, and even unfriendly. It was very interesting to watch the ice gradually breaking. The Russians soon began to see that our

schoolboy jokes and lack of deference in speaking to each other were for us a natural human way of behaving, and we began to see that the Russian reserve was not unfriendliness but just different manners.

When a Russian receives an official guest, he does so with all the trappings of formality, but with a grave face. He seldom puts on the smile of welcome which is obligatory good manners in most western countries. When the King of England or his representative awards decorations, he smiles and everyone conspires to make the occasion as friendly and human as is consistent with the dignity of what is being done. If you have ever seen a film of President Kalinin conferring Soviet orders you will notice that there is nothing but the most formal handshake and that the faces might be wooden masks. On public ceremonial occasions the Russians maintain a reserve which no British public school could approach.

Our conventional smiles may seem as out of place to Russians as the conventional giggles of some Orientals seem to most of us. Hubert Butler, who lived with a Soviet family before the war, tells me that his landlady suspected him of being a spy. But the maid stood up for him, saying: "He must be a harmless idiot to judge by the way he keeps smiling whenever he talks to me."

"I only meant to be friendly," was the reply.

"Yes, but real Russians only smile at jokes."

I thought Mr. Trukhanovsky was a little shocked at our schoolboy behaviour. He addressed all of us very correctly by our surnames with Mr. or other title prefixed, but we found it quite impossible to maintain this standard with him. After two or three days he became just "Truke" without any Mister. Being a perceptive man, he soon realised that this unconventional form of address was a sign of friendliness, and that when the English go on too long addressing you formally it is an indication that they do not like you very much.

One day the following conversation took place:

*Wilfrid Roberts*: You know, Truke, the difference between you and us is that you keep up your palaces but you haven't got anyone to put in them, whereas when we have a palace we like to have a tame peer or two to put in it just for appearance sake. Now just look at Lord Faringdon. That's what we keep him for.

*John Lawrence:* Why, a palace without any peers in it is just like a zoo without animals.

I thought Truke was going to die of laughing.

After about three weeks we had rubbed off most of each others corners, and when we came to say goodbye to our train on the last night we had one of the best parties I have ever attended. Wilfrid Roberts succeeded in persuading the Russians that it was an old English custom to drink champagne out of an enormous flower vase which held about a bottle. We tried to make everyone empty one of these at a single draught. When the British component eventually went to bed, having consumed far more champagne and brandy than was good for them, our Soviet friends sat down to a very large meat meal.

The train rumbled along at a moderate speed towards Sverdlovsk, stopping fairly long at some of the stations. We always got out at stops in order to see as much of life as possible. At one place we found that the school was near the station, so we paid an impromptu visit of inspection. We passed through the Urals at night both ways and so did not see much of the scenery, but they do not present a serious mountain barrier. Siberia is, in the main, a continuation of the great Russian plain.

The people of Sverdlovsk, where we spent two days, are proud to consider themselves men of the Urals rather than Siberians. Sverdlovsk, which is the old Ekaterinburg, was founded in 1723 in memory of Peter the Great's second wife Catherine, but it grew slowly and in 1924 had only 70,000 inhabitants. When we went there, there were about 700,000, and during the height of the evacuation there had been over a million people living there. It follows that most of the population are recent immigrants from Great Russia and the Ukraine.

None the less, they have already acquired a special character. I spent most of my two days with Commander King-Hall in the Urals Industrial Institute, and found that both students and teachers were tougher and more outspoken than their opposite numbers in Moscow or Leningrad.

The winter, though long and hard, is healthy and invigorating. The summer is very short, but hotter than Moscow.



When we were there in January, there were more than 72 degrees of frost Fahrenheit, but we felt well. The moment we went out of doors it was necessary to have on all one's warmest clothes including (in my case) fur boots, and after standing about for even a minute or two, waiting for the car, the chill begins to penetrate to one's bones, starting from the feet up. But it was all right if one was warmly wrapped and kept moving. There is little wind and the air is dry and bright. Everyone who has lived in the Urals or Siberia agrees that the cold is easier to bear than the Moscow winter, and there is no doubt that the Siberian climate breeds a vigorous race.

One night I went for quite a long walk by myself after the banquets were finished. There was no black-out and the town looked clean and beautiful under its snow covering. In the centre there are some pleasant old-fashioned houses, and in the central square a well-designed tribune for May Day processions with a ramp down from it which the children used as a slide in the winter.

The architecture and lay-out looked simple and pleasant, and struck me as better than modern Moscow. We were taken to the theatre and given a composite show of local talent. I got the impression that the dramatic theatre was good and that the opera was alive, but that the ballet did not make the grade. We were shown one act of the first ballet to be composed on a Urals theme. It was called *The Stone Flower* and had received high awards, but was remarkable for its subject rather than for choreography or performance. It must be the first geological ballet in the world.

In the Urals geology comes close to everyday life. We were taken to see the Urals geological museum, a fascinating place even for ignorant people like myself. The Urals were created by some primeval convulsion which forced deep strata from the bowels of the earth high above the surface. In the course of many ages the upper rock has been worn away, leaving enormous deposits of valuable minerals which abound in the bowels of the earth though rarely upon the surface. Every single element that has been found upon the earth occurs in the Urals, very often in enormous quantities. There is nothing like it in the world except in the Far North of Canada, where the mineral wealth is less accessible from centres of population.

It is these minerals which have made the Urals important. They have long been known, but were not worked on the present scale till the Revolution.

On our second evening we were entertained to a banquet at the Palace of the Pioneers, which turned out to be the house made famous by Mamin Siberiak in his novel, *The Privalovsky Millions*.

Before dinner there was a very good performance by the children, with some seventeenth century English music. My neighbours at the banquet used every device to make me mix my drinks; for once in a way they succeeded, so that I cannot give a coherent account of what happened later.

In peacetime Sverdlovsk would not be a bad place to live in. There is a vigorous growing life and a good intelligentsia consisting mainly, but by no means exclusively, of engineers. There are better theatres and concerts than in most provincial towns, and in the long winter there is excellent skiing close at hand in the Urals. The country round Sverdlovsk is cleared of forest, but it is not many tens of miles to the taiga, the great Siberian forest which originally spread as far as the Yellow River in China.

I never got to Siberia proper, but I heard many things that made me wish to go there. The peasants of Siberia are the descendants of free settlers who have never been serfs and their wooden houses are, I am told, never overcrowded and always spotlessly clean. They have developed a kind of life more like that of the American pioneers.

### *The Road to Yaroslavl*

In the summer of 1945 I acquired an Austin 10 which I drove myself. The war was drawing to an end and I began to hand over the work to my successor in office. It was therefore possible to take some time off, and I began to explore the Moscow neighbourhood. One week-end I made an expedition to Yaroslavl on the Upper Volga, about 170 miles from Moscow. There is a motor road all the way, but it was in bad repair and it was not possible to make good time. The last twenty miles to Yaroslavl were slow going because the road was in course of drastic reconstruction.

I drove out on Friday evening to Zagorsk, the little town that

clusters round the Troitsko-Sergeevskaya Lavra, the most famous monastery in Russia. The monastery is now a museum and is, on the whole, well kept, though there are too many people living in the monks' quarters. The famous paintings by the 15th century artist Rublyov were taken away during the war but have now been replaced. The inn at Zagorsk gives clean beds, but in wartime you have to take your own food or buy it at the local markets. Prices in the market fall the further you go from Moscow. We made enquiries where one could stay in Yaroslavl and were recommended to the Hotel Bristol.

After Zagorsk, which is 45 miles from Moscow, the road goes through pretty, undulating forest land, variegated with clearings and villages. The first place of any size is the ancient city of Pereyaslavl, which has scarcely changed since the 17th century. Visitors are shown the cathedral from which Alexander Nevsky started on his expedition against the Teutonic knights in 1242, and many other churches of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

The little town lies inside and round an earthen rampart on the shores of the lake of Pereyaslavl, which is the cradle of the Russian fleet; the local museum shows relics of the boats of the flotilla created here by Peter the Great when he was scarcely out of his boyhood.

Pereyaslavl is a country town in the true sense of the word. There are plenty of green spaces and air between the houses both inside and outside the ramparts

In the museum there was a "chernaya izba," or smokehouse, in which an old man had lived till about 1932. This was a little wooden hut about 12 feet square with an ordinary Russian stove and chimney, but no windows and scarcely any furniture. Such windowless houses were already rare before the Revolution, but in living memory they were quite common. The occupant of this one had been eventually persuaded to move to a home for old people.

Forty miles further on is the equally ancient city of Rostov, not to be confused with the more famous Rostov on the Don. This city stands picturesquely on the shores of a lake in the midst of a large plain; in ancient times it must have stood surrounded with lake and marsh like Ely. The tightly packed

inner city, about a quarter of a mile square, has many churches of the 17th century; outside the brick walls there are straggling suburbs consisting mainly of wooden houses of the country type with carved wooden fronts.

No one wished to take responsibility for letting us inside the ancient monuments, and we eventually had to obtain permission from the NKVD.

Rostov, with its bulging domes, is typical of the Russian architecture of the 17th century, which has become almost a symbol of Russia; it is the perfect expression of the old Muscovy before Peter the Great. Its first great expression is the church at Kolomenskoye, near Moscow, built by the father of Ivan the Terrible in the early 16th century. The church stands on a tall foundation on a high bank above the Moscow river; the ground plan is not unlike the ordinary Byzantine church, but in place of a dome it is surmounted by a tall and ingeniously constructed steeple. It has the soaring quality of Gothic intensified by the absence of nave and transepts; everything concentrates on the spire, and it is only after several minutes that one begins to look at the lower tiers.

Russian churches of the 16th to 18th centuries are varied by the ingenious arrangement of the bricks at different angles to make patterns, and there are many attractive architectural details on the exterior. But there is little of the beauty of well-moulded stone which the European sightseer is accustomed to look for. One's eye goes straight to the domes and pinnacles; the foundation scarcely counts.

We saw the interior of most of the churches at Rostov, but they are disappointing; the frescoes are seldom more than quaint, and I have never found the internal proportions of such churches satisfying.

This traditional Russian style blends eventually with the Russian baroque. Perhaps the greatest monument of this style was the famous "New Jerusalem" monastery, built by Rastrelli at Istra, near Moscow. It was deliberately destroyed by the Germans, but when I saw it the ruined arches and strong baroque plaster work were still beautiful against the blue sky. We passed through the site where Istra, a fair-sized town, had been; apart from a very few brick chimneys and a small group of brick ruins in the centre, there was nothing

to show that there had ever been a town. The wooden houses had burnt, the grass had grown and the surrounding fields had become a wilderness. There was a handful of people living in the remains of the monastery; they told me how the Germans had driven them out into the forest in December to live as they could; others, they said, had been driven off into captivity.

From Rostov to Yaroslavl is 35 miles. The Russian friend who was with me had never seen the Volga, which is even here as broad as the Thames at Westminster. Yaroslavl, known to the Elizabethans as Yaroslave, is a growing industrial town with an older core on the banks of the Volga where the public offices and ancient monuments are situated. It was an important trading post in the 16th and 17th centuries and there are still many churches built by the merchants of that time. It was prosperous in the 19th century and there is a fine embankment by the Volga.

The town seemed well-kept in spite of the war. There were new buildings; in the centre the streets were well-paved and cobbles were being rapidly replaced by well-laid asphalt. I was told that most of the improvements had been carried out during the war, and soon afterwards I noticed in *Pravda* that the city architect of Yaroslavl had earned special commendation. The Hotel Bristol was built in the *art nouveau* style before the Revolution, and the rooms were clean. I was given the best room, large and furnished with quite comfortable Edwardian furniture. I was committing a technical breach of the regulations by going so far outside Moscow without a permit, but the war was over and nobody minded.

#### *Vladimir and Suzdal*

Having decided to write a popular history of Russia as soon as I was released from the Government Service, I was anxious to visit the celebrated city of Vladimir, which played a great part in the foundation of the present Russian State.

The original centre of Russian civilisation was in the Ukraine, but when, in the latter twelfth century, nomad incursions made the richest parts of the Black Earth steppe untenable, the centre shifted to the forest zone of the north. Vladimir is well placed on the river Klyazma, at a point where a salient from the

black earth of the south comes up into the forest. The forests protected the inhabitants against raids and yet the soil was good. In the late 12th and early 13th centuries Vladimir and Suzdal formed the centre of Russian civilisation.

To-day, Vladimir is on an important motor road half-way between Moscow and Gorki (Nizhni-Novgorod). The 110 miles are covered in three or four hours. Half-way I stopped to give a lift to a Red Army lieutenant who was hitch-hiking. When he asked where we were staying in Vladimir, I had to say that I had made no plans. He kindly offered his help. The hotel turned out to be full, and after seeing it I must confess that I was glad to find it so. Our friend then took us round to the local House of the Red Army, which served as a centre for officers stationed in the neighbourhood or passing through Vladimir. There again there was no room and we were told that by the rules no one but an army officer could be put up. Our officer friend, in no way daunted, said: "Well, we must apply to the City Soviet." I knew that when one is in a fix it is always the right thing to apply to the authorities, but I would have been shy about walking in unheralded. However, my Red Army friend escorted me in at the front door of the city offices, enquired the names of the chief officials and walked along the passage, going straight into all the rooms in search of someone in authority. It so happened that no one was in and I was beginning to wonder what to do, when my friend said: "Well, you're the editor of a newspaper; obviously the local newspaper ought to put you up, and they will be very pleased to see you too." The newspaper offices were in the same building, and eventually we tracked down the editor on duty. This delightful man was in no way taken aback by my request for a night's lodging; he made suggestions for us to see the town for the next hour and promised to arrange something before we came back. So I strolled out and began to take stock of the city.

Vladimir stands on a highish hill, which looks all the higher for the surrounding flatness. The Klyazma, about the size of the Thames at Oxford, winds slowly along the foot. Vladimir is growing and has already some important factories, but there is still an old-world Barchester-ish air about the place. It has

two cathedrals of the 12th century and a ceremonial gateway known as the Golden Gate, built by the famous Andrew of Bogolyubovo in the 12th century. There are other buildings of a later age, including a 17th century monastery on which German prisoners were working. The guard told me that most of the prisoners worked well enough, but he was at pains to explain that they were not allowed anywhere near the frescoes which were being restored.

At this stage German prisoners engaged on public work were a very common sight round Moscow. They were well fed and well clothed; most of them looked very unhappy, but about one in ten seemed to enjoy life as it came along and not to give a damn for anything else. I talked to many Russians who had visited P.O.W. camps and to some Red Army men who had been concerned with prisoners. They all said that the prisoners were very well fed and well treated; some Russians resented this and thought that they should have been made to pay for their misdeeds, but most felt that the honour and dignity of the Soviet Union required that prisoners should be well treated, whatever the circumstances.

After seeing the town we went back to the newspaper office, and while final arrangements for our lodging were being made we were taken to see some of the chief local officials. A new "oblast" or province of Vladimir had been created during the war out of a part of the larger "oblast" of Ivanovo. In the next two days I saw some of the men and women who were in charge of building up this new "oblast." They struck me as being a fine lot, and proud of their local antiquities. It was obvious that the town was well run, but the authorities insisted that much remained to be done before Vladimir was modernised, as it should be. Several of them expressed a hope that, when I came to write my history of Russia, I would do justice to the part played by Vladimir and Suzdal in building the Great Russian State.

After meeting the officials we were given an excellent dinner with our friend from the newspaper and the local professor of archeology, who is one of the leading antiquarians of the Soviet Union. Finally, we were put up in the "House of the Red Army," which was the former building of the local "Assembly of Nobility" in Tsarist days. Beds and washstands were

specially put for us in one of the reception rooms. A spare bed which was provided for my non-existent chauffeur was in the end used by a Lieutenant-General who arrived unexpectedly.

Next morning breakfast was brought about 10 o'clock, and it became clear that time was no object. Our friends of the previous day joined us and we partook of tea, cocoa, vodka, brandy and liqueurs, as well as a substantial breakfast of a more conventional kind, with sausages and jam made from the famous Vladimir cherries.

The plan for the day was to visit Suzdal, about twenty miles away over an indifferent road. The party consisted of a Russian friend and myself, the editor from the newspaper with his ten-year-old boy, and the professor of archaeology, who never for one moment stopped giving us information about the local antiquities. Fortunately my appetite for information is insatiable, but the boy suffered a good deal. He kept his manners perfectly, however, and I don't think he even lost interest in archaeology for the first few hours.

Suzdal is now a rambling little town, quieter even than Pereyaslavl and Rostov, for it is farther off the beaten track. The antiquities are mainly of the 12th and 16th centuries and are being restored with care and discrimination under the directions of our friend the archaeologist. We were received by the Town Soviet, a body which in this case corresponded roughly to a Rural District Council. Half were men and half women and were of the type of strong-minded healthy human beings that come to the front in any country community which is left to itself. We were entertained to lunch, and I began to feel rather ashamed at consuming so much hospitality as an uninvited guest. But I was able to contribute a bottle of gin, a drink which had never been seen in those parts, but was pronounced satisfactory.

In the afternoon we went to see another 12th century church two or three miles away. The evening was so lovely that I went for a long stroll by the river with the members of the City Soviet; all of us forgot about time and it was late before we got back, but although we were unexpected the chairman of the local collective farm insisted on our paying him a visit and partaking of a lavish collation. This village lived on good land, where food was plentiful, and was not too far from its



market. Even in wartime the people enjoyed a reasonable standard of living. I had to drive carefully after so much hospitality, but eventually we arrived back at Vladimir at midnight—to find a large meal waiting for us.

The next morning, after another exhausting breakfast, we were to drive out to Bogolyubovo, where there are the remains of the 12th century palace of Prince Andrew of Bogolyubovo, and a church built by him—the Pokrov na Nerli, or Church of the Holy Shroud—which stands at the point where the Nerli River flows into the Klyazma. This little gem is the best preserved and most beautiful of the churches in this region. It is not very large, but stands on a little hill and looks tall; the present dome, which is not the original, is to be replaced with a lower dome in the original style. This church's beauty depends upon the simple and elegant proportions, which are very much in the English taste. The architectural decoration on the outside of all the Vladimir churches is obscured by paint and whitewash, but it is planned to clean and restore this and the other churches of the region. From what I have seen the work is being carried out with care and discrimination.

We returned a bit late to Vladimir, and after luncheon I was asked to pay my respects to Mr. Paltsev, who is the Party secretary for the Vladimir "oblast." Since arriving in Vladimir I had gathered that he was not only the effective ruler of the province, but was widely respected and liked. I had imagined that this would be just a courtesy call; I meant to thank the authorities for their very great hospitality, and I reckoned on getting to Moscow before nightfall.

Paltsev was a fair-haired man, thirty-eight years old and of medium height, with a manner which combined a sort of personal diffidence with a knowledge of his own authority. We found ourselves talking man to man almost at once. I gave him my candid impressions of the Vladimir oblast, which were mainly favourable; I could see that he set himself a high standard and was not satisfied. He showed us the plans for the development of the city and gave me some photographs of the antiquities, which he was very proud of. He was beginning to ask me about my own home at Bath when light refreshments were announced; these turned out to be quite a large lunch. In Russia the fact that one has just dined is never a reason for

refusing hospitality, but I did say that being my own chauffeur I had better go slow with the vodka. Mr. Paltsev, with a charming smile, told me not to worry, because if necessary he would detail a chauffeur to drive me back. But he did not press me when he saw that I had had enough, and I did not have to avail myself of this offer.

In Moscow one sees the worst side of Soviet bureaucracy, but this journey to Vladimir did much to restore my sense of perspective. It is sounder to judge the Soviet Union by the impact of a paternal autocracy upon the still primitive peasant society of the provinces, rather than by the impact of the Moscow bureaucracy upon the intelligentsia. No doubt Mr. Paltsev has humanised the machine of government more than some of his colleagues, but he is a rising man; his type is important for the future, for such people have direct access to Stalin. As this is written I see that he has become a member of the Committee for the Revision of the Stalin Constitution.

### *Stalingrad*

My first glimpse of Stalingrad was from the air on the 3rd of January, 1944, nearly a year after the end of the battle. Bare walls were standing in most places, but scarcely a roof was to be seen. We came down at the aerodrome some distance out of the city and were weather-bound for two days. There was a thaw, as if to remind one that even the Russian winter can fail to live up to its reputation, but we were thankful because the building in which we lodged, though moderately heated, had only single windows. All the passengers from our aeroplane were put in a closely-packed dormitory in a building used by the Red Air Force, with whom we shared our meals. I had not felt so strongly the companionship of the road since our first journey from Murmansk. The Russians have a way of making a perfect stranger sit down and of talking to him as if the company had been friends all their lives. It is this as much as anything else which Russians, and foreigners who have lived long in Russia, miss in the West.

The Red Air Force food was plentiful and good, though somewhat monotonous; at every meal there was a heaped plate of fresh meat hash and potatoes, preceded by red caviare and black bread. There was no butter. The drink was unlimited

quantities of sweetened tea, and the bill for two days' stay was negligible. The battle had raged furiously over this aerodrome, and the building in which we stayed was the only one which had yet been made habitable.

Those of the inhabitants who had returned were living in another village across the aerodrome which had escaped destruction. They came every day to work on "zemlianki" or dug-outs, which they were making as temporary accommodation for themselves. The *zemlianka* is the most primitive form of dwelling used by the Russians in historic times. In emergencies they always fall back on a *zemlianka*, which is made as follows: a rectangular pit four or five feet deep is dug in the ground. This is then lined with logs, which project above the surface of the earth, and given a roof and floor in wood; a stove with chimney is put in and windows are added as soon as possible. These dug-outs are easy to warm and have saved the lives of many Russian families whose villages had been burnt by the Germans.

When I was travelling by rail from Moscow to Warsaw in September, 1945, I saw countless people living in *zemliankas*, though many others were fortunate enough to have their houses left intact or repairable. I passed through Minsk, the capital of Byelorussia, and tried to compare the ruins with other cities. The destruction of Minsk is not so complete as Stalingrad, but the percentage of houses destroyed seemed to be about the same as in Warsaw, which is, of course, a much bigger city than either Minsk or Stalingrad. The centre of Berlin approaches it in destruction but is compensated by the relatively intact suburbs.

At Stalingrad our little community assembled every evening in one of the rooms in our house and someone played the piano. A few people tried to dance; it was impossible to feel gay, but there was a companionship about that little room with its oil lamp.

Not everyone fed as well as the Red Air Force, and there were a few beggars.

I next saw Stalingrad on the 4th of February, 1945, when the British Parliamentary Delegation were received there. At that time there were about 250,000 people living in the town. The majority of them were citizens of Stalingrad, but there were

also many komsomols and others who had volunteered to take part in the reconstruction. There were about two square metres of living space for each inhabitant; the people fed in public canteens. Public health was remarkably good in the circumstances and there had been no epidemics.

At first almost everyone lived in "zemlianki" or in tents. The tents given by the Queen of England were heated with hot water pipes and were very useful. The only new buildings were temporary constructions, but a number of public buildings had been restored and there were already enough schools for the 27,000 children of school age then in Stalingrad. Two theatres had kept going from very early days.

The housing position was improving, but no one was allowed to return unless he had accommodation available. It is the employer's business to provide living quarters for anyone directed to Stalingrad. The Parliamentary Delegation were shown the Ilyich Hospital, one building of which had opened on January 1st, 1945, as a general hospital with 200 beds. It was well designed with broad corridors and sunny wards; the February sun in Stalingrad can be quite warm. The staff were very pleased to show the British gifts which were being used: electrical equipment, bath-chairs, surgical equipment, pyjamas, bedsocks, and crockery and cutlery on which was the King's crest. There were several mothers and babies in the maternity wards, but until then (February, 1945) there were not many other patients in the hospital. The larger Stalingrad hospital, for which a fund has been raised in Britain, was already being built.

We visited the battlefield, which has been described by better writers, and the two great factories, the Stalingrad Red October Metallurgical Plant and the Stalingrad Tractor Factory. The tractor factory had been completely burnt out and then bombed and shelled to pieces. When we were there it was employing about 10,000 workers, forty per cent. of whom were women, as against 22,000 workers before the war. The management were wrestling manfully with indescribable confusion. Most of the workers were employed on reconstruction, and few of them were skilled; in spite of all, one workshop was operating tolerably well, though others were only just emerging from chaos. The machinery was mostly old stuff, rescued from the

debris, but there were some new machines from America and Britain. Before the war the factory produced one tractor every three minutes. When we were there they seemed to be turning out about fifteen a day, and two days after our visit the factory received the Order of Lenin for producing its five-hundredth tractor since the battle. The tractors we saw looked tough and well built.

The Red October Factory was then employing 7,000 workers—forty per cent. women—as against 16,000 before the war. Earlier it had been making armour-plate and armour-piercing projectiles, but when we were there most of its production went to feeding the tractor factory. The chaos here was even more striking than in the tractor factory, because the machinery was on a bigger scale; but work was already going on in several of the shops. In both factories the shops were very imperfectly roofed and in many places the walls were open to the famous Stalingrad winds, which blow from the icy steppe and the Volga. Inside the factory icicles were dropping upon sizzling hot steel.

In the evening we were entertained by the City Soviet and members of the Stalingrad Defence Committee who had organised the civilian population during the battle. The atmosphere was most cordial and there were several spontaneous references to British help. General Yekshin, who had shown us the battlefield, proposed a generous toast to the British Navy which had brought supplies to Murmansk.

The people of Stalingrad are very proud of the sword of honour presented by King George and of the scroll presented by President Roosevelt, which are kept in the City Hall together with the shield presented by the Emperor of Abyssinia and other tributes to Stalingrad, including an embroidered handkerchief presented by the women of Dover.

Our train left Stalingrad late at night and we woke up next morning in the country of the Don Cossacks. Most people we spoke to here and elsewhere along the line knew about the delegation's visit from the radio and newspapers. At Salsk a radio technician, with whom we got into casual conversation, greeted Stephen King-Hall as a famous broadcaster whom he had heard. We were also told that there is a collective farm near Salsk inhabited entirely by foreigners, mostly Americans

and English, who had gone there in the early thirties and had now become Soviet citizens.

The country was flat, snow-covered steppe; it is very rich, but subject to droughts, and there are no trees except along the water-courses. Timber is short and the little houses are built of whitewashed clay.

Country such as this is the setting for the great cities of Southern Russia.



COUNTRY PEOPLE





ACCOUNT KEEPING AT A COLLECTIVE FARM



CHAPTER XV  
TRANSCAUCASIA

*On the Road to the Caucasus*

I FLEW to Baku in wintry weather on the 5th of January, 1944. Two hours after Stalingrad we were over the Caspian and warm southern sunshine struck in through the window of the aeroplane. On the right we could see the whole of the Caucasus main range. An hour later we landed at Baku, thirty feet below sea level, in Mediterranean sunshine to find Mediterranean vegetation.

Baku has one of the most comfortable hotels in the Soviet Union, but on this first visit I only spent one night there before flying to Teheran, over the Elbruz mountains, thickly wooded in Virgil's day, but now denuded and almost desert. There is iron in the earth, so that the rivers look bright red from the air as if they had been dyed with cochineal.

Persia was fascinatingly beautiful in the bright southern winter, with snow on the mountains all round Teheran. At the end of March I was back again in Teheran on the way to the Soviet Union with Peter Smollett, who was then head of the Soviet Relations Division in the Ministry of Information. After waiting for several days in Teheran for flying weather and priority, we confided to each other that neither of us meant to fly if there was any possibility of travelling by surface through the Caucasus. So we called on the Soviet Consul and explained what we wanted; he told us that the journey would be slow and uncomfortable. We replied that we fully understood what war-time conditions were, and that we did not expect any special arrangements. Smollett added that he had travelled all over the Soviet Arctic. The Consul answered: "Evidently you are desperate characters, so I must see what I can do. Your visas entitle you to enter the Soviet Union at any southern point, so you can go through Tabriz and Julfa, but I had better prolong your visas by a week to be on the safe side, as it will take you several days to reach the frontier."

In two or three days we were seated in a British lorry

bumping along the indifferent road to Tabriz, which carried so many convoys of supplies to the Soviet Union. The driver was a Persian, with whom we had no common language, but I was pleased to find that he reckoned all distances in parasangs. We spent three days on the road, stopping off at Indian Army staging posts, where we were most hospitably entertained. The officers and men, practically all Indians by race, who kept this supply route going under very difficult conditions, were doing a fine job that has scarcely received proper recognition.

After Kasvin, an airy, sleepy market town with a few beautiful old buildings and the appearance of a kindly and traditional mode of life, contrasting pleasantly with the vice and misery of Teheran, we were in Persian Azerbaijan, a country which seems destined to remain in the news. Near Teheran most of the country is stony upland desert, but there are trees and crops with straight rows of poplars wherever there is a little water. It was April and the trees were coming out in their fresh green. The typical Persian landscape is a bare, dry plain, high enough itself to give the air a mountain freshness, but surrounded by higher rocky mountains, generally red and looking like the rocks in Persian miniatures. At every fresh turning in the road I would exclaim: "How like Spain!" and Peter Smollett would answer: "How like Mexico!"

As one goes north there is more rainfall and the ground becomes gradually more fertile until, near Tabriz, ploughed fields and green crops are the order of the day. The last staging post before Tabriz lies on a wind-swept hill, which is free from malaria, but is cruelly cold even in April. In the winter there has been thirty degrees of frost and deep snow.

Captain Khan, the six-foot-two Pathan officer in charge of the staging post, had spent the winter with nothing but one thickness of corrugated iron over his head. But he felt the cold less than we northerners did.

Tabriz itself was a disappointment. It claims to have suffered more earthquakes than any other town in the world, so that there is only an arch or two standing of the famous 15th century blue mosque. There is still, however, some splendid tile work. We enjoyed the hospitality of Mr. Rapp, the British Consul-General. He and his wife and daughter, with one Vice-Consul, a bank manager and an Indian Army major, constituted the

British colony. Mr. Rapp lent me his horse to go riding the next morning. I had not been on a horse for a long time and it nearly ran away with me, but that only took us more quickly to the villages, which cluster in the hills round the plain of Tabriz. The people are rather more vigorous than those of the Teheran district, but even so they look diseased and undernourished, living in miserable hovels. I saw many emaciated people in rags and tatters, which could not have been much use against that upland winter.

Most of Tabriz consists of mud hovels, but there are some better houses. The shops in the main shopping street were well stocked, but the prices were fantastically high; they may not have been higher than the prices in Soviet commercial shops, but in Persia there were no rationed goods to be had at cheap prices.

Tabriz, or "Tauris," as it used to be called, has always been a trading centre. When Marco Polo visited it in the 13th century he found that "the merchants concerned in foreign commerce acquire considerable wealth but the inhabitants in general are poor. They consist of a mixture of various nations and sects, Nestorians, Armenians, Jacobites, Georgians, Persians and the followers of Mahomet, who form the bulk of the population and are those properly called Taurisians. Each description of people have their peculiar language. The city is surrounded with delightful gardens, producing the finest fruits." Nearly all of this might have been written to-day.

There were Russian control points at the entrance to all the principal places on the road from Teheran, but we were never detained longer than was needed to check our identity. Our British passports were accepted as identification and we were never asked for passes. I mention this point because it has sometimes been stated that British travellers along this route were required to produce passes. Other people may have had different experience from ourselves, but I cannot help thinking that some of the trouble has arisen from the language difficulty.

When the Red Army personnel saw the Union Jack on our car they generally saluted, and we were invariably treated with courtesy. Pictures of Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt, as well as of Marshal Stalin, and coloured pictures provided by

the Ministry of Information, were shown at several tea houses where we stopped along the route.

There is a branch line of the Soviet Transcaucasian railway system from Julfa to Tabriz. We arrived at the station at midnight and caused considerable excitement among some Red Army troops who were waiting to leave by the same train. When they heard we were going to Moscow, an N.C.O., who assumed that we should see Marshal Stalin, asked us to assure him that the Red Army was doing its job in a disciplined manner.

The soldiers then seized our luggage and carried it into what seemed to be the best compartment. Passengers who had previously settled down there withdrew when an officer suggested that guests must be given the best. It was long afterwards that we discovered that special accommodation had been very kindly booked for us in another and more comfortable carriage by the Soviet Consulate, who were heartbroken when they found that we had by mistake got into a wrong compartment.

The only light in our carriage was a candle on the table, but before we went to sleep the officers and men of the Red Army on the train began to pay us courtesy visits and enquired about conditions of life in England, the health of Mr. Churchill, the future plans of Miss Vivien Leigh (Lady Hamilton) and Mr. George Formby. Next morning we arrived early at the frontier station of Julfa, where the formalities were quite short, though evidently no one was expecting us. The shortest way for us to go to Moscow would have been to take the train straight to Baku, but we naturally preferred to travel through Armenia and Georgia. This meant a journey along the Turkish Frontier. We called on the N.K.V.D. representative at the station to ask whether a special pass would be needed. After some telephonic communication with an unknown body behind closed doors, he came back to say that he could find no reason why we should not travel through Armenia and Georgia.

The train went about three hours later. An N.K.V.D. official kindly took charge of our luggage so that we were free to look round the town. We had no guide but soon found the local "intourist hotel," no more than a ramshackle Levantine coffee-house. The manager gave us breakfast and raised a clean towel and two minute pieces of soap. His sense of cleanliness was

strictly limited, but we were grateful for his offer to get us food for the journey and to send a telegram for hotel accommodation at Erevan, the capital of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, one of the constituent republics which make up the Soviet Union.

### *Armenia*

The train for Erevan left punctually and ran to time, as did all the trains which we took on this journey. We had places in a "soft" (upholstered) compartment, together with a Red Army major who was returning from a tour of duty in Persia with his wife and five-year-old child. Besides the food bought at Julfa we had army rations for twelve days with us, but our fellow-travellers did not let us eat our own food. They crowded in to see us and treated us to ample supplies of bread, sausage, butter, cheese, eggs and wine, with spring onions and radishes. There was, however, a shortage of glasses, and a tin mug had to go round the whole compartment whenever we were invited to drink. A Red Army officer of Greek extraction became the spokesman for the party and toasted Mr. Churchill, Mr. Eden, the Royal Navy, the R.A.F. and the British Army, the Teheran Decisions and the Glorious Future Freedom and Happiness which Continued Collaboration Between the Allies would Assure. When we were introduced he kissed our hands, and subsequently kissed the tin mug before each toast. All this was done without the slightest constraint, and we began to learn what to expect from Caucasian manners.

When Caucasians greet you they bow politely and put their hands upon their hearts. The Red Army people who came into our compartment all apologised for wearing the equivalent of battledress and offered to put on their dress uniforms, which they assured us were in their suitcases. If only we would allow them to put them on we would then see all their decorations. We had to ask to be excused from this ceremony, because our own good clothes had been sent to Moscow direct from Teheran, and we would have felt too shabby, and apart from Peter Smollett's O.B.E. we had unfortunately no decorations to show off. This explanation was accepted with grace, and we were assured that our companions felt no doubt that we would look even more magnificent in our best clothes.

We then brought out a picture book of Britain, prepared by

the Ministry of Information in Russian, which we were carrying to Moscow. When one of the officers came across a photograph of Mr. Churchill he rose from his seat, bowed, with his right hand on his heart, kissed the photograph and said: "I greet you, great warrior-leader of our great Allies!" Not content with expressing these feelings in Russian, he repeated them in Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani Turkish, Uzbek, Turkmenian, Kirghiz and Tadjik, explaining each time what language he was using.

A pretty little Ukrainian Red Army girl, called Katya, had joined the party; one of the Red Air Force officers appointed her as his acting batwoman and sent her out at each station to buy eggs, cheese and wine, which she did without a murmur. On the contrary, she too placed her hand on her heart every time she passed the tin mug of wine and exclaimed: "This is one of my happiest days. I have never seen anyone from England before and now we are travelling together on this wonderful journey and can assure one another of our friendship and everlasting loyalty!" I think we enjoyed the journey every bit as much as our hosts.

Katya was a lorry driver stationed at Baku and begged us to come and look her up at the barracks. She said all the other girls would show us the same feelings of inter-allied friendship. A fortnight later we started on a very long and dusty walk to what turned out to be the uttermost ends of Baku. We found the barracks and plucked up courage to ask the fierce-looking girl sentry, who was armed with a tommy-gun, whether Katya was there; the sentry told us in three words that she had gone to Rostov on the Don, and we had a dull walk back.

One of the officers in the carriage proved unable to take his drink quite as well as might have been desired, so we went back to our own compartment. Katya joined us soon after and explained: "The poor boy has been at the front for a long time, but there is a limit to a girl's admiration for the country's heroes." The Red Army major with whom we shared our compartment immediately offered to discipline the offending officer, who was of junior rank, but he was dissuaded from doing so by an N.C.O. of the N.K.V.D. who was on duty on the train. Having sobered up, our acquaintance called on us later in the evening and, with apologies for not having a visiting card,

offered to write his name and address on a rouble note. After a little thought he decided that a ten-rouble note would be more appropriate.

All this time we were passing through rocky upland country of a bare Mediterranean type. The lower slopes were covered with spring green, but we could see that the country would soon be parched and brown. Mount Ararat, with its two snow-covered peaks, one higher than the other, began to dominate the landscape long before we reached Erevan.

Looking out of the window we could see that the people lived in square-built, one-storeyed little houses, which were roomier and in better repair than those we saw in Persian Azerbaijan. The people, too, were more vigorous and better clothed, though even so their standard of dress was below that of Western Europe. We found that, in spite of the war, people in the Caucasus appeared to be well fed. Bread was as short as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and we saw little butter after our first day, but there seemed to be plenty of meat, cheese, eggs, fresh vegetables and fruit. We saw very few beggars and were told that they were the result of the dislocation of village life caused by the war.

We reached Erevan in the evening, to be met by the manager of the Intourist Hotel with the explanation that all the best rooms in the hotel had already been taken "by the other delegates to the Shakespeare Conference." Would we mind, therefore, living in his own apartment. This was comfortable, but we felt ashamed at turning the poor man out.

I must admit that we did not realise that the All-Union Shakespeare Conference was being held in Erevan, but everyone assumed that we must be the British delegates, so we tried to play the part. That evening *Othello* was being performed in Armenian. We went straight off to see it without waiting to dine, but even so we were late. As soon as the manager learnt who we were, he had us ushered into seats in the front row, where we found ourselves in the company of the leading intellectuals of Armenia and the most prominent Shakespeare experts from the rest of the Soviet Union, some of whom we already knew from Moscow. We were rather puzzled by the presence on the stage of characters whom we did not recognise as belonging to *Othello*, and, of course, we could not understand

Armenian, but eventually the continued presence on the stage of a pale young man in black velvet with flowing hair persuaded us that we were, in fact, seeing *Hamlet*. After this we began to enjoy the performance.

The Armenians have a great theatrical tradition going back about a hundred years. Those who saw him say that Adamyan, an actor of the last generation, was one of the best Shakespeare actors the world has known. The Armenians are very gifted, and the best theatres of Armenia are as good as you will find anywhere, but the operetta which we sampled one evening was not good; it had only just been started and the actors were conscious of their deficiencies.

Next morning, when we came down to breakfast in the hotel restaurant, we were each given three hard-boiled eggs, plenty of bread, sausages, tea and sugar, and a large bar of excellent chocolate, but no butter. The same breakfast was served every day, and apart from the chocolate the Soviet guests at the hotel had the same as we did. Among our fellow-guests were the "Dynamo" football teams of Leningrad and Moscow, both of which had come to play against Armenian teams. They enquired after the wartime activities of the members of the Arsenal team and particularly about Hapgood, Drake and Roberts. Russians take a particular interest in the Arsenal team, whom they sometimes refer to as the "Woolwich Artilleristi." These members of the Dynamo team, being leading sportsmen, were exempt from military service. Their duty was to play for the entertainment of war-workers and second-line troops, to organise the physical training of youth, and generally to maintain the high standard of Soviet sport. A few of them wore medals for the defence of Leningrad and for the defence of Stalingrad. They explained that when in those cities they had, of course, taken part in their defence. One or two of them had actually fought in the Leningrad battles, when manpower was very short. They afterwards returned to their "work."

We had been invited to attend the public lectures that were being held in connection with the Shakespeare festival. The news of our arrival had spread like wildfire, and when we entered the morning session of the conference, which was attended by some six hundred leading Caucasian intellectuals, actors,



teachers, other cultural leaders and students, we found ourselves the centre of interest and friendly attention. We were invited to take our seats on the stage, together with the Praesidium of the conference; when our presence was announced formally to the audience, they rose from their seats and clapped for two and a half minutes.

Fortunately for us, the lecture was in Russian, not Armenian, and I listened with interest to a learned comparison of the historical conditions in Shakespeare's England and various periods of Armenian history.

The Armenians feel that Shakespeare has expressed their feelings more completely even than their own poets, and Armenia has a great poetical tradition.

This lecture, like other Soviet lectures, went on for the best part of two hours, with a short interval. During this interval boy and girl students addressed us coyly in halting and faulty English, begging us to confirm to their less fortunate colleagues that they were really able to make themselves understood in the language of their allies.

We spent the afternoon seeing the town. Erevan has about 250,000 inhabitants, and gives the impression of a small capital rather than of a provincial town. The older buildings on the outskirts are not very different from the ordinary oriental slum, but about half of the town has already been rebuilt and there is now an excellent water supply. Indeed, the Erevan water is so good that one can take it as a drink rather than a thirst quencher. In a southern land one soon becomes sensitive to the qualities of water.

The Armenians are by tradition fine masons and the local tufa is an excellent building material. There are two colours, dark grey and a beautiful pink. The tufa is soft and light and easy to work, but it sets hard. Most of the new buildings are built in a happy combination of European and local styles. The most impressive of them are the work of the celebrated architect Tamanyan, who died in the nineteen-thirties. Some of the blocks of workers' flats looked more individual and intelligently designed than the concrete barracks which one sees in Moscow.

To my eye Erevan is a beautiful modern city in a magnificent situation, but some visitors from Leningrad, or still more from

Tiflis, continue to adopt a patronising line about everything Armenian. The authorities set their faces against this, for it is their aim to remove all obstacles to friendly relations between the different peoples of the U.S.S.R. Attitudes inherited from the past still persist to some extent in regions such as the Caucasus, which were previously torn by racial dissension, but on the whole it is most remarkable how friendly former enemies have already become.

When we were in Erevan the constitution of the Soviet Union had just been amended to allow the Constituent Republics, such as Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, to set up their own Foreign Offices and Commissariats of Defence. This is not the place to discuss the practical significance of this change, but it is clear, wherever I have been in the Caucasus and Central Asia, that the enhanced status of the republics is highly prized by their peoples. As a corollary to the existence of an Armenian Foreign Office, there had just been set up an Armenian branch of the All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS). This was under an intelligent and energetic young lady who was a doctor of "philosophical sciences."

The Soviet conception of philosophy is far removed from those studies which I undertook when reading Greats at Oxford. It is nearer to the older meaning of a philosopher in the sense of "a thinker." The lady in question was writing a dissertation on the "Subjective Factors in History," which she was about to submit to Moscow University. She explained that the rigid Pokrovskian school of Marxism was now quite dead, but that it was still necessary for Soviet philosophers to investigate more energetically the precise rôle played by great leaders such as Stalin and Churchill, by the masses themselves, and by great organisations, such as the Russian Communist Party, in organising and mobilising human effort at a given stage in history so as to assure the fullest realisation of objective possibility.

In the evening we saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Children's Theatre. There are a number of children's theatres in Soviet cities, to which grown-ups are not generally admitted unless accompanied by children. There are, for instance, two excellent marionette theatres in Moscow. In Erevan the actors were alive, and we enjoyed the play in spite of not understand-

ing the language. The ass's head stays in my mind, with its nice big ears which waggled engagingly.

The Shakespeare experts asked many questions about the film *Henry V*, then being made. They had read about it in *British Ally*. I had a long talk with one Armenian actor whose life's ambition was to play Shylock at Stratford-on-Avon. He was born in Constantinople and had only come to live in Armenia after the Revolution; his Russian was fairly fluent but full of mistakes. The Armenians, with their tragic history, have a fellow-feeling for the Jews, and I was told that Shylock represents for them the type of a persecuted people.

The Armenians were very interested in the doings of their compatriots outside the Soviet Union and already had hopes that some of them would return after the war. They were proud of writers such as Michael Arlen and Saroyan, and equally proud, it seemed to me, of various Armenian millionaires in America and Britain.

We spent the next day seeing more of the town. The average age of the crowds was young and there were many pretty girls of an aquiline southern type, but few beauties. In the streets we saw large hand-painted posters symbolising Anglo-American-Soviet solidarity. We visited the picture gallery, one of the best provincial galleries in the Soviet Union. There were some pleasant pictures of the 17th and 18th centuries, but nothing of the first rank. The most interesting section was that devoted to the Armenian painter Avatonyan, an early 19th century portrait painter, who achieved an unusually subtle blend of eastern and western styles.

Walking down the street we came to the Erevan Medical Institute, so we went straight into the hall, unannounced and unaccompanied. Within ten minutes the students had mobilised four English teachers attached to the Institute and had introduced us to the Director, who showed us over. The main work of the Institute was to train doctors, but it was also carrying on important work on the manufacture of drugs from local plants and the prevention of malaria, which is Armenia's biggest health problem. The Director was just beginning to work on penicillin and had been interested by an article about this drug in the *British Ally*. There were portraits of famous British scientists, such as Newton and Darwin, in several of

the rooms, and the hygiene department had an exhibition giving prominence to British inventions in hygiene such as the water-closet and the English filter.

### *Georgia*

The journey to Tiflis took eighteen hours. When we arrived we found that the local Intourist Hotel had not received the telegram notifying our arrival, but a telephone call from the station produced a car within forty minutes. We filled in time by strolling round, and were joyfully recognised by a Red Army officer who had made the journey from Julfa with us several days earlier. He introduced us to complete strangers in the street as Allies just arrived from England. A Red Army girl, who had lost her hand during the battle for Leningrad, asked to be told more about the part played by British women in the war effort of the Allies. We visited a wine-shop near the station and were given good wine at fifteen roubles a glass. Toasts were drunk to the Allies and their leaders.

Tiflis is a city of 519,175 inhabitants with a vigorous life of its own. Old Tiflis, which nestles becomingly in the bend of a mountain torrent, has a picturesqueness and fascination of its own, half Oriental and half European. The new town has many well-built streets of fine buildings, but the architecture is not so interesting as at Erevan.

Despising the funicular, I walked to the top of a hill where there is a famous viewpoint, but the main range of the Caucasus was shrouded in cloud.

In the evening we went to a performance by the Armenian jazz orchestra, which was performing in Tiflis. The music was not jazz in our sense, but ordinary light music. It was not particularly good, but a Georgian crooner had a great hit with some sentimental songs about lovers separated by the war and hopes for family reunion when "the lights go up again." There were some humorous sketches taking off Hitler and Mussolini. Next day we visited the local branch of the Marx-Engels Institute and the small Museum of the Revolution, which had interesting relics of Stalin's youth in Tiflis.

His school reports showed that he had got top marks in everything except Greek and Old Slavonic. He was particularly good at leading the Church choir. Records from the Ecclesias-

tical Seminary of Tiflis, where Stalin had his secondary education, showed that after the age of thirteen to fourteen, Iosif Vissarionovitch Djughashvili had begun to give trouble to his teachers by insisting that he should continue to borrow from the town library forbidden literature such as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the dramatic works of Schiller, and various French classics. There was also a record to the effect that he resented clandestine inspections of his mattress and locker while he was absent in the refectory, and that he insisted on his right to be present when his belongings were searched. When eventually he was expelled from the seminary he got a job at the local meteorological observatory and spent his nights producing weather reports and astronomical observations, while in the day he organised revolutionary study groups in his rooms. In a bookshop we came across a collection of reminiscences written by schoolmates of Stalin. This book contains an article about Stalin's youthful poetry in Georgian, which was published anonymously in an anthology. The Marshal's schoolmates stated that he began to doubt the existence of God at the age of thirteen and revealed this to his friends as a conclusion reached by him after studying *The Origin of Species*.

In the evening we went to a Georgian opera called *Daisi*, by the well-known composer Polyashvili. The theme was a conflict between two groups of Georgians, one of whom wished to collaborate with the Persian overlords and the other to revolt. The audience enjoyed the gay, tuneful music and were enraptured by the rich costumes and Caucasian dances.

Our fellow-guests in the hotel consisted mainly of a troupe of second-rate actresses and some engineers who had come to build a big steel works. We preferred the engineers. One morning we went into the local department store and talked to the assistants. It was a fair-sized building with several floors and must have done a good deal of trade before the war. This was just before the commercial shops were opened in Moscow, and even in Tiflis consumer goods had begun to appear in appreciable quantities. Silk dresses could be got for 950 roubles plus twenty-five coupons and the presentation of a special permit. Shoes were 300 roubles, twelve coupons and no permit. Ladies' hats of tolerable style, 150 roubles, no coupons and no permit. Cosmetics and haberdashery, including hairpins and

the like, were in good supply, as were children's toys and gifts for Red Army men such as map cases, propelling pencils, scarves and gloves. These gifts were coupon free but could only be purchased by relatives of men in the forces. In the local bookshop people were asking for books in English, but the supply was hopelessly inadequate.

We paid a courtesy call on the editor of the local Russian-language newspaper and were shown over the printing works. On leaving, one of us exchanged fountain pens with the editor as a token of Allied collaboration. It turned out, to our embarrassment, that the editor's American fountain pen was of much higher quality than our London utility pen.

We spent an afternoon visiting the Palace of the Pioneers, which is housed in one of the finest old buildings in Tiflis, the palace of the Viceroys of the Caucasus. An account of the visit is given in Chapter IX.

One evening we went to the largest cinema in Tiflis, where *The Thief of Bagdad* moved the public to uproarious laughter and deep sympathy. On the train next day I got into casual conversation with a young gypsy; he could not read because his nomadic existence had made education impossible. Our fellow-travellers said: "Can't you see he's a gypsy? How could he know how to read?" All the same he had seen all the British films which had been shown in the Soviet Union. His favourite was *The Thief of Bagdad*. Not being clear about the distinction between Britain and America, he said: "Seeing that Bagdad is in Turkey, and the Turks are neutral, I cannot understand how you, who are our Allies, got permission to make this film in Turkey."

The week before, Tiflis had been seeing George Formby in *Let George Do It*. George was a tremendous success throughout the Soviet Union and his tunes were whistled everywhere. At this time the Caucasus was full of them. *Let George Do It* is a comic film about the British Secret Service with a patriotic theme. This subject matter, as well as the hero's nice, ugly face and his banjolele, helped to make the film a success.

At a kiosk in the foyer of the cinema we saw maps of the Sicilian campaign specially prepared with a Georgian text on sale. They were on the lines of our ABCA maps.

On the way to the station for Baku we visited the nearby wineshop once more, but supplies had run out.

### *Azerbaijan*

The Baku train stopped for twenty minutes at Kirovabad, formerly Ganja, where in the 12th century the Persian poet Nizami broke with puritanism, to sing the story of his own heart "kept far away from those highwaymen, the passions." We soon discovered that on the strength of his Azerbaijan origin he has been acclaimed as the founder of Azerbaijanian national literature, although he wrote in Persian. The Azerbaijanis are very proud of Nizami, whose name is prominent in Soviet cultural publications about the Caucasus. His works have been translated into Russian, and published in well-produced illustrated editions.

In the station at Kirovabad there was a photographic exhibition illustrating inter-allied co-operation. The central photograph showed Lord Beaverbrook's arrival in Moscow and his conference at the Kremlin. The official in charge was rather apologetic for showing such old pictures; the week before they had had more recent pictures of the R.A.F. raids on Germany.

Back on the train there were, as usual, sympathetic questions about the air raids on Britain, and a colonel of the N.K.V.D. borrowed from us a copy of the Russian edition of *Front Line*, issued by the Ministry of Information, which he read from cover to cover. The wife of a Red Army general, who was travelling with her six-year-old son, made sympathetic enquiries about the fate of English children during the air raids.

We arrived in Baku just in time for May Day. We did not see any public processions, but the streets were full, and we walked about and made friends with the people. Most foreigners seem to regard Baku as a dingy and depressing town, but I have never been able to share this view. It is indeed low-lying, for the level of the Caspian is lower than sea-level, and this sometimes makes one sleepy for the first day, but after that one wakes up to a vigorous and stimulating atmosphere.

The Azerbaijanis, who speak a dialect of Turkish, are the most numerous of the Moslem peoples of the Caucasus. Baku itself has a population of about a million, of whom approximately one-third are Azerbaijanis, one-third Russians, and the

remainder Armenians and other nationalities of the Soviet Union. The resulting mixture is very lively and unlike anything else I have seen in the Soviet Union. A Baku crowd has none of the Russian concentration and single-mindedness, but is perpetually jumping about from one thing to another like a lot of quick-witted Cockneys. We made friends with some small boys, who were very like London boys. They took me to the top of the parachute tower and, pointing out a camouflaged anti-aircraft gun, said: "It's a secret, but you are our Ally, so it doesn't matter."

From this tower there was a good view of the town, which lies surrounded by bare hills, but is too far from the Caucasus for mountains to be seen. The oriental core of the town has a picturesque ancient citadel, with palaces and mosques of the Khans of Baku. There is a broad embankment along the sea front with gardens backed by solidly-built houses, behind which the town spreads back into the hills. There are some ancient and not very picturesque slums, but most of the buildings are modern and built in a simple but undistinguished style. The layout is well contrived to take advantage of the lie of the ground. The oilfields lie all round the city, and even come into the suburbs at some points. Oil and salt have made much of the country round into a desert. Derricks stand everywhere, and the spilt oil lies in horrible black pools. It gets into the sea, and I am told that bathers have to take special precautions if they wish to avoid being impregnated with oil. On some days the city is filled with the smell of oil, and I can well believe that this makes the summer heat very trying. But I have been lucky in my visits to Baku and my memories are of Riviera sunshine and sea breezes.

On the seaward side there is a mole and harbour and numerous oil derricks standing in the sea. I afterwards met the man who had invented this method of getting oil from beneath the sea. The system is to put a casing round the spot where the boring is to be made and then simply to put mud from the surrounding sea bed into the casing until the whole stands a little above sea level and sets hard in the sun. I was told that borings can be effected up to six hundred yards from the shore.

In Baku it is surprising to see public notices written in more than one alphabet. The traditional alphabet is, of course, the



Arabic, which was displaced by the Latin after the revolution. More recently the Latin alphabet has been in turn supplanted by an adaptation of the Russian or Cyrillic alphabet, but no one has bothered to take down the older notices in Latin characters. There has been a similar succession of alphabets in most of the Oriental territories of the Soviet Union, and I was anxious to find out whether the changes had caused confusion. Everyone I have asked has agreed that surprisingly little inconvenience was caused, and the school teachers say that the change to Cyrillic has been a positive help because, anyway, the children all had to learn the Cyrillic alphabet for Russian, which is a compulsory subject; now they only have to learn one alphabet instead of two. I suspect, too, that the new alphabets, which are the fruit of maturer experience, are better phonetically than their predecessors were.

In the evening we went to see the famous Azerbaijanian comic opera *Arshin Mal Alan* ("The Hawker"), by Hadjibekov. I am ashamed to say that I had never heard of this deservedly famous work. The audience was like a British bank holiday audience at a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. They knew every word, and our neighbours explained to us in Russian what was happening.

*Arshin Mal Alan* is a lively comedy, written in 1911, which seems the perfect expression of the spirit of Baku. The scene is laid among well-to-do Moslems, who do not let their daughter see her fiancé before the marriage, so, of course, he dresses up as a hawker, and the usual complications are entertainingly worked out. The music is based on traditional Azerbaijani folk music just sufficiently adapted to be acceptable on the opera stage. Hadjibekov has mixed traditional oriental instruments with the ordinary European instruments; this means that the orchestra must be rather light, for otherwise the European instruments would drown the oriental. This style is clearly suitable for a light opera such as *Arshin Mal Alan*, but I was surprised to find on my next visit to Baku that the same composer's *Ker Ogli* uses the same type of orchestration to great effect in a serious opera. *Ker Ogli* is a fine dramatic work, full of colour and rhythm and excitement, but it is serious *a la mode de Bakou*, and it is easy to see why other races of the Soviet East have felt an urge to more full-bodied orchestration.

In the intervals we were asked into the private room of the director of the theatre, where we met several of the leading figures in Azerbaijanian intellectual life. I had the pleasure of following up these acquaintances on subsequent visits. One of the musicians hummed the tune of "Shepherd's Hey" and told us that he often played this piece to himself. Percy Grainger had been passing through Baku a few years before; he was asked to leave a copy of the "Shepherd's Hey," but refused, so they stole Mr. Grainger's copy, while he was sleeping, and copied it out. As we went out of the director's room we heard two boys chatting away in idiomatic English. They were studying at the Baku foreign languages school and made a habit of practising together.

The people were not so well fed at this time as in the rest of the Caucasus, but they remained vigorous. The clothes worn on the public holidays may not have been so good as those of a war-time British working-class crowd, but they were not very far short of that standard. The shoes were well above the usual Soviet level, and one was conscious of the fact that oil had brought wealth and prosperity.

I was next in Baku with the parliamentary delegation in February, 1945. We were received by the President of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan and met most of the political and intellectual leaders of the Republic, but were not there long enough to get the feel of the higher administrative personnel, and we did not meet Bagirov, the local Party Secretary, who, under Stalin, is the ruler of Azerbaijan.

I concentrated on getting to know the intellectuals, and have pleasant memories of sitting at dinner next to Doctor Mir Kasimov, a middle-aged gentleman who was one of the first Azerbaijanis to become a doctor and is now director of the Azerbaijan Medical Institute. Education has created a large reading public and the leading Azerbaijan writers enjoy considerable prestige. In subject matter they are influenced by Russian models, and western forms such as the novel are well established; but the older Oriental literature still exercises a powerful influence and the verse forms remain Persian. I was impressed by a dignified and reserved elderly writer, who must have been educated before the Revolution; he was aloof

most of the time but his eyes lit up as he spoke about Arabic literature.

Azerbaijan is about the size of Scotland, with a population of 3,210,000. Before the Revolution only three per cent. of the people were literate. Most of the existing schools were Medrassahs, where the children were taught to recite the Koran in Arabic, which they did not always understand. Now there is a modern university. We visited it and learnt much about the progress made since the Revolution. In 1917 there were only about 4,000 children, i.e., two and a half to three per cent. at schools other than the Medrassahs. There was no university in Transcaucasia, let alone in Baku, in spite of repeated requests to the Tsarist government. Now the population is over eighty per cent. literate, including adults. Besides the university in Baku there are a number of "Higher Educational Establishments" which train students up to university standard. These include the Baku Medical and Pedagogical Institutes, the famous Baku Petroleum Institute, a Cattle-breeding Institute and a new Institute of Economics, which had about 400 students in 1945. At Kirovabad there is a cotton institute.

Just over half the students at the university are Azerbaijanis and two-thirds of the remainder are Russians, the rest being Armenians and other nationalities. In 1935 there were 900 students. In 1945 there were 2,300. Friendly relations are maintained with the universities at Tiflis and Erevan; the Pedagogical Institute, or Teachers' Training College as we should call it, has separate sections for the Azerbaijani, Russian and Armenian languages. It is one of the over-riding objectives of the Communist Party to maintain genuine equality between all nationalities of the Soviet Union, and it is the business of each republic to make generous provision for the education of any minorities in its area. Any local administration which failed to do so would soon be pulled up.

The biggest faculties in the university of Baku are philology, i.e., languages (600 students) and law (500 students), but the scientific faculties taken in the aggregate are larger than either. The courses take from four to five years, and the students are mostly from seventeen to twenty-three, but there are some as old as thirty-five; twenty-five per cent. are from Baku. There

are hostels for the rest. There is a professor for physical culture, which forms "part of the time-table."

The following dead or classical languages were studied in 1945:

Arabic	...	...	300 students
Persian	...	...	500 students
Turkish			
Old Slavonic			
Latin	...	...	800 students
Greek	...	...	50 students (only started in 1944)

No Latin or Greek is taught in Soviet schools, but Latin up to about school certificate standard is now compulsory in all the "Art" faculties in Soviet universities. Not very many students take their degrees in "Classical Philology," but the number is increasing. Those who go on from Latin to Greek now drop Latin almost entirely for one year in order to get their Greek up to the same level as their Latin. I believe that this system originated at Eton. The new edition of Liddel and Scott is the basis for a new Greek-Russian lexicon now in preparation.

Some of us went from the university to visit the central offices of the Azerbaijanian Academy of Sciences, which is now independent of the All-Union Academy of Sciences, the heir to the famous Russian Academy founded by Peter the Great. It is a mark of the progress attained by the Union Republics that they now have their own Academies of Science, which, of course, maintain close relations with the All-Union Academy.

The Azerbaijanian Academy of Sciences occupies a spacious building in the classical style, erected as a cultural centre by an oil millionaire before the Revolution. We were shown the library with a well-worn file of the *British Ally*, and copies of some of the Academy's publications. These included the complete works of Nizami (in Azerbaijani) and the new Azerbaijani-Russian dictionary.

We visited the Stalin Oil Trust and were shown over by the director, a thirty-one-year-old Azerbaijani who had been appointed to his present post a year before. He appeared to be on top of his job and has remained in my mind as characteristic of the Soviet-trained technicians who now play such an important part in Soviet Asia.

The Baku oilfield is about seventy-five years old. In 1900 it produced a small fraction of its present output, and that by "barbarous and wasteful" methods. In 1925 it produced about forty per cent. of the present output and in 1935 about fifty per cent. Although some of the reserves have not yet been surveyed, it is certain that the field has many decades of life ahead. The Stalin Oil Trust went through difficult days in 1941-42, but when we were there it was working "quickly and not too badly." We were told that for the next three or four years all the production will be needed to make good the ravages of war, so that nothing will be available for export. Movable derricks, as used in America, would already have been installed but for the war. Boring goes down to 3,500 metres compared with a maximum depth of 4,500 metres in America.

The Stalin Oil Trust is one of the concerns which come under the Azerbaijan Oil Combine. This in turn was under the All-Union Peoples Commissariat for the Oil Industry, but we understood that the Azerbaijan Oil Combine had pretty wide operational autonomy. The All-Union Commissariat for Oil has now been split into two on a geographical basis, but it does not seem that this affects relations between Baku and Moscow.

We were shown the compressor station, with American machinery erected in 1944, and some of the borings. As we went round we were introduced to a rank-and-file workman who was a member of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., and to one of the workers who had become a Hero of Socialist Labour. The member of the Supreme Soviet did not speak very good Russian, so that it was impossible to get much out of him, though he was my neighbour at the excellent lunch which followed. He had been to Moscow several times for sessions of the Supreme Soviet, which, unlike our Parliament, only remains in session for a few days at a time. As usual in the Caucasus, the meal consisted of shashlyk with radishes and spring onions, and large quantities of rice, washed down with good red wine.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE ROAD TO SAMARKAND

“Ad claras Asiae volemus urbes.”—Catullus

#### *Kazakhstan*

WE left Baku on the 9th of February on the five-day journey to Tashkent, feeling that we were going to visit the famous cities of Central Asia. We spent our first evening passing through the Daghestan plain, which was wooded country with oaks, ashes and occasional hedges, surprisingly like England.

It took all the next day to pass through the Kalmuk steppe by the new railway to Astrakhan, constructed in 1942. The day was sunny, with a light frost, and the tufty grass was showing through a thin snow covering. We could see that the Kalmuk steppe was dry, but not too dry for pasture. We got out at several small settlements along the line, where people were living in dug-outs. One, which we went into, was just a warm shed with iron bedsteads for the railway workers, but another had been made into a tolerably primitive two-roomed cottage inhabited by a man and wife. We were told that the local collective farms each own many thousands of sheep and hundreds of cattle. Here, and throughout this journey, there were small markets at every station, where sour milk, cheese, black bread, fowls and sometimes meat and eggs were being sold. The Kalmuks, who are a Buddhist tribe of Mongolian (not Turki) origin, had been evacuated during the Battle of Stalingrad on suspicion of contact with the Germans. The inhabitants who remained were Russians and Tartars.

On balance the Soviet Union received much loyalty from the non-Russian nationalities during the war. The rear areas appear to have remained universally quiet, industry was built up, and large numbers of the non-Russian nationalities served in the Red Army, both in the front line, where some of them gained the highest distinctions for valour, and on the lines of communication. But in those areas where the Germans actually advanced into the territory of oriental peoples there appears to

have been collaboration. The Kalmuk Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, the Crimean A.S.S.R., as well as the Volga German A.S.S.R. have disappeared from the map, and certain changes have been made in the national areas of the Northern Caucasus. It is widely believed that the populations of these areas have been removed to Central Asia.

As we crossed the Volga at dusk by a twenty-two span iron bridge, built in 1942, we saw the spires and pinnacles of Astrakhan against the sunset sky. Next day we passed parallel with the Volga through the Stalingrad oblast and the territory of the former Volga German republic. It was common knowledge that all the Germans had been evacuated, and I have it on the best authority that the Russians dropped parachutists disguised as SS men among the Germans to test their loyalty; as none of the parachutists were denounced the authorities moved the whole population. I have been told, on the same authority, that "many of the Volga Germans were loyal and even Party members, but that there were too many traitors among them." People who were evacuated from Moscow to the former territory of the Volga Germans sometimes arrived to find whole districts deserted.

The lower Volga is a land of dry, treeless steppe, but the soil is the famous "black earth"; it is good cattle country and famous for its water-melons, but it lies too far to the east to be safe against drought, so that there is a risk in cultivating cereals. We stopped some time at the little country town of Krasny Kut, and were struck by its prosperity. The houses were in good repair, many of them had two storeys, and the people were comparatively well dressed. Many wore leather top-boots. They were contemptuous at the suggestion that anything grows in England which does not grow at Krasny Kut.

The next day our train turned east and we passed through Northern Kazakhstan. The country was the same dry steppe as on the previous day, and equally rich, but the weather was bitterly cold. We got out at each station and talked to the people; they were mainly Russians, but there were also many Kazakhs, evacuated Poles, and other nationalities. I have been told that large numbers of the Volga Germans were evacuated to Northern Kazakhstan. If so, they have been removed one

day's train journey from their old homes to country which resembles in all essentials the district in which they have lived since their ancestors came to Russia in Catherine the Great's day.

We stopped for a long time at Aktyubinsk; the town looked well kept, and we noticed the fine new building of the railway workers' club. We were told that there were a number of Volga Germans here, but I did not speak to any. From here we turned south-east into the "hungry" or "accursed" steppe.

Kazakhstan is the vast plain which constitutes the centre of Russian Turkestan. On the north it takes in some of the Black Earth steppe bordering upon Siberia, in the south and centre there is much waterless desert, and on the east and south-east there are high mountains with some good land. The Kazakhs, who are a nomadic people of extreme Mongoloid appearance, are Moslems and speak a Turkish dialect. In the past there was a tendency for Russian settlers from Siberia to squeeze the nomads out of the fertile northern steppe into the central desert.

There are many ores in the mountains of Kazakhstan and the Karaganda coalfield is one of the most important in the Soviet Union. The salt deposits of the deserts contain valuable chemicals and there are important oilfields at Emba and Aktyubinsk. Industry is therefore growing rapidly in Kazakhstan and many workers have come from other parts of the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan was also an evacuation area during the war and its population has been swollen with large numbers of evacuees and persons sent into administrative exile. The country is changing fast and the impact of the Russians and their industrial civilisation upon the nomadic people is seen in a particularly interesting form.

For some years the Kazakh nomads were comparatively little affected by the Revolution. They continued to pasture their horses, sheep and camels on the pastoral zone which fringes the desert of Kazakhstan. Every year they drove their herds over the steppes in search of water and feeding as the seasons changed. These migrations often meant long journeys over dry country and much traditional knowledge had been built up. Artificial wells were sunk at intervals along the main routes, and full use was made of the spring waters, which collected



for a short time on low ground; while almost instinctively, in order not to exhaust the land, the Kazakhs had evolved a system of changing pastures, so as to rest them in turn. The life was hard but not necessarily unprofitable, and many nomad herdsman owned large flocks.

About 1930, collectivisation came upon the nomads as a major calamity, for the new system as first applied meant the destruction of the nomadic way of life. In future they would stay at the collective farm during the winter, often working under a Russian chairman with an imperfect knowledge of their language, and feeding fodder to cattle near the steading. Their opposition took the form of slaughtering their livestock rather than hand it over to the new collective farms, whose demands may have seemed to be legalised robbery. Soviet figures show that between July, 1929, and July, 1933, the number of horses in Kazakhstan fell from 4,060,000 to 466,000, of cattle from 7,200,000 to 1,650,000, and of sheep and goats from 25,500,000 to 2,750,000.

This was rock bottom. The Kazakhs had to recognise that collective farming had come to stay, and that in their own interests they must try to make it work. Meanwhile, the authorities had discovered that the success of their schemes depended on the co-operation of the farmers, and were prepared to meet them half-way. The second half of the thirties was a period of steady recovery, and by the beginning of the Soviet-German war the total number of livestock of all kinds had risen to over sixteen million. Prosperity was shared between the collective farms and their members as individuals; about half of the horses, two-thirds of the cattle, and three-fifths of the sheep and goats were still privately owned.

The rates of increase, however, had already begun to slacken. The disappearance of nomad farming meant that not all the land could be used, for it was necessary to prepare winter fodder for the growing number of livestock, and distant pastures could not be used for haymaking. The problem was complicated by the drift of labour to the towns. The agricultural population of Kazakhstan fell by a fifth between 1926 and 1939, from 5.5 to 4.4 million, and when war came the labour shortage was intensified by the call up of nearly all the men for the Red Army. There were not enough hands to look after all the

cattle, and many animals perished for lack of proper care and inadequate feeding, while many more were slaughtered for food.

At first the authorities refused to admit the limitations imposed by the war, and went ahead with their plans for increasing the number of livestock and in particular the number collectively owned. Livestock were badly needed and the Soviet Government decree of March, 1942, actually planned to increase the number of collectively-owned livestock in Kazakhstan at the beginning of 1943 to 660,000 horses, over two million cattle and eight million sheep and goats, compared with 304,000, 828,000 and just under two million respectively five years before. In a vain effort to fulfil this plan the farm managements, encouraged by the local authorities, requisitioned livestock from the private herds of the farmers. As the *Sotsialisticheskoye Zemledelie* put it two years later, when this policy had been officially disapproved, "the contracting for and purchase of livestock belonging to collective farmers has often been conducted in a compulsory form and without payment of the value of the livestock."

In the autumn of 1941 many peasant households may have had more livestock than they could look after when the men had been called up and been glad to sell; but over the next two years they evidently felt that hard work on the farm did not pay. The result was that they stopped working hard, and even more livestock died from shortage of fodder and lack of care.

Even before the war the shortage of fodder was making it desirable to bring the old nomadic pastures back into use, and the decree of March, 1942 provided for the organisation of some nomad herds on the abandoned land. It proved difficult, however, to find herdsmen. Even active young Party workers were hesitant about venturing across semi-desert steppes where they did not know the trails, and where the disused wells would first require to be found and cleaned; and the old nomad herdsmen, who had the necessary experience, saw still less reason to put themselves out. Here is how the *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* of September 14th, 1943, describes the problem:

"The Provincial Committee of the Party rightly decided to send part of the livestock to graze in the pasture lands, but the district organisations did not take kindly to this suggestion, and the Secretary of the Sairin district Party Committee flatly

refused to send any animals to the Syr-Darya area on the ground that the local grass was bad for them . . . It is most important that the flocks should be supplied with water in desert areas, and the Provincial Committee ordered special brigades to be sent for digging wells. By the appointed date no brigades had arrived. A second date was set when only three people came who had to be sent back as they had not brought any tools.

"In the course of two years none of the responsible Party officials or agricultural experts have visited the Kzyl-Kum desert to ascertain conditions of which they have no clear idea, yet that area is supposed to serve as a natural pasture ground for the livestock of several districts."

In December, 1943, A. A. Andreyev was appointed Commissar for Agriculture. He is a secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party, and one of the most powerful men in the Soviet Union. It was he who was chiefly responsible for carrying out the collectivisation of the North Caucasus in 1929 and 1930, so that he had already practical experience of the problems raised by a revolution in agriculture.

One of his first acts was to issue a decree for Kazakhstan, which forbade any further purchase of livestock by collective farms from private herds, and emphasised that one of the most important tasks immediately ahead was to increase the number of privately owned livestock within the limits laid down by the law. In Kazakhstan these are not severe. In the most settled districts a collective farmer may own privately two or three cows and several calves, two or three sows with young, from twenty to twenty-five sheep and goats, an unlimited number of poultry and rabbits, up to twenty beehives, and one horse and one milking mare, or two camels or two donkeys, or two mules; and in steppe districts from eight to ten cows and several calves, from 100 to 150 sheep and goats, an unlimited number of poultry, up to ten horses, and from five to eight camels. The Soviet Government now seems anxious that collectively and privately owned herds should expand together, rather than that either should prosper at the expense of the other, and this decree about Kazakhstan is the clearest expression so far of the new policy.

The authorities are simultaneously continuing their attempts to win the co-operation of the Kazakhs in re-establishing the use of the old pasture lands. A remarkable article (State Farm

Production—No. 4, 1944), by a Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Commission of the Kazakh Republic, extols the value of the experience and skill of the old nomad stockbreeders, and recommends the establishment of 15 to 20 nomad state farms along the valleys of the Chu and Sary-Su. The article continues:—

“The choice of staffs for this work is most important. Not every Kazakh knows the conditions of the Sary-Arki, and the ‘Hungry Steppe’ with their numerous abandoned wells that must be found and cleaned, and with the old nomad trails which must also be found and used. Experienced stockbreeders with the necessary knowledge may be found in the Sary-Su and Djana-Arkun districts. As nomads they wandered there through the vast river valleys and along the mountain ranges of Central Kazakhstan. They are the very people who should be appointed directors of state farms or engaged as cattle breeders and cattle drivers.”

The agricultural revolution has indeed come full circle in Kazakhstan.

It is too early to forecast the success of the “New Livestock Policy” and press reports suggest that so far the experience of the various districts has not been uniform. But whatever the future may have in store, the history of stockbreeding in Kazakhstan in the last twenty years well illustrates the dangers of trying to put through an agricultural revolution in a hurry, the unsparing “self-criticism” of the Soviet Press when mistakes are discovered, and the flexibility of tactics that the Soviet Government has always employed to attain its ends.

To return to our journey: we passed through Emba in the night and spent all next day travelling through very barren, snow-covered desert, sometimes going for twenty miles without seeing so much as a camel drawing a sledge. In one settlement Kazakh tents stood beside Russian stone-built houses and mud huts; at Saksaulsk and Novokazalinsk there are well-built stone buildings and even factories. It should not be assumed that all buildings of mud are “mud huts” or that mud building necessarily connotes poverty. Mud is the natural building material in most of Central Asia and I have been inside spacious and comfortable mud houses. We caught one glimpse of a frozen arm of the sea of Aral; after this the railway goes along

the river Jaxartes or Sir-Darya, which was frozen and does not seem to be used for irrigation in this district. We saw some people in rags and a few beggars, but no one so emaciated or inadequately clothed as may be seen in some other countries.

On the 14th of February we woke up just past the town of Turkestan to find no snow and very barren red soil. The weather was sunny and warm for the first time for many days. We saw Poles, Kazakhs and Russians at the first stop, but there was no opportunity for conversation. After this the country gradually becomes more fertile till one comes to good land near Tashkent.

We stopped at one village and went into a mud house inhabited by the family of a Russian railway worker. The interior was poor but not dirty. At another Kazakh hamlet we went into the well-built school, part of which had been temporarily taken over by some Russian A.T.S. A friendly Kazakh militiaman, or policeman as we should call him, told us that after learning the three R's from seven to eleven, the children went to a boarding school at Arys for further education. I learnt later that this is the usual system for villages which are too small to provide more than elementary education, and that there are also "Junior Technical Institutes" for children of school age. The militiaman told us that when people trekked off to fresh pastures in the summer, teachers went with the tents. We climbed up a hill to look at the reservoir with water for irrigation laid on by pipe from some distance. In spite of this we understood that the crops had failed the previous year for lack of rain.

### *Uzbekistan*

Later in the day we came to fertile land and at 6 p.m. arrived at Tashkent, the biggest city in Central Asia and the capital of Uzbekistan.

The Uzbeks are settled cultivators of the river valleys of Central Asia, and the heirs to an ancient civilisation. The Uzbeks are by origin a Tartar tribe who conquered the country in the Middle Ages. Their Turkish speech has in most districts replaced the Iranian dialect spoken by the Tadjiks or Sarts, whose ancestors formed the population in Alexander the Great's day or earlier. Much intermarriage has, however, taken place

and the Mongolian type has been heavily diluted. In Tashkent the prevailing cast of features is a blend between Iranian and Mongol with broad face, quite prominent nose, and eyes half way between the European and Mongolian types. Black hair is nearly universal. The women wear it becomingly in plaits down their backs. Two plaits is standard, but a beauty will do her hair in as many plaits as possible. There is an Uzbek proverb, "Long plaits, short wits."

Outside Tashkent, and particularly to the south of Uzbekistan, Iranian types predominate increasingly till in Bokhara one sees men and women who look as if they had stepped out of Persian miniatures. The national costume is a silk gown with broad wavy horizontal stripes in gay colours, worn with a sash and a Tartar skull cap. This is the usual dress in the countryside, and is quite common even in Tashkent. The Uzbeks are stockily built and physically vigorous.

When we were there the snow was beginning to melt into mud, and the short winter was nearly over. Nevertheless, the scene had an unmistakable look of the Russian winter and reminded one of the geographical unity of the Soviet Union.

Some of the women still wore ugly black veils, supported on a wooden framework, but the fashion was going out. The Soviet Government discourages the wearing of veils, and carries out active propaganda to this end, but has not had recourse to the drastic prohibitions employed in Turkey and Iran. A woman deputy from the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan told me that she had been one of the first women to discard the veil about fifteen years ago. Many girls had been killed by the men at this time for breaking the tradition. She gave detailed accounts of some gruesome cases.

Our party was lodged in two dachas standing in gardens of their own outside Tashkent. After supper we were received by Mr. Usman Yusupov, President of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan, and local secretary of the Communist Party. He is of medium height, looks about forty, and is the ruler of Uzbekistan under Stalin. Whenever he appeared there was no mistaking that he was first in authority and respect. In four days at Tashkent we were continually meeting him and the members of his cabinet, and began to feel we knew them quite well. They are nearly all Uzbeks by race; the only Russian

that I know of in an important position is Mr. R. M. Glukhov, a tall friendly man who is vice-chairman of the Uzbek Council of Peoples Commissars. At least one traveller has suggested that Glukhov is the power behind Yusupov, but I have watched both men together and have no doubt that Yusupov is the chief.

He is a peasant from Ferghana, where many of the present leaders come from, and in appearance he might be a Far Easterner. He has a racy peasant humour, and an incisive way of expressing himself. One feels that he is popular, and it is not surprising to learn that when his fellow-countrymen address him in their own language, they never say: "Comrade Yusupov," which would nowadays be the equivalent of "Mr. Yusupov"; they call him instead: "Brother Usman."

He started by telling us that before the revolution only one and a half to two per cent. of the population were literate, whereas now ninety-eight per cent. were literate. I was not told, and forgot to ask, what test of literacy was applied here and elsewhere. Brother Usman told us that out of a total population of seven million in Uzbekistan, a million children were at school. Before the war, all children of school age were being educated, but now, owing to wartime difficulties, about six to eight per cent. of the children were without schooling. The Government hoped to remedy this soon.

The population had grown from four and a half million in 1926 to seven million in 1945; before the Revolution there had been a hundred and sixty schools in all on the present territory of Uzbekistan, excluding the religious schools in which only the Koran was taught. In none of the 160 schools was the instruction in Uzbek. Literacy among the Uzbeks was two to three per cent., and mainly among the priesthood. In 1944 there were 4,630 schools with 1,089,000 children. Every child now received its education in its native tongue.

Before the Revolution there was no University education at all in Uzbekistan. Now there are thirty-six "Institutes of Higher Education," with about 21,000 students. They include:

The Central Asiatic State University at Tashkent;

The Uzbek State University at Samarkand;

Eighteen Pedagogical Institutes and Teachers' Training Colleges;

The Tashkent and Samarkand Medical Institutes;  
The Tashkent Institute for Irrigation and Mechanisation of  
Agriculture;  
The Tashkent and Samarkand Agricultural Institutes;  
The Central Asiatic Industrial Institute.

Before the Revolution there had been on the average one doctor to 50,000 inhabitants in the Ferghana valley, which was the most civilised part of Uzbekistan. In the Kara Kalpak country there had been only one doctor to 250,000 inhabitants. Now there were 6,000 specialist doctors working in the Medical Institutions of Uzbekistan, i.e., one doctor for about 1,200 inhabitants. The usual Soviet medical services had been introduced. I had no opportunity of judging what standard of efficiency obtained.

The population of Tashkent is about a million, of whom forty per cent. are Uzbeks and thirty-five to forty per cent. Russians. Mr. Yusupov told us that it was Stalin's policy to promote the people of the non-Russian nationalities to high positions wherever possible, and that many Uzbeks now held responsible posts.

Next morning we began to sightsee, and found that Tashkent was a well-built modern town, with trees everywhere. The city covers an enormous area, as most people try to have a small house of their own with a garden and three or four fruit trees, which they sit under in the heat of the summer. The water channels go everywhere and there is an elaborate system of control to ensure that everyone gets his proper share of water. The old town is a squalid collection of mud huts which is being rapidly pulled down.

The first sight we were shown was the exhibition of the twentieth anniversary of Soviet Uzbekistan. The Central Asiatic Republics only joined the Soviet Union at the end of 1934, so that there has been even less time for the Revolution to show results here than in Russia. The exhibition was well produced and illustrated many sides of Uzbek development. It was here that we first learnt about the development of hydro-electric power, irrigation, cotton growing and the cotton and silk industries. We were shown silk parachutes made for the army and military uniforms manufactured in Uzbekistan, as well as a variety of cotton textiles. We learnt, too, that



Tashkent was making bombing planes and bombs up to five tons in weight, and we saw the skin of a tiger shot last year in the delta of the Oxus.

There is a fruit drying and canning industry and other branches of the food industry, mainly specialising in good quality products. There is also a high-class wine industry whose products we were able to enjoy at many banquets.

After lunch we visited the Tashkent observatory, which ranks as the third most important observatory of the Soviet Union. It was founded in the latter half of the last century, and specialises in establishing the exact time and measuring the position of the fixed stars, for which purpose it corresponds regularly with Greenwich and other foreign observatories. The director and his assistant, who are both Russian, showed us the interesting precise mechanisms which are used for measuring the time. Some of them were made in England many years ago. The most delicate mechanism is kept at the bottom of a deep shaft like a well, so that no changes of temperature may affect it. We were allowed to look down but not to descend, for fear that the heat of our bodies should raise the temperature.

After this we went to the Tashkent University. We talked to some of the professors and research students and got the impression that, while the senior professors were Russians, there was already a good crop of younger Uzbeks coming on. The university was founded in 1920 and has faculties of chemistry, physics, mathematics, philology, history, social studies and oriental studies. At its foundation the university admitted practically any Uzbek who could read and write and wanted to study. It was thus full from the start, but as time went on and better material became available the standards were raised. The proportion of men to women seemed higher, both here and at Baku, than in Moscow and Sverdlovsk. It would appear that even during the war the students of Soviet Asia were exempted from call-up more generously than was the case in Moscow. It was evident that having started to create a local intelligentsia, the authorities were making every effort to maintain the rate of development.

Later we visited a school and kindergarten. The kindergarten had 180 children of different races aged from three to seven; the parents pay nothing, and the children are prepared

for school, being taught to speak Russian and Uzbek as well as singing, dancing, drawing, etc. The teaching is in Russian; there are other kindergartens with teaching in Uzbek. The staff, who made a good impression, consisted of a woman director, a trained nurse, six girls in charge of different age groups, and special teachers for music and for reading and writing. A doctor attends every day from nine to one, and a dentist every other day. The children did a special dance for us and were photographed sitting happily on our knees. I made a paper sword out of a roll of newspaper, to be given to the best boy, but as merit seemed to be equal, it was given to the first who came. The teacher told him to use it against the Fascist enemy.

From the kindergarten we went to Uzbek Girls' School 159. This school is in the old part of the town where the houses are one-storey mud huts with flat roofs and narrow streets between them. The director was a pretty Uzbek girl who wore her hair in long plaits down her back, and a tartar skull cap, according to the local custom. Her Russian was not good, but she seemed on top of the job. The staff consisted of twenty-five teachers, all Uzbek except for those teaching Russian, foreign languages and military subjects; fourteen of the twenty-five had been through the Pedagogical Institute, and four of the remainder had done courses at Teachers' Colleges. There were 420 children, all Uzbek except for two Tartars from European Russia. The normal course was ten years, from seven to seventeen, but some children left at fourteen, in which case they had to continue with three hours' schooling a day in some kind of technical school. The sixteen year olds could carry on conversation in Russian, but the younger girls could only understand a few words.

On our first evening, we were taken to the opera, and in the long intervals had good opportunity of talking to various notabilities. These included Mr. S. Umarov, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Peoples Commissars (in charge of science and culture), Mr. Y. Y. Aliev, Peoples Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Mr. H. M. Abdulaev, President of the State Planning Commission, Professor Kary Niyazov, a mathematician who is President of the Uzbek Academy of Science, and Mrs. Mahmudova, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan and a member of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

This lady was until recently a worker in the spinning department of the Tashkent Textile Combine, and remains a mill-girl at heart. We had met both her and Professor Kary Niyazov earlier at H.M. Embassy in Moscow.

The opera was *Leila and Majnun*, with music done in collaboration by the Russian composer Gliere and the Uzbek composer Sadykov, and libretto adapted from the poem of Mir Alisher Navoi (1441-1501). *Leila and Majnun* is the most famous love story of the Moslem world. We could not, of course, follow the Uzbek words, but the general course of events was clear. The scene opens at an Arabian Koranic school, which was apparently co-educational; Leila excels at her lessons, and Kais, the hero, falls in love with her. He is not yet known as Majnun or the madman. It is examination time and an argument follows about the intelligence of women. Kais alone speaks up for women. Leila's father Omir, who is acting as an external examiner, exclaims in anger: "Was even one of the prophets a woman?" To which Kais replies: "But women were the mothers of prophets." Leila is the only pupil who supports Kais. Omir, enraged, takes his daughter away from the school.

The lovers are heart-broken and Kais goes off his head. Omir, shaking his head, says: "Such love is dangerous, such love is a calamity to the people." Another bridegroom is found for Leila and the lovers bewail their fate. The mad Kais goes to live with beasts in the desert, but turns up at Leila's wedding feast; he is driven away before she can see him, but she hears his voice; this decides her and she refuses point-blank to go through with the marriage. The bridegroom commits suicide, but Kais has disappeared.

Leila finds Kais weeping on his parents' grave, but he is by now too mad to recognise her and rushes off; she dies crying "Oh, fragile mist of mortal pain!" Kais comes in to recognise Leila's dead body and dies too.

The music is founded on traditional Uzbek material, but the orchestration is European, and more full-bodied than in the Azerbaijani operas; the singing was in the native, oriental style, and harmonised well with the orchestration. The work was immature but it held our attention throughout, and there were

some beautiful moments. The singing of Halima Nasirova as Leila stays in the memory.

The libretto follows the version of Navoi, who is considered one of the founders of Uzbek literature. He was also a man of learning and a statesman, being Grand Vizir to Hussein Baikar, the great-grandson of Tamberlane, who maintained a brilliant court at Herat. Navoi was one of the first poets to write in his native Turki rather than in Persian, and his name is held in great honour in Soviet Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks are proud of Samarkand's century of glory, but they speak less of Tamberlane himself than of his grandson, Ulugh Bek, the great astronomer and enlightened ruler of Samarkand, and of Navoi.

I had some talks with the leaders of the Uzbek theatre and with the appropriate commissars about the problem of creating an Uzbek opera, and I learnt that there are, besides *Leila and Majnun*, many other modern Uzbek operas which try to solve the problem in different ways. There is also an indigenous Uzbek form of "melodrama" or "musical drama," which has not yet been much cultivated by highbrow artists, but sounded as if there were makings in it.

Another day, we saw *Othello* at the State Theatre of Drama. By this time I was well accustomed to seeing *Othello* in languages that I did not know, and was convinced from the start that we were seeing the right play. The performance and production held us throughout, and were up to the best standards of the Moscow stage. In the intervals I met the director of the theatre—an Uzbek who spoke imperfect Russian and had worked in Moscow under Vakhtangov and Stanislavsky before the Revolution. When he started to work with Khamza, the founder of the Uzbek drama, there were no Uzbek theatres at all.

Several attempts had been made to translate Shakespeare, and various methods were employed before the present successful translation of *Othello* by Academician Gafur Guliam was made. This translator knew enough English to puzzle out the text. When he came to passages where his first attempts were unsuccessful, a good actor, who knew English well, was asked to read the lines aloud in the original; fortified by this, Academician Gafur Guliam then attempted to convey the same musical and emotional qualities in Uzbek. He has evidently

found a fitting adaptation of the Uzbek poetical diction, if one may judge by the effect on the audience.

*Othello* is one of those universal stories which appeal to every people. It was more surprising to learn that *Hamlet* had been equally popular. A few years ago the prize for the collective farms which did the best work was a trip to Tashkent to see *Hamlet*.

Marlowe's *Tamberlane* has not yet been translated, but those responsible were interested in the possibilities of staging an Uzbek version. It seemed to me that the episodic convention of the pre-Shakespearean drama would be acceptable in Central Asia.

On our last evening we went to a gala concert of Uzbek dancing and music, specially put on in our honour and attended by the highest in the land. The orchestral music by Uzbek composers was immature, but this was more than made up for by the rest of the programme, and especially by the singing and acting of the beautiful Halima Nasirova, who played the leading part in *Leila and Majnun*, and by the singing and dancing of the famous Tamara Khanum, who has performed in London at the Albert Hall. Tamara Khanum is of Armeno-Turki extraction and was brought up in Central Asia. She has developed her own style of singing and dancing, and specialises in singing the songs of the peoples of the Soviet Union in their own languages, and wearing the right national costume. She also sings in the languages of neighbouring countries such as Persia, and had learnt an English song specially in honour of the Allies: she did not, of course, know in advance that we were coming to Central Asia. Tamara Khanum has endless beautiful clothes for each number. As she goes out after one song her assistant announces the next, and by the time she has finished, Tamara has come back again in an entirely new costume. One regretted that there is no English national costume, for she had donned in our honour the most extraordinary get-up. The only other unsuccessful item was a Spanish song and dance learnt from republican exiles who had been evacuated to Central Asia. For some reason the Russians can never do Spanish dances properly.

The Uzbek style of dancing is of a liquid Oriental type, which depends on a subtle ear for rhythm. The beautiful silk

costumes add to the effect. In some ways the most interesting parts of the performance were the traditional folk dances produced by Miss Turgunbayeva, who has an important ballet school for dancing in the local style. It was difficult to judge from one evening, but I got the impression that her settings of traditional dances show an almost European sense of structure which puts them in a different category from any other oriental dancing I have seen. I am putting a good deal of money on the most brilliant of Turgunbayeva's pupils, sixteen-year-old Kumry Sadykova, who is the daughter of the composer of *Leila and Majnun*.

We spent nearly a whole day visiting the "Red Uzbekistan" collective farm a few miles outside Tashkent. We were met by three enormous men, who might almost have been farmers from Yorkshire, except for their large fur hats. One of them was the chairman of the farm, Abdu Jamil Matkabulov, who had held his present post since 1938. He was an impressive man, who showed a good grasp of the affairs of his farm but spoke little Russian. Being near Tashkent, the farm had an assured market for its produce, and was prosperous. Its chief obligation to the State was to supply specified quantities of cotton at fixed prices, but twenty-five per cent. of the vegetable crop also went to the State, as did a norm of meat and milk fixed according to acreage; there was a money income tax, both on the farm as a whole, and on its individual members. The State paid for the compulsory deliveries of cotton in money, and in products such as grain, fats, manure, textiles, cotton, linters and fodder cake. The money component of the State price varied according to quality. The following table shows the development of the farm since 1940:

	1940	1944
Number of families in collective farms ...	236	215
Number of workers in fields ... ..	480	400
Cultivated area of farm ...	498 ha	620 ha
Area under cotton ...	220 ha	100 ha
Yield of cotton per ha ...	21 centners	28 centners
Grain harvested ... ..	1 ton	200 tons
Working horses ... ..	83	63

	1940	1944
Mares ... ..	68	70
Colts ... ..	?	69
Oxen ... ..	250	34
Cows ... ..	?	55
Calves ... ..	?	130
Sheep ... ..	400	282
Camels ... ..	?	1
Total revenue ... ..	1,400,000 rbls.	11,000,000 rbls.
Total number of "work-days" worked ... ..	?	213,000
Wages per "workday"—		
Money ... ..	5.4 rbls.	48 rbls.
Fat ... ..	50 grms.	50 grms.
Vegetables ... ..	600 grms.	200 grms.
Grain ... ..	?	1,300 grms.

These wages also included (in 1940 at least) tea, sugar and textiles supplied by the State in return for cotton deliveries.

One hundred and fifty men had gone to the front as well as 111 horses and thirty carts; that is, rather more than two men from every three families.

It will be seen that with the help of the motor tractor station more land had been brought under cultivation since 1940, but that the area under cotton had decreased. The reason for this is that, being near Tashkent, this farm had been directed during the war to concentrate on vegetable production for the local market. The allowance of vegetables to the members per work-day had been reduced by two-thirds, but it seems that this had been made up, as far as consumption by the members of the farm was concerned, by the increase in the grain harvested.

Nearly all the money income of the farm is distributed to members as payment for work-days, but 500,000 roubles were put to reserve in 1944. Likewise, after making the compulsory deliveries to the State and paying fees in kind to the motor tractor station, and making provision for seed, eighty-five per cent. of the remaining produce is divided among members as individuals; the other fifteen per cent. is used for providing hot meals in the club room and for maintaining aged members.

The sheep are sheared in spring and autumn and give on the average two and half kg. of wool. Dairy cows give 2,000 litres

of milk per head per year. No outside labour is taken on, for this would be exploitation. Boys sleep in the stables as a precaution against theft.

To become a member of the farm it is necessary to make a formal application which is decided on at a general farm meeting. The new member has to contribute cattle if he has them or, alternatively, an entrance fee, which can be paid by instalments. Members can leave voluntarily or on a doctor's certificate, and can be expelled for bad work.

We were shown the spacious farm buildings, which included a fair-sized club room with a stage for cinema shows and concerts. Two or three collective farms generally club together to get up their own amateur concert parties, which tour the district. A friend of mine, who is a distinguished musician from Moscow, was once invited to perform at some collective farms in Central Asia. Traditional hospitality demanded that he and his troupe should eat an enormous meal at the first farm before giving their concert, but they were horrified to discover that at each succeeding farm visited in the day they were expected to eat an equally large meal. He ate six feasts in one day and gave six concerts.

The rest room of the Red Uzbekistan farm was a spacious hall built of mud, with a low dais covered with carpets and with gaudy hangings on the walls. Here about twenty old men in turbans were sitting cross-legged on the dais drinking green tea out of bowls and listening to the wireless, which is relayed throughout the farm. We were told that the women have no rest room as they prefer to rest at home.

After this we were entertained by the chairman and his wife to a sumptuous meal, taken seated cross-legged on the floor, and without knives, forks or plates. Instead, large pieces of bread are cleverly baked into the shape of a plate. After the hosts had broken the bread for us we set to at a table groaning beneath the weight of geese, ducks, legs of mutton, vast quantities of bread and much besides; after this we had "manty" (large meat-balls in suet) followed by shashlyk on skewers, all washed down by an excellent home-brewed wine drunk in large quantities out of handleless cups. Only then did we get to the piece de resistance, the traditional Uzbek "ploff" or pilaf, which was followed by green tea, fruit and sticky oriental sweets. Just





THE PLOF

Lyudmila Morozova :

Col. Charles Ponsoyby :

Tom Fraser  
Chairman's Wife

Uzbek Agronomist :

Murad Hadjaev :  
Lord Farrington :

Col. Walter Elliot :

Chairman's Wife



as we were about to move there was a stir, and our host brought in a bright silk dressing gown, which was presented to Col. Elliot; before we knew what had happened he was dressed up in complete national costume and the rest of us were wearing Tartar skull caps. We were all photographed together amid much hilarity, and as we left our host gave each of us a warm hug.

We were then taken off, rather the worse for wear, to visit the Tashkent Textile Combine, probably the biggest factory in Central Asia. We walked through about half the shops of this vast cotton factory, and saw all processes from carding to the final production of printed fabrics. There were long rows of machines working steadily, and it seemed to us that the number of workers supervising the machines was small, but that the operatives were rather shabbily dressed.

Madame Mahmudova from the Supreme Soviet, who joined us in the spinning section, could not resist the temptation to mend one or two breakages herself. Her dexterity was such that we were not surprised to learn that it had been the foundation of her career.

Later we saw the Chkalov aircraft factory, which was evacuated from Moscow in 1941, but also received machinery from evacuated factories in Kiev. It was then making Douglas bombers, but was scheduled to make transport planes in Tashkent after the war.

On our last day we visited the Chirchik Electric Power Station, some distance out of Tashkent. The Director was a peasant from the Kuybishev province, who had received a technical education; the chief engineer was a Kazakh who had studied at Moscow with him. The two men had worked together on the Dneprostoi project and were evidently close allies. The construction of the Chirchik Station was begun in 1936; it started work in 1941. The river Chirchik is first harnessed at a big dam ten miles above the station we visited, to which it is led by a concrete canal. The river's discharge varies from 2,500 cubic metres per second in July, when the mountain snows are melting, to sixty to a hundred cubic metres in winter. All the water forms part of the local irrigation system, and at certain periods of the summer, when all of it is needed, some of the power stations cease working. The Chirchik scheme will

eventually include four separate power stations. The two completed aggregates already give 250,000 kw. and supply power to Tashkent as well as to the local industries of Chirchik. In 1924 there was only one 1,000 kw. Diesel station at Tashkent, but all the industrial centres of the Tashkent oblast are now on hydro-electric power. The biggest expansion took place during the war, and was largely carried out with evacuated machinery. Of twelve hydro-electric stations in operation in Uzbekistan, with a global output of 200 megawatts, six stations have been built and put into operation during the war. Almost all the machinery used in the power stations of Uzbekistan is Soviet. The turbines of this particular station were made at the Stalin plant in Leningrad, and the generators at the famous Kirov (Putilov) works. The only exception is a station near Chirchik, which is being constructed with Canadian machinery.

The Chirchik stations form part of an organisation known as Uzbek Energo, which administers all the electric supplies of Uzbekistan and certain stations in other republics which supply Uzbek industry. Uzbek Energo is itself under the control of the appropriate ministry in Moscow.

The Chirchik power and the water from the river are used by a large chemical plant which we visited. The first block of shops was finished in 1940, but enlargements are being made all the time. The chief products were nitric acids from atmospheric nitrogen and ammonia, which are used both for war purposes and for fertilisers. The factory employed about 2,400 workers, of whom thirty-five per cent. were Uzbeks.

We spent one afternoon shopping, and were enabled to buy some beautiful hand-woven silks and embroidered Tartar skull caps in the Tashkent shop which sells the produce of the artels producing such wares (see page 75).

For our last evening we were invited to a banquet at Mr. Yusupov's official dacha—the Chequers of Uzbekistan. This house stands in its own grounds a few miles outside Tashkent surrounded with fruit trees. The entertainment rooms are spacious and pleasant and include a banqueting room where we sat down fifty people at table. The company included all that we had previously met and other notabilities, too, so that we were rather tightly packed, but that only helped to make the party go.

The table was loaded with the usual assortment and received added distinction from an array of ducks and partridges sitting stuffed on top of their own carcasses, but the best sight of all was a jeyran, or gazelle, complete with horns and studded all over with white nuts. There was a good choice of Uzbek wines, but most of us stuck to our host's home-brewed wine from his own vineyards.

Mr. Yusupov was the sort of host that makes a party go; he interrupted everyone who proposed a toast, generally interposing some pointed Uzbek proverb, but he had personality and nobody minded being interrupted. When things were well under way, a live jeyran was brought in bounding, and we were told that it is the custom to slay this animal in the presence of the guests. Curiosity overcame most of us and we left our chairs to gaze at the poor beast, after this the party took on a nomadic aspect, which helped one to bring variety to the conversation and to avoid overeating.

Mr. Fraser, whose birthday it was, had the good fortune to sit beside Miss Halima Nasirova; when called upon to propose a toast he made a graceful tribute to the women of Soviet Uzbekistan. Miss Nasirova replied by singing an impassioned song, which ended in the breaking of a plate, and from that moment the party really opened up. Tamara Khanum and Halima Nasirova performed their best songs and dances until it was time to adjourn to the next room after the "plof." The Uzbeks have a most civilised custom by which one attains or—more probably—passes the optimum of alcoholic consumption while at table, after which one goes over to green tea and is not pressed to drink any further. It would be tedious to chronicle all that was done to entertain us further, but one moment stands out when the Iago of the previous night broke out into lines which we instantaneously recognised as Hamlet's "To be or not to be, that is the question," though none of us understood one word of Uzbek.

Eventually we left Ferghana, having kept the special train waiting for over an hour. Our only disappointment was that we had not tasted the jeyran, but, to our surprise, we found it waiting for us in the train.

When we awoke we were travelling through the broad Ferghana valley in the usual mixture of mud and slush which

accompanied us throughout Central Asia. Even the astronomer at Tashkent, who is the local clerk of the weather, confirmed that it was an exceptionally bad winter. The Ferghana valley is of great potential fertility, but until recently could not be adequately used through lack of water.

Everywhere we went people told us of the great Ferghana canal. The first stretch of this is 164 kilometres long; after all the locks, bridges and other complicated installations had been constructed by engineers, volunteers were invited for the excavation work, which had been left to the last. A tremendous drive was made to persuade the local population to take their part in the project, which meant so much to their own well-being. Eventually 164,000 people took part, and the excavation was completed in three weeks during the period of lull when the cotton crop requires no attention. The people camped by the bank of the canal; they were given good food and the most popular artists from all over the country congregated to entertain them. It is said that all who took part in the digging were volunteers, and certainly they must have worked with a will, or the job would not have been done. I wondered at first whether I had got this story right, but I heard the same account from many people, some of whom could not have been primed.

Many other irrigation works of a humbler size, but very useful in their districts, have been made by this method of "popular construction," and the Ferghana canal itself has now been greatly lengthened. In the Ferghana valley we saw many irrigated fields with rice and other crops and rows of mulberry trees along the boundaries between the fields, but there were other tracts of desert which the water had not yet reached. In some places injudicious inundation had brought the salt to the surface; when this happens fertility can only be restored by a long process of washing the salt out again.

The capital of the valley is the town of Ferghana, founded in the last century by the celebrated General Skobelev; the population is about 80,000, and industry is developing. There are many public gardens, with fine old trees, and some modern buildings but rebuilding has not yet progressed very far. We were told, however, that there were already enough schools, kindergartens, maternity homes and the like. Seventy per cent.

of the population of the town are Uzbeks, and there are seventy Uzbek members in the City Soviet of 101. Outside the town the proportion of Uzbeks is higher. Earlier in the war housing had been unduly congested, but by then many of the evacuees from European Russia had gone back.

We visited the Ferghana textile factory, which is less modern than the Tashkent textile combine, but employs 2,000 workers, of whom seventy-five per cent. are women. They looked healthier and better dressed than usual. The director was a Tartar from Northern Kazakhstan; he showed us the factory crèche, which takes 120 children, and the kindergarten with 155 children. It was obvious that all the staff, including the director, were fond of the children, but they did not look as well as the children in similar establishments elsewhere. In the factory we saw all processes from carding onwards, except printing and dyeing. The machinery was mostly supplied by Tweedsdale and Smalley, of Manchester, and dated about 1927. The factory had its own subsidiary farm, which formed a branch of the workers' supply department (see p. 64); not being a collective farm this paid no compulsory deliveries to the State.

There are rest homes in the hills for the workers, and a summer camp where the children are sent in turn for three-month spells, with extra food and an outdoor life. The workers can get two meals a day in the canteen; the menu is changed daily and there is a choice of dishes. Prices were:

Soup	...	...	80 kop. to 1.40 roubles
Meat	...	...	80 kop. to 2.30 roubles
Pudding	...	...	45 kop. to 80 kop.

The official dacha of the City Soviet was a pleasant country house near a squalid mud fort left over from the old days. From there we went to the little town of Margelan, built entirely of mud, where practically everyone wore national costume. We visited a silk-weaving artel, where the gay Uzbek silks were woven on hand-looms. The machinery did not look very efficient, but the workers, who ranged from quite young boys and girls to old men, seemed very cheerful. Like all artels, this one elected its own boss. She was a pretty girl of twenty-five who spoke no Russian.

Nearby was a collective farm called after Frunze. The chairman knew his job, but was not so striking a character as

his opposite number in the Tashkent farm which we visited. He knew very little Russian. The farm had sent 219 men to the front, but we were told that even so the village was living better than before the war.

The farm grows its own food and many of their clothes are made by the villagers themselves, no doubt from the cotton and silk which they produce. Furthermore, this farm, like 198 other farms in Uzbekistan, makes its own electricity from a hydro-electric station; electricity was laid on throughout. We were told that the people are thus more or less independent of market fluctuations.

Most of the houses looked primitive but the communal buildings were well-built and pleasant. These consisted mainly of "chai khanehs" or tea houses which serve as club rooms. There were five of them spread about the farm. We were invited into a new dwelling house that was just being finished. It was well constructed and spacious, being made of the traditional mud, with its own walled yard and space for fruit trees. The men's and women's quarters were separate.

In the middle of the main farm buildings there was quite elaborate anti-fire equipment. A man is always on duty and there are fire practices twice a week.

Next morning we awoke near Samarkand, which lies in fairly fertile land, watered by the river Zerabshan. Modern Samarkand, with 100,000 inhabitants, is divided by a drop in the ground from old Samarkand with 65,000 inhabitants. Just beyond the walls of this lie the ruins of the still older city, Alexander the Great's Marakanda, which was abandoned after its destruction by Jengis Khan in 1220. To the east the towering Tien Shan mountains look far closer than they can really be.

Samarkand is the "educational and scientific capital" of Uzbekistan, with 4,000 students, mostly training to be doctors and teachers. The University, with 500 students, specialises in the Uzbek language and literature. Our delegation presented a copy of the collected poems of James Elroy Flecker to the English Department of the Faculty of Modern Languages. In return we were indeed given

"Such sweet jams meticulously jarred  
As God's-own prophet eats in paradise."



There were several types of jam, each with a most delicate flavour, but I could not identify the ingredients. Furthermore, Samarkand produces excellent white wine and dried fruits.

The old buildings date mainly from the period of Tamberlane or Timur Lenk (reigned 1369-1405) and Ulugh Bek (died 1449) and from the period immediately preceding Tamberlane. In spite of earthquakes and faulty construction, much remains. The earlier buildings are covered with blue and white tiles, which are sometimes baked in relief with blurred contours well designed to give the eye something soft to rest on in the glaring heat of summer. In the age of Tamberlane and his descendants, these are succeeded by tiles in deep and varied colours with wonderfully strong patterns drawn upon them. After the 15th century technical skill falls off. I had the good luck to visit Isfahan three weeks later, where one feels the past cultural unity of Persia and Turkestan. The remains of 15th century work in Isfahan are in the Samarkand style, but not so striking; the great buildings of Isfahan are of the 17th century. The later tile work is weaker both in colour and in drawing, but the architects have used it to achieve most subtle contrasts in colour, which enhance a perfection of proportions rarely to be seen outside Greece and Italy.

Ulugh Bek built a great Medresseh, which is now being judiciously restored, and made Samarkand a centre of liberal learning. Outside the town are the ruins of his famous observatory, from which the position of 992 fixed stars were recalculated for the first time since Ptolemy. This astronomer king was eventually killed by a faction led by his own son, which objected to his enlightened views on learning. We saw his grave next to that of Tamberlane. When his skeleton was unearthed a few years ago, Ulugh Bek's severed head was found by his side. A restoration of his features, reconstructed from the skull on an ingenious method by Professor Gerasimov, was on view in Tashkent. There must have been a strain of scholarship in the Tamberlane family, for besides Ulugh Bek both the father and grandfather of Tamberlane preferred a life of learning and retirement to the high military commands to which their hereditary position would have entitled them.

The mausoleum of Tamberlane is well preserved. The tomb of Timur himself consists of the largest piece of jade in the

world. It is of dark colour to suit Timur's own character, and was cracked in transit. Part of the mausoleum is used as a workshop for training restorers of ancient monuments. Some good plaster work had been done in one of the old techniques.

The tradition of Samarkand as a centre of Moslem learning survived the death of Ulugh Bek, and two fine 17th century Medressehs were built on the Central Square of "El Registan" to balance Ulugh Bek's own magnificent construction. But learning soon degenerated into fanaticism, and the Russians found little trace of the earlier liberal traditions when they reached Samarkand in the last century.

Next day was spent at Bokhara, a city of 60,000 inhabitants. All new buildings and factories are outside the old town, which is to be kept as a museum town. Bokhara was the capital of an Emirate for 700 years ending in 1920. It has more atmosphere than Samarkand, and the leisurely people in the streets seemed to belong to an older world. Most of the population are Uzbeks, but there are also large numbers of Tadjiks and Central Asiatic Jews, a distinct community which speaks a dialect of Tadjik. Buildings survive from many periods, but the most interesting is the well preserved tomb of the ninth century Persian monarch Shah Ismail Samani: a well-built, domed building of brick, which achieves its effect by good proportions and by setting the bricks ingeniously at different angles. The result is a pleasantly uneven surface, with patterns which look rather like the best knitting. There is also a fine 12th century minaret and an interesting series of buildings from the early days of the Uzbek dynasty in the 16th century. The tile work is far inferior to Samarkand or Isfahan, but there is some good brick vaulting.

The public library is called after the famous Arab philosopher Avicenna, a local boy who made good. Manuscripts of his work are shown with pride and we learnt that his complete works are being translated from Arabic into Uzbeki.

Official receptions take place in the summer palace of the Emirs, which was built at great expense outside the town, about the year 1910, in the worst possible taste. We tried to make ourselves agreeable by showing an interest in Bokhara carpets, but were met with blank looks and "No, we have never made carpets here, though there was once some talk of setting up a

carpet factory." It appears that Bokhara was never more than a distributing centre for carpets made in the neighbouring steppe. The pride of Bokhara is its karakul or astrakhan lambskins.

We left by train after dinner and about midnight crossed the Oxus, the immemorial boundary of Uzbek and Turkoman.

### *Turkmenia*

Next morning we awoke in the bleak Karakum or "Black Sand" desert, just past the Merv oasis. Beyond the Oxus there is much less Mongolian and Iranian in the dominant physical type. The typical Turkoman is a tall, dark man with long features, dreamy, lustrous, black eyes and a nose which is nearer to the Negro model than to the Mongolian. The men, and particularly the boys, give a feeling of North Africa. They are full of jokes and fun, and wear enormous astrakhan hats, spreading out at an angle with a flat top. The women look like gypsies and wear gaudy dresses of red silk with bangles. Their hair, worn in two black pigtails down the front, is less seductive than the Uzbek style.

A great part of Turkmenia is desert but there is cultivation wherever water can be brought. The backbone of the country is a thin strip along the mountains of Khorassan parallel with the Persian border. There is rain down to the foot of the mountains and irrigation is spreading cultivation into the desert. Rain had just fallen and there was a thin carpet of fresh grass spreading further than usual into the Karakum.

The Turkomans are "proud horsemen" and one feels at once that this is a man's country, where women have counted for less than horses. It is not surprising to learn that singing is considered exclusively a man's job and that the Turkomans have already reared a superfluity of male children. In the old days the deficiency of girls was made up by stealing brides from other tribes. Even now a Turkoman girl will scarcely ever marry outside her own people, but the men often marry foreign girls—nearly always from other Turki-speaking people, who find no difficulty in mastering Turkmenian.

I had imagined that Ashkhabad would be a dingy oriental frontier town with a few good buildings in the centre. The name Ashkhabad means "city of love," and it is in fact a well-

built modern town with well-paved and asphalted streets. Three hundred thousand people live here out of 1,300,000 in the Turkoman Republic. The figures of educational and cultural advance were similar to those for Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, but of course on a smaller scale, Turkmenia being a smaller country.

The Turkomans used to be a nomadic people but we were told that nearly all had now been settled on the land. I knew that the process of settling nomads generally produces friction, and I asked many questions about how this result had been achieved. I was told that at the beginning it was difficult to get the nomads to settle, but that the State provided them not only with land but with water from the new irrigation schemes which multiplied the value of the land, with tractors and agricultural machinery to work the land, and with other necessities of a settled existence. Those who tried the experiment of settling found themselves better off, and others had followed their example. Now only a few stock breeders remain nomadic.

Obviously, success in particular settlement schemes must have varied in proportion with the practical advantages of this kind, which it was possible to offer at each particular stage of Soviet development.

The pride of the Turkomans is in their horses and their carpets. They are all carpet-conscious, and one sees good specimens everywhere. I had always been insensitive to carpets, but after seeing them hanging on every wall for several days, I began to appreciate the texture they give to rooms. There is a museum of carpets which shows the evolution of this local art from its humble beginnings in the 17th century. The best work is now done at the All-Union Experimental Carpet workshops. The girls sit all day, cross-legged, in their red silk national costumes, making carpets by the traditional methods, no attempt being made to mechanise the processes. One of the largest carpets in the world hangs in the Museum of Graphic Arts, which is housed in a former Bahai Mosque. This was specially made for the drop curtain in the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and is to be handed over when a projected exhibition of Turkmenian art takes place after the war.

To my mind the most pleasing carpets are those made to

the traditional patterns but there is also a new style of carpet portraiture. In one of the Government buildings there is an enormous carpet; the lower part is traditional, but if you raise your eyes you come to double life-size portrait busts of all the members of the Politburo. There is a Turkoman woman who is said to make carpet portraits straight out of her head, without any sketch to work from.

Soviet Asia is a wine country and it had been very pleasant for a change to drink good dry wines instead of vodka. But the Turkoman wines are not as good as their carpets. They are sweet and sticky and do not go well with food.

The Turkoman steppe has played an unusual part in history. It is protected from invasion on the south by high mountains, on the west by the Caspian Sea and on the north by the Sea of Aral and impassable desert, so that the Oxus forms the only open frontier. Moreover, the Turkoman country alone among the steppe lands of Europe and Asia, leads nowhere and offers little temptation to an invader. It was indeed engulfed in the universal Turki wave, so that the ancient Iranian dialects have given way to Turki, but it is tempting to think that the Turkomans, who differ so strikingly from their neighbours, still represent to some extent the descendants of the ancient Parthian tribes.

A few miles east of Ashkhabad are the ruins of Anau, a city which was inhabited in the earliest times of man's settled existence and was only finally abandoned after its destruction by the Turkomans in the 18th century. The impressive ruins of a 14th century mosque and many other buildings remain.

One drives from the capital westwards along a good motor road at the foot of the mountains, to the site of Nissa, the first Parthian capital and burial place of the Parthian kings. After the capital was removed to a more central position, Nissa still remained an important provincial town and the centre from which the Parthians recruited those famous horsemen who fought the Romans level and maintained the dominance of the Turkoman steppe over half the Middle East from 140 B.C. to 226 A.D. They could turn in the saddle and aim their arrows backwards; hence the expression "a Parthian shot." The ruins of Nissa stand high above the surrounding plain; the line of the square walls of the citadel shows clearly and parts

of the ancient palace and water supply have been excavated, but as with everything Parthian, the remains are mainly remarkable by the fact of their existence.

The ostensible reason for our journey to Nissa was the local collective farm. This covers about 2,200 acres of fertile land on the edge of the plain, on which cotton, silk, and vegetables are grown, but no less important is the pasture up in the mountains and out in the desert. The authorities have distributed the land so as to give each farm so far as possible a little of every sort of land, i.e. irrigated land in the plain, mountain pasture and desert pasture. This farm owned 12,000 goats and 5,700 sheep, which give five and a half kilogrammes of wool on the average and are sheared twice a year, in May and September; the sheep stay out all the winter, but the cold weather sets in so late that they have time to grow a coat after the September shearing. The women make carpets in the cottages.

From here we were taken to see a State stud farm; one of the interpreters, who had been hopelessly overworked, got mixed up and called it a "horse-factory"; I am sorry to say that we teased her so much that when we got to the stud farm she lost her head and started calling it a "horse-factory" in Russian too. The object of this stud farm is to provide stallions and brood mares for improving the breed on collective farms all over the country. The main type is the native Akhat Tekinsky breed, but the big English polo-pony is used as well. One of the stallions had won first prize in Moscow.

Copies of the "British Ally" were put out in our honour and I had a most warm greeting as the editor. This oft repeated compliment to my country is one of my pleasantest memories of the Soviet Union, for everywhere readers of our paper welcomed me as not quite a foreigner, when they learnt what my work was. Knowing how Westerners look to a Russian eye, I was always touched when people said to me, "Vy nash"—"you are one of us."

Water is all-important to Turkmenia and there is a Peoples Commissariat of Water Economy. The greater part of the country is desert, and the only rivers are the Oxus or Amu Darya on the east and various streams which spread from the Persian mountains in the south.

In three provinces the main source of water is the Oxus; the

potential surplus is very great and it is calculated that one-third of the Oxus water can be removed without affecting navigation; at present, however, it is not planned to use more than fifteen per cent. of the water for this purpose. The water is to be used partly for irrigating the adjacent provinces of Turkmenia and Uzbekistan, and partly for more ambitious projects. On the Uzbek side there is a plan to take Oxus water to the Zerabshan, which now peters out in the desert not far from Samarkand and to return the resultant stream to the Oxus. On the Turkoman side a hundred kilometres of the great Karakum canal have already been constructed out of a projected four hundred and seventy kilometres. This scheme will bring Oxus water to the Murghab oases and eventually to the Tedjen; to carry the water further would mean syphoning or pumping. (See map.)

The section already constructed has given Oxus water access to a part of one of the old beds of the river, and at flood time every year the water has advanced further into the desert, forming in course of time a vast lake known as the Kilisky Uzboi. Sediment is brought down and the desert is acquiring a new life. In the reedy swamps around the edge of the lake, waterfowl and wild boar abound, and there are said to be even tigers. By degrees dry land is forming and the river is giving a new province to Turkmenia. The Oxus is sometimes called "the Nile of Central Asia."

The Oxus carries an enormous quantity of silt which consists partly of injurious heavier particles and partly of lighter mud, which is said to be as good for the fields as the famous Nile mud. To catch the heavier particles, broader stretches of the canals have been dug out to serve as silt traps which are dredged.

The Murghab and Tedjen also, though they are less important than the Oxus, have created groups of fertile oases. The first irrigation reservoirs in the Murghab area were built in 1905 and in 1910-11 on one of the Tsar's estates, but by 1925 these had silted up. To remedy this other dams have been built by the labour of the local collective farmers much as the Ferghana canal was constructed. These reservoirs also will in time silt up but in this region it is much cheaper to construct a new dam than to dredge out an old reservoir.

In the Ashkhabad region and generally to the west of the Tedjen there is nothing but small streams. There are tradi-

tionally used by the Persian Kanat system, which consists of running the stream along a specially constructed underground channel. The Persians excel at this remarkable system of construction, and one of the most prominent sights in the Persian landscape is the long rows of shafts a hundred yards or so apart with the excavated débris lying round the head of the shaft like a shell crater. From the air the lines of these Kanats can be seen going on for tens of miles till at last the water issues, a few fields are irrigated and there are some straight lines of poplars. In Turkmenia this system, which is efficient but very expensive in labour, is now being replaced by artesian wells.

I was curious to see how culture had developed on the soil of Turkmenistan. I knew, of course, that most of the people had been nomads until less than twenty years ago, and I was soon told that not merely were there no women's songs, but there was no tradition of dancing either for men or women. The nearest approach to traditional dances are the musical weaving games played by the women. At first sight it would seem that this placed rather severe restrictions on the choreographer's art. None the less we were told that we were to see a Turkoman opera and that a new form of ballet of quite exceptional interest had been evolved. Our visit was only scheduled to last two days, but I prayed that we should be delayed by weather long enough to see all this.

First let me take the reader to the Turkmenian Film Studio, which had recently won All-Union prizes for the best newsreel and for the best reportage of a concert. The southern light of Turkmenia favours the photographer's art, and we were shown a feature film that had won the Stalin prize just before the war. It was a straightforward tale of socialist emulation on a cotton farm and emancipation of women, made attractive by the good looks and vivacity of the heroine and the acting of the hero, Mr. Alty Karliev, now the director of the Opera Theatre, and one of the moving spirits in Turkoman life.

The opera we saw was called *Shasenem and Garib*. It was much less sophisticated than the Azerbaijani and Uzkebi operas, but very good fun, and some of the songs, when heard again the next day, made an even stronger impression than at the first hearing.



The Turkomans told me that the Uzbeks are a sentimental people who enjoyed tragic love stories and like to see the stage littered with corpses in the last act. The Turkomans prefer fun and incident and a happy ending.

The story of *Shasenem and Garib* takes place partly in Persia at the court of Shah Abbas and partly in Turkoman tents, hung round with soft red carpets. The first scene is in a *Medresseh*, which is again coeducational. The pupils include the hero, Garib, and his cheerful friend Ilmrad. Garib is miserable, because he cannot see among the girls the beautiful Shasenem, the daughter of Shah Abbas. Shasenem comes in and tells Garib that her father intends to marry her to someone else in spite of a previous promise that she should be Garib's wife. Garib makes a row, and is condemned to exile.

The next scene is in a bazaar; Ilmrad tries in vain to cheer Garib up, until Shasenem arrives to do her shopping and Garib is persuaded to dress up as a slave and get bought by Shasenem. The lovers enjoy themselves for a short space, until a jealous woman denounces Garib to Shah Abbas.

The next scene is in a tent beside a river. Shasenem is in despair, for her wedding to the hated rival is to take place within a week. The sound of an approaching caravan is heard and Shasenem invites the passing travellers to a meal. Shasenem's girl friend recognises the leader of the caravan as her long-lost husband. He and his new-found wife go in search of Garib to tell him of the now imminent danger of Shasenem's marriage. Garib is found and the party go off to the tent of his mother, who has gone blind from grief, and believes that her son is dead. She has one more look in the family linen chest, and finds at last a written statement from Shah Abbas undertaking to marry Shasenem to Garib. To cut a long story short, the paper is produced in the nick of time to prevent the hated marriage, and everyone lives happily ever after.

The costumes were Persian of the seventeenth century, and it was fascinating to see how the tall hats and flowing robes looked when they were worn. The inside of the tents, with carpet hangings on every wall, gave a strong feeling of nomadic life.

Next day, as there was no flying weather, we saw a ballet called *Aldar Kose*, or "The Old Man with the Little Beard."

The hero, who is somewhere between a human Puck and a Fairy Godmother, enters riding on a real donkey. Rejep is in love with Karagyz, but the Khan sees her and instructs his chief Djigit or tough to get her for his harem. Aldar Kose comes to the rescue and substitutes a Shepherd Boy for Karagyz. The lovers run away with Aldar Kose, but get caught and the girl and Aldar Kose are brought back. The Khan orders that Aldar Kose is to be castrated; trying to escape he gets into the Khan's harem, where the Khan's wives hide him. Rejep steals into the harem at night, looking for Karagyz; Aldar Kose has a very narrow escape from destruction worse than death, but in the end all three run away, taking with them all the wives of the Khan. Unfortunately, Rejep gets caught; Aldar Kose and the Khan's wives run into a band of robbers, but they easily make them drunk and escape. Meanwhile, Rejep is to be executed, and the people have assembled to witness the sight. Among the crowd are Aldar Kose with Karagyz and all the Khan's wives, in disguise. In his attempts to save Rejep, Aldar Kose begins to do conjuring tricks, and eventually turns Rejep into a girl. This trick is repeated several times, until the Khan in delight asks to be turned into a girl, too. Aldar Kose agrees, and to the general delight turns the Khan into a donkey. The Khan-donkey runs off, the lovers are married, Aldar Kose has a popular triumph and goes off to new adventures.

The style of dancing is founded mainly upon the European classical tradition, but with some Oriental elements. It is designed for dramatic expression, and the choreography is excellent, being in a class far above most contemporary ballets. The technical standard of dancing is not yet high, but its other qualities render this ballet more worthy of a place in the Temple of the Muses than many more pretentious works.

Next day the weather cleared and in an hour or two a Soviet plane had taken us to Teheran, where there was time to think over all that we had seen in Soviet Turkestan.

In all I have spent about a month in Soviet Asia, and can only claim a very cursory acquaintance with this vast area. On the other hand, we were taken wherever we wanted to go, shown whatever we asked to see, and able to talk freely with the people everywhere, very often away from our official companions. It goes without saying that our hosts tried to show

us the best in their country, but that does not alter the fact that this best is there and that there is a good deal of it. Twenty years ago, the Emirates of Bokhara and Khiva and other parts of Russian Turkestan were poor, backward, corrupt and stagnant. The present standard of life in Soviet Turkestan is low by Western European standards, but higher than in many other parts of the world, if one is to judge by the people's clothing and housing, water supply and public health, the provision of schools and the general appearance of the population. It is clear, moreover, that the economic basis has been laid for a further rapid rise in the standard of living.

The federal constitution of the Soviet Union is not a matter of legalistic checks and balances, such as are familiar to Anglo-Saxons, and there can be no doubt that the last word always lies with Moscow, but this does not affect local sentiment as much as might be expected. The essential point about the Soviet Federal Constitution is rather that the system has been operated in such a way as to foster local pride and local achievement; there is no doubt that very large sections of the people feel great pride in Soviet Azerbaijan, Soviet Uzbekistan or Soviet Turkmenia.

The question is often asked whether the Soviet Nationalities policy has not much to teach colonial powers such as ourselves. This may well be true, particularly in the matter of psychological approach, and in certain practical measures such as the use of communal labour. But no useful comparison can be drawn without a detailed analytical comparison of the circumstances. Such an analysis would have to start from certain broad facts of population and geography. The British Empire has a population of about 70,000,000 Europeans, who are all members of advanced communities, as against a very large non-European population. The colonial empire alone has a population of 66,000,000, many of whom are extremely primitive people, separated from the United Kingdom by vast distances, by innumerable languages and dialects, many of which were never written before the British arrival, and by extreme differences of physical type, which are found to raise difficult problems of personal relationships.

In 1939 the Soviet Union had a population of about 150 million Europeans and Christians as against no more than 20 to

25 million non-Europeans, who were generally more backward than the Europeans, but far more advanced than most of the peoples of Africa. The majority of these orientals were Moslems, speaking Turkish dialects, which are not difficult to learn. There has always been a vast reserve of Russians ready to form the core for any new development in the most distant parts of the Soviet Union, and about a third of the population of the great cities of Soviet Asia is Russian. Moreover, no difficult racial problems arise because there are only two main physical types—the European and the Mongolian, which are found in every degree of mixture, so that there can be no question of a colour line. Further, the geographical unity of the vast Soviet land mass has imposed unity of conditions over vast areas which go right across all racial boundaries.

The Soviet Union has only a handful of really primitive peoples and it is rightly proud of some of the steps that have been taken for their welfare, as for instance in the invention of alphabets for languages which had never before been written down. The British Empire has this problem multiplied by hundreds; we may well claim to have invented far more new alphabets for primitive peoples than the Russians have, but it is impossible for us to devote as much manpower as the Russians can to trusteeship problems, for there are fewer of us to deal with a far bigger problem. It would, however, be unwise to take refuge in the thought that to this extent the Soviet Union has an unfair start. Public opinion in most countries will look at results rather than reasons.

## CONCLUSION

"We must expect, therefore, that the future will disclose dangers. It is the business of the future to be dangerous."

—*Science and the Modern World* by A. N. WHITEHEAD.

πάντα ῥεῖ "All Things Flow."—HERACLITUS.

IN Russia, as in Britain, the first hopes of rapid recovery after the war have proved false. Our wounds are deep and there is no margin from which to make good the deficit when corn or coal fail. The disastrous drought in the Ukraine has been officially compared with the terrible famine years, 1891 and 1921.

Fuel is short and there are frequent cuts in electricity supply. Last winter at one place near Moscow the current was cut off every weekday between six and ten in the evening for one or two hours. There was no fixed time and people did not know when to cook. Indeed this may have been intentional, for cooking on electricity was technically forbidden (see p. 58). This winter the current has been switched off at 8.20 every morning, to come on again at 4.30 p.m.

The streets are beginning to look brighter. There are new trolleybuses, which are sturdier and roomier than their predecessors, streets signs have been touched up, there are more sellers of icecream, oranges and apples, and there are more cars. A friend writes that there are German "Horch, Mercedes and Opels, with an occasional grand Maybach, and day by day more of the new ZIS 110 appear on the streets"; this last is a new Soviet model of fine appearance. Jeeps have been banned from the city centre.

To quote the same friend, "people are definitely more smartly dressed," fur coats are a little commoner and the commission shops are reluctant to handle second-hand clothes, though it is still easy to find buyers privately.

"Commercial" prices continue to fall, but in September, 1946, the prices of rationed goods were more than doubled (see Note on Value of Rouble). In spite of the accompanying wage increases this means that it has become difficult for many

families to buy their full ration; furthermore many of those who were better off have been moved into a lower category so that their ration has in effect become smaller. No government would take such a step lightly and it seems clear that in general the food position is now about as bad as it was during the last years of the war, though conditions always differ from place to place according to the crops. One good harvest would solve the immediate problem.

Many restaurants and cafés are now open, to say nothing of wine and beer bars, and my friends tell me that there is no shortage of agreeable meeting places. War-time restrictions on long distance travel have been removed; this is already making it easier for foreigners to get to know the Soviet Union.

My correspondent from Moscow writes that the "Metropole restaurant is now the brightest spot in town, with a good, well-lighted cocktail bar and carp gambolling around the fountain in the main hall. The fifteen-piece band continues to drive customers to the far end of the restaurant. Favourite dish is Kievskii cutlet with chips, carrots and peas. This is something really tasty, chicken rolled up into the form of a chicken's leg, battered and fried so that it retains the juices which spurt out all over the waistcoat unless the thing is attacked with care." It is more than seven years since I tasted that delicious dish.

In the shops, too, there is more to buy, both of Soviet products and of goods that have come in from abroad as reparations or have been brought back by the armies of occupation. Fine German cameras, which would go for £30 or £40 in London, can be bought for 600 roubles in the commission shops; American field glasses can be had for 270 roubles and there are microscopes and other miscellaneous optical equipment on sale. The second-hand bookshops are well stocked with French and German classics and western books on art; they will all find readers.

During the war private initiative found its outlet in the peasant markets described on page 66. While this was lawful in itself, the high prices that could be obtained were a temptation to abuses of various kinds. In particular many peasants, not content with working their own gardens, took over land that belonged by rights to the collective farms, so that the Soviet agricultural system began to get out of gear. The Government has adopted two complementary remedies. A new Council for

Collective Farm affairs has been given the task of spring cleaning the organisation of the Collective Farms and seeing that they stay on the right lines.

At the same time it has been announced that co-operative trading is to receive facilities on an altogether new scale. It is too soon to say how this will turn out, but evidently the intention is to provide a constructive outlet for local initiative. What was done by the peasants with doubtful legality during the war as individuals is now to be done on a co-operative basis with at least some state backing.

Public transport is still crowded, and one of the latest music-hall songs runs something like this:—

“We have a wonderful metro,

We have a wonderful metro,

But we can't get on to the metro, etc. . . .”

This song comes in *Ordinary Concert*, the current show at the puppet theatre. My correspondent asks where else “would you first of all get the unending patience required to produce a show like this, the mimicry so deeply studied and the puppets so painstakingly made. The first act shows an ensemble of 60 (I counted them) puppets, two rows of women and four of men, each puppet with a different face and each face a caricature of any Russian face at any time.

“All these dolls, conducted by a puppet who is like any conductor, sing away . . . Each section takes its proper part of the melody; some hum, some bellow full-throated, some take tenor, some bass . . .

“There are nine or ten scenes, each announced by the puppet announcer who is a caricature, again perfectly done, of a well-known Moscow character.”

One scene is a take-off of a gypsy chorus. “Not a gesture is missed; even unto the dancing gypsy, for all the world like the — Ambassador, in the middle of his elaborate tap dance, putting his hand to his shoulder to hitch up his little jacket, in danger of falling off—and the rather gaunt but still game woman in the ‘family’ at the back, whispering something to her neighbour while the dance proceeded . . . This puppet company is having a new theatre built; they do deserve it. Incidentally, tickets for this particular show are harder to get than any in the city . . . I had the ‘Blat’ to snap up a couple.”

Satire is an essential part of the Soviet conception of press and stage, but the satirist's path is not easy. It is reasonable in all the circumstances that artists in the Soviet Union should be expected to direct their activities to a social end, but in practice the specification has been so narrow that men and women, whose patriotism is not called in question, have been reprimanded in terms that may make it very difficult for them to find a publisher. Satire that misses the official bullseye and poetry that distracts from the daily task are frowned upon.

Eighty years ago Saltykov-Shchedrin, the greatest of Russian satirists, wrote of that half-real town in which he places his "Provincial Sketches": "Yes, I love thee, distant region touched by none. Thy expanse and the simplicity of thy inhabitants are dear. And if my pen touches often upon those strings of thy organism which sound an unpleasant and false note, that is not from want of warm sympathy with thee but just because these sounds reverberate sadly and with pain in my soul. There are many ways of serving the common cause; but I make bold to think that to unmask malice, lies and vice is also not without use, all the more so because it presupposes complete sympathy with goodness and truth."

We have the best authority for saying that the Soviet Union is not perfect, and a little freedom to indulge in old-style satire might well do more good than harm. But, if there is a Saltykov-Shchedrin among us to-day, he remains silent. Not that the Soviet press and hierarchy are sparing in their criticism of abuses that come to light. "Self criticism" is certainly one of the strong points of the Soviet régime, but the criticism itself too often bears the stamp of official deliberation. This is to use the Beelzebub of official control to cast out the devil of bureaucratic inefficiency. Red tape cannot be abolished by sealing wax.

The Soviet Government is paternal, and like all paternal governments it tends to become too paternal. The sense in which the Soviet people are invited to take part in politics is the same as that in which the men of the 8th Army were invited to take part in strategy. The overall plan is explained to them with care and often with sympathy, but it is not they who control the decisions.

It is not the purpose of this book to forecast the future, and if the reader presses me to say how I expect the social life of the



Soviet Union to develop, I can only reply: "Wait and see; the future is sure to hold surprises for everyone, but you will be less surprised if you observe with sympathy for Russian aspirations and if you can remember that the Russians are men and women of like passions with ourselves."

Much of what passes for the foundation of the Soviet State is little more than the expression of an economy that has long been based on shortages. But in the end shortages will go, and after that it would be rash to prophesy what new paths Soviet life may not find. When, for instance, the forests of Siberia begin to supply pulp for paper on an American scale the whole system of priorities in literature will cease to have meaning.

When all is said and done it is easier to criticise than to rule the Soviet Union. Whatever has been done has been decided in the midst of pressure and shortages which would make the life of most Western statesmen seem a country holiday. Discussion must of necessity be curtailed, and it is not surprising if the authorities find themselves disciplining the intellectual life of those in their charge rather in the manner of the powers that be at an old-fashioned public school.

In spite of all difficulties a firm foundation for a rising standard of life has been laid. There are, moreover, solid grounds for hoping that the ultimate trend of Soviet society is towards a fuller and happier life, though there may also be legitimate fears that progress will sometimes be slow. Only one thing is certain: no country can stand still. *Πάντα ῥεῖ*, all things are in flux.

## THE VALUE OF THE ROUBLE BEFORE DECEMBER, 1947

Rouble prices are misleading unless they are fully explained. To begin with there is no easy way of converting roubles into pounds. The official rate of exchange is 21 roubles to the pound; foreign missions are legally entitled to buy roubles for their staff at a special diplomatic rate of 48 roubles to the pound and some foreign embassies give their staff an exchange compensation allowance. The purchasing power of money depends however not on any of these rates, but on where the money is expended and by whom.

Rent and transport cost little and a minimum of rationed goods is provided at controlled prices. In the poorest families most of the wages go on buying the barest necessities at controlled prices, while those whose work is more valuable receive progressively higher rations, higher wages and access to better shops where again the right to buy varies according to the rating of the purchaser's job. The picture is complicated and to simplify would be to mislead, but the following family budget gives a rough idea of how things might work out in an ordinary Moscow worker's family at 1944 prices. I have imagined a married couple with two children and a grandmother living at home. The man works in a factory where he earns 675 roubles a month, and his wife is an office worker with a salary of 325 roubles, so that the total family income is 1,000 roubles a month. This is roughly how they would spend their money :

	Roubles
*Taxes and subscriptions to Trade Unions, State Loan, etc.	300
Rationed food (see pp. 64-65)	300
Rent	50
Other expenditure at controlled prices including some clothes (cp. p. 58), transport, entertainment and a little household equipment	200
Total	850

This leaves 150 roubles for expenditure at uncontrolled prices. If the family decided to buy food in the open market, they would have had to pay approximately the prices shown in the following table; rationed prices for 1944 and for the present moment are shown in separate columns for comparison.

	1944 Open Market Price in roubles per lb.	1944 Rationed or Controlled Price in roubles per lb.	September, 1946, Rationed or Controlled Price in roubles per lb.
Black Bread ..	13.5	0.45	1.5
Butter ..	270	12.4	29
Meat ..	90	6.3	13.5
Tea ..	270	40	?
Sugar ..	315	2.25	6
Potatoes ..	7	0.4	?
Rice ..	113	3	8.5
Milk, per pint..	25	1.5	?
Eggs (each) ..	15	1	?

For goods in the commercial shops our family would have had to pay the following prices in roubles :

	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Men's Clothes</i>		
Suit .. .. .	4,500	13,500
Shirt .. .. .	500	1,000
Woollen socks .. .. .	270	—
Shoes .. .. .	1,500	6,000
<i>Women's Clothes</i>		
Coat and skirt .. .. .	3,500	6,500
Dress .. .. .	1,000	4,000
Cotton shirt .. .. .	280	—
Cotton stockings .. .. .	60	280
Silk stockings .. .. .	280	450
Jersey .. .. .	800	1,500
Shoes .. .. .	1,800	5,000
<i>Household Goods</i>		
Aluminium saucepan .. .. .	300	750
Electric iron .. .. .	600	—
Cup and saucer .. .. .	60	—
Tumbler .. .. .	40	150
Soap (tablet) .. .. .	50	150
Comb .. .. .	40	80

Since 1944 progressively more goods have been coming on to the market. Open market prices are roughly halved and household goods are down by a third, but the prices of clothes are little altered.

On the other hand, the prices of essential rationed goods have been more than doubled, as is shown in the second table above.

Wages remain about the same, except that the wages of the lowest paid workers have been increased by about 100 roubles a month to offset the increase in the price of bread. It is the intention of the Soviet Government to reduce in stages the difference between controlled prices and the open market.

Medical services and most education are free.

January, 1947.

\*NOTE.—No two families would spend their money exactly alike, but the following break-up of expenditure on taxes, etc., and food would be typical :

	Roubles
War tax .. .. .	100
Income tax .. .. .	50
Trade Union subscription, say .. .. .	50
Voluntary subscription to State Loan say .. .. .	80
Miscellaneous subscriptions, say .. .. .	20
<b>Total .. .. .</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>Rationed Food for family of five for month :</b>	
145 lb. bread .. .. .	70
11½ lb. meat .. .. .	73
14½ lb. cereals .. .. .	40
6½ lb. fats .. .. .	50
7 lb. sugar .. .. .	16
7 oz. tea .. .. .	18
Miscellaneous .. .. .	30
<b>Total .. .. .</b>	<b>300</b>

## WHAT THE NEW ROUBLE WILL BUY

In December, 1947, the Soviet Government issued a new rouble currency, whose exchange value remains, as before, 21 roubles to the pound, though 21 roubles still will not buy anything like £1 worth of goods. Wages remained unchanged and the new currency was exchanged rouble for rouble against the old in all official transactions. But in order to catch hoarders of notes, cash in the hands of the public was devalued by 90 per cent.; private banking accounts of over 3,000 roubles and holdings in state loans were devalued by a proportion which varied with the circumstances of the case. This is not the place to discuss the economic consequences of the currency reform, but I am prepared to hazard a guess that in the towns at least the amount of cash in the hands of the public was not particularly large. If a Russian has money he buys something with it almost at once.

By the same decree rationing and differential prices were abolished. How does this affect the typical family of town workers whose family budget for 1944 was analysed on pp. 240-41?

Their wages are not changed by the new decree, nor is their expenditure on rent, taxes, gas and electricity. But it is reasonable to assume that the family income had already been increased by about 200 roubles as part of the adjustment of wages necessitated by the increase in rationed prices in September, 1946. This gives the family an income of 1,200 roubles a month or about £57 at the official rate of exchange. Assuming that taxation, subscriptions, etc., remain as before, about three-quarters of this sum remains for other purposes.

The new uniform prices are on the average about the same as the 1947 rationed prices and much lower than the old commercial prices. Assuming that it costs our family 300 roubles a month at the new prices to buy the equivalent of their old rations, and that 50 roubles goes on rent and 100 roubles on small incidentals, they are left with something like 450 roubles a month for extra food, for clothing and for amusements. This works out at about 110 roubles a week or rather over £5 at the official rate of exchange.

This sounds a lot of money but how far will it go? The family will be able to eat their fill of bread, potatoes and cereals without straining their purses and it is reasonable to assume that these staples will be on sale in unlimited quantities. After the new arrangements came into effect there were bad failures of distribution in certain cities, but these difficulties seem to have been overcome and it is scarcely conceivable that any Russian Government would make the blunder of abolishing bread rationing without making sure that the grain reserves would stand the strain. It can scarcely be taken for granted, however, that other commodities, such as radio sets for instance, will always be available in the shops.

Fats will be more of a problem. Unrefined sunflower seed oil which is the cheapest form of fat costs 5s. per lb. It is possible to acquire

a liking for the taste, though I have not done so, but there is a limit to one's consumption of sunflower seed oil and other forms of fat are very expensive; butter, for instance, is 27s. 3d. per pound.

The following table of prices may be compared with pp. 240-41. Prices differ between town and country and between different parts of the Soviet Union by about 10 per cent. above or below the average. Those given here are for Zone II, which includes Moscow and Leningrad.

<i>Food</i>	Unified Prices (after December, 1947)		
	Roubles per lb.	£	s. d. per lb.
Black bread .. .. .	1.35		1 3
Sunflower seed oil (unrefined) .. .. .	5.4		5 0
Butter .. .. .	29	1	7 3
Tea .. .. .	72	3	8 3
Sugar .. .. .	6.75		6 4
Potatoes .. .. .	0.45		5
Milk, per pint .. .. .	2	1	11
Eggs, each .. .. .	1.4	1	3
Beef .. .. .	13.5	13	0

N.B.—Potatoes in Moscow cost over 3s. per pound at the beginning of December, 1947, and before the harvest about 9s. per pound.

<i>Men's Clothing</i>	Roubles	£	s. d.
Suit (semi-wool) .. .. .	430	20	3 1
Suit (wool) .. .. .	1,400	65	12 6
Socks .. .. .	17		16 1
Shoes (black calf), per pair .. .. .	260	12	3 9

<i>Women's Clothing</i>	Roubles	£	s. d.
Cotton, sateen, mercerised (24½ in. wide), per metre .. .. .	25.20	1	4 0
Pure wool (53½ in. wide), per metre .. .. .	450	18	19 6
Dress (cotton) .. .. .	70	3	12 3
Dress (wool) .. .. .	510	23	18 0
Cotton stockings, per pair .. .. .	7		6 9
Nylon stockings, per pair .. .. .	40	1	18 0
Shoes (black calf), per pair .. .. .	260	12	3 9

<i>Household Goods</i>	Roubles	£	s. d.
Comb .. .. .	4		3 10
5-valve radio .. .. .	600	28	2 6
Soap (household) .. .. .	6		5 8
Soap (toilet) .. .. .	18		17 2

Soviet nylons are something new. It remains to be seen how easy they will be to get.

P.S.—A friend in Moscow writes that the currency reform appears to have "killed inflation and all its evils at one stroke. You can see that there is less speculation and that roubles are really worth something," though they are not, of course, worth 21 roubles to the pound.

The same friend says that "you can get an excellent meal in a Moscow second-class restaurant now for about 25 roubles" (say 24/-). First-class restaurants cost about half as much again. Sausage in a second-class restaurant costs about 4/6 per lb. Beer is about 11/- a bottle and Soviet Madeira about 15/- a glass.

March, 1948

J.W.L.

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