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AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN THE U.S.S.R,

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ENGLISHWOMAN
IN THE U.S.S.R.

By
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PUTNAM
43 GREAT RUSSELL STREET
LONDON

First published October 1940
Reprinted January 1941

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW

TO
LEV, GEORGE, AND
ANNA ELIZABETH

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AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN THE U.S.S.R.

CHAPTER ONE
TYPIST AT THE EMBASSY

into their own hands and brought to a halt the fighting on at least one front.

When the Russian Workers' Government made public the secret treaties between the Allies (of which Tsarist Russia was one), my father and his colleagues published them for all in Britain, who chose, to read and understand.

Later too, when Councils of Action were set up throughout Britain to demand that the blockade against the Workers' State should be withdrawn, my father gave them every support in the *Herald*.

All this was not without its very strong influence upon me, and it was not surprising that I started work on my new job with great enthusiasm.

I was interested above all in those people from Russia, with whom I was now to work; that interest grew later into a strong bond of affection for Soviet people in general.

We English tend to think of Russia as a country where only Russians live. Working there in the Russian Trade Delegation, which later became the Soviet Embassy, perhaps the first thing I grew to realise was the large number of different peoples to be found in that country which, even to-day, twenty years and more later, is still loosely referred to as Russia.

When the country which had set up the Soviet system of government adopted its new, more appropriate name, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, I became still more impressed at the vastness of the country. It was not just Russia, but the Ukraine, White Russia, Caucasus, Crimea, Georgia, and several other republics. Besides the republics, there were the big autonomous regions. And all these republics and autonomous regions were bound together in fraternal relations in one big Soviet Union. The peoples of the different republics were quite separate as regards language, customs, culture and so on.

And yet, even to-day, there are people here in England who have no idea of this simple fact. I call to mind recently a

working woman who, surprised, said: "But all Russians are Jews, aren't they?" And I asked myself, where is the education, the culture, all those good tilings, which the civilised people of Britain are supposed to possess? How can one hope to get people to understand what is going on in the Soviet Union, when they do not even know what a vast country it is, what a variety of nationalities are to be found there? And holding the views I do, is it surprising that I should then ask myself: is all this ignorance deliberately fostered? And, turning to the newspapers of the last few months and seeing the sort of news one finds in them about the Soviet Union, am I to be blamed for believing that this ignorance is the result of a calculated policy?

In those days, in 1920, I was not an ardent reader of the Press, so it never entered my head that there could be such deliberate falsification of news, deliberate misrepresentation. It was only later that that came. Perhaps it was fortunate for me that the newspapers never appealed to me very much.

And so, for me, "Russia" had to be these people in the Embassy, who had come from far away where there was a workers' republic, and who would ultimately return there.

I had little to do with the chiefs of the delegation. The secretary I occasionally saw; he was a Russian emigrant and had worked in England for many years. He had been taken on to the staff after the delegation arrived in England, and for me, therefore, was of no particular interest. I felt he knew little more about revolutionary Russia than I did, except by virtue of his work.

The same applied to the under-secretary: a woman, with whom I found it not at all easy to work, because she was of a nervous temperament, was very keen to please the chiefs, and unconcerned about how and when we officers worked. Many was the time when the Russian typist took matters into her own hands, trooped down to the secretary, and gave him a piece of her truly Soviet mind. With the advent of the revolution in Russia, all kow-towing to the chiefs and unfair

relations towards the smaller fry on the staffs of Soviet institutions were thrown out. My good typist friend from Russia kept to this standard, in spite of the efforts of the under-secretary, trained in English offices, to introduce the master-versus-man methods.

I remember that this side of life in the Russian Embassy always interested me, and at times there was a certain amount of friction between members of the staff, who could be divided into two parts: the Russian emigrants who retained the old idea about relations with the staff, and those who had come straight from revolutionary Russia.

It may be of interest if I describe one or two of those of the staff with whom I was in daily contact.

There was the Russian typist, Musia, who shared the same little office with me. She was petite, large-eyed, with a mischievous mobile mouth and sparkling white teeth; she sported a "patch" on her right cheek, very small and "fetching", which she put on carefully each morning. And she was never without her cold creams and powders and lipstick and nail varnish.

She came to London from work in an administrative office in Kharkov, then the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. There she had earned just enough to eke out a tolerable existence and had very few good clothes to wear. She assured me that when she was sent from Russia to come to work in London, she had stopped at Riga on her way out to buy clothes, for she had brought from Russia only one change of clothing in a tiny suitcase and the dress, coat and hat she stood up in.

I can believe it. It was 1921 when she arrived in London. The Soviet Government had quelled the Civil War and had barely driven out all the armies of intervention sent against it.

All energies throughout the country were turned towards restoring the demolished factories; it was no time to think specially about clothing. Machinery and food came first.

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When I first was introduced to Musia, she appeared more like a chic little Parisienne, for when she had been given the chance in Riga to get herself an outfit, her choice of clothing had been perfect. She was, and looked, very young. But she had realised herself that something had to be done to give her a more sophisticated appearance, and Musia had successfully put on at least five years to her age, merely by her choice of clothes. But her face gave her away.

In all the years I knew Musia, one thing stood out strongly: her determination to drink her full at the stream of life.

Had she been born ten years later, she would have had a million more opportunities. But she was a child of the revolution period, and she had striven to do the best she could for herself in difficult circumstances.

Hard work studying typing and shorthand at one of the few available evening schools in early revolutionary Russia gave her her opportunity. She was selected from a number of others to come to the Embassy in London.

She had never been particularly interested in party politics, so she told me. It was her humble birth, her miserable childhood, her horrifying experiences during the civil war and intervention, that made her utterly loyal to the Soviet Government. And those who selected her knew well what they were about.

She was the daughter of a regular soldier in the Tsarist army. During the World War he had disappeared and her mother had been left with five children, all girls. As related by Musia, they were kept spotlessly clean, because a washerwoman can best advertise her good washing by the clothing on her daughters. And so Musia's childhood had consisted largely in fetching and carrying bundles of washing; "looking nice", into the bargain, was part of her stock in trade.

In London she never ceased to complain of the greyness of her underclothes since she had entrusted it to the London laundries. Cockney born and bred, it seemed white enough to me.

It was Musia whose unending flow of chatter forced me, out of pure curiosity, to learn all I might about her and at the same time to try and understand the Russian language. And so, as she picked up English, I found myself learning Russian in the pleasantest way possible and in the most charming company.

Musia was vivacious, hard-working and generous-hearted. She was naturally flirtatious. If Musia's face wore a sad expression, I always knew she had fallen in love again, or out of it, but never very seriously.

Finally, back in Russia, she married a member of the staff of the OGPU. He was the last sort of man I should have expected her to look at. In London she ran to rather effeminate, handsome young men. The man she married was stocky, not handsome, but with a good sense of humour, and very reliable. To Kolya she was definitely anchored, and in him she found a real harbour. Wherever Kolya went to work, there was Musia by his side. Sometimes she was a mere housewife; sometimes she had work to do in an office near to him, as in Tbilisi; sometimes she just had to "be a lady", as she put it. Thus, for instance, when her husband was attached to an embassy in the Far East.

But this child of the revolution period was a young woman to be admired; she knew what she wanted; she worked and did her duty because she liked it; and she never looked back.

It must have been no easy task for those responsible persons far away in the Soviet Union who were entrusted with the task of selecting the smaller fry for those early delegations and embassies abroad. When I think of it all now, the task seems to me almost an impossible one. There was no question of using the services of those who had worked under the Tsarist regime; that would have been too risky for a Workers' Government. The revolution, civil war and intervention had pretty well upset the system of education, and people and their families were scattered far and wide.

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So suitable candidates were scarce, especially as only thoroughly reliable people could be trusted abroad.

Yet, during those days of work at the Embassy, I never once stopped to ask myself why the people I worked with had such curious pasts. To me, since they were from revolutionary Russia, they would naturally be a curiously assorted band of people.

For instance, there was Lydia Orlova. She had been trained from childhood as a ballerina, and had performed in Leningrad before the revolution. She was then about thirty, tall, not beautiful, but with the definite features and long, grey, cat-like eyes that are an asset on the stage. During the World War, she had carried on as the artistic world does, and had continued to perform throughout the civil war period in a touring company, entertaining the Red Army men at the front.

She had joined the Communist Party in the early days of revolution, and when she became too heavy for dancing, she had turned to office work. Throughout she had shown herself loyal to the revolution.

I remember her most because she was so demonstrative. I found her outbursts of affection and her deep, resonant, somewhat actressy voice, a little overwhelming; but I submitted to her embraces, not without embarrassment, because I knew her to have a heart of gold and I would not have affronted her for the world. She was a very intelligent woman and very capable at her work. The one unfulfilled desire of her heart at that time was to be a mother; and later in Russia a huge sigh went up among all who knew her when finally she married and ultimately achieved her goal.

The two young men from the cypher room were a source of constant amusement to Musia and me. True, we saw them infrequently, only when they emerged from their sanctum to bring us telegrams in code to type for them. But we made the most of these opportunities.

One of them was a huge fellow over six feet tall. He had

fair hair and the palest blue eyes. His thin-lipped, large mouth always wore a smile, and his attitude in the presence of women had always something deferential about it. I had an idea women were not, however, his best subject.

He quietly adored Musia—so rumour had it. It is certain that he was unobtrusively attentive to her every whim. He would do anything for her, provided it was not against his principles, and it was Musia's delight to ask for things she knew his principles would not allow him to do for her.

"Run and buy me some chocolates!" she would wheedle.

"All right, at five o'clock I'll be through, and I'll fetch them," he would reply.

"No, fetch them now. I shan't want them at five o'clock," she would pout, aping the films she loved to see.

"Musia, you know I can't leave the cypher room for so long," he would plead, in all seriousness.

And Musia would laugh.

"Akh, you noodle, just as though I'd send you out! And anyway, we've got some."

But he never seemed to grow wise to our bantering. He was a quiet sort of fellow, rarely spoke about himself; so I never discovered much about him.

In an argument he would listen carefully to his opponent; he never became ruffled, but tried patiently to explain and to convince.

As a cypher clerk, he was probably perfect. He never worried about what news the cypher cables brought. Yet he worked through what must have been very harassing days for those early Soviet diplomats.

The other cypher clerk was very different. It was certainly not patience that found him his job; very likely, though, he worked more quickly than his colleague.

He was a Latvian and a Communist and from peasant stock. When his wife later joined him, she brought all the roughness and cajolery of the village to that little community and we found her quite a problem. She was per-

petually looking for trouble and never finding it. She remained blunt and rather unloved till the last I saw of her.

We always felt she should never have come to London, but it was the genuine passion that existed between this husband and wife which resulted in permission being given for her to join her husband. As the wife was never tired of explaining, there had been no "marriage by bartering" of the usual kind in peasant families, when she and her husband joined forces. She had chosen her husband herself, and was mighty proud of the fact. To understand the full force of this, one had to know the Russian peasantry in Tsarist days, and the way women were bartered into marriage, frequently at a very early age and against their will.

Our Latvian friend, her husband, would tolerate no jokes. He would turn red as a turkey-cock, throw an insolent remark over his shoulder and stampede out of the room, when we teased him. He frequently said he resented our superior attitude.

I never really came to understand him; for one thing, it was difficult for me ever to know what he was saying, he spoke so quickly and in the semi-dialect which Latvians often use, when speaking Russian. But I gave up joining Musia in her sallies. It would never do for him to think I was a superior Englishwoman. So with me, at any rate, he won his point, if only because his words caught me on a tender spot.

Actually it was our long-legged cypher clerk who bore all the brunt of our fencing with his Latvian colleague. Passing the door of the cypher room, after one of Musia's efforts, we might often hear the voice of the Latvian rising high in fury, while a gentle, yet determined undercurrent of quiet arguing made a comforting accompaniment.

Looking back, I often think that Musia and I together made an impudent couple, and that a much firmer hand was needed with us. Our only saving grace was that we were devoted to our work and ready at all times to do everything that was asked of us.

As for me, I was appreciated above my worth and was well on the way to imagining myself far more important than I really was.

But another good creature came to London from the Soviet Union and helped to put me in my place.

Valentina Ostroumova was the daughter of a priest. She was of medium height, with short cropped hair. Her eyes were round and dark with a merry twinkle; her pearly teeth projected slightly; her cheeks were too rosy for good health; and she was the embodiment of good humour.

It mattered little what tragic, all-engrossing problem I took to Valentina. She would always throw back her head and first laugh at my discomfiture, till, infected, I had to laugh myself.

"That's better," she would say. "How could I talk to you when you looked like that!"

Then she would turn suddenly serious and thrash out the whole business. I early learned that it was as well to be completely undecided if I went to Valentina for advice. For so sure as my mind was half made up, Valentina would decide on just the opposite course. Then there would be a heated argument.

And so, if it was a question on which I could compromise, I usually gave in to her superior judgement. It was, after all, less tiring, for I frequently lost the trend of Valentina's arguments. The Russian language, spoken slowly, was something I could understand with great difficulty. But Valentina's torrent of words was hard enough for the Russians.

She came to London almost straight from the front of fighting against intervention. She had a healthy scorn for the English ruling class, as she had had for the Russian aristocracy, and her scorn was expressed in a total disregard for conventions. Occupying the position she did on the staff, she could not express her opposition to the British *status quo* in any other way.

I remember the first day I arrived to share her London

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rooms with her. She lived in a furnished flat and the landladies had provided us with a whole dresser full of crockery. I had come home before Valentina and found the dresser stripped, and dirty dishes piled up on the draining-board and table.

I turned to and cleared up.

When Valentina came in she was furious.

"*Gospodil*" she declared, "you've not washed all those things? Here have I made arrangements for a woman to wash crocks for me only once a week, on Thursdays, and you have done it all. You haven't come here to be my serving-maid. You are my comrade!"

I was dumbfounded at her fury, though much of her torrent of words was, as usual, lost on me. But her meaning was clear, and she was really angry.

A vision floated before my eyes of the type of Socialist to be found in England, who considers that being revolutionary should reveal itself in dirty collars, dirtier fingernails, greasy unkempt hair and a cap. Surely Valentina was not like that! In her personal appearance, she was always perfectly clean and tidy.

I decided to be firm from the start.

"You'll only have flies everywhere!" I protested. "And revolutionaries don't have to be dirty and untidy!" I added. The words had slipped out.

"Of course not!" retorted Valentina, a bit ruffled. "But I pay a woman to clean up once a week, and if I have friends in on Wednesdays, then I leave the crocks for her as well. Is there anything so very wrong in that?"

I felt very ashamed of my suspicion that the crocks had been piled up throughout a whole week. I was even more ashamed as she went on.

"You know, Violet," I heard her saying, "now you're with me you've got to read and be interested properly in things. Furthermore, my dear, you're going to learn Russian. I can't talk to you if you can't speak Russian. And one

day you will go to Russia. Meanwhile, can't you forget about housework for a bit?"

I saw a vision before me of lots of learned books and stodgy textbooks and I almost shuddered at the thought of it. Fortunately for me, however, Valentina in that one respect never lived up to her word.

Those three months with her were very good. It was something of a privilege to be allowed to enter the circle of Soviet citizens in London at that time. They themselves would gladly have mingled with English people; but in general it was considered unwise in those days. There was already much talk about "Russian propaganda".

On quieter days, when we two were quite alone at home, Valentina showed me photographs of herself, out in the country in the home of Kalinin and his wife in the summer-time, haymaking or weeding with the members of the family.

She showed me others of herself at the front, standing bare-headed alongside an army lorry, taking down a stenographic report of a meeting, for publication in the following day's newspaper. The Red Army men, even in those days, were never without their daily newspapers.

She showed me, too, a photograph of Madame Kollontai, now Soviet Ambassador in Stockholm, the woman on whom Valentina had first modelled herself, as she told me, not without a little embarrassment and a twinkle in her eye. That was way back in her 'teens.

But Valentina's flouting of convention was sometimes very worrying to me.

In Soho, where we might take her to get her the salted herrings and hors-d'oeuvre which were the nearest approach we knew to the *zakuski* she loved, she would jump from soup back to salted herrings, she would demand plain boiled potatoes with butter, and then wind up with a glass of milk in the most disconcerting fashion, much to the horror of the epicurean French waiters.

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Once her infectious laughter rang out in the House of Commons. How out of place it seemed! Yet, why should one not laugh there?

I remember, on that occasion, my father was conducting a number of Russians with me round the House. Valentina, who was so wise and splendid in other ways, could not refrain, when shown the worm-eaten timbers of St. Stephen's Hall, from saying:

"Why, we've plenty of rotten old beams like that in Russia!"

Father laughed. He flouted conventions almost like Valentina herself. And he was far too wise not to understand how she felt in general about the *status quo* and ancient traditions of England.

But I was young, and I felt it was an unnecessary comment, reflecting on my father. I considered that Valentina ought to know better how and when to joke. But she was quite irrepressible.

Somehow there was always a barrier of my own erection between this Valentina I loved so much and me. Here, it was not that I was a "superior Englishwoman". Rather was it that Valentina had acquired, through her experiences, a sense of values of which I had nothing. She was actually years and years older than me in knowledge and experience. Sometimes I felt she was really too good for words, almost a prig and that only her humour saved her.

And again, I never managed to convince Valentina that I had any commonsense at all. Later, in the Soviet Union, when she heard I had married, she came especially to meet my husband and right there, in his presence, declared:

"What a one you are, Violet! Always doing the wrong thing! Fancy coming all the way to the Soviet Union to marry an intellectual and a grandson of the landed gentry into the bargain! He'll just make a housewife of you. He will be the great mind and you'll just trail along at best his shadow. Why couldn't you marry a good Russian working

man, who would have been your real **comrade, and** from whom you might have learned something?"

I was still unchanged enough to be a bit horrified. But my husband took it aD in good part. It was several years before I became thoroughly accustomed to the outspoken ways of Soviet people, and saw how much misunderstanding was avoided in the little everyday things of life.

Looking back, almost everything about Valentina seems right. She was firm about her work and so long as her work absorbed her and her services were needed, she had no time to develop her more womanly side. Several years after the October Revolution, when many more had been trained to help in the great work of building Socialism, and Valentina felt she could afford to drop out of things for a while, she shouldered motherhood with the rest. But she never allowed home life to engross her.

Even with her son, something of the crank remained in her. She chose to live alone, refusing to have her husband in the same house.

"But why, Valentina?" I asked. "Don't you need your husband's companionship? And what does the boy think about having no father?"

"First of all, Violet, he has a father. And once when he asked me why his father did not live at home here, I explained to him that he would not want his mother always tidying and pottering about after her husband. Yet, if his father lived at home, that is what I would find it necessary to do."

"And what did your son say?" I queried.

"I think he understood. Anyway, he is quite happy. He has plenty of companionship in the kindergarten. There is hardly room in his day for me and his father," she assured me.

This problem as to whether children need their parents by them if they have good kindergartens and schools is one **that** worries people.

In my humble opinion, not every mother or father is the

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best companion for a child. But to discuss this point would require a whole book in itself. The great thing in the Soviet Union is that the education of the very young is considered very carefully, and no parents are coerced into the work of training the young, by force of their economic circumstances. A careful balance is preserved, for those who would use it, between the influence of the home and parents and the influence of the state and school.

To-day, her tuberculosis patched up and her health constantly guarded by skilled Soviet medical men, Valentina is doing a great piece of work as Director of the Political Section of the Northern Sea Route Administration; she is also Secretary of the Igarka City Committee of the Communist Party. That she was a born leader revealed itself even here, in London, nearly twenty years ago, among her own Russian colleagues.

A book I recently picked up, *I Went to the Soviet Arctic*, by Dr. Ruth Gruber, describes Valentina as Igarka's Stalin. Only those who know of the great work being done in that new Arctic port of Igarka and who understand the tremendous part played by Stalin in the Soviet Union as a whole, can really appreciate to the full that compliment to Valentina Ostroumova.

CHAPTER TWO

I GO TO RUSSIA

AFTER FIVE YEARS work in the Soviet Embassy in London, there arose an opportunity for me to go to the Soviet Union, which I accepted.

In October of 1925 I travelled across Europe to the Land of Soviets.

I remember the curious feeling I had, passing under the archway erected on the frontier which divided this new world from the old, when I read the inscription on it: "Workers of all Lands, Unite!" It was an indescribable feeling, which only one who has been brought up in the traditions of the Socialist movement can feel.

I remember too the totally different atmosphere I felt on the Soviet side of the frontier. It expressed itself in the difference between the Latvian officials, in whom were retained something of the officiousness and jauntiness and overbearing mannerisms of Tsarist officials, and the Soviet frontier officials, who, though stern and businesslike, were at least human. There was a vast difference, and I have noticed it too when travelling over the Polish border, between the superficial politeness and even obsequiousness of the Polish and Latvian officials and the straightforward, unbending firmness and helpfulness of the Soviet officials. There was more in that difference of atmosphere, but it would need somebody better able to write than myself to explain it.

Arrived at the Moscow terminus, I picked my way through bundles, baskets and peasants; bearded young men, old women with crab-apple faces, younger ones with clinging babies.

One group in particular caught my eye. The members of it looked bedraggled, yet picturesque. A mother was seated on a hamper, suckling a very young baby; **huddled in the**

full skirts of her sheepskin coat was another child, its head in her lap, fast asleep. By her side, sprawled on the ground, his head on a sack, was a young, bearded man, gazing up at the ceiling. An older woman completed the picture; she was almost toothless, but without doubt was enjoying her meal of black bread, salted cucumber and slices of sausage.

It was perhaps the young woman whose figure stood out brighter on the background of drab browns and blacks and the greyiness of the general spectacle of that vast station hall. Her sheepskin coat was not of the usual black, but a ginger colour. She wore a dull-red flowered shawl on her head and wound, Russian-fashion, round her neck. Her skin at the neck and breast was very white against the permanent tan of her face, and her babe was wrapped, parcel-fashion, in an eiderdown of bright mauve.

The air of the hall was heavy with a curious smell of garlic, makhorka and a strong odour of smoke, common to most big stations in the Soviet Union.

There was something medieval about the clothing of these peasants and travellers: the shaggy fur caps, the tight-fitting bodices of their sheepskin coats and the full skirts, gathered at the back; the coloured stitching down the length of the middle-front and round the bottom edge.

Many of them wore huge shoes of plaited bark over thick linen, swathed round the feet and up the legs like puttees. The shoes were secured by strings, criss-crossed up the legs to the knee.

There were a few seats in the hall, but they were all occupied, and it seemed strange to me to see so many people standing, seated or lying around at a terminus.

"Arc they all waiting for trains?" I asked. And I felt even as I asked that my remark was superfluous.

"Of course," was the reply.

"Are they so exhausted that they cannot just stand and wait? It is so difficult to pick your way through so many 'corpses' lying around/'

"They are certainly tired. Many of them have travelled all night already, arriving at some other railroad terminus in another part of Moscow. They may have been here all day, waiting for the evening train out to their destinations."

It seemed to me there was something wrong somewhere, but I did not pursue the question then.

We were by now out of the station and I looked at the picture before me. Almost like toyland, everything seemed so small.

A long road ran as far as I could see to the left and to the right, as I stood. It was a wide road, paved with cobblestones, like London in the days of Dickens. The road needed repairing: it was raining and the puddles were deep.

Across the road was a line of shops and houses. It was they that gave the toy-like appearance against the broadness of the road. They seemed so tiny. They were built of wood and the eaves and windowframes were adorned with what, in the distance, looked rather like fretwork.

Single-decker trams coursed down the road, adding to the impression that everything was tiny.

I was distracted from my gazing by the voices of my companion and the drozhky driver, which had risen high above the general hubbub. I had often heard my father tell, with great amusement, of similar altercations both in Finland and Russia. They were haggling about the price of the fare.

I watched my companion move away and approach the next coachman, and as he did so, I was amused to note that instead of being incensed at being turned down, the first driver merely shrugged his shoulders and settled down to roll himself a cigarette. The period of the New Economic Policy was a good one for these men. Later, when buses and trolleys and taxis and the underground were added to the humble trams, this form of hvehhood dropped out, and these once dictatorial drozhky drivers were squeezed off the **streets** into other occupations.

The second coachman in the line was more amenable, or was it merely that his equipage was so decrepit that his bargaining was handicapped?

I stepped, or rather stumbled, into the vehicle.

Now, when you step on to a bus, you step on to *terra firma*, and there is nothing really daring in stepping on to a bus, even when it is in motion.

But this vehicle seemed to crumple under my weight; the footstep grated against the kerb, and I was almost thrown into the seat.

"*Gospodi*" I ejaculated, using the Russian "good lord!", which was always on the tip of my tongue when caught unawares.

My companion scrambled in more gracefully, smiling at my discomfiture.

I have never liked travelling behind a horse. I eyed this horse warily. It was definitely undersized compared with the horses still to be seen on the streets of London, and I anticipated the worst.

It set off at a miserable pace, barely trotting, but after a few moments I resigned myself to the belief that we would eventually arrive safely at our destination. It was not comfortable travelling; I felt, as in slow motion, every shake and jolt of the wheels over the uneven cobblestones. Not that the springs were bad. On the contrary, the carriage was almost too well sprung, and it was as much as I could do to keep a grip on the all too narrow seat.

My companion turned to me:

"Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes," I assured him. "How long will it take?"

"About thirty-five minutes ought to do it now," he replied.

I resolved to forget the discomforts and take in the scenery. Thirty-five minutes seemed to me a long time. This was something nobody had warned me of; I had thought at worst I should travel by tram.

What a backward country this Russia truly was! No taxis, no buses, no underground. There was the alternative of the tram, with several changes, or this obsolete vehicle known as the *drozhky*. Yet the people had changed their system of government; they were marching towards Socialism. It seemed almost incredible. But the spirit was there... .

By this time we were on a road paved with ordinary granite blocks and it was easier going. We were passing down the Myasnitskaya, now known as Kirov Street. On either side were high buildings, large shops and offices; it had been one of the big business centres in Tsarist days, and it has again become one of the centres of Soviet business life.

The rain continued. I was cold and damp and for a few moments almost despondent. Where was I going? What would I do? How would I manage? Would I like the people I would have to meet? My natural sociability had completely left me.

I thought of home, cursed myself for being romantic, half-wished I had never undertaken this adventure. But my bridges were burned at least for just as long as my pride prevented me from returning to England.

Actually I was very weary, though I did not realise it. All the impressions of the last three days had affected me.

But the mood passed as new sights were brought before me. There in front was a white wall; beyond it a higher red brick wall with green turrets and loopholes; behind and above it there towered buildings, golden domes and spires. I could not fail to recognise the Kremlin.

The thought flashed through my mind that I was indeed privileged. Not many ordinary, everyday English people had this chance of being in Moscow, of taking in everything to be seen and heard there, of trying to understand the great October Revolution and the Soviet Government which had held its own in the midst of a hostile world for just eight years.

There was something really new here, that I really wanted to fathom.

Again I was awakened from my day-dreaming by a loud clanging nearby. It came from the belfry of a little church, which rose before us right in the middle of the road. We were on the Okhotny Ryad, the home of the provision merchants, the happy hunting-ground of the more privileged, moneyed people of Tsarist Moscow.

There was something harsh and imperative, almost aggressive, in those bells, and their tune was not pleasing to the ear. London bells I had always liked; I had liked to walk through the streets of the City on Sundays; to hear the hymns played out on the church bells. To me they always sounded like a child at a piano, confidently thumping out each single note with one finger, making no mistakes. They were musical bells.

To me, these Moscow bells sounded "jangled, out of tune and harsh". What a long way away Shakespeare and school seemed now!

I grew to loathe those Moscow bells, and it was with great relief that I learned one day that they would never ring again in the towns, but could only raise their harsh voices in the countryside.

We left many churches behind on our journey across Moscow. Some could be passed over, as one would pass over bad reproductions of masterpieces. Others were so very beautiful that they took my breath away: their high shoulders, their Byzantine contours, their domes, coloured and be-starred, their wondrous golden "laced" crosses—these were things that could hold believers by their beauty alone, and they have remained as valuable remnants of first-class architecture of past ages.

At last we arrived at our destination; we had passed down a narrow turning off the Arbat Street, and we now drew up at a high, double-doored, wooden gateway between two houses; on the left a bungalow of wooden beams like the first houses I had seen outside the station, the other a three-storied brick house.

A wicket-door in the right-hand gate was open, and we passed through into a cobbled courtyard. We were met by a young woman, short, neatly dressed, her black hair parted in the middle, Russian fashion, and knotted in the nape of her neck. Her face was small, swarthy and freckled.

"You've arrived," she said as she led me to the farther end of the courtyard and through the door of a two-storeyed brick house.

"So you are the Violet we've heard so much about!" she said, when we were inside; she pronounced my name with difficulty. I felt very embarrassed and at a loss to know what to say.

At the back of my mind I wondered what she had heard about me. No doubt she thought me stick-in-the-mud, smug, all those things foreigners usually attribute to English people. Her voice broke in on my thoughts.

"You aren't a bit like I thought you would be. Nobody told me what you looked like. I always imagined that English women were tall and slim and very proud. You look like any Russian; perhaps even German, but never English."

I protested that there were thousands like me in London: of middle height, broad, inclined to be stocky. As I spoke I recalled the thin, slender, fragile-looking factory girls of Bow, and thought perhaps I was giving a wrong impression after all. Then I remembered that the Russian people could only know English women who had lived in Russia, or those women of the upper middle class or of Victorian days, written about so well by Dickens and Thackeray. The heroines were rather like that, and given to fainting. I had to prove somehow to these Russians that I was quite a usual English type.

Many times, on meeting Russians, I was brought right up against this problem of why it was I clashed with their idea of what an English woman ought to be, and I came to the conclusion that I was right in putting myself forward as a typical English woman. Among the great mass of women in England, as with the great mass of ordinary, child-bearing

women throughout Europe, the height is not tall, but average, the figure is somewhat stocky, and the haughty manner is entirely absent.

"You must be tired," Manya said.

"Yes, I think I am," I replied, half-ashamed at my readiness to avoid conversation and to hide myself away in bed.

'Til make some tea, and you're probably hungry."

"Oh no, not hungry. I seem to have done nothing but eat and drink on the trains. But I would like tea."

Manya left the room. I looked round. The room contained the bare necessities which ordinarily a whole house holds; but everything unessential was absent. There was the divan, on which I was seated. It was covered with a hand-woven coverlet of brown, with a border pattern of cross-stitch. I was to see many of the kind while in Russia.

Along the wall, the whole length of the divan, was another hand-woven strip about three *cet* deep, in reds and browns and whites. There was a tiny photograph of Lenin and another photograph of a young Red Army man in uniform on a little dressing-table in one corner, which also held a brush-and-comb peeping out from a freshly-laundered, white embroidered linen sachet. There was a tiny vase, but no flowers.

On the window-sill were the usual green plants: one fern-like, two cactuses, a primula not in flower, and something of the small palm variety.

Lace curtains were at the window; they were, I learned later, a relic of Tsarist days, of good lace, retrieved from the war and civil war days by Manya's careful mother. They had belonged to her grandmother.

There was a bookshelf, containing medical books and some of the Russian classics. And behind a screen, there was something more which I did not investigate. After all, I was a visitor.

A small, solid table was in the middle of the room; it was **smaller than the** regulation, marble-topped tables in English

teashops, but it served Manya both for taking meals and for working on between meals. It was covered with another hand-made coloured cloth, the sort of thing in which visitors to Russia take such delight. I never discovered how it was that Russians could tolerate working on tables covered with cloths. It has always been a source of great discomfort to me, even to write a letter on a table covered with a cloth.

The tea came. It was very hot, very weak, and with lemon. I had not then acquired my distaste for tea with lemon, and I enjoyed it and felt refreshed. We were more or less silent, and my thoughts again turned to myself. I was on the edge again of getting cold feet. There seemed to be no other room. There was just the one divan. Where was I supposed to sleep? I was so very tired, that it was all I could do to be moderately polite.

"I think you should go to bed early," said Manya, and I was suddenly afraid that perhaps my face had revealed my tiredness.

"I'm not really tired," I lied. "And don't let me upset all your plans. Perhaps you want to read or work. I can go out for a bit and look around."

But Manya saw through me.

"There will be time for that. Don't stand on ceremony, Violet. You see, we are all very simple and ordinary here, and although everything may seem difficult to you, you will see how happy we shall be. You must be tired. See, this is what I have arranged," and she went off into the details.

The bed was to be mine. As she spoke, she lifted the cover, revealing a spotless interior; a bed fit for a princess.

"You see," she tried to explain, "after the revolution, all the people who had lived under Tsarism in slums had to be given better accommodation. There were to be no homes in cellars and wooden hovels. The big houses were divided up, leaving those who had remained behind in them, mostly serving people, with a fair proportion, and the rest being distributed to needy ones.

"I was given this room, and I am very satisfied. It isn't all it should be, but I am very busy, working for my examinations, and I can't attend to its comforts as I would. For instance, this bed. It is really only a box mattress, mounted on eight bricks." She raised the coverlet; each of the four corners of the mattress was resting on two bright red, new bricks.

"And you have just this one room?" I asked. "How are we going to sleep?" I could contain my curiosity no longer.

Manya's face showed an expression of puzzled surprise. There were thoughts passing through her mind which obviously brought up all sorts of difficulties. I hastened to reassure her.

"Look here, I can dig in anywhere. Can't you have your bed, and put me up something on the floor?"

The shadow left her face.

"I was afraid you would not like sharing the room with me," she confessed. "There is no need for camping out on the floor. I have my trestle bed. I often put up my friends if they stay late with me and would rather not go home. I had intended to fetch it in. That will be all right, won't it?"

She hurried out of the room, and returned with the canvas folding bed, linen, mattress, pillows and other necessities. Deftly she made up her own bed, having first moved the table to make room for it. It looked comfortable enough, yet it seemed unfair to turn her out of her own bed. I resolved to come to some other arrangements with her on subsequent nights. By merely having me to share her room, she was putting herself out enough for me.

"And now you really must go to bed."

"Of course, and I expect you have talked enough English by now," I added. For we had managed as best we could with her little English and my little Russian. The conversation had not been quite so smooth as it is written here.

The stage was set for bed, but I hesitated. Where would I wash. I suspected what was the truth, that there was no bath-

room. I thought of the warnings I had had on leaving England, about germs, typhus and so on.

Again Manya came to my rescue before I had spoken. She was the most intuitive being I have ever met.

"I'll just drop into my neighbour, while you wash and get into bed. Is there anything you need?"

"Where do I wash?"

"How stupid of me. Here, I'll show you."

Behind the screen there was a washstand. But it was nothing like anything I had seen before. There was no water laid on to the room. The washstand was a moveable affair. There was no plug in the bowl, the tap was S-shaped. Water was supplied to it from a zinc cistern, fitted into the high back. The cistern could be filled by lifting the lid at the top, much as one can lift the top of an upright piano. Manya turned the tap to show me how the water flowed. It was a mean trickle. She showed me, too, the cupboard beneath, in which was a large pail, to catch the used water. Then she left me.

I later discovered that where no water is laid on, or where a tenant occupies one room in a flat where there is no bathroom, this is the standard feature of Russia. The alternative would have been for tenants to perform their ablutions under the kitchen tap, or by the well. That would be inconvenient for all concerned.

It was a relief to undress and I turned to the cold water with enthusiasm. I turned the tap and was greeted with an upright spurt of water, straight in the face. I hurriedly turned it back. Then I realised what had happened. If you want an upright spurt of water, you can have it. I later discovered that it had its uses.

The device merely required a little intelligence and attention to the job in hand. I reversed the tap and obtained the required downward stream of water, and for the first time in my life knew what it was to wash under running water. True, I hastened. Somehow I could not believe that the small

supply of water would not run out at an inconvenient moment when I was covered in soap. Neither could I accept the idea that the pail would not run over.

I finished without mishap, and soon understood that the whole contraption was sound enough and that accidents could only really happen to sluts who omitted to empty the pail below as soon as the top supply of fresh water ran out.

I fell into bed with a feeling of well-being, yet my mind was not at rest. What small things can haunt the brain!

Many are the rumours spread *in* England about the uncleanliness of foreigners. I had been warned that Moscow was swarming with bed-bugs. Somehow it seemed impossible, in this spotlessly clean room, yet I eyed the strip of peasant-made cloth which ran along the side of the bed, fearing it might be a suitable home for insects.

When the door opened, and Manya's comely face appeared, I again felt ashamed of my thoughts, and banished them.

It seemed all so unfair that Manya had to empty my pail of water and bring in fresh for herself. I said as much and she laughingly replied:

"Don't worry about that, Violet. He who does not work, does not eat, except in rare cases of old people and invalids. We will not demoralise you here in Russia. We will keep you to your share of the work."

It was this sort of outspoken candour that I met everywhere in Russia and that made life so easy for me right from the beginning. There was no outer veneer of politeness, no hypocrisy. There were no attempts at keeping up appearances, no barriers of class, no inhibitions. It was always the same. Here I helped Manya, so she said, and she helped me and we liked it.

I do not deny that I was lucky. I doubt whether I could have fallen straight into the hands of a more balanced, healthy-minded, intelligent girl, if I had sought throughout the Soviet Union. And I am sure that contact with Manya

did much to give me that confidence in myself which I gradually gained throughout those thirteen years in the Soviet Union. Manya was cultured in the best sense of the word; she kept all the best of the culture that had existed under Tsarism; she had naturally, by virtue of her generous, good nature found that combination of the best in the old and the best in the new world in which she was now living.

Not everybody in the Soviet Union had been so balanced; but the majority were like her.

Manya was in bed, too. I lay, cool and comforted. The small window, called a *fortochka*, the only part of the double window that is opened in wintertime, stood wide open. The very cold air mingled with the very hot atmosphere of the room; I could feel a breeze on my face; I could see the stars shining bright through the little window. It was very peaceful.

From the latch of the window there hung little packets tied to strings. They hung between the inner and outer windows, which also form a feature in Russia and are usually fitted in all cold countries. I wondered what the little packets contained. They were perhaps the only untidy object in the room. I decided to ask Manya in the morning.

I slept and awoke in the morning refreshed and very early. I remembered my fears about insects. There had been none. I ruminated a little, got my regular morning fears under control, and thought of getting up. But Manya was still sleeping and I hesitated for fear of waking her. I lay and cogitated.

Soon Manya roused herself. She moved quietly about the room presumably to avoid waking me. So I broke the tension and called her softly.

"What's the time, Manya?"

"It's early yet. Half-past six."

"Is it convenient for me to get up? I'd like to."

"But you must still be tired, Violet."

"No, I feel perfect. How good it is here, and how fresh the

cold air is. But **it** must be cold outside," and I suddenly thought of washing in very cold water in those complicated circumstances again.

Truly, I thought, I was spoiled. After all, there are thousands of working people in England, throughout the provinces, who have no water laid on to wash in. They have to bring in the water from pumps and wells nearby, and wash in bowls. Here, indeed, was comparative comfort. The water only had to come from the kitchen tap. A minor discomfort, in truth.

Our respective toilets finished, we turned to and together prepared breakfast. Manya brought out her coffee-pot, a blue enamel one, and I followed her to the kitchen.

Here I met with another setback. There was no gas-cooker, only a long brick oven and a fireplace at one end. The system was the same as the old closed grates and ovens still to be found in English homes where there is no gas, where all the cooking is done by a coal fire. The difference was that the stove, where pans and kettles could boil, was very large, as was the oven, while the door which closed in the fire was only about 15 by 20 inches, and the grate went far back for about a yard. In fact, the fireplace was built for long logs of wood.

I afterwards learned that this stove was only used on washing-days once a fortnight, and on holidays, when a great deal of baking was in progress. On washing-days, too, baking was done, as is often the case in England.

On a small table at one end of the kitchen stood a primus stove, and a slow-burning kerosene stove a little larger in size. I had had very little experience with a primus stove before, and I knew nothing about kerosene stoves, which burn with wicks, like lamps. Now, it seemed, it would be a daily part of my life to cook on stoves fed with kerosene, and I did not look forward to the idea with much relish. Manya handled the primus deftly, as she did everything else, and the coffee was soon ready.

The mystery of all the little parcels hanging out there in the cold between the inner and outer window was then solved. I had forgotten about them. As Manya unwrapped them there lay revealed a number of what in England would be delicacies: caviare, rare good sliced salaami and other sausages, cheese, butter; the place from which they had been untied served as a substitute for a refrigerator. You just hauled up the stuff by the strings, for the inner and outer windows were plastered up permanently during the winter. Only the small top part of the window, the *fortochka*, could be opened, and the draught caused by the heat of the rooms inside and the intense cold outside during the winter meant that it required only five or ten minutes for the cold air to rush in completely ventilating quite a large room.

After partaking of breakfast I was inclined to the belief that there is nothing so stimulating as very cold butter, fresh rolls and caviare for breakfast, together with good coffee. In those days there was still good coffee to be obtained, though later it temporarily went off all the markets. There are some who might be revolted at the idea of caviare for breakfast. I can only say that there must be something about Russia which makes it particularly appetising at precisely that early morning meal. Perhaps, too, one has to be in one's twenties, or the taste has to be acquired gradually from early childhood!

We had covered the beds while we breakfasted, but the meal over, we threw them open to the cold air and went out.

"I'm sorry to be dragging you round the shops; it doesn't seem the sort of thing a visitor to the Land of Socialism ought to be doing on her first morning."

"But I'm not going to be a visitor. I shall have ages and ages to see everything. And I like going round the Moscow shops. They are so different from ours in London."

We were walking fast down the street through which the *drozhky* had brought me. The cobbles were trying to my ankles; we town-bred Europeans are very soft.

We turned out of the Sivtsev-Vrazhek Street. I remember it took me months to learn to pronounce it correctly, but I mastered it in the end, by dint of constantly being forced to ask my way. We were on the Arbat Street now. Here were big shops, well stocked, but the majority of them were privately owned. The few co-operative shops were at that time struggling to get the upper hand. It was a hard struggle, for the co-operatives were run on honest lines; the private traders obtained the fine products they had for sale by every possible underhand means known in the world of profit-making and bartering. But of that more later. However, in the main, the co-operative shops provided everything an ordinary working person could desire. The private traders dealt mostly in luxuries and specialties, in things which the majority of the people did not yearn after.

At the kerbs there were peasants, selling wooden spoons, plain and coloured, egg-cups, children's toys, handicrafts, from big baskets. One of the curious features, too, were the women who stood in the kerb, with anything up to fifty aprons slung round their necks, one on top of the other; they had made them out of remnants and were selling to the public at large. I could have watched them peddling their wares, but Manya waved them aside and hurried me on.

"You'll see lots of that here," she said, "and you don't have to buy of the first peddler you meet. As for all those handicraft goods, there is a splendid shop not far from here. One day we will go and see the fine things there, and you can look round the handicrafts museum. Not to-day, though, for I would like you to come with me to the *batty a* (public baths); I'm sure that is what you are wishing for more than anything else."

The ordeal of the *banya* was one I did not relish. I had heard about it and I knew there was no privacy there. I still was mid-Victorian enough to like to wash in private. Still, I determined to do as Rome does, if I had to, and I

readily agreed that hot water would be a good thing. **But** the ordeal was postponed.

Manya's shopping seemed to me a little curious and sketchy. I had put myself entirely in her hands and she seemed only too pleased to take the initiative.

She bought butter, more caviare, more coffee, cocoa, which I discovered was a concession to me, for she knew I liked chocolate, and would probably, therefore, like cocoa. Because of the tremendous amount of cocoa brought to Russia during the years of famine by the Quakers of England and America, she was under the impression that it was almost a staple drink of the English. Actually I had scarcely touched cocoa since I was a child.

She bought salted cucumbers and ham, and a bottle of red wine. I was completely taken aback at the latter purchase, until I discovered, later, that the price was reasonable enough, something more approaching French prices than English.

Then we crossed the road to a large pastrycook's on the corner of the street. This was also a private-owned shop. Pastries were a luxury which the Soviet authorities had not included in their scheme of planning to any great extent. True, pastries could be obtained, made at the "Bolshevik" factory which had been taken over and re-named from a large firm of biscuit manufacturers that had been confiscated and put under workers' control. They were of a fairly good standard, but these others, made by private bakers on the premises were, without doubt, better. Later all private-owned bakeries vanished, failing to compete with the splendid factories and bakeries built and run by the Soviet authorities.

On entering the pastrycook's I was somewhat overawed at the sight of half a dozen women consuming one, two and even three pastries piled up on little plates. There were a couple of chairs available, but the majority stood and ate them, while their shopping bags stood on the floor, at their

feet. Actually, this custom of eating pastries at all times of the day, and even without an accompanying cup of tea or coffee, is common throughout Europe. But I only discovered that later. At the time I was surprised at the habit.

We really are a curious lot, we lower middle-class inhabitants of England. It is considered vulgar to eat in this way in shops; to eat in the streets. There is a small concession: one is not considered, at least among the lower middle-class, vulgar if one conceals a bag of chocolates in the handbag, and surreptitiously pops one into the mouth, preferably when nobody is looking.

What a curious thing gentility is, and how curiously interpreted.

Manya invited me to a pastry, but I refused. Somehow, although I am not exactly conventional, and although my mouth watered at the sight of these dainties, I could not bring myself to eat one, standing there in the middle of a shop. But how one's ways change! I remember a later date, long after the rationing period was over, somewhere about 1933, when I ate the first good pastry and so broke a fast of about four years' duration. Then it did not matter to me that I partook of it in the middle of a newly opened confectioners, run on Soviet lines. I just enjoyed it—and without coffee or tea.

Manya bought eight pastries; it seemed an enormous number for two, but I was unaware of her plans. It was in this shop that I first noticed the use of the abacus. It seemed to me strange that the shopgirl could not work out the cost of eight pastries at 25 copecks apiece, without using this device, which looked to me like a child's educational toy. The only difference was that the abacus she used was of plain wood, while the child's toy for counting consists of a brightly coloured frame, with multicoloured beads threaded on the wires.

Before the revolution, the abacus was used throughout the business world. But the revolution has brought great

changes, and with it counting-machines for offices and better education in arithmetic for the average man and woman. Although the abacus is still stored somewhere under the counter in every shop, it is not used for every simple little calculation. The people of the Soviet Union, growing stronger each day in every way, are learning to rely on their brains for the elementary calculations. Mental arithmetic is now taught in the schools, whereas before there were hardly any schools at all.

There was more work to do when we arrived back at Manya's room with our purchases. Manya's bedclothing had to be folded carefully and laid precisely on top of the divan on which I had slept. All the pillows we slipped each into a hand-woven linen cover; as is the case throughout Russia, the pillows were not oblong but square. They were piled tastefully along the back of the divan; and I soon learned that Manya allowed no one to abuse her pillows. There were other smaller ones for use in the daytime. These were merely decorative; after all, they were for night use, and everything has its special use.

Looking back over the years, and remembering the wreck of a home I allowed my children to reduce mine to, I can well appreciate Manya's care for her property, when some of her more rough-and-tumble students put in an appearance in her well-ordered little home. I would have profited if I had been half as strict as she was. True, she never had children scrambling and pushing about in her rooms, whereas I did; and I never restricted my children very much.

We had dealt with the washstand contraption before we went out; breakfast things too had been disposed of. There remained the daily business of the floor. I had not observed it the night before, but now I saw that it was of splendid parquet and well polished. I could not believe that Manya performed that work as well. True, the mats were small and there was the backyard to shake and beat them in. But I marvelled at the actual flooring.

I turned to Manya as usual for the explanation.

"Once a month a man comes in and turns the whole place upside down. He gives it a good polish, and with care, it remains good for a long time. I merely sweep and polish a little; perhaps only once a week is it necessary to polish, unless there have been many people in."

I noticed a square of linoleum covered the floor behind the screen.

Sweeping and dusting took almost no time, and was done with the *fortochka* wide open. I often wondered, sharing that room and housework with Manya, how the war and revolution and civil war and intervention had not managed to blot out everything of this sort from the minds of people. But when quiet times came the majority reverted to their good habits, and Manya, although a mere child during all those years of upheaval, was now the perfect housewife.

"Tell me a bit about yourself, Manya," I requested, when we had settled down, each into a hard, straight-backed chair drawn up to the centre of the table. "Why are you not at work to-day? Everybody works in the Soviet Union/"

"That is a long story. To-day, for instance, I should be reading for my exams; but knowing you were to arrive I got ahead with my reading beforehand. I could hardly throw you on your own mercy when you arrived, could I? It is good to have a rest-day at the wrong time, isn't it?" she said, pensively, I thought.

"Is your work very hard?"

"It is not easy," she admitted. "You see I have aimed high. I am studying for medicine. I want to be a doctor and am specialising in child welfare and motherhood."

I pricked up my ears. Here was something I would like to know about.

"And how do you do it?" I persisted.

"Well, we combine studies with practical work. Part of the time I am getting ready for my examinations. The other part I am attached to the Institute of Social Hygiene. I shall

go there to-morrow, and the next day I shall be at one of the clinics. It is all planned very well. We are expected to know not only the medical side, but the social side as well. It is useless being only a doctor who prescribes medicines for complaints. One has to get at the root of the matter. To do that, the social side has to be examined. And we in the medical world in Russia are aiming more to eliminate the cause of sickness than to cure it. We cure it by the way. But curing is not enough."

We had breakfasted very early, before eight o'clock. Manya suggested coffee.

We drank coffee and consumed two pastries apiece. It seemed a queer thing to be doing at 11 o'clock in the morning. But everything was queer, and lots of tilings were good. For instance, the cream in the pastries was real cream. The apples, sliced and jellied on the second piece of puff-pastry, also tasted like apples. Somehow, the food I had tasted in Russia seemed to be what it was labelled.

I recalled the universal pastries of London, where the cream is white of egg or custard, and the apples have been so long away from the tree that they might be turnips. I was not indulging in anti-British emotions. Russia and everything Russian was much nearer the soil, nearer the cow, nearer the source of natural things, and I was to notice this right through my stay there. There were very few patent foods; cooking was more troublesome, but the results were better than all the tins and packets of food we consume so readily in England. Out there, it was like having country fare in the heart of the town. And it was, indeed, country fare in most cases, brought in the same morning, straight from the farms of peasants, who had often carried it in on their backs.

I remarked as much to Manya.

"Yes, but you haven't seen the markets yet. I'll take you to the Sukharevka one day, and you will meet my father there. He keeps a small lock-up shop there. Sells textiles, woollens and cottons. He would be proud to meet you."

Again I had the feeling that I could not live up to it. Who was I, anyhow? Everything I said and did would be put down as typical of the English people. What a responsibility! Well, I could only be my natural self, and I could think of many other English people who would probably, nay undoubtedly, behave themselves more badly than I would. And there must be millions like me in England. I could not be really such a deviation from the average English person.

I thanked Manya graciously, though I felt a bit of a hypocrite. I was so unready to meet people.

"What shall we do about dinner to-day? You haven't bought anything, have you?"

"I only make hot meals at home on Sundays, and only then if I don't go home to my people. They live not far from the station you arrived at, in one of those wooden houses that so struck you. You'll like seeing it and we'll go there on Sunday, if you like. To-day, we shall dine with my cousin, in one of the dining-rooms off the Ohotny Ryad."

We chatted about things in general and set off at two o'clock.

"Now, it's rather a long way," Manya warned me. "Would you rather take a tram?"

"I'd rather walk."

The tram experience could wait. Down the Arbat we went, through the Vozdvizhenka, now known as Comintern Street, along the Ohotny Ryad, through the white arches that no longer stand at the entrance into the Red Square. In those days, the Red Square was still cobblestones. A double line of trams filed slowly through it. I turned and looked again at the white archways. There were two, adjoining, and they were not beautiful, to my mind, but they were old. They were even crumbling, and they were a great hindrance to the traffic even then. Later, when Moscow grew into a bustling, hustling city with an abundance of motor traffic on the roads, they became a perfect menace,

and were consequently removed and the road widened. But that was several years later, when asphalted roads were the order of the day in the city, and when the Red Square became beautifully paved and smooth.

For the first time I saw the Mausoleum, standing not very high, its contours very modern, built in brown and black wood. It was the old, original Mausoleum that had been built to take Lenin's body when he died. It is now replaced by a slightly larger, very beautiful stone Mausoleum, in valuable marbles in reds, greys and blacks, from the Urals and other parts of the Soviet Union. A long line of people were standing outside, patiently awaiting their turn to pay homage to the Great Lenin. I was too appalled in those days at the idea of death in general and seeing the dead in particular; consequently I never ventured inside the Mausoleum. It was only later that I broke through my prejudices.

We passed across the Square. My mind went back to the brutal days of feudal barbarism, as I stood by the "Lobnoye Mesto", a circular stone platform, from which sentences of death had so frequently been delivered. But St. Basil's church was very pleasing to the eye. It was like nothing I had ever seen anywhere else; except in picture books. It was difficult to believe that it had been built by grown men, so multi-coloured and so like something from a child's imagination it seemed to me. I do not understand architecture at all, but even the uninitiated could see that in St. Basil's there is a riot of splendid fine combined with a delicacy of treatment, which calls for appreciation. It stands there to-day, a relic of past ages, a living anachronism, and a credit to the hundreds of artisans who must have been involved in its construction.

I thought of the great contrast it must make, standing there on the Red Square on November 7 or May 1, when the parade of the Red Army passes by.

Those feudal days were days of barbarism we are told. But it was barbarism based on ignorance. With all the knowledge of science we have arrived at to-day, what thinking

man can deny that our system to-day is worse than the feudal? What sort of world is this, where a country, desirous of living in peace, is forced to build up huge armaments, because of the menace which hangs over it? Science, and all we have learned since feudal days, has led not to a better understanding among peoples, but to a world where science is prostituted to the meaner desires of man. Science is forced to send people backwards along the road to barbarism. The wheels of history have been turned back.

There is one exception. It is of that exception that I am writing. One-sixth part of the world has thrown aside the system which sends the wheels of history backwards. The people there have hacked, with one fell stroke, at the root of the evil. They have turned science to another road; the road which helps man to make life more wonderful. The fact that part of the science of that country has had to be turned to the production of lethal weapons is due to the fact that the rest of the world has not followed the example of the October Revolution. The rest of the world prefers to remain a world of profit-making for the few, of oppression for the many. No man, with the light of knowledge in his eyes, can deny the truth. There are those who will not see the truth; there are others deprived of the truth.

It was inevitable that I should have these thoughts in my mind. At every step I took in the Soviet Union, my mind became crowded with comparisons and thoughts. They crowded in, in spite of me.

Manya had been silent; meanwhile, we had arrived at our destination, a little dining-room on the corner of a street which ran at right angles to the river embankment. Inside it was very warm. At the door we were requested to leave our coats. I had never acquired the habit of carrying a hand-bag, consequently I had to empty my capacious pockets of cigarettes, handkerchief and purse. This was another of those little irritating habits, which I was forced to adopt. It is a rule in the restaurants of Moscow, that coats are re-

moved before going to the tables. Nobody can deny that it is a good rule. There, in the Soviet Union, part of the expense of running a dining-room had to include the wages of a door-man, who took charge of the coats and goloshes. I rarely wore goloshes, so the inconvenience of removing them never worried me very much. We were handed a square disc of wood with a number on it attached to a string. It was always as well not to lose the disc.

We found a table and took our seats. The table was covered with a linen cloth, not too clean. Obviously there had been several rather careless diners before us. A pile of black bread stood on the plate in the middle of the table. There was salt and pepper and a small fern as well. A strong smell of cabbage soup and garlic filled the air. I almost grew to like that smell.

Manya picked up the menu; I could not fathom it, the handwriting was too difficult. It took me some time before I could order my food myself; not only was the difficulty with the handwriting, but the names of the dishes meant nothing to me. And it was a very long menu.

The waiter appeared. He was hot, his hair was greasy and curly, his doubtful-looking shirt was collarless and open at the neck. He wore a somewhat unwholesome-looking apron and carried a table-napkin, which he used to flick the crumbs off the table on to the floor. A woman went round, while we were there, sweeping away the crumbs in a rather cursory manner. She moved slowly and was very old.

There were still no co-operative-owned dining-rooms, as far as I could judge. True, industrial workers had their own dining-rooms, run at the factories; there were also artels, which ran dining-rooms on a sort of communal basis, making only enough out of them for their upkeep and a fair wage for those who ran them; but the majority of the dining-rooms in 1925 were run privately.

I gave up any idea of choosing a meal, and left everything to Manya. There was, in fact, no alternative, for Manya's

English vocabulary tapered away when it came to articles off food in their cooked state.

We started off with *bortsch*, because I knew what that was and had liked it. It appeared with lashings of sour cream floating on the top. The plateful was enormous, and the soup very good. Beetroot, onion, potato, carrot, all in a freshly made stock of good beef, and at the bottom a goodly-sized piece of the beef itself.

I have never been able to explain my appetite in Russia. It was always there, and when things were not so easy as regards food, I almost regretted it. Still, I never went hungry. I merely learned to take types of food which I had never tackled before. There is a lot to be said, too, for the clear Moscow air.

But when the second course came after the *bortsch*, I felt rather like a small boy at a party, who eats for the sake of eating rather than because he is hungry.

I told Manya.

"Good Lord!" she said, "do they starve you in England?"

"Perhaps it isn't long enough since we had those pastries," I volunteered.

"Nonsense," she replied. "You have to eat well in a cold country."

I said no more and began to wonder whether we English are starved, even those of us who have enough money to buy as much food as we like.

There is a school of thought in England which tends to imagine that to enjoy good food is something in the nature of a crime. I had come under the influence of that sort of thinking when young, but I was sure the influence was no longer there.

I remember being told, "You should always leave the table feeling you would like some more." I can't say I stuck to that principle, but I had always been a little guided by it.

Now it seemed to me all wrong. There can be nothing criminal in eating as much as one wants to eat, provided the

rest of the time you are doing hard work, living a healthy life.

True, in working-class families the idea that it is vulgar to eat a great deal, that a little must be left on the plate, and nonsense of that kind, probably arises from the fact that there just is not really enough food for all. I know that there is an idea that women do not need as much food as men. Certainly, in working-class homes, it arises from the fact that the wife, allegedly, does not work so hard as her husband. The wage-earner must be fed, otherwise there would be no wages, if he fell sick from under-nourishment. The woman can faint at the wash-tub, but she is not faced with the fear of losing her job for that. The job of washing, cooking and caring for children is always there, however sick a woman may feel. And so, economic circumstances often forced the working women, running their homes, to have smaller appetites than the men. How often does one steak do for a mother and three children, while the second is kept for the husband when he returns? And how often is this done, without the husband knowing anything at all about it?

I talked a little about this with Manya. She saw some sense in my remarks, but she was all for the science of the thing. She talked about calories until I was frankly bored. But on the whole it was always good to listen to Manya; her enunciation was so perfect, and provided she spoke slowly, and interspersed her Russian with English as well, when I stopped her because I did not follow, everything went well enough.

Our conversation remained on food and calories.

"Manya, does everybody in Russia talk about calories? Or is it just because you are studying for the medical profession?"

"Pretty nearly everybody that goes to school will learn about calories," Manya answered. "We try to get all our children and students to understand the elementary things about themselves. Food is one of the things they cannot do

without. Judicious eating is one of the factors of good health. Of course, in my profession, it is of even greater importance, especially when we are concerned more especially with the health of expectant and nursing mothers and their children."

I was a little overcome at her reply. She had said many things I had not followed, and she talked a lot about prophylactics, all of which was lost on me. I shifted to safer ground.

"Where is your cousin? I thought I was to meet him."

"Maybe, after all, he cannot come. Sometimes they change the lectures round, and he has probably been detained. He lectures on Western European History at one of the universities."

The second course consisted of two meat-balls, potatoes chopped up and slightly browned, lying in too much fat, and a long slice of salted cucumber.

It was by no means up to the standard of the soup, but the meat-balls were of fresh meat, as is the custom in Russia, and good to the palate. I had not yet really acquired a taste for salted cucumber, and I missed the regular English vegetables.

We wound up with ice-cream, the rather watery, yellowish kind that used to be sold in England in Italian shops. And then there was the inevitable glass of tea, without lemon.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY DAYS

WE WALKED SLOWLY back to Manya's room, to find that her cousin had arrived there. He was a Red Professor, had worked in London for a short period, and his name was Mischa. He spoke English much better than Manya did, and I determined to find out all I could of the problems that, even in those few hours I had been in Moscow, were a source of worry to me.

He explained to me a great deal about the position in Russia since the revolution, how after the fighting, throughout what is now termed the Soviet Union, against the allied troops of intervention had ceased, there had been a big and immediate problem before the authorities.

It was no easy job for the population to settle down to normal life. First of all, those who had been taking part in the fighting had to be absorbed again into working occupations. All the wreckage of factories and homes had to be restored. The country had, as it were, to pick itself up, stand on its legs, and try to build that Socialism for which the revolution had taken place.

On the other hand, it was natural that people were unsettled. Families had been broken up and one of the first desires of the people, as individuals, was to find their relatives, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. There was a steady trek back to places of origin; the work of organizing resistance to the enemies from abroad had now to give way to other work, and the local Soviet authorities found themselves faced with the problem of settling in the people, getting them into the right sort of work again, patching up all that had been broken, making good homes for the people, and putting into operation wheels which had been standing idle.

And so, even in 1925, three years after intervention, in its direct form, came to an end, not every inhabitant of the Soviet Union had found his niche. Owing to the destruction wrought on the railways during the fighting, travelling facilities were still not of the best.

Mischa explained to me that the rolling-stock on the railways was meagre; the patched-up engines and coaches often broke down again and had to be sent to the depot for further repairs. There was as yet little question of building new engines and coaches on a scale that would have quickly put things right. There was so much to do in all spheres of life. It was a patched up system, and as such, the fabric was constantly tearing.

The work of building up again, and on the best lines, was a slow and painful process.

So the train schedules were not strictly adhered to. It was no unusual thing for trains to be several hours late, and for the long-distance trains to be even days late.

This might seem a ghastly state of affairs to a foreigner, but for those people of the Soviet Union who had been through all the previous horrors, this was merely a nuisance, and so long as steps were being taken to get the country on its feet, nobody much bothered about it. And steps were, indeed, being taken, and the foundations went deep, for see what a country the Soviet Union is to-day.

All this easily explained the somewhat forlorn and long-suffering attitude of those travellers I had seen on the station on my arrival, who patiently waited for their trains. It explained, too, why it had not been possible to take steps to provide for shelter for these people, while they were waiting, perhaps for a whole night and day, for the connection which would take them further on their journey. Waiting, in somewhat uncomfortable surroundings was a minor tragedy to people who had waited for the enemy to rush into their villages, burning and pillaging, who had probably taken part in **the** fighting themselves, who had suffered so much in the past.

Then there were so many people travelling, because some were still returning to places where they had at last discovered their relatives were. Some were changing their homes once and for all, seeking work elsewhere, their own villages having nothing to offer them; others were merely ambitious of getting a job in town.

And lastly, as private trading had been introduced under the New Economic Policy in 1921, the more astute members of the business world, regular speculators, who had no interest whatsoever in Soviet society, saw an opportunity of making profits, set out to gain all they could, and found plenty of business reasons for travelling from one part to another. There were no restrictions on travelling. One merely needed the time involved in waiting at the depot or the station where tickets were sold, and also the money necessary for the fare.

It must not be imagined, however, that all those business men who, under the New Economic Policy, were enabled to open shops and help in the distribution of the necessities of life, were all scoundrels and speculators. There were many who worked hard, travelling from place to place, bringing in goods to Moscow, who made a small profit and lived comfortably enough on it, but who in no way speculated on the hardships and shortages. There are a few who gradually, when the co-operatives grew strong, found no further use for their shops, and threw in their lot with the co-operatives, bringing with them all the experience of years of careful trading.

Mischa also explained to me how poor the country now was after all the hardships it had come through. He explained that everything could not be improved at once, that it was all rather like a patchwork, some things very old and ready to drop to pieces, some things very new, like the whole goal they had set themselves, and the rest a mixture.

Take the factories, for instance. Everything had been done to restore what was left of them; that work was completed.

But the job now was to reconstruct, to reinforce what there was, to add extensions. This was the great thing in 1925. This was being done. Nobody imagined it was enough, but it was next on the order of the day. The time would come, when totally new plants would grow up, but not yet.

During the period of the New Economic Policy, there were still concessions leased to foreign capitalists, which meant that profits which might have gone to swell the income of the Workers' Government still had to go into the pockets of individual foreign industrialists. The Workers' Government would have preferred to manage those industries themselves, but it was not yet strong enough to tackle the work. For the time being, concessions had to be left to these foreigners.

And so, the country was not rich, its budget was still small, and the people as a whole could draw from the budget only as much as there was to draw. The main thing was that nobody could take the lion's share. There were no idlers, into whose laps the fruits fell of the toil of others.

I asked Mischa why it was that the people were dressed in such drab clothing. Almost as I asked I realised that his explanation of the other points would naturally cover this question as well. But there was something interesting about that drab clothing; it wore a whole history on it, for all to read.

I had noticed that many of the women went about in leather jerkins or short yellow cowhide jackets of a distinctly masculine cut. They seldom wore hats, but seemed to prefer leather or cloth caps or shawls. True, in the centre of the town I had noticed some women in fairly fashionable felts or fur toques, but the "fashion" of the day in Moscow was the cap or shawl.

Of course, when all hands have to be turned to the work of men, when barricades are thrown up, when there is shooting and fighting, when many women are doing the work of men, it is a natural thing for them to turn to the more com-

fortable and free garb of the male. Men's clothing has very convenient pockets, and so on. It is of a tougher material, which stands hard wear.

The women who wore shawls were mostly from what, under Tsarism, had formed the working class and the peasantry. It had always then been their head-covering, and so it remained, for lack of anything different. A foreigner might consider a shawl a sign of poverty, but these women had never had anything different, and they liked their shawls.

The cap was simply a hang-over from the civil war days. Shawls were now at a premium, because so many factories had been demolished and output stopped over so many years. Those that appeared on the markets had been snatched like hot cakes. And if there were still women in caps, that also was not a sign of poverty. Communist women and others who had taken part in the civil fighting, had found the cap more convenient than the shawl. When the fighting ceased, they stuck to their caps. Why buy a shawl; what was wrong with the cap? I noticed that many of the younger women had taken to caps; they wore them at a jaunty angle, and carried them off like mannequins.

The luxury industries had gone, and had not as yet been restored. I must confess that the hat-shops that did exist displayed concoctions which in the main only the dowdiest maiden aunts would be found dead with here in London.

The great thing still, in those days, was to get the essentials on the market. The essential things were those which would help the country march forward from strength to strength: coal-mining, oil, engineering industries and the food industries were the most important. Such things as hats and fashionable clothing were quite outside the planning and left to the initiative of the people. Obviously, the people had other things to think about and work for.

I grew tired of talking, and Manya was looking at the clock. We had been talking for nearly three hours. **Our thoughts turned to supper.**

The little parcels came out of the "refrigerator", and were untied and displayed on little dishes. The wee table was laid for three. There was ham, caviare, salted cucumbers, Russian-made Gruyere cheese. The wine added to their charms. It was dry red wine, not for the epicurean taste, but better than French *vin ordinaire*. I remember it called itself "Kardanakhi", from the place of its origin. I was thankful that it was not port wine, which even to-day seems to be considered the drink for women in Russia.

It was a successful supper. Wine was not customary at meals, but this was an auspicious occasion; for that reason Manya had bought it.

But it finished me off for the day. It already seemed years since I had arrived, and I was ready for my second night's rest. We bade farewell to our visitor, and hastened to tidy the room and turn in to sleep.

I remember the next day in particular, because, having omitted to visit the "banya" on the previous day, it was the first thing we did, after breakfasting and tidying. Manya had miraculously arranged for some other student to take her turn at the Institute of Social Hygiene; apparently that was allowed. I was almost afraid for Manya's career, but she was so well-organised in general, that I could trust her to know what she was doing.

We set out, Manya and I, for the Sandunovsky Baths, in the centre of Moscow, not far from the Red Square. On the way I told Manya I was not keen about it, but that I would see the whole business through, since one had to be clean. She was definitely surprised at my prudishness, and said if I liked we could arrive at a compromise.

It appeared that one need not go into the big hall and bath with the "madding crowd", but could hire a "number" as it was called.

"Do you mean I can have a proper bath?" I asked.

"If you want to use it," Manya replied, a little put out at my squeamishness. "I never use it, somehow I don't relish

using a bath that thousands of people have used. I prefer the big hall. But even in a 'number' I can get all I want, and if you must have a bath, my dear, you can have it."

I was a little puzzled, but decided to wait and see.

We paid our money, obtained tickets, handed them to another attendant and were shown into a room.

It smelt damp, there was a carpet on the floor, leather upholstered chairs and sofas, large windows high up in the walls and shut tight. I waited to be initiated. I could see no bath, no taps, nothing but another door.

"This is where we undress," said Manya. "Through that door is the bathroom, look!"

She opened the further door and I peeped through. There was stone flooring and a drain in the middle of it. A long slate slab ran along one side and at one end were a number of zinc tubs—rather like foot tubs. There were two taps fitted in the wall, with a square slate slab on which, presumably, to stand the tub when filling it.

Thus it was that a "number" in the public baths consisted of two rooms, one to undress in, the other to wash in; almost like taking a number at an hotel.

We began the whole performance of undressing and entered the second room. Manya filled two tubs, and pushed one over to me. I had a loofah and soap, but Manya had a curious bundle of what looked like fine straw, and was called a *mochalka*. I had noticed, outside the baths, there were several women standing over their baskets filled with these flat pads of white horse-hair-like strands and pieces of soap wrapped in attractive paper wrappings.

Apparently, the correct method of taking a bath in Russia was to soap all over, and then rinse by lifting the tub and pouring the water over yourself. The soaping and rinsing could be repeated as many times as you liked. The only stipulation was that the number could be occupied for only one hour. After that, if you wanted to indulge longer, you had to pay for another full hour.

I noticed that on a raised platform at one end of the bathroom there was actually what we call in England a bath. It was very large, to all appearances perfectly clean, but I decided that actually the tub method was just as good, since there was no shortage of hot water. There was also a shower, to cool off under, fitted with hot and cold water.

I was compelled to admit to Manya, while dressing in the outer room, which was refreshingly cool after the steamy bathroom, that this method of performing ablutions was in no way inferior to the West European method. One might even add, as an Indian I met in Moscow impressed upon me, that the English way of bathing, as practised among the middle and lower middle classes, is a pretty shifty sort of affair, since one finishes up in dirty water.

However, so much for that. I left the banya feeling too warm; the air outside struck very cold, and I realised that public bathing really had a disadvantage, at any rate for me. My fears, indeed, were not unfounded. In the evening I felt some twinges of rheumatism, but I could hardly blame the Sandunovsky Baths—rather was it the fault of my own constitution.

The trip to Manya's father at the Sukharevka market was arranged for the Saturday, when Manya had free time again, and the day dawned bright and frosty and we set out. We travelled by tram.

At the Arbat Square, we boarded an "A" tram and waited, for it was here that the conductors and drivers were changed, and the cars halted often for as long as five minutes. A lad entered the car. He was a short, fair-headed boy of about twelve. His face, strangely enough—for he was obviously a waif—was washed and shone in marked contrast to his neck and fingernails, which were black. He stood in the attitude of a choir-boy and with a voice like a eunuch—his voice was really good—sang out his song. I remember the tune to this day, I saw the child so often and heard his song; it was the same tune used in the Soviet film *The Road to Life*, which

deals with just this type of boy and the efforts made in these very days to train them to useful lives.

He sang his song, which consisted of several verses, then approached each of the passengers in turn. It was rare for him to be refused. Something in his cherubic face and angelic voice made the kindly people of Moscow open their purses to him, even though we all knew he was a little scoundrel who had broken out from some orphan home or other.

The conductor arrived and shooed him off. But I later discovered that they all knew him as one of the "regulars". This was his own particular "pitch" and he fought all others who tried to compete and "take away his living", as he used to say.

The problem of these waifs was one which caused the Soviet Government considerable concern. Everything possible was being done to get these waifs off the streets. Periodically they were rounded up and taken to suitable children's homes; but often, after the "excitement" afforded their young minds during the chaos in the land during the civil war fighting and intervention, they had found it impossible to settle down to the normal routine of school life. They preferred to live by their wits and roguery, and the fact that corporal punishment of children was a criminal offence in the Soviet Union, made it difficult for those who ran the homes to keep these children in check. Nobody wants to suggest that corporal punishment is a good thing; but if a child has run loose for a number of years, it is difficult to find any means of inducing it to lead a normal life. Corporal punishment would have cowed them; but it would never have developed them. So mild disciplinary measures were adopted, and the game of cat-and-mouse continued. And indeed it was a game. There were some young desperadoes who even resorted to violence when they wanted something particularly. In fact, these children were a big problem and some of them never recovered from the warping of their minds which resulted from those early experiences. But the system of patient explanation and kindness

worked in the majority of cases. The hordes of waifs which used to haunt the towns in the wintertime and holiday resorts in the summer are no longer to be seen. They, too, are absorbed in the work of building Socialism, with a few exceptions who have had to be kept apart as unreformed criminals. Statistics show, however, that the percentage of people of this sort in the Soviet Union is extremely low, and that crime in general is on the downgrade.

It was the memory of the young rogue who regularly begged on the Arbat trams that brought all these thoughts to my mind.

To continue the story, we arrived at the Sukharevka, the biggest market in Moscow, and searched out Manya's father. His little lock-up shop was set in a long row of others of a similar kind, with woollen materials for suits and coats, hard cotton and woollen mixtures, splendid linens, flannellettes and prints. We halted before the shop and the introductions were made. The man was nearing sixty, short, round, definitely Jewish. He looked very kindly and a little as though he found life difficult. I joked with him about his abacus, and he took it all in good part, saying that there was little schooling in Tsarist days, and that he wished he were forty years younger, to have the chances of the present generation. Our visit was short, for he had his business to attend to, and we parted from him, taking with us his invitation to dinner the following Sunday.

We sauntered round the market. There were several rows of small shops of the same type, all selling similar materials, at the same prices. There were other rows of shops, stocked with groceries. There were some which specialised in furs, others with ready-made coats and dresses; special hat shops, where the fur-lined serge hats with ear-flaps were on sale side by side with helmet-shaped winter caps made entirely of deerskin, or lamb's wool.

Another row of shops revealed ironmongery and household goods and the like.

I was never particularly interested in this part of the markets.

However, there were one or two other features of market life which could only be found in precisely this part. Pedlars went round with their deep boxes of hot cabbage and meat pies made of a dough like our doughnuts. They were kept hot by means of a charcoal brazier inside, and the pedlars left behind them a thin trail of smoke and steam. There was also a rough-and-ready sort of establishment, run by a private trader, where the shopkeepers themselves could obtain tea; but most of them preferred to have it brought to them at their shops by men who carried large teapots and hot water and glasses. My memory is rather dim as to how this was managed effectively. I only remember these men did exist and that I vaguely wondered how they managed to carry round such a heavy weight.

We moved over to the other part of the market. Here were peasants, who brought in their wares every day and carted back with them everything they were unable to sell. True, it was rare they had anything to take back, for the usual practice was to sell all they could on the market and then at 6 o'clock, when the market was closed down for the night, they would sell the remainder on the Moscow streets.

Behind long wooden planks on trestles stood a row of women with their handchurns, selling milk by measure. The measures were not all of the same size, though officially they should have been, so a good housewife would watch out for the largest. But there was another consideration. It might happen that a peasant with a particularly large measure would not really be giving the best value for the money. Often the milk was watered down, for there was, as yet, no complete system of official inspection.

The best place to buy milk was in the co-operative shops; all the milk sold there was inspected, up to a special standard, and good measure was given. The price was no higher than on the markets. The only trouble was that there were not

sufficient co-operative shops on the one hand, and that if a housewife had to go to the market for her purchases, she was unlikely, afterwards, to make a special trip to the co-operative shop for milk, especially if there happened not to be one near to her home.

Again, the transitional period to co-operative distribution from private trading was to be felt. The battle was on, but the co-operatives had not yet the upper hand, nor, in the sphere of agricultural products, could they ever hope to have it so long as individual farming was the order of the day. Several years later, when the peasants began to cultivate collectively and to distribute their milk through co-operatives in a hygienic manner, they discovered that they benefited thereby and that the town population was better satisfied.

Meanwhile, the distribution of milk on the markets was a curious business indeed. And the really wise housewife would taste the milk before buying it. Apparently the peasants were ready enough to agree to this procedure.

Manya carried her own private spoon and had a little poured into it; I noticed that others resorted to the lid of the churn.

Somehow, as I saw how housewives could, without shuddering, drink from the lid of a churn they could not fail to know had touched the lips of others, my mind turned to those holy relics which, in the Greek Orthodox Church, have been touched by the lips of hundreds of people. What awful barbarism these tilings were to the minds of any civilised human beings, trying to fight down disease and sickness! Was it not surprising that the Bolsheviks, when they came to power, should want to get rid of all these uncivilised things once and for all?

But at that time, things of this sort were still minor details. A nation can be educated only gradually, and other things, such as the care of mothers and infants and schooling for all, came first.

I remembered, too, that there were still thousands of

peasants throughout the Soviet Union who continued the age-long custom of sitting *enfamille* round a bowl of food, each dipping into the bowl with his own large wooden spoon. They still had no use for plates. It was only when collective farming began, when large dining halls were erected where the peasant folk could take their meals in comfort, that the idea of plates every day, and not merely at holiday time, weddings and funerals, found a place in the minds of the more backward peasants.

There were other long planks on trestles which displayed great pieces of beef, veal, pork and mutton. There were smaller joints, too, but I could recognise none of the usual English cuts.

Later, when it became necessary for me to keep house for a family myself, I found the Russian cuts more economical than the English, especially in the wintertime, when one could buy large portions and keep them frozen for the whole week, cutting off each day the sort of joint one wanted. But it was two or three more years of floundering around before I met the friend who showed me this way.

The most fascinating benches were those which displayed goods from the poultry and dairy-farmers. Here were turkeys, chickens, young sucking pigs in season, eggs, curds, sour cream, butter and all sorts of cheeses.

For the layman, it was not easy to shop on the markets. The food came straight from the peasants' homes, and unless initiated in the art, it was difficult to tell how fresh it was, especially in wintertime. And the peasants were still very cunning and past-masters in the art of making things look fresh when they were not.

Manya approached a stall for eggs.

"How much?" she inquired. The peasants never put prices on their produce. They rapidly sized up the purse of the customer by the cut of his coat, the tone of voice, whether a woman wore a hat or a shawl.

She named her price.

"Why so dear?" asked Manya firmly. "I'll pay half."

The peasant raised the price to three-quarters of the original figure demanded.

"No, too dear," replied Manya and stalked firmly away, dragging me with her, astonished.

"All right, come on then," shouted the peasant after us.

Manya turned back, paid the price she had offered and took up the eggs.

"Why all the palaver?" I asked. "Isn't it easier for them to say the price at first?"

"Ah well, they try it on. If you had come alone, you would have paid the first price she asked. Not everybody yet knows how to bargain with the peasants. Actually, she put the price up because she saw you were a stranger, and reckoned we would pay it. In fact, it isn't much good taking you with me when I shop. It is just so much more haggling."

I felt distinctly snubbed, but it was hardly my fault. It seemed I would never be any use until I got into a leather jerkin and cap, and learned Russian properly. But things were to change for me in time so that it would not matter what I looked like, nor how strong my accent was.

There was a loud squealing alongside. I moved towards the noise, and beyond the crowd, towards the edge of the market, there was a veritable farmyard. Apparently some people preferred to see their food alive before purchasing it—a thing I have never relished doing.

There were hutches, containing rabbits, young pigs, hens, pigeons, fine old cocks, and even turkeys. I had noticed one or two women carrying off live hens under their arms, professionally tied at the legs, and had my suspicions that there must be livestock somewhere on the market.

Altogether, there was probably nothing so very different to distinguish this market from the regular weekly markets held throughout other countries. It was strange, however, to find a retail market of this sort right in the heart of a big town.

The last part of the market I visited was one where men and women stood around, or moved among the crowd, offering second-hand clothing or home-made towels, sheets, d'oyleys and fancy work, crocheted goods, and where long rows of second-hand boots: top boots, working boots, tennis shoes, sandals, goloshes, were set out on the ground.

Throughout the market, even in the wooden shops, the method was the same. Nothing was priced. The trader sized up his customer as best he might and charged accordingly. If you were a fool, you paid without question. If you were a good bargainer, you came away with a good bargain. Sometimes the trader could afford to give in to an astute customer. It was all a matter of luck whether you got a bargain. Much depended on the luck the trader himself had had during the day, on his state of mind, on your own method of bargaining. It was always wiser, too, to do your purchasing, of dry goods at any rate, towards the end of the day, when, on the one hand, there was a sporting chance that some trader or other had had a successful day already and was ready to strike a bargain, or when he was too tired to bother much, provided you were firm enough.

In fact, after visiting the market and listening to Many a's cool explanations, I decided that you needed to be quite a strong character to cope successfully with even the simple matter of buying food from private traders in Russia of those days.

I recall an amusing incident, when I tried to buy just a bar of chocolate all by myself.

I had come across a little kiosk where confectionery was for sale. The wares, on the whole, were not appetising, but like all good traders, this one had been careful to choose his site far from the shops.

I asked the price of a bar of chocolate which seemed no worse than an inferior kind to be bought in tuckshops in English villages. I knew that the price of a similar-sized bar of good chocolate in a co-operative shop would be about 10 copecks.

"Twenty-five copecks" was his prompt and smiling reply.

"Why so much?*" I asked in my best broken Russian.

"It's not dear," he suavely replied.

"But good chocolate in co-operative shops costs only ten copecks," I retorted, my indignation rising.

"As you like. You needn't buy it," he said curtly.

But I had already placed the money on the counter as I spoke. Yet I now did not want to take the chocolate. I couldn't bring myself to take up the money again. It was really a ridiculous affair, and I knew I had lost.

"Neither will I," said I, "and you can keep the cursed money too."

He smiled coolly, and I marched off. I turned for a moment and saw him pick up the money with a shrug of his shoulders.

I had not learned the art of bargaining, and I had lost my temper. That was bad, and I made a mental black mark against myself.

It was worse when I returned to Manya, for I felt I must tell her. She was fast becoming my shield and protector. She threw back her head and shook with laughter.

"But, you little idiot," she said. "You'll never teach these swindlers anything, so why try your high morals on them. First of all, you should have offered him half the price, and you would probably have got your precious chocolate for fifteen copecks, if you really had to have it. Never mind, you tried your luck, and you lost. You're not the only one. But you shouldn't buy chocolate from private traders. For one thing, you cannot tell whether it is wholesome or not. And as for losing your temper! Well, that indeed was stupid because you didn't improve matters. If you wanted to stand on your principles, you should have called over the nearest militiaman. As likely as not the scoundrel had no licence to sell half the wares he was displaying, and you might have done some good."

This was my first hauling over the coals. I deserved it and

knew it. More and more was I to learn that to lose your temper in the Soviet Union gets you nowhere. The great thing was to rely on the authorities and to act in an organised fashion.

And so, during these first months, I came up against many things which seemed to me out of line in a land building Socialism, but they could all be explained; one had only to search for the reason. What stuck firmly in my mind was the fact that there, in the Soviet Union, everything was in a state of transition from the old world to the new.

One Sunday in November we set out, Manya, her cousin Mischa, and I, to visit the trader parent and his wife. We took a tram from the Arbat. There were no queues for trams, but many people travelled on Sundays. A crowd was gathered at the stop, but it did not disconcert me. I had fought my way on to buses and trams ever since I was a schoolgirl, and considered myself adept at squeezing through crowds and leaving the minimum of hurt feelings behind me.

Safely inside the tram, Manya expressed surprise at my agility. I explained that it was merely a matter of practice, and that travelling to and from work in London during the busiest hours had been the best possible school. Then it had been on the underground and I had found it was mostly a matter of keeping the eye on the train doors, making yourself as collapsible as possible, edging yourself in as inoffensively as possible, and finding yourself safely boarded.

I have often heard visitors to Moscow complain bitterly of the trams. True, they got worse, during the period of industrialisation and before the underground was opened and the trolley-buses put on the roads. But even then, I could not truly say they were impossible. Most of those who complained were people from more fortunate sections of society abroad than I was. Not realising the discomforts of travelling in rush hours in their own countries, they could hardly be in a position to judge of the Soviet Union. After all, the work-

ing people form the majority of a country, and their experiences are what should be considered typical of a country.

We duly arrived at the wide, dusty high-road, which I had first seen from the Moscow terminus steps on my arrival. The whole square badly needed re-paving, and in parts there were men at work on it. Ten minutes more and the tram brought us to the outskirts of Moscow. We alighted, crossed the road, went back a few paces, and there was the little wooden house.

It was a single-floor house, with a loft overhead. There was the "fretwork" woodwork round the windows and edging the one pointed gable. The entrance was a little wooden porch at the side, and to get at it, we passed through a wooden gate in the wooden fence surrounding the garden.

An appetising smell of food met our nostrils as the door opened, and we were greeted by a rather meek, round, elderly Jewish woman and the equally rotund, red-cheeked grey-headed Jewish father, whom we had already met. The door opened straight into the living-room, where the table was already spread for Sunday dinner.

They were Jews indeed, but not orthodox; it was of small consequence to them, whether the Sabbath meal was on Sunday or Saturday.

The meal was the best I had yet encountered. And there is something about Jewish fare which is extraordinarily acceptable to a cold and shivering Englishwoman, experiencing her first winter of snow and ice.

The salted herring was literally beautiful to behold and prepared so skilfully that not a bone marred the eating. The salted cucumbers were delicately flavoured with dill and lay in surprising shapes, garnishing the roast veal. The veal was stuffed as I rather think only Jewish people know how to stuffit. The roast potatoes were done to a turn.

But between the herring and the veal, there was chicken broth—my pet abomination! Or they called it chicken broth, but this was something different. For one thing, there

was something green floating on the top in tiny shreds, fresh from the market. How it had been grown at that time of the year I never fathomed. But it made all the difference and eliminated the flavour I have always found so unpalatable. There were wonderful white objects floating in it too, and to this day I have never discovered of what they were made. I only know it was not semolina, like similar additions to chicken broth.

There was nothing particularly surprising about the sweet: it was red jelly. It can be found, in varying degrees of quality, everywhere throughout European Russia. In restaurants it is more purple in colour than red, and not very pleasant. Home-made, however, it is perfect, especially with cream. And this being an auspicious occasion, the cream was present.

This jelly is made from the juice of *kliukva*, berries like bilberries, which are gathered in the cold months, even after the snow has fallen, and can be kept almost indefinitely in refrigerators or under the snow. I have seen them growing in the woods round Moscow, but they are to be found in greatest abundance in the tundra regions and are despatched to the centre in huge barrels. The jelly is made by thickening the hot juice with potato flour.

But the meal did not finish at the sweets. Fruit was not very abundant in Moscow in those days. But there were grapes and apples, good country apples, straight from the villages.

The grand finale to dinners in Moscow is the samovar. It appears, bright and shining and humming to itself, with the little teapot squatting on top. The cups are always the best when visitors appear, although they have almost disappeared and given way to glasses; and there is always a porcelain bowl to match the cups. It is not a slop-basin, but serves quite another purpose.

By the time the samovar appeared, almost an hour had passed since the beginning of the meal. It was a slow and steady business, taking meals on holidays; rather like the

French everyday method. And the samovar was not all. In Russia, the people do not eat confectionery in the promiscuous way we women have in England. Sweets in Russia are always eaten with tea, so the samovar on this occasion was accompanied by small shallow vases, something like champagne glasses only broader in the bowl and perhaps even longer in the stem. Often they are made of coloured glass, and there may be as many as half a dozen on the table, containing different kinds of sweets.

Tea with lemon and without sugar is very good with confectionery and I wonder we have never introduced it in England.

I discovered the use of the porcelain bowl when my cup went up to the hostess to be re-filled. She first ran some water from the samovar into the bowl and then took my cup and rinsed it. She then dried it with a beautifully embroidered long strip of fine linen, with lace sewn at each end. After this, she poured my second cup. This is the old Russian method and many homes in Russia have continued to follow it on high days and holidays. The younger generation have almost entirely dropped it, but in my mind, where it remains, it is a symbol and very pleasant outward expression of the careful hospitality which Russians in general extend towards guests, who are always welcome. It is not for nothing that the Russians, as a race, have always been regarded as hospitable.

An amusing account was told me, while we took our tea. In Tsarist days, merchants taking tea in hotels or inns, would always be asked:

"With a towel, or without?"

Just as in France, you pay for the use of a table-napkin in the less opulent restaurants, and can refuse one if you cannot afford to pay the franc for it, so a merchant in Moscow was often judged by whether he took his tea with a towel or not. The towel was provided so that he could mop his face and neck from time to time, for when merchants drank tea, it

was no genteel affair. The number of glasses drunk might run to a dozen, and the body perspired freely as a result, whether from the natural heat of a summer day, or from the overheated rooms in wintertime. Moreover, tea from the samovar is served almost boiling.

We chatted a great deal over dinner that Sunday. I heard many first-hand tales of the pogroms under Tsardom, the cruelty and injustice of which remain in my mind, although the actual details have faded. All sorts of petty crimes committed accidentally or deliberately were laid at the door of the Jews, though they may have had nothing whatever to do with them. There were cases of the mass arrest of all the male Jews in a whole village in retribution for some petty offence attributed to one of them. Women and children were left to fend for themselves in the absence of the wage-earner. What often saved the Jewish families was the fact that they worked as artisans and trained their boys in the same trade. Often a young boy had to bear the burden of the trade, after his father had been carried off.

The merchant himself talked a great deal about the difference in his life under the Soviet system. He had been a member of the Jewish Bund, and understood very well the new life that was rising under Soviet rule. He was fully in agreement with the road Russia was going, but the thought was ever before him as to how he would manage later; he knew that private trading was only a temporary measure, countenanced temporarily by a Soviet system which was moving towards Socialism and Communism. He knew that he could not for ever live as a private trader. But he was a philosophically inclined old man. He was grateful to the Soviet system for freeing the Jews from the awful horror under which they had lived in Tsarist days, and could never cease mentioning how fortunate he was that his daughter, though a Jewess, had all the advantages of the Russian or any other national. He was proud of her success in her studies and glad to know she **had** a good career before her.

Manya, when I left the Soviet Union, was a qualified doctor, specialising, as she had wanted to, on the care of mothers and infants.

The days went by in Moscow, till, after two months there, luck took me to Sverdlovsk, one-time Ekaterinburg, the former headquarters of the erstwhile Lena Goldfields Company. An opportunity had arrived for me to travel to the edge of Siberia.

CHAPTER FOUR

AT A COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

THE JOURNEY TO Sverdlovsk I took in the company of a young Red Professor who was being sent there to teach in the Communist University named after Lenin.

There were again the vast numbers of poorly clad peasants with their baskets, bundles, their wives and children and aged parents. People setting out for new homes.

We took our seats in the train which was to be our home for three whole days. We travelled "hard", that is to say, each occupant occupied a whole wooden bench. The whole coach was like the English corridor train, except that the corridor was not on the outside edge. The Russian trains, moreover, are broader than the English and a coach contained two-decker bunks across, and two-decker bunks along the corridor side, up against the windows. These side bunks were somewhat shorter than the others, and therefore not comfortable.

Above the upper bunks, there ran a wide wooden shelf, originally made for luggage. During these days, however, a third passenger was allowed to climb up and make this a sort of third-deck bunk for sleeping. Those who occupied these upper shelves never remained there all day. But many of those in the second-deck bunks would lie all day and night and only rarely come down to stretch their legs at one of the halts.

I was fortunate in having had booked for me a lower bunk, and I spread my hand luggage on my seat, and took up a position in the corner, window-side seat. My companion occupied the opposite lower seat.

In Russia, all seats on long-distance trains are booked well in advance, and no more than the proper complement of

seats can be booked for each train. Only in these days of insufficient trains were the upper shelves, originally intended for luggage, used in addition and tickets supplied for them on the day of departure.

At first, I felt this journey would be a really terrible ordeal. Firstly, the idea of sleeping in my clothes in an overheated train was distinctly unpleasant; secondly, I had no idea what to expect, I had to be on the train for three days, and I knew there was no restaurant car on it. I had been told to rely on my companion, but being independent spirited by nature, I was sorry not to be able to know what was coming, and meet events in my own way. Funnily enough, for me, part of the joy of travelling is to plan it all in advance.

Above me was a woman who seemed quite at home. She obviously had no intention at that early hour of six o'clock of staying in her bunk, however. After ferreting around a bit, she sat herself on the end of my bunk. I was surprised, but nevertheless stowed away my luggage as best I could, while she edged further on to the seat into a more comfortable position.

The man in the upper bunk opposite would have been taken for a successful tramp, in England. He wore a mud-stained old army coat and a much-handled, helmet-shaped, Russian army hat of khaki cloth, deprived of the customary red star in the front. His leather boots were whole, but very much patched and covered with mud. It was no pleasant thing to pass along the corridor past rows of feet, many unbooted and revealing socks in holes or soiled and leather-stained linen swathings in lieu of socks.

Most of the women in the train were more fastidious about things of this sort. The peasants kept their feet covered, the others wore slippers in varying degrees of repair, which they had changed into, leaving their outdoor shoes on the ground below the bottom bunk. Perhaps the feet of the men were more aggressive, because so often they protruded over the end of the bunk, since the men were taller than the

women, or tended to lie stretched out, while the women **lay** huddled, their knees approaching their chins.

We had boarded the train in the evening. Most people had taken their last meal for the day, and had turned in for the night.

As for me, everything was vastly different from anything I had ever experienced in my life, and my eyes were so full that I felt disinclined for sleep. I was frankly puzzled, too, at the way in which the different travellers took everything so much for granted.

The lighting was bad; what there was of it came from the high ceiling of the carriage. It is obvious, therefore, that seated in the corner of the train with the shelf of the upper bunk within little more than a foot of the head, any light provided was blotted out by the shadow from it. Reading was out of the question. I wondered how I would stand three days of it, with nothing to do but look at the passengers opposite, to chat a little, or to try and sleep. I hankered after knitting needles and wool. But I had brought none from England, and I noticed none in the Moscow shops, though I did not search for them.

But over all the apprehension I felt, there predominated a feeling of excitement, of stimulated interest. This was how the Russians travelled, the bulk of them. What was it really going to be like?

With all the fuss of getting settled in, having tickets examined by the guard, over an hour had passed already. The train slowed down as it approached one of the larger stations. I do not remember the name.

"What about some tea?" asked the Red Professor.

"Where do we get it?"

"I've brought a kettle. You've got tea, somewhere, haven't you?"

I blushed with shame and admitted I had none.

"Oh, yes you have. It's in one of your cases. Manya put it in, **and** sugar."

How like Many a! She had squeezed it in at the last moment, and there sure enough it was.

"And what do we drink out of?" I persisted.

"I thought all English people carried tooth-glasses. **Don't** your

He was perpetually teasing me. I had no tooth-glass, and my investigation of the washing amenities on the train had already brought me up against the problem with full force.

"No, I haven't a tooth-glass. What's more, somebody might have warned me against this travelling business," I added, almost irritably.

"But I would like a cup of tea," I continued, wistfully.

"Ah well, we'll see," was the unsatisfactory reply.

The Red Professor had travelled in Europe and Russia, and there was little he did not know about travelling requirements. I hoped for the best.

As for me, I had travelled second-class on European trains, where tooth-glasses are provided. Everything had been easy-going. Now, if I was to be comfortable on future journeyings, I had to be more methodical in my packing. Rather like camping out, I thought.

Still, the tea problem was solved easily enough. My travelling companion had two thick glasses. And we did not use the kettle. We put the tea straight into a thermos flask; and when the train pulled up, we stepped out of the hot train into the frosty air and lined up with others to obtain boiling water from a tap in the wall of a wooden hut at the end of the platform. Our thermos attracted not a little attention, but it was not the time of day to enter into conversations, and having filled our flask, we hurried back to the train.

After the refreshing coolness of the air outside, the atmosphere of the coach seemed too insufferable for words. Again the feeling of despair, which attacked me periodically, swept over me. What awful travelling this really was! **Yet** the others took it calmly enough.

How good the tea was to throats parched by **the over-**

heated train. There is no time so bad for travelling in Russia as in the early winter. The windows are already sealed fast for the winter months. The heat is turned full on, for Russians like to sleep warm. The air is changed only when the doors are opened at the different halts along the line. True, there are good ventilators provided in the roof of the carriages. But if the occupant of the upper bunk feels the draught too much, he will shut it.

As a matter of fact, the huge difference between the temperature inside the coach and the cold air outside is sufficient to make a draught through these ventilators even when the train is at a standstill. I reasoned it out for myself. With the train travelling fast, the wind through a ventilator must be terrific. And the draught round the feet on the floor was also great. There was certainly something to be said for wrapping up in a blanket on the second bunk and never putting foot to the ground.

In this respect, I had been well advised in advance. With great difficulty, for my feet are broad, I had managed, after visiting a number of shops in Moscow, to procure thick felt boots on leather soles. They reached to just below the knee, and I confess to having taken the precaution of wearing knee-caps as well, after a twinge of rheumatism in Moscow had made walking a difficulty for a day or two. Even so, my feet were never really warm, so long as they rested on the floor. So most of the time I sat in my corner, with my legs tucked under me on the seat.

We chatted a little and then turned in for the night. I had brought with me one large and one tiny pillow and two blankets. In those days, no mattresses were provided to lay over the benches, and we really travelled and slept "hard".

I am one of those very blessed people who, provided the mind is untroubled, can sleep almost anywhere and almost at any time of the day or night.

That first night I was really exhausted with all the new impressions and my perplexities. It was not easy at first to

become accustomed to the hard board, but I found, ultimately, that by lying on my stomach, with one pillow beneath me at hip level, and the other at my head, I could feel tolerably comfortable. There was one blanket as well, between me and the boards, and I was covered by a second blanket and my coat.

I found the snoring of the unshaven young man on the upper bunk opposite a little trying at first, but the regular rhythm of the train's motion and the general warmth helped me, and I was soon asleep.

I awoke because my feet became very cold. The train was at a halt and somebody had left the door at the end of the carriage open. People began to stir and complain.

"What the devil are they thinking about! We'll all die of pneumonia," bewailed an elderly woman in one of the side bunks.

"I don't know. Can't somebody shut the door?" grumbled another.

The door slammed to with a bang, awakening others, who stirred and groaned, cursed and complained.

I swung my feet to the ground and found my way into my slippers. I felt pretty stiff in the small of my back, and not at all warm. The cold morning air was fresh, but...

I looked at my watch: four-thirty! Not at all the time to think of getting up. My companion had slept soundly all through the racket. He was obviously skilled, for he had not changed his position and his blankets were still wrapped neady round his feet. But he had come through all the horrors of the front-line fighting in the civil war. For him this was still something of a holiday.

Well, I would try sleeping again. I put on my tweed coat. I wrapped the blanket round my waist and hoisted my bound legs on to the bench, tucking over the end of the blanket so that my feet were raised. I left my spine to the tender mercies of the hard bench, put both pillows under my head and slept on my back this time. My hands felt curiously

unprotected, otherwise I was comfortable enough; I shoved them into my pockets.

Sleeping on the back is something of an art. I could never have done it normally; but again the motion of the train and the gradual warmth that crept over me and, probably, the fresh air that had invaded the coach brought success.

I did not wake again until nine o'clock. Everybody was astir around me. Some people were already drinking tea. My friend had apparently already been out and procured hot water and had made tea again in the thermos. Seeing my eyes were open, he proffered me a glass.

"You can sleep, can't you?" he bantered.

"What about yourself?" I parried. "At 4.30 you were snoring!"

"And at six o'clock I was up and about!" he retorted. "Army discipline, my dear."

I had nothing to reply.

What luxury that was! Tea in bed. Well, this sort of travelling seemed to have some compensations. There never was tea like it, and a slice of lemon floated on the top. Could Jeeves nimsel have risen better to the occasion?

I would like to draw a veil over the ablutions that followed. Without a doubt this part of the life of Russia at that time was the worst possible. And again, it was not the system at fault, but the hang-over of ignorance and lack of culture from the previous regime that was mostly responsible. The authorities did the best they could, but the vast majority of the peasants had had little training from childhood. It was quite beyond them to leave a public place as they found it; consequently, although the conveniences had been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected at the Moscow terminus, by the time half a dozen people had made use of them, they were worse than pig-sties, and one had to balance on heels, to avoid the considerable amount of washing water splashed on the floors.

Actually, the second day things were worse. **The** pipe from

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the water cistern to the hand-ewer had frozen, and no water ran from the tap. I resorted to eau-de-cologne, but it was thoroughly unsatisfactory, to my mind, although temporarily refreshing.

The morning passed rapidly enough, because I had risen so late in the first place, and partly because there were many diversions.

The tramp-like looking individual—I never discovered where he was going or for what reason, or what his occupation was—played chess with the Red Professor, and although I can understand only the rudiments of the game, it was interesting enough—there being nothing much more to do—to watch them, to listen to their occasional ejaculations, to try and understand the things they said. About two hours passed this way. Then I was subjected to a fire of questions from the young woman occupying the bunk above mine.

Where had I come from, where was I going, what was my work. Did everybody in England wear the sort of coat I had; were astrakhan hats fashionable in England, did I knit my own gauntlet gloves, and a hundred and one other questions.

The foreigner in Russia usually finds himself going through an ordeal of this sort. The Soviet people, friendly and companionable among themselves, extend their welcome unstintingly to the foreigner, and behave towards him just as they would towards their own Soviet friends. They are quite unsparing in their questions about everything that to them is strange and new. I have known foreigners to Russia resent their attitude. At times, it is true, the barrage of questions can be very trying, partly because one cannot answer them easily, partly because the average Englishwoman, like myself, can rarely find an answer without putting herself to a deal of trouble.

After all, what could I say to a woman who asked me whether everybody in England had a coat like mine. It was an ordinary, rough tweed. Actually, I had gone to some expense to buy it, I had had it specially made for warmth, and

it was not of a fashionable cut at all, partly because of its bulkiness, partly because I personally do not find fashionably cut clothing at all comfortable. Yet there are many other English women who do wear the type of clothing adopted by myself. To provide an honest answer would have meant going into the question of differences in social strata, differences in the individual tastes among English women, and a hundred and one other points.

I explained as best I might, and gradually veered the conversation round to the weather—the good old stand-by of the bad conversationalist. I felt somewhat mean as I did it, but I am not readily sociable with chance acquaintances.

It turned out that the young woman was a school teacher, but she had the textbook idea about the English climate. Our conversation for a few minutes became a little argumentative on that point.

"Oh, of course, in London it is always foggy, isn't it? You must find the snow and ice here very good by contrast."

I flatly denied the permanent London fog of her creation. I tried to explain that fogs were not a constant feature of the London weather. I could almost read suspicion in the young woman's face. She obviously preferred to believe the textbooks; for all I knew she might be doubting the veracity of everything I said.

True, since I returned to London, I have been inclined to agree that there is always fog in London. Certainly after the clear air of Moscow, which by the way the Russians consider is not particularly good, London air is permanently heavy with smoke and petrol. And there seems to be an ever-present haze, except on rare, really fine days. My health has never been the same here as it was in Moscow. But in 1925, when I had only been out of London for a month or two, having lived all my life there, I was of no two opinions on the matter. There was fog only in wintertime, and that not very often.

"And it is almost always raining there, isn't it?"

I had become accustomed to the variability of the English climate, and I had never found rainy weather trying as some people do. Here again I denied her statement. The young woman looked more disinclined to believe me than ever. I hastened to modify my original flat contradiction, murmuring that perhaps, because I like rainy weather, I just hadn't noticed how much rain actually fell.

The young woman appeared to be somewhat appeased.

The conversation went on, rather haltingly, until we turned to languages. I warmed up, as always when the subject of languages comes up, not because I am a linguist, but because languages have always appealed to me. I discovered that this young teacher had set her heart on learning English. She brought out her textbooks, her exercises, all her little efforts. We went over them together, and I gave her all the assistance I could. We laughed and joked a great deal about English spelling and pronunciation and revelled in it all.

I was later to discover that these students of English in 1925 were rare beings. As a general rule, the languages found among the Russians were mostly French and German: French among the intellectuals of Tsarist days; German among the technicians and engineers. The new generation in 1925 also seemed to fall into similar categories. As the Soviet Union bought a great deal of machinery from Germany, before Hitler's regime was set up, some knowledge of German terminology was necessary to the young Soviet technicians and engineers; it was the students of literature and the arts who turned more to the French and English languages. As more people were connected with industry than the arts, it was more common to find young people learning German.

Later, when American industrial methods were more universally studied in the Soviet Union, there began a greater tendency towards the English language.

The morning passed easily enough and wore into the

afternoon. At about three o'clock the train pulled up at a big station.

We all tumbled out of the train, the Red Professor hurrying me across the platform and into a large hall, filled with long dining tables. They were already spread for dinner, and steaming plates of soup already stood, waiting for hungry travellers. We took our seats and began the meal.

I will not describe the meal, except to say it was served with great despatch and was very similar to the average meal to be obtained in the average dining-room in Moscow.

What struck me was the trustful way all the food was brought us by swift-moving waiters, in this great lofty station dining-room, with its large palms and ferns standing in huge tubs on the floor between the tables.

I had time to observe the buffet along one end, where thick sandwiches of white or black bread and cheese, caviare—red or white, and a variety of salted fish, could be bought. There were spirits, wines and beer also on sale. And, of course, the inevitable tea-urn puffed away at one end.

I was a little flustered all the time I was eating, fearing the train would go off without us, until I asked what the signal would be that the train was ready to start.

Even as I asked a great warning bell rang out.

"That is only the first bell," said my neighbour. "A second will sound, and then a third. After that the train will not wait for us. The technique", he added, smiling at the word, "is to swallow the remainder of the meal as the first bell rings and then rush for the waiter. As the second bell goes you gather up your oddments and run; if you are lucky, you will be on the train as the third clangs out."

I rose hurriedly; we paid our bill and returned to the train.

I was surprised, after dinner, to find myself only too ready to doze; I succumbed to the desire and slept. I was horrified, when I awoke, to find it was seven o'clock in the evening, but was soothed almost immediately when I found that most people had slept too.

From then until about ten o'clock I just sat back and listened to the men and my young teacher acquaintance talking together. It was obviously a serious conversation, but I could make out little of it, much to my chagrin.

There was always much to talk about in the Soviet Union. The changes which took place all the time were always the subject of discussion far and wide. To talk of that country as being run by a dictatorship of one man has always amused and often thoroughly annoyed me. Anybody who has Uved there for any length of time is forced to admit that the interest shown in the events inside and outside the country is enormous. There are very few totally apathetic people there; and it is not surprising. Great events had happened, stirring up the life to such an extent that there was hardly a home that had not been affected. Once awakened to events, these people had never fallen asleep again; they retained their interest, they put forward their criticisms frankly, as such people will; they put forward their proposals. In trains, dining-rooms, cafes, in factories, offices, homes, the changes were always under discussion.

The whole training of the people, ever since the October Revolution, has been in the direction of making them feel a sense of responsibility for everything that takes place in the country. They have been imbued with the truth that the country is their own to make or mar; the law is made by them, and can be changed by them, through their representatives.

Both the Webbs and the Dean of Canterbury have done everything to show in theory how this democratic system works in the Soviet Union. For me, having Uved there so long, it is not difficult to understand how it works in practice. Only those who will not see can fail to believe the **truth** about that democracy.

And so, in 1925, there was a great deal of discussion, for it was still a difficult period. There were those in opposition to **the** Communist Party and the Soviet Government on the **question of the attitude** towards the peasantry.

All through the revolution and afterwards, the Bolsheviks have been well aware of the fact that the peasantry could not be regarded as a uniform section of the population, all having the same interests, the same ideas, the same aims as those of the workers, or even among themselves. The Bolsheviks were well aware of the fact that so long as there was exploitation by rich kulaks in the villages, there would be antagonisms there between the poor peasants who were hard driven by the kulaks and the kulaks themselves who were only interested in making the most out of life for themselves, regardless of the interests of the nation as a whole. The system of exploitation which still expressed itself in the villages was something which a Socialist Government could not countenance. But the situation inside the country was not yet sufficiently settled to ignore the desires of the kulaks. Neither were the bulk of the peasants themselves educated enough to understand the great changes that had taken place throughout the country, or the position they themselves occupied in the scheme of things. With a peasantry that had suffered and been left in the darkest ignorance under the Tsarist regime, it was not an easy thing to explain economics and politics to them.

In 1925 it was a matter of providing as much for the middle peasants as was reasonable, without encouraging them also to grow into the type of peasant who would want to exploit the poorer peasants. It was a matter of raising the level of the poorer peasants through the granting of facilities specially to them, by grants, loans of agricultural implements and the like, by giving them every opportunity of getting the most out of the land the revolution had provided them with. It was a matter of educating these peasants to the level of the working people, of teaching them, too, that they had a world of prosperity to gain by co-operating with the workers, and helping to build a world where co-operative labour, not for profits but for the benefits of the whole of their society, was conducted on the basis of each for all and all for each.

It was no easy problem to maintain an even balance between the villages and the towns. The towns were increasingly demanding more grain, since the level of the workers' standards was rising, and their taste for good agricultural produce at fair prices was increasing.

In the Opposition there were those who believed that if the kulaks were allowed to grow rich, the problem of the countryside would be solved.

I was very vague in those days about all these problems. Neither was I in a position to understand half the problems posed by those three young people in the train to Sverdlovsk. But I could gather enough to understand that they were discussing Bukharin's slogan: "Peasants, enrich yourselves," a slogan which was very soon condemned as one which, if followed, would have wrecked the Socialist planning of the country.

The remaining two days in the train were much the same as the first.

We were very near our destination when the train drew up at Viatka, the home of the handicrafts on the border between Europe and Asia. We stepped out of the train to look round. The platform was lined with little lock-up shops. At first glance, the bright stalls of wooden, painted toys were a toyland in which any child would have revelled. The whole effect was as though a large section of a scene from Russian ballet had come to life. The smiling faces of the neatly dressed peasants were a joy to behold. And colour and paintwork against the cold whiteness of the typically Russian scene beyond, with the black line of pine forests in the distance, made me feel that I had really and truly entered a fairy tale from Hans Andersen.

The sky was deepest blue, with a white puff of cloud here and there. The sun shone brilliantly. It was the most beautiful sight to behold.

We moved casually from stall to stall. The toys were very **simply** made, **but** very brightly coloured; there were, be-

sides toys, yellow sealskin slippers, embroidered in brightly coloured Russian leathers in diamonds and strips, and lined with the softest lamb's wool or rabbit-skin. There were long Siberian fur boots, reaching almost to the hip; there were reindeer coats and caps, such as are worn by the Samoyeds in the Arctic. Hand-knitted woollen mittens were well in evidence.

There were brooches of Ural stones, set in filigree; there were rings and pendants, bangles and bracelets, and boxes of valuable stone.

There were very beautiful artificial flowers made of coloured feathers, so like the real thing that even I, with my utter dislike of artificial flowers, had to accept them as being very perfect and closely approaching the real thing.

It was indeed a station beautiful to behold.

At last, some hours later, the train drew into Sverdlovsk. Outside the station, which had nothing in particular to record, it was bitterly cold. There was a hard frost. The snow on either side of the rough roads was piled high and the ground was frozen hard. The trees, frosted over, and the dark forest line in the distance, as we drove away in a sledge, again reminded me of Hans Andersen's stories.

As we drove, the air struck painfully against the cheek-bones; we huddled together and wrapped our scarves high round our ears and noses. In the shafts of sunlight, bright hard infinitesimally small pieces of ice glittered and sparkled like diamonds, as close together and as tiny as dust in the air so clearly to be seen in shafts of sunlight through the windows in summertime.

One almost expected to see reindeer; but of course, they were thousands of miles farther north.

My first journey in a sledge seemed to me a hazardous-enough undertaking. I constantly urged my companion to slow up the driver, fearing that any minute the whole equipage would turn over; it seemed to me a miracle that we kept right side up.

Every time we turned a corner, the sledge skidded across the road and bumped into the pile of snow with a severe jolt. I felt a weakling at every jar. The road, under the ice, was very bad, for the beaten-down snow had followed the contours of the holes and ruts. It was the bumpiest, skiddiest journey I ever hope to take, and a large part of the way the journey took us uphill. I found it difficult to take my mind off the thought that the horse would not stand the strain and we would suddenly start sliding slowly down the slope, gathering speed as we went.

Ofcourse, nothing of the sort happened. The horses in the Urals are small, but very strong.

I had not recovered from the feeling that something untoward would happen, when the horse suddenly doubled its speed and finally drew up smartly outside a large red-brick building on the top of a hill. It was the Lenin Communist University, standing high above the surrounding town.

We entered the building and beyond the lobby found a large hall. We turned to the right, up a few stairs and came to a door. We knocked on it, and the caretaker opened to us.

He welcomed us, after we had explained who we were, and turned to show us our rooms. The rooms I was to occupy were in the same corridor. He opened a door, and I saw a largish room, with a big window at the opposite wall. To the left there opened two more doors. One gave on to a tiny kitchen, the other on to a small room, where an iron bedstead, a table and two chairs stood.

The smaller room was to be my bedroom. The kitchen was for my use. The larger room was to be a living-room, which I was expected to share with the Red Professor.

I was a little surprised to find so much floor space for my own use, but I soon discovered that there, in Sverdlovsk, there was not the shortage of rooms which I had found in Moscow, and that many lecturers and their families, attached to the University, had whole flats to themselves, and were very comfortably housed.

My Red Professor friend was shown another room, some distance along the corridor.

It was during this period of my stay in the Soviet Union that the urge grew up in me to be up and doing, to have some sort of work for which I was responsible and to which I was suited, and to get right down to the heart of things. I never thought, for one moment, how really difficult that was going to be.

For one thing, the language difficulty was not to be ignored.

Left alone, I investigated the room in which I was to sleep. There was an iron bedstead; planks of pinewood formed the basis for the mattress to rest on. The mattress itself was a little lumpy; it was filled with hay, which smelt fresh and sweet. The pillow was of feathers. I had my own linen sheets bought in Moscow and two heavy army blankets were on the bed.

In the outer living-room there was a fair-sized table, four hard chairs, and we later, between us, bought a box mattress and mounted it on bricks as I had learned from Manya was possible and practicable.

I remember how the question of curtains puzzled me. We had to do everything as economically as possible. I turned my mind back to my schooldays, and although I am no artist, I think that the curious curtains I turned out were not too bad. It was a piece of impertinence, in that country where handicrafts stand at such a high level, for me really to have got down to the job of decorating two long strips of unbleached calico for the window-curtains. But it is usually a safe proposition to do something different from the normal. So my curtains, stencilled in curious crayons—blues, reds, greens and blacks—were praised by all and sundry. Actually they were pretty awful from the artistic point of view. And it was perhaps a sign that I had already fallen into that attitude of looking upon life as something ever changing, that I could put up curtains that much labour had been spent on, but which **were** totally unwashable. **At** least, hot water **would** have removed all my efforts at art, and after laundering my

curtains would once more become plain strips of linen—if ever the crayon could be washed off satisfactorily at all.

We had no covering at all on the floor, neither did we ever become enterprising enough to get anything substantial. To brighten the well-scrubbed boards, however, we did buy a strip of thick hand-woven, highly coloured matting of peasant origin, to run all along one length of the room, from the door to the window. The general effect of the room was bizarre, but not altogether unpleasing.

For warmth I relied on the fur slippers I bought as soon as I could get down to the market. They were the same as those I had seen on the stalls at Viatka.

There were a million things to be arranged and only gradually during the course of a whole week did I really get things settled.

I was fortunate in obtaining the services of a woman to do the hard scrubbing which the wooden flooring required at least once a week. Her name was Dunya, and her regular work was cleaning the rooms of the University and the big hall. She shared it with half a dozen other women. They were paid regular wages, belonged to their own trade union, attended trade union meetings together with the students and professors, and their problems were considered with those of the rest of the University community.

My first morning, after sleeping rather later than usual, I arose in not the best humour. There was the primus stove to be tackled; there was the question of heating the central stove, which warmed all three rooms. My breakfast was a scanty affair.

It was a glorious day outside, and I had almost decided to let everything slide, and explore. But a gentle tap on the door changed all my plans.

Dunya had arrived. Her bright smile and confident manner was cheering; she was deferential, but not obsequious. She saw I was a lost soul, and she did her utmost to set everything ship-shape.

Swiftly she carried in long logs of birchwood and pine, kindled the fire, and soon there was a roaring blaze through the little door of the living-room stove. It was a very tiny door, about nine inches by a foot. I sat over that blaze and gloated. I had felt very cold and miserable before Dunya arrived.

In Moscow, the heating for Manya's room had come from a stove which was kindled in the room next to hers, so that was a task we had never had to cope with. It was all done by the next door neighbour, and Manya had but to pay her share of the fuel.

But I could not sit long over the blazing fire. Dunya appeared with a long rake, stirred the glowing remains of wood and pushed them to the back, shut the stove door, heaved herself on to a chair and put the top lid on, to prevent the heat going up the chimney, and the operation was complete. I had not noticed the upper part of the stove. Dunya had opened another little door, about seven or eight feet from the floor level. I later discovered that inside was a cast-iron lid, which could be removed and replaced as required. And woe betide the person who tried to kindle the fire with the lid on. And worse was the fate of the unfortunate one who, having burned a large quantity of fuel, and raked the embers together, then omitted to put the lid on. For when that happened, all the heat rose quickly and vanished into thin air high above the housetops. The stove grew cold in an incredibly short space of time, and all the labour was wasted.

I rather think that in learning to operate one of these Dutch stoves, which to the initiated are simple affairs, I probably made every mistake that it is possible to make, from forgetting about the lid to closing the stove too soon, when the wood was still smoking, and filling the room with smoke.

The volume of air which was heated and enclosed in this sort of wall chamber, known as the Dutch stove, was fairly large. The cell was probably four feet wide, another four

across, and as much as eight feet in height. Certain it was, as I knew by experience, that even on the coldest day, our Dutch stove kept our three rooms warm for twenty-four hours. I had to agree that it was a better arrangement for heating rooms than our English coal fires, around which we huddle in our relatively warm winters, toasting the front, freezing the back, which is open to draughts from open doors and windows.

There were many things about life in Sverdlovsk which filled me with interest. I could have lived there much longer, observing and learning the people, but that was not my first task. As before, my first job was to learn the language, and I felt the best way to do so would be to sit side by side with those students and learn with them.

It is difficult to explain that particular University.

In common with all the other Communist Universities throughout the Soviet Union it was not like the university we know here in England.

Its aim was to instruct the students in a new world outlook; the subjects taught were such as would arm these men and women with knowledge which would make it possible for them to understand the processes taking place in the world in general and their own country in particular, as well as the special phase through which their country was passing on the road to building Socialism. Such subjects were: Marxian philosophy and economics, Socialist construction, economic geography of the world. *•

The students studying at this university came from all parts of the Urals and from outlying parts extending as far as the Taimyr Peninsula. They came from Yakutsk, Irkutsk, Viatka, Tobolsk, Omsk, Tomsk and so on. They were the pick of the advanced working people; some of them had shown great devotion to the cause of the workers during the civil war years; some of them were children of men and women who had been exiled to Siberia under Tsarism. Some were peasants who had been through a whole school of

learning, rubbing shoulders with town workers at the front, and had trekked back to their homes, carrying all they had learned with them, and now helped to build the new world of working people.

I did not discover this directly, through working side by side with them. True, they would tell me tales of that past period; but they did not seem to think of themselves as particularly wonderful people. When the opportunity arose for applications to go forward for the entrance examination, they had put down their names, out of a desire to become more useful to their country. Most of them realised that without a full understanding of the aims and objects put forward by the body of working men who managed the affairs of the country, without a full understanding of the goal of Socialism they were heading towards, they could not give so much, as Communists, to the people of the locality in which they lived.

It has to be understood that many of the students, members of the Communist Party, had come to believe in that party at a time when little thought could be given to study. It was the practical problems, and the manner in which the Bolsheviks solved those problems, which had brought many of them to the Communist fold. They felt, by that instinct which is strong in working people, that the road their country was traversing was the right one. But they realised only too well, that unless they studied the history of the working-class movement, not only in Russia before the revolution and after, but also in the countries of Europe, they could never hope to get others to understand. They were thirsting for learning.

There is one other side to be remembered. In drawing up the curriculum for the University, those responsible bore in mind the fact that there had been little schooling for several years; that many of the devoted supporters of the Soviet Government and Russian Communist Party, who would come to the University to study, had had precious little

schooling, and sometimes no schooling at all, in Tsarist days. There was a tremendous amount of leeway to be covered.

And so, in the first year, the students were taught the more elementary subjects such as mathematics, elementary economics, the Russian language, simple mechanics, the early history of the working-class movement in Russia. In the second year, roughly speaking, there was some higher mathematics, philosophy, beginning with the earlier philosophers and proceeding right through to Hegel, and Marx's criticism of Hegel; a little Russian literature, Western European history, Marxian economics. The third year was a continuation of the second. The fourth, culminating year, brought the student right up against problems of the working-class movement and working-class conditions abroad, and problems before their own country.

It was a very heavy programme; the lecturers were a mixture of old, tried Marxian Socialists who had been persecuted under Tsarism, but had learned much from practical work in the ranks of the Russian Social-Democratic Federation. They had in many cases taken study circles among the workers during Tsarist days and were from the intellectual section of Tsarist Russian society. Side by side with them were young men who had passed through a school of training as lecturers in the Institute of Red Professors in Moscow, under similar old Marxian teachers. So among the lecturing staff there was to be found the old and the new teaching cadres.

It was never expected that all the students who had so enthusiastically given in their names and succeeded in entering the University would stay the course and graduate. Sometimes for health reasons the student had to give up. Sometimes he or she found the subjects too difficult and that they had no real bent for learning. But the work of teaching those who had voluntarily joined the Communist movement was of primary importance, and these Communist Universities were the places where such training was given.

During my first week in Sverdlovsk I met several students; they visited me in my room, and I was invited to inspect their hostel. I found that they slept in dormitories, each student having a bed, like my own, a bed-side table and locker. Besides this they had a large room set aside specially for reading, where they could obtain all current newspapers and journals, and where there was a fair-sized library of the Russian classics and some translations of European classics.

There was also a games room with chessmen, draughts and dominoes, of which the Russians are inordinately fond. There was the big meeting-hall in the main building of the University, where they met for trade union meetings and party meetings.

As for sports, at that time there was nothing special; but ski-ing and skating could be indulged in by all. Most students brought their own skates and skis with them, but they could also be hired from the small supply which belonged to the University. As students in the Soviet Union return to their homes for three months in the summer, the lack of provision for summer games was not noticeable. Actually, too, in those years the great swing towards more sports for the people had not yet come. It was only later that the craze for sports of all kinds gripped the people of the Soviet Union. In 1925 the advanced sections of the Soviet Union were still the deeply serious-minded, studious, rather harassed, temperamental individuals, who felt the burden of pulling their weight to get the country into order too much to think very much of physical sports. It was as yet not the time for things of that sort. The Government was not yet in a position to pay great attention to sport. That all came later.

The town of Sverdlovsk itself provided little amusement. The local cinema was a poor show indeed. It was in a barracks of a building; the seats were benches with no backs; I visited it once, saw a highly interesting film of the revolutionary days, called *Cross and Mauser*, which was an attack upon the treachery of the rich priests and the way churches

AT A COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

were used by the White Guards to store arms, and so on, but never brought myself to suffer again the aches due to sitting so long in one position on a bench. Yet such was the interest in the cinema, which only after the revolution found its way to places like Sverdlovsk, that the building was always packed, and some people even stood through a performance.

The one shining light in Sverdlovsk, however, was the Opera House, which I will refer to later. I mention it here only to say that all the students at the Communist University and workers in the surrounding factories had opportunities at frequent intervals of visiting it on free passes. At other times, they were provided with tickets at considerably reduced prices, as compared with the price paid by other members of the Sverdlovsk population.

On the first day of my second week in Sverdlovsk, after the preliminary arrangements had been made and permission obtained, I entered a class-room of the first year students and took a seat there as a very privileged person. I was allowed to attend the classes as an external student and non-stipendiary. All the other students, like all students throughout all the republics of the Soviet Union, were provided with a stipend sufficient to cover the bare necessities of life. In the case of married men and women some provision was also made for their wives or husbands where necessary, and any children there might be living back in their home villages or towns.

My first lesson was in the Russian language.

It was curious, but quite understandable, that at this first lesson I was ahead of quite a number of the students in the theory and spelling of the language. At dictation I made few mistakes, unless I had found it difficult to get the sound of the word, or it was a word with exceptional spelling. On the other hand, many of the students fell into mistakes which I had long ago learned to avoid.

The teacher was surprised, but the students more so. They found it difficult to understand why I wrote so well and

spoke so badly. It was only during the break, halfway through the lesson, that I had an opportunity of explaining my position. When they heard that I first went to school when I was four years old, that I had remained at school until I was seventeen, and that there had been nothing to distract me from the smooth course of learning, they were satisfied, and I lost half the admiration they had been ready to offer me. I often laughed at this loss of "respect", for Soviet people have a great respect for learning. But I had at least to be honest.

The second subject was elementary economics. I remember we used a textbook drawn up by somebody called Mikhailevsky. It was not difficult compared with Marx's *Capital*, which I had tried to struggle with in my youth, not very successfully I fear. But I was severely handicapped. Even when I felt I could fathom the meaning behind the Russian wording, I could not prove the fact. For the lessons were more oral than written. It was a case of getting up and answering questions, or trying to explain some point in economics.

Throughout those lessons I sat dumb; but I learned a great many new Russian words.

I remember the lecturer, or teacher, was a very young man, not more than twenty-four years old. He had been through four years in the institute of Red Professors, and was considered one of the more brilliant young men of his year. Unfortunately for him, he was weakly, physically, and the students never grew to like him. Neither was he good as a teacher, though he could lecture well enough, and later he produced some good treatises on economics. But there were all too few teachers and lecturers in those days. This young Communist professor knew that there was the greatest need for teachers; and so, when his Party had called on him to do this particular work, he had willingly enough undertaken it, knowing that the time would come when others, perhaps more suitable, would take his place and he would be free to follow work closer to his inclinations.

The students never forgave me for my behaviour in the economics class. They thought I was just miking, and that had I wanted to I could have spoken up well enough.

"But I don't know the different, new words/' I said, not without exasperation.

"But if you understand the meaning, you have only to look up the words in a dictionary," they would retort.

"But I can't string them together properly," I persisted. "And it only needs me to string them up incorrectly, and the whole argument goes wrong."

"But if you really understand, then you can string it up properly," they went on.

"But the wrong words get mixed in, and anyway, I'm not a public speaker. I can't get up and harangue like you do," I finished up, thoroughly annoyed. For if there was anything that kept me in a constant state of wonder, it was the way these zealous students would struggle with their handicaps in order to show they understood the lesson. Nothing would daunt them, once they were on their feet. The other students could pull them up, could interject, but they stood firm till they had proved their point, even if they had successfully proved just the opposite to what they were asked to prove.

When a student was thoroughly tied up in knots, the teacher patiently came to the rescue. I always maintained a hearty admiration for the way those students listened to the lecturer or teacher and the manner in which they took all criticisms. They were as ready to laugh at their own mistakes as they were to criticise others.

The mathematics master had been an engineer in Tsarist days. He was not a Communist, neither did he take any part in the social or political life of the University or of Sverdlovsk. He was a specialist in his line, and had readily accepted the invitation of the Soviet educational authorities to undertake the education of these Communist students.

I found myself liking him from the first. He had a splendid

sense of humour; his lessons were always very entertaining; he was a born teacher, who could not help making his lessons interesting. He not only taught arithmetic, algebra and geometry, but it was he who conducted us round the local factories, explaining in simple terms the different functions of the machinery. There was never the slightest doubt in my mind that he thoroughly enjoyed his work. And he was very much loved by all who studied under him.

There was little for me to do in the mathematics class. It was all very elementary. But my friendship with the maths master developed into an arrangement whereby I helped him study English and he helped me to read through books on machinery.

The proposition was of his making, and I fell into it more because I had insufficient courage to refuse than because the books he loaned me were of use to me. True, I gathered together a small vocabulary connected with the parts of machinery, but of the working of the machines and their structure in general nothing has remained in my mind.

There was another side of learning which came into our curriculum by virtue of the fact that all the students were Communists. Two hours each week were spent in the Party Cabinet. There were to be found all the current Party pamphlets and conference and congress decisions. From time to time a debate took place. I remember the man who ran the Party Cabinet. He was a huge, fat fellow, but with little sense of humour. I ran against him right from the start, because I honestly revealed to him my ignorance of Party affairs and of the opposition trend in the Party at the time.

I found him far too exacting, and I suspected him of not remembering the sort of material he had to deal with and the make-up of his students. It may have been that I was to blame. Perhaps I did not understand his manner of speaking, but he struck me as being rather the bully type, and I felt that his own knowledge was schematic and did not go very deep.

The students managed **him** very well, however. For one

thing, on the basis of their own experiences of life in the Soviet Union, they could sometimes floor him on practical questions, although as far as I knew, he never made a mistake on theoretical questions.

Looking back I am inclined to believe he had had too little experience of practical work, had gone through his theory and passed well, but was as yet too young to put his theory into practice. This is a fault seriously criticised among Party people in the Soviet Union, and I have no doubt that the young man was later given an opportunity by his Party to make up on the practical side.

I was not bound to attend all classes, as the other students were, but somehow I felt that since the privilege had been extended to me to attend, I was in duty bound to go. Sometimes it was with a very heavy heart that I went. The barrier between the other students and myself was very great. Our lives had been so different. Actually, through my own self-made fears, I missed much that I might have gained from the students. Similarly there was much I could have given them from my own store of knowledge. But one cannot run before walking, and to change one's mode of life, to meet people of a totally different world, is not easy, if one wants the meeting to be on an equal footing.

I remember, towards the end of term, just before the New Year holidays, I missed the final conference, at which students had an opportunity of exchanging views on the subjects they had learned. It was customary for one student to read a paper (only they never read them, but made speeches, which seemed to me to come easily to them); the others then discussed the subject of the speech.

I was suffering from a sort of mental lapse, and the bright sunshine outside and the crystalline snows drew me far out into the forests, away from everything. It was almost playing truant, and somehow, although the walk was exhilarating and I had done what I wanted to, I was not comfortable in my conscience.

After the dinner hour, I turned up rather sheepishly at the hostel of the students. Some of them would be travelling back to their homes for two weeks. There were one or two with whom I wanted to talk a little before they went.

I was hailed by a humorous young man, who was dullest of all in the first year.

"Where have you been?"

"I couldn't come," I replied stupidly.

"But why?"

"I don't know. I couldn't have taken part. I wanted to miss the conference."

"Well! What an individualist! You might at least have come, if only to give me moral support," and he laughed at his own joke, and called the others over.

"What do you think of her? She didn't want to come. I had to go, or I would have been down for the first year again next year!"

I shook off my bad humour in their company. They could not understand me, but they tolerated me, which was something.

I came up against other difficulties in Sverdlovsk. The Red Professor who had accompanied me from Moscow was not happy at his work.

I had realised for some time that something was wrong. Friends from among the teaching staff had often dropped in for tea in the evening in the big room I shared with Mischa. There had often been heated arguments, not all of which I understood.

Mischa had a grudge against life, and it was that he ought never to have been asked by the Party to go and teach in Sverdlovsk. He had wanted to remain in Moscow and teach.

Now the question of distributing trained Marxian professors, members of the Russian Communist Party, is decided by a special Educational Department of that Party. Every Party member in the Soviet Union has some say in what he shall do, but the final decision is made by this educa-

tional body in the case of Party members who have been given the highest opportunity of obtaining Marxian education. The highest educational institutions were at that time to be found in Moscow. A Red Professor, on graduating from the Institute, would be sent to work where there was the greatest need. When Mischa graduated, there was a vacancy in Sverdlovsk University. But he wanted to remain in Moscow, purely because he felt himself qualified to teach in the best Communist University in the land, that in Moscow.

I never could fathom why Mischa was so adamant about it or why, when the decision was taken against his will, he should have been so strongly averse to it.

I only discovered the reason many years later.

But Mischa was annoyed, and he never failed to show his annoyance or relate his grievance at every possible opportunity.

All those months he was in Sverdlovsk, he kept in close communication with friends in Moscow, urging them to pull wires to get him back there. Although he was not a delegate to the Moscow Conference of Red Professors, which took place in December 1925, he nevertheless left his classes in Sverdlovsk in charge of an assistant lecturer, which was breaking discipline, and attended the conference as a visitor, hoping thereby to have his case taken up.

I remember one particular evening, when Mischa and a number of other lecturers and teachers were seated round in our sitting-room, discussing the affairs of the day. Feelings had run high; one of the men had jumped from his chair, and was hurling hard words at Mischa:

"But that is just too much! That is an insult and nothing less!" he roared. "How can you, calling yourself a Communist and a Red Professor at that, stand and say the things you do. It is quite beyond my comprehension. You must have some sort of mania. Do you think that just because you **got your teeth** knocked **out** in the civil **war**, and escaped from

a whiteguard prison at Kiev, you can do what you like for the rest of your life? There are thousands and thousands in the Soviet Union who have been through what you have; there are hundreds and hundreds with brains as good as yours, only give them your opportunities. No, what you want, Mischa, is two years in a factory, rubbing your corners off with good working men. You're too big for yourself, since you went abroad to finish off your book."

The young man flung himself from the room, and never returned to it.

This was a pretty kettle of fish, and no mistake! That Mischa was suffering from something or other was evident. That he was constantly stirring up trouble was another thing. But what he had said that was insulting I did not discover.

The young man who had hurled himself from the room had struck me as being particularly intelligent and cool-headed. I had often chatted with him, told him my difficulties, how I felt I did not fit in with things. He had given me a great deal of comfort, had shown me that one can only rise to whatever occasion may come one's way, and assured me that as likely as not I had done the best I could in my own sphere.

He knew that I had had very little help from Mischa, who had, before coming to Sverdlovsk, made himself my adviser and protector. He had cleared up a misunderstanding between Mischa and myself more than once. Consequently, his rough words and sudden departure from the room seemed to me to have a deeper meaning than I could gather. I determined to see him on the following day.

But the days passed, and I found no opportunity of meeting him. He had banished himself from my room for ever; not because of me, but because Mischa might be there.

It was not until something like ten years later that I met him again by chance in Moscow. Mischa, I had already learned, had followed the path of his own choosing. His unwillingness to listen to those who would gladly have **been**

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his friends and stood by him, his own headstrong nature and breaches of discipline, his desire to climb to the top of the tree, regardless of the methods he used, had brought him to a sad end. Apparently, even back in those days, his desire to remain in Moscow was not for any other reason than that he was already working with opposition elements inside the Communist Party; he had formed part of the network which had been laid to undermine the Soviet Government; he had lied when asked directly concerning his loyalty to Party decisions, pretending to be loyal. He had certainly made a career for himself, had climbed pretty well to the top, but he had climbed the wrong tree, a tree which inevitably had to be cut down by those who were honestly leading the Soviet people to Socialism, by the Soviet Government authorities.

So Mischa's career ended badly. He was convicted with many another to a number of years work, where his brilliant, misguided brain could have rest and time to think over things from a different angle.

It has often seemed strange to me that a simple working man, who had been given the same privileges and education as Mischa had, should have been the one, ten years previously, in my little room in Sverdlovsk, to pass the verdict on Mischa. I have no doubt that although he thought that work in a factory, rubbing shoulders with industrial workers, would have done Mischa the world of good, he never thought that Mischa would come to it, some ten years later, having first been tried in a Soviet Court of Law.

There was one particular subject which we discussed in the Party Cabinet. It was Bukharin's theory, "Peasants, enrich yourselves." At that time, in 1925, no decision had yet been taken against Bukharin in particular. The question was still in the stage of discussion through the countryside.

There had been discussions on all sorts of topics in my living-room, when students and lecturers had dropped in to drink tea in the evenings. But I was not sufficiently alive to follow perfectly the trend of their arguments.

I remember that I prepared for this discussion with great care. But I was hampered as usual. There was no one available with whom I could consult. Mischa seemed disinclined to disillusion me about Bukharin's theory, and I was sufficiently astute to know that the theory was considered incorrect.

I went to the class with an unpleasant feeling that I could not stand firmly and explain where the theory was wrong. There was something I had not fathomed in the material with which I had been provided, together with the other students. I had concluded my reading and come to the conclusion: much might be said on both sides.

After the discussion, I felt clearer on the matter. But I wanted to get Mischa's opinion. There had been another discussion in my room and the others had left. Only Mischa remained.

"Then you think Bukharin's theory is right?" I asked. For I had noticed during the evening that he took little part in the discussion, except to query certain remarks.

"I didn't say so," was his reply.

"But you didn't come down one way or the other, neither have you helped me with this problem this week."

"It is better for you to think it all out for yourself," he replied cryptically, with a smile I had almost grown to hate.

"All right. One day I shall fathom it all. But it seems to be a very important argument. I cannot say you are a very helpful Red Professor."

The shaft went home; he left the room in a huff.

In a few brief words, the problem, which I later did fathom, was this:

Bukharin knew well enough that one had to differentiate between the different strata of peasantry; there were the poor peasants, little better than agricultural labourers in point of fact, who could be regarded as being in a similar position to the wage-slaves of industry in the profit-making world; there were the middle peasants who could, as econ-

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omic conditions dictated, either drop into the section of poor peasants and turn to agricultural labouring or might, on the other hand, make a sufficiently good living out of the soil to grow, one day, into rich peasants or kulaks; there were the kulaks themselves, rich peasants exploiting the labour of poor peasants, and enriching themselves at their expense.

Ignoring the tendency of the middle peasants to become kulaks, Bukharin regarded the kulak stratum as something in the nature of concessionaires, holding their lands as enterprises on concession from the Government, and controlled, so Bukharin thought, by the Government through the banks.

Bukharin put forward the theory that these rich peasants should be encouraged to make the most of their individual enterprises, to grow rich, and that they would naturally gradually grow towards the Socialist system.

Bukharin's theory is ridiculous when we consider the aspect of those peasants who worked for the kulak. A kulak, moreover, getting richer and richer every day, has no incentive whatsoever to "grow towards Socialism". Je. would be provided with no further incentive in life, like all others who exploit labour and make profits from that exploitation, than the incentive to make more profits. There was no reason whatsoever to believe that if grown rich, these kulaks would change of heart and give up profit-making, any more than we believe that the financiers of England and America will voluntarily give up their riches and throw themselves into the melting-pot. It would be contrary to the nature of the beast to expect kulaks, enriched, to whang their spots. Nobody better than the Bolsheviks, who had wasted their country ever since the revolution suffer perpetual molestation from the exploiters of the world, knew this to be the truth,

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were well aware of the working of the class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat. They knew that the only way to prevent capital-

ism, the system of profit-making, from rearing its head again in the Soviet Union was to nip it in the bud. The Bolsheviks knew that only through collective labour on the fields could the peasantry become prosperous for themselves and for the rest of the Soviet population.

Consequently, Bukharin's theory, "Peasants, enrich yourselves," fell to the ground. It, too, was nipped in the bud.

Essentially, it was the old question again which we have here in England: whether the capitalist, profit-making, class will voluntarily, by virtue of some kind of conversion, grow into Socialism. Whether they will voluntarily agree to give up their profit-making, exploiting methods, and let a government of working people control the surplus which the total mass of workers produce over and above their own personal requirements, for distribution among the rest of the population, for use for the benefit of the whole population.

This was one of the points on which my father and I often used to talk. It was also the subject of his conversations with all and sundry whom he met in Russia, when he visited it in 1926. He believed, together with the leaders of the Labour Party in England and the social-democratic leaders of other countries, that provided the Labour movement could have an absolute majority in the government, they could so organise things, through nationalisation, at first with compensation, afterwards without, to get Socialism in England. He believed that the capitalist class could be persuaded to give up their privileges. So much faith had he in mankind, and the good to be found in all men.

I, together with my colleagues in England and the Bolsheviks of the Soviet Union and Marxists the world over, do not believe this. We know that the capitalist system was for a long time a vast improvement over the feudal system; yet in every country the noble lords of the feudal days relinquished their hold on their positions only because they were beaten in bloody battles, battles in which people who laboured helped the new capitalist class, because they too,

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with their masters, saw no way of developing until the feudal system **had** been swept away.

No revolutionary change has ever taken place without stubborn resistance on the part of that section of society which was being swept away in the revolution. Cromwell in England swept out the feudal system and brought in the capitalist system. The working people of England will one day sweep away the capitalist system and bring in Socialism. If Socialism is to come to England, we believe it can only come by the path of working-class revolution. All other talk of building Socialism by peaceful means is, in our eyes, so much self-deception. Hitler talks of Socialism: see where his idea of Socialism has brought him and the people under his sway. Yet there was a time in Germany, after Versailles, when that country, with relatively little or no bloodshed, could have become a Socialist country and joined forces with Socialist Russia.

But all this is really outside the confines of my book.

What I wanted to show was that Bukharin's theory would have meant giving some measure of power to the rich kulaks, which they would inevitably, by their very natures, have used against the Soviet Workers' Government in an endeavour to re-introduce the profit-making system, to restore capitalism, and that it arose out of his theory that the kulaks would mildly turn Socialist, just as there are some in England who imagine that rich financiers will one day change their spots and meekly become Socialists and help build Socialism for the working people.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM HOME

PERHAPS THE PERIOD around the New Year, when I received Christmas letters from England and heard of the holiday-making, was the loneliest I have ever lived in my life. The students were mostly back in their homes for the end-of-term holidays. I was left much to my own devices.

January 7 is Christmas, old style, in Russia. So those of the population who still keep Christmas, and there were many, some of whom attended church, others who did not, turned their thoughts to preparations in the first week of January.

On January 6 I set out in the early morning, down the Karl Liebknecht Street on which the University buildings stood, through the long high road of the town, known as Lenin Street, to the right across a little bridge over a thin trickle of river, now frozen over, through a number of little turnings, out on to the market square. I passed women with laden baskets, with small fir trees tucked under their arms and trailing in the snow behind them.

At last I arrived, to find such a bustle of buying and selling as I had never yet encountered. The trestles were laden with fat geese, ducks, turkeys, young sucking pigs, sides of beef, veal, mutton, hams, everything good to eat. The peasants had certainly made a good job of their farming. There was Christmas fare on all sides.

At one end of the market were rows and rows of fir trees lying on the ground waiting to be bought. It struck me then as curious that people were so ready to buy the trees, when they had only to walk a couple of miles to the forests to find all they required. But the fir trees were sold for a song, so why should housewives go to the forests and cut them themselves?

There were stalls, too, with all sorts of baubles for the trees: coloured globes, tinsel and "snow", sparkling scraps for scattering over the trees when the decorating was complete. In Russia the top decoration is not necessarily a fairy, as here, but most frequently a star. And the one adjunct to the tree which is never forgotten is the Santa Claus, or *Dyedushka Moroz* (Grandfather Frost) as the Russians call him. He is made out of cotton wool, treated on the outside to give a gloss. He is often dressed in pure white, like snow, although the Red *Dyedushka Moroz* is also in vogue. The cotton wool is very compressed and the bottom hem of the coat and compressed wool inside is stuck with glue to a large piece of cardboard, to give the figure stability. He carries a staff and sack. *Dyedushka Moroz* is always placed at the foot of the trees, in the mould of the tub in which the tree stands, and is partly concealed by the lower branches.

Here, as in the Moscow market, there was quite a menagerie of live animals, and the best housewives preferred to buy them alive and do the killing at home themselves. I remember that later, when I was living outside Moscow and had the opportunity of buying a hen from a neighbouring peasant, the young girl of seventeen who worked for me at that time in the house, rose to the occasion in the best style when I asked her to make sure the peasant killed the hen thoroughly before she brought it home to me. Olga replied:

"But why? I can kill it; I've done it before."

To us, townsfolk, this seems a most abhorrent job, but to people who have lived among animals and poultry and have been brought up to the killing of them, it is all just part of the day's work.

The Sverdlovsk market at Christmas-time was also a place where the children congregated for amusements. There were the fortune-tellers, gypsy women for the most part, who were a constant source of amusement to the children. They were muffled in warm coats of all fashions, some of them with puff sleeves, swallow waists, full skirts and fur trim-

gings and braid, obviously looted several years back, and in some state of decay. Peeping below were their brightly coloured skirts, with contrasting coloured aprons. Around their greasy black hair were shawls, loosely tied in the rather slovenly yet swaggering, picturesque style of the gypsies; long thin straggling plaits, interwoven with bright ribbons, hung down on each side of their comely, weather-beaten faces. They wore a variety of jewellery and ear-rings, and their throats were wound round with multicoloured beads.

There were side-shows, fat women, jugglers, Punch and Judy shows, with the ever-patient, scruffy-looking dogs; there was the *shamianka*, the barrel organ resting on a pole, with the inevitable monkey, in a costume more resembling that of the American bell-hop than anything else. There were other gypsies who carried boxes of envelopes and parrots to pick them out for those who wanted to know their luck.

But the central joy of all the children was "Mischa", the great grizzly bear, and another Polar bear, familiarly known as "Polya", both of whom danced awkwardly to the mouth organ or *garmoshka* (concertina), amid shouts of laughter from young and old alike.

The ragamuffins were there in profusion and they reaped a good harvest for days ahead in petty pilfering, in purses stolen from engrossed and haggling housewives, or in direct payment for odd jobs they performed, fetching and carrying for the merchants.

The spirit of Christmas was indeed in the air, but only the more material side of it. There was little to show the other side.

As I walked back I thought of Christmas in England. I had fallen into the more serious side of life in Moscow. I had as yet seen no revelling in the wilder sense of the word. Certainly there was much happiness; I too had shared that, and I had been warmly welcomed back there in Moscow. But I still felt lost in Sverdlovsk, and Christmas thoughts did not make it easier for me.

I dismissed these thoughts. Somehow, life here in Russia was a very serious affair because serious events were taking place. When days became more settled, when the Soviet Government with the Soviet people had put behind them the darkest days of their existence and had reached a degree of prosperity unknown in any other countries in the world, then and only then did life take on a lighter vein.

However, although several days had passed since New Year's Day, it was holiday time for students, and my companions were no doubt very happy back in their own homes. As I walked towards home I made a plan.

Dunya, the woman who did for me, lived alone by herself. She had lost her husband in the Great War, when the Russians were fighting the Germans on the long Eastern front and were killed by thousands in battles against far superior forces. Dunya had no children, her one daughter having died during the famine consequent upon the blockade of revolutionary Russia after the war.

My plan was to celebrate with her; we would have holiday fare and perhaps we could arrange something entertaining in the evening.

I had left her at home cleaning the floors. During the week since the New Year I had been careless about meals, and my purse was all the heavier for it. It is an unsatisfactory business at the best of times cooking food for oneself, and when term came to an end, my self-discipline seemed to have gone with it.

I hurried into the flat and found Dunya just about finishing-

"Dunya, are you very busy this afternoon?"

"No, Valentina Georgievna," she replied. "Is there anything I can do?"

My plans seemed stupid in the face of her serious inquiry. I did not want to tell her I was lonely, I wanted company and amusement. She might misconstrue my words and imagine that I was being ignored by those of the students

left in the University. It was my own fault if I was isolated and I knew it. But I was in no mood for serious young students, and during that week I had avoided them.

"Oh, it isn't really very much. I've just come in from the market. It was wonderful there, everybody so cheerful and bustling, whole families trooping round doing their shopping. Couldn't we go back to the market and then cook a really good meal to-morrow? Or had you made plans yourself?"

"If you want me to, Valentina Georgievna," said Dunya, readily enough. "I'll help you get in the shopping."

"And won't you come to dinner to-morrow, and help me cook it? We could invite Phillip Yakovlevich. He is all alone here, his wife has gone back to Moscow to be with her daughter while she studies there. He doesn't know many people hereabouts. We could call on him on the way to the market; we have to pass his rooms."

Dunya smiled. Apparently the idea had only just caught on.

"You want to celebrate?" she said.

"Well, perhaps not celebrate, but we'll do what we can," I replied, a little abashed.

Dunya was all for setting out there and then, but I was a little weary after walking so far, and although she would never have admitted as much, I knew she must be tired too.

We drank tea together first. It was comforting even to sit with Dunya at one table. She would never talk much herself, but she would listen to my chatter, asking a question now and then. And she was very big-hearted.

Moreover, she had definite views about the wicked rich peasants; she and her family had been poor peasants, consequently she could appreciate all that had been done in the countryside by the Soviet authorities.

She had no inhibitions. She was content to serve these hundred or so students to the best of her ability and she was very much liked by all of them.

It had been a great thing for me when she came to me that first morning of my arrival and had taken me under her wing. She was only a year or two older than myself, but the experiences she had gone through had added a good ten years to her. For one thing, she had married at the early age of fifteen, had borne her daughter at sixteen, had lost her husband at eighteen. She had fended for herself ever since, and her first experience of marriage, which she had been forced into by her parents against her will, left her unwilling to seek companionship that way.

We called on Phillip Yakovlevich on the way.

He was a short, round, merry man of nearly fifty. His curly, fair hair was thinning on top. His face was pock-marked and he had a charming smile. He had spent some years in America in his early manhood and spoke English well with a pleasing hint of an American accent. His work in the Soviet Union was connected with government trading concerns.

My invitation that he should partake of something in the nature of a feast with me and Dunya the following day was gladly accepted. He crowned all my plans with a promise to bring with him three tickets for the opera in the evening.

Our purchases consisted of a goose, apples to stuff it, flour for some very special cake Dunya had set her heart on preparing, cream for the same, berries for jelly, icing sugar, spices, vegetables.

We returned home with ten copecks left between us and no prospects of more money for a week ahead. But with the small stock we had at home and the goose, we reckoned we would not starve. Looking back now, there seemed to be no end to that goose and to the variety of ways in which it could be eaten.

We carried our burden back, panting and sweating as we went, although there was a frost of 40⁰ C. The sky had already darkened, the sun had gone; it was almost dark.

As we entered the room, it seemed too hot, and I flung off

my coat and ran to open the window. Dunya hastened to prevent me. I expostulated, but she was adamant.

"You can't do that when you are overheated," she said, gently. "You might get pneumonia!"

It was insufferably hot, but I knew it would be useless to argue with Dunya. And for all I knew she might be right. Cold air at a temperature of something just over 40° C, blowing in and creating a draught, might take one to death's door, as Dunya had often explained.

We partook of a frugal meal and wound up with tea and *sushki*, which were rings of dough, baked hard and shiny, with a sweet vanilla flavour. I had never tried them before and they were Dunya's contribution.

But apparently the day's work was not yet over. Dunya insisted on starting on the cake. It had to be cooked a day early.

I was not disappointed that Dunya would remain that evening. It would be company for me. And I saw as she made that cake that she was glad to have an opportunity of being alone in the kitchen, pottering around with nobody else to interfere with her. And what a cake it was, and the time it took to make!

I have never, before or since, found such a cake in the Soviet Union. As far as I can judge, it must have gone completely out of fashion.

All I can remember of the making of it was that it required much attention and patience, a great deal of beating eggs and whipping the mixture out in the cold air outside. I tried to help, but there was not much I could do beyond washing all the bowls and wooden spoons and basins which Dunya made free use of, in case she might require them again.

The cake actually consisted of layer after layer of the thinnest wafers of pastry, interleaved with a marvellous creamy mixture, the secret of which I never fathomed. Each layer of pastry had to be baked separately and left to cool. Soon the tables in the kitchen and living room were Uttered

with these rounds of pastry. I should think there were almost fifty of them; yet they were so thin that when placed one on top of the other, the complete cake, cream fillings and all, stood no higher than about nine inches.

It looked a prodigious concoction when completed. And it took almost four hours to prepare. No wonder it has gone out of fashion!

Dunya stayed in my rooms that night.

I awoke early the following morning but found no Dunya. As I finished breakfast, she came in.

"Where have you been, Dunya. You've had no breakfast?"

"Well, you see, Valentina Georgievna," she said somewhat embarrassed. "I share my home with an old woman. Actually it is her house and she lets a room to me. She is very infirm, and I always take her in tea every morning at seven o'clock. She goes to bed early, so did not know I was not in last night. She would have worried this morning, if I hadn't taken in her tea as usual at seven o'clock."

"But why should she have worried, Dunya?"

"Well, the bandits," was her reply. "Only a few days ago a woman was stripped of her winter coat by a gang of young hooligans and left to shiver her way home in a thin cotton dress. They held her up with a hatchet. Then six months ago a murder was committed with robbery on the outskirts of the town."

I could not deny her fears. True, there were few bandits about then, as compared with previous years. But particularly round Sverdlovsk, because of the lonely forests not far off, they were still to be found in the summertime. They usually chose milder parts, however, when the winter months approached. Actually, in the wintertime, it was safe enough to walk through the forests round about Sverdlovsk.

Still, from time to time cases were reported in the newspapers about people being held up and asked to remove their coats. It was a sign of the times, when the Ught industries had

not yet been reconstructed to produce such an abundance of clothing at cheap prices as would make such robberies out of the question. This banditry, if not political, was another hang-over from the civil war. It was being severely dealt with, but had not yet been crushed.

Dinner the next day was a huge success, and crowned with a delightful evening. The only thing I had omitted to buy was supplied by Phillip, namely the wine. Perhaps Dunya had not liked to remind me of it, so it was fortunate that our guest had brought his contribution.

I noticed, in the kitchen, a samovar. I did not mention the fact that I had seen it. It was evidently Dunya's surprise addition to the feast.

Phillip was humorously malicious about the absence of the wine.

"Of course, Violet," said he in almost perfect English, "knowing a little of your family and the fact that you were trained to be a teetotaler" (which I was not, incidentally), "I knew you would forget the wine. So I took the liberty of bringing my own and was generous enough to bring enough for you and Dunya too."

Dunya at this juncture hurried to the kitchen and returned with a pernicious-looking bottle of colourless liquid. The vodka! I was relieved. After all, it is the national drink at feast-times, and it was really remiss of me not to have bought at least one bottle. Actually I knew nothing about vodka, for I had never acquired a taste for it.

The dinner table was a joy to behold. A really beautiful Ukrainian tablecloth covered our two tables. The *zakuski* were garnished, appetisingly prepared by Dunya, and there was a choice assortment.

But the crowning feature was the humming, purring of the boiling samovar. We sat round chatting and drinking tea for a long time. We toyed with sweets and nuts and fruit. There was a feeling of satisfaction about everything, and I knew my dinner had been a success.

Like all men who are getting on in years, Phillip grew sleepy after the meal. I nudged Dunya and we went to the kitchen for a womanly conference.

"See, Dunya, I'm going out for a walk. Could you get Phillip to lie down on the divan? And take some rest yourself. We'll just clear the tables and we can wash everything when I return."

Phillip was an easy-going sort of fellow, and did not demur when I announced that I would leave him alone, while I took a walk. I knew him well enough to realise that he would not offer to accompany me.

I turned to get my coat and hat, and remembered something else.

"And, Phillip, I know you are a good hand round the house. Would you prevent Dunya from doing anything while I'm out? And all I would like you to do is to make some coffee round about six o'clock, before we go to the opera."

"Yours to command," he replied, bowing slightly and smiling at his own facetiousness.

It was a good walk. The cold air was exhilarating. There had been a goodly fall of snow in the night and the ground was not slippery. I turned to the right, down the slope to a road below, across a track trodden down by peasant boots, towards the forest.

I had taken the walk once before. Then I had been accompanied by a number of friends. Phillip had sung out there in the forest: snatches from grand opera, revolutionary songs. His voice was still good. He was one of those rare, born natural singers and it had been a real pleasure to listen to the resonant, baritone notes out there in the still forest.

I now walked alone. I had to avoid toboggans as they slithered down the slope, ending up on the road almost at my feet. The children were careless about where they landed, and it was often a near thing. But they were happy as sand-boys.

I passed several young people on skis, flushed faces and

bright eyes. They pushed on their sticks, plodded heavily along after a long run through the forest roads.

The sky overhead was darkening. The sun looked like a great dull-red globe hanging in the sky. I hurried my foot-steps for there would not be more than an hour's light, and I wanted to reach the edge of the forest before turning back.

The sharp walk warmed me so that I was forced to loosen my fur-lined coat and it flew out behind me as I walked. I passed a few little wooden houses standing in their small plots of ground and surrounded by wooden fencing. Nothing green was to be seen.

The houses were left behind as I followed the narrow track of down-trodden snow that led to the small church on the edge of the forest. It was hard going; the front muscles of my legs tightened with the strain, for it is never easy walking on snow.

The church stood, very small, with high shoulders, golden dome and laced cross, ordinary white, leaded windows and no stained glass. It was locked, so I could not go inside.

It looked a lonely enough building out there. There was no graveyard, no house alongside. Whenever I happened to take this walk, it was always locked up. Yet the notices on it, which were fresh, showed that it still served for worship at the proper times.

I walked round it, stepping gingerly in snow which reached to the top of my *burki* (felt boots). A false step into a hole brought me stumbling down, and one boot became filled with snow. I knew what Dunya would have said about that.

I cursed myself for my stupid sense of curiosity that had sent me wading through deep snow, the more so since there was nothing interesting to be found by circling the church.

I sat down on the church steps and remedied the position by pulling off my boot and shaking out the snow. It was enough to make my foot cold, and it was some minutes before it warmed again.

CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM HOME

I took only a few steps into the forest. It was growing late and somehow Dunya's fears had infected me. Besides, it was not a little eerie out there alone.

There is perhaps nothing so splendid as getting right away from the world of people. And there was no place where it was so easy as out there, on the edge of Sverdlovsk town.

All the restrictions, all the petty conventions, all the fighting and quarrelling between peoples seem so many mere stumbling blocks in the road of life, something that keeps people apart, makes them suspicious and narrow.

Out there alone in the world everything seemed possible, even the idea that one day men would learn to live together in peace.

The sky darkened still more and the quiet, brooding feel of the atmosphere crept into my bones. It seemed natural that great men like Tolstoy and Lenin must have had similar feelings about the stupidity of life as it was, of the cruelties inflicted on those hard-working peasants, of the bestial nature of the wealthy squanderers and idlers. It seemed to me natural that they should have arrived at the conclusion that some gospel of sanity was required, that some example had to be set, that some sharp change had got to be. Tolstoy and Lenin took different paths, but their minds had been made up because they abhorred the life which people were forced to live.

It was good to be alive out there in the Soviet Union and to know that there, at least, the fundamental evil—the exploitation of man by man for the purpose of grabbing profits and amassing wealth and living lives of luxury and idleness—had been rooted out once and for all. All the people had to do now was to keep a vigilant eye open to see that this evil never raised its head again in any form. All they had to do was to hang together, work hard and build up that Socialism of which they dreamed and for which they now planned.

As I retraced my steps I thought of many things; of the great discussions taking place in the Russian Communist

Party at that period; of the question of how far the evil roots had really been drawn out, of the measures to be taken to prevent capitalism ever again taking root in the Soviet Union, of what the official government attitude should be towards the rich peasants.

I thought of England and the demands that even then were being put forward by working people to improve their lot. It was little enough news I obtained of events in England. But these were the months that preceded the General Strike and the prolonged fight of the British miners. The British working-class movement in the form of the trade unions and Labour Party had been searching for years for a way out for their workers. On the question as to what British workers ought to do, I had long made up my mind_____

I was again very tired by the time I returned to my home. I almost wished the day could end. I was in no communicative mood. It had all been very perfect, and this seemed the natural end of the day. But other plans had been made, and I had to go through with them.

As I entered the warmth of my room, I flung off the mood. PhiUp Yakovievich jumped up, all smiles.

"What it is to be young!" he jibed.

"You're not old. You're just a lazy old humbug," I retorted. "Did you have a good sleep?"

"Splendid. And here is the coffee. We were only waiting for you to return."

"And who made it?" I asked, ready to reprove him.

"Well, as a matter of fact, Dunya took advantage of me," was his honest reply. "You see, I was sleeping heavily and did not hear her moving about."

As Dunya entered the room I reproved her.

"Dunya, you are just like all the other women. You spoil the men and they just take advantage of you. PhiUp should have prepared the coffee. He does it quite weU."

A broad smile lighted her homely face. She knew I wasn't reaUy annoyed with her, though I had spoken sharply

enough. She knew too that it is always easier for a woman to do a small job than to go to the bother of showing a man where everything is kept. We had often talked of simple things of this sort. Dunya knew from experience that I was as bad as herself where men are concerned, and that for all my principles, I usually preferred to do things myself in my own home.

"But you didn't touch the dinner things, did you?"

"Oh no, Valentina Georgievna, you told me not to."

I almost purred with satisfaction. So much, at least, I had forced Dunya to understand. When it was a question of sharing work, she knew I meant what I said. I was distinctly relieved, for Dunya had done enough for a guest.

Moreover, I noticed with even more satisfaction that she had rested. I could see by the dent on the pillow which she had not yet shaken out.

We drank coffee more or less in silence. My own thoughts were again far away. Phillip had turned to the newspaper. Dunya was always ready to be silent.

Practically speaking, Dunya and I could have coped with the washing-up very well ourselves. But Phillip's conscience had pricked him; he insisted on helping. The kitchen was all too small for three of us; the whole performance was delayed because we stumbled against each other. But finally everything was shipshape again, the little parcels were slung from the window bolt in the makeshift "refrigerator", and it was almost time for us to set out for the opera.

We were to hear *A'ida*.

I did not expect very much when I approached the stately, white building of the Opera House in company with Phillip and Dunya. It was a well-proportioned building, from the portico of which a flood of yellow light shone on the snow, welcoming us as we picked our way across the open ground in front of it.

There was the usual feeling inside. It was almost time for the opera to begin; the musicians were tuning up; there was

an air of expectancy in the dimly lit hall. We groped our way to the seats and settled in, only just in time.

The music was good. The voices of the singers equally good, and I noticed that for the most part here was young talent.

The arts had been protected and encouraged right through **the** period of revolution, civil war, blockade and intervention. The fact that out there in the provinces, in far-away Sverdlovsk, there could exist and flourish an Opera House, where music of a high standard could be heard, was in itself a splendid tribute to the Bolsheviks and their efforts to preserve the arts.

Aida in that Opera House was something really splendid. There was probably nothing of the splendour of costume and scenery to be found at Covent Garden, but the music was so good that costumes and background were of little importance.

I remember the leading tenor was Koslovsky, who has gone since then from heights to greater heights and is to-day one of the best lyrical tenors in the Soviet Union. There was a very young and very charming singer, Mukhtareva was her name, who has also gone far ahead to-day in the opera world of the Soviet Union.

In the interval I took stock of the audience. It consisted of people from all sections of the population of Sverdlovsk; students, workers, peasants from the surrounding countryside; there were managers of industrial concerns like Phillip himself, shop-assistants, some small private shopkeepers, and members of the local Soviet. One or two faces I recognised; others were pointed out to me by Phillip, whose work brought him in contact with many people.

The theatre itself had an interior rather on the old style: stalls, pit, side-boxes and circles. It was average in size. The promenade custom, common in all the Russian theatres, was there too. Before the starting time, those already **arrived and** waiting, promenade **in** twos and threes round

and round the galleries or in the big salon set aside and hung with prints, photographs, caricatures and cartoons of theatrical people of note. Often, in the theatres, there are little models of different scenes from plays and opera. This was so in the Sverdlovsk Opera House. Other theatres have a special museum room containing articles of interest connected with the theatrical world.

In general, a visit to the theatre or opera in the Soviet Union can be not only a pleasure for the ear, eye and mind, but a source of information on the theatre in general and the history of the particular theatre visited.

It was during the interval that Phillip told me how the Sverdlovsk Opera House came into being. Sverdlovsk had been the central town of the goldfields of the region. In Sverdlovsk big merchants and traders, and among them Englishmen connected with the Lena Goldfields, had their offices and sometimes their homes. The question was raised in the Sverdlovsk *zemstvo* (town council) as to which undertaking should be carried out: the building of an Opera House or the laying down of a sewage system and water-supply for the town. The vote was cast in favour of the Opera House.

As Phillip was at some pains to explain to me, the better choice in those days would have been the water-supply. He hastened to add, however, that for the merchants and concessionaires and wealthy peasants who alone had a say in how local affairs should be conducted, the fact that no water was laid on in the town was really of no special inconvenience. It was not they who had the arduous task of dragging water up to the houses in huge barrels. It was not their women who had to labour to draw water for washing clothes; who had to go down to the rivers and ponds, break a hole in the ice in wintertime, and rinse their clothing in the fresh but icy water beneath the ice and snow.

On the contrary, it was they and their wives and families **who found** Ufe in Sverdlovsk entirely lacking in amuse-

ments beyond the plays and concerts they were able to arrange for themselves in the big salons of their houses. After visiting the splendid opera houses and theatres of Moscow and Leningrad and other big towns, these people found Sverdlovsk a dull corner of the world. Yet they had to be there to supervise their own interests.

So the wealthy and influential had their way. The common herd continued to suffer. The Opera House, for the use of the privileged, was built in Sverdlovsk. It was paid for out of the labour and taxation of workers and peasants, who also did the actual building work. Yet the place was not for their use.

It is not strange that as I sat there, listening to the opera, I should have felt a pang of gratitude to those Bolsheviks who had done all they could for the time being in Sverdlovsk. Who had helped the workers and peasants of Sverdlovsk to take control of the local government through local Soviets, and who had driven out those parasites on the people's backs? Who had thrown open this home of drama and music to the people at large, had made the cost of theatre tickets low enough to enable all and sundry to enjoy all the theatre could give them? Who had provided vast numbers of free tickets to people who could, as yet, not earn enough to pay even the low price charged? For it is to be remembered that Soviet Russia in 1925 was still a very poor country. There was little enough of everything to go round, little enough being produced in the factories and workshops to provide everybody with big wages. And even that very water system the town needed so much was not yet provided, although the drainage system was. It was not until later that these other important improvements were made.

In 1925 when I was in Sverdlovsk, there were no trams, no buses, no taxicabs. The drozhky was the only form of conveyance, and the drozhky drivers charged what they liked.

I remember when the news was first brought to me of the

improvements in Sverdlovsk, when a friend in 1931 came through to Moscow and told me of the big new houses that had been run up, of the trams, of the paved roads, of everything that goes to make a civilised town.

The Sverdlovsk Opera House in 1925 was everything that could be desired. It belonged to the people and they flocked to it. It was packed at every performance with an attentive, appreciative audience of the common people. And even as I sat there I used to think of England. . . . How many people can listen to opera in England? Certainly very few could in those days. And it is only the wireless that has brought it a little nearer to the people even now.

Yet, in 1925, life in Sverdlovsk seemed to me very hard. True, the people living there did not notice those hardships. What I considered hardships were things that had always been there or were always lacking. To the population of Sverdlovsk, life was easier than ever before. There was plenty of work to be done; there was a workers' inspection in the factories to see that the rights of industrial workers were safeguarded; there was free medical advice and attention; there were the grants to mothers, free attendance at childbirth. There were the holidays with pay, there were all those advantages which only in the Soviet Union the working people enjoy, even to-day.

To-day Sverdlovsk is a town which can take its place with any other in Europe. It has its libraries, its workers' clubs, its cinemas, its grand shops, its big and airy workers' flats, its creches, its kindergartens and schools. Its University is so transformed, I am told, that nothing of the old that I have described here is to be seen.

One might almost say that the only relic of culture which has remained in Sverdlovsk from Tsarist days is the grand old Opera House. It is the only relic, because there was nothing at all else in Sverdlovsk which could honestly be called cultured, in those dark days of Tsardom before the **October Revolution.**

CHAPTER SIX

A VISIT FROM MY PARENTS

IT WAS THE year of the General Strike in England. The Soviet trade union membership had done all in their power to collect kopecks and roubles to be sent over to help the British miners and others who were on strike and, to their minds, needed help from working people all over the world, in order that their wives and children should be provided with the necessities of life.

It had not been difficult *in* the offices and workshops of the Soviet Union to collect. I remember that even in our Communist University in Sverdlovsk, where the students are given only a very small stipend, enough to keep them in pin-money—for everything else is provided by the University—it had not been difficult. We had all given a very little, but it had helped.

And so in 1926, in Russia, the bond between the people of Russia, all of whom were at work, and the working men of Britain was very close.

One hot day in the summer of 1926, I stood on the quayside in the Leningrad docks, waiting for the arrival on a British steamer of my parents. They had received the invitation of the Central Council of Trade Unions of the Soviet Union to come to Russia and spend a short time visiting all they could manage to see.

Slowly the ship hove to, and there they were on the lower deck, waving their handkerchiefs and smiling, surrounded, as father always seemed to be, by ordinary, simple folk, members of the crew.

Mother, despite her years, tripped down the gangway for all the world like a Victorian miss; father stepped down in his somewhat clumsy, but robust manner, and greeted me

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with a hearty hug. My mother's face was radiant with expectancy—so different she seemed from the harassed mother I had always known, worried about the vagaries of her numerous children and the fate of her agitator-husband.

As usual, father turned to give a final shout of farewell to the seamen, some of them begrimed and overalled, straight from the stokehold and engine-room, who were lined up on the lower deck, seeing the last of him for some time, in the way people always seemed eagerly to watch my father till he was out of sight.

As usual I found father's heartiness a little embarrassing. Neither did my mother ever really get used to his "hail-fellow-well-met" attitude to people in general. Father always had a way of treating everybody as though they were just another bit of his family; he was always without restraint and nothing could ever hold back his natural exuberance.

As we approached the waiting car, father turned to the chauffeur with his usual Cockney "Whatch'er, comrade," and the astonished chauffeur, seeing his cheery countenance, grinned broadly in greeting, though he did not understand the words.

The car took us to the Europayskaya Hotel, just off the Nevsky Prospect, the central street of the town. My father, dragging everything he knew out of his very retentive memory, pointed out the places of interest to mother and myself, as we drove through the Leningrad streets: the Peter Paul fortress, the Petrogradskaya Storona, that part of Leningrad from which the flower of the revolutionary working men and women had come to take part in the storming of the Winter Palace. He pointed out the Winter Palace itself, the Cathedral of St. Isaac; he even advised us that we must be nearing the hotel when we turned into the Nevsky Prospect itself, and then sat back for a moment in thought.

Of course, he had been there before, in the hungry days immediately after the revolution, when he had met Lenin. In those days black bread and weak tea had been his staple diet, with very little to vary it.

Arrived at the hotel, we were shown our rooms, and then taken to the dining-hall.

After the meal, my mother would not hear of resting. She had never been a restful woman, always busying herself around the home, and now that she had arrived in Russia, there was nothing that would allow her to waste a single minute of the time. She wanted to do and see everything that came her way.

Nothing in her appearance showed either exuberance or enthusiasm. She was still the quiet, retiring mother I had always known. Yet she was definitely the driving force those few days we spent in Leningrad. There was to be no miking; everything that could be seen was to be seen. Wherever father went, mother went too. I used to tire long before she did, when we were shown over factories, creches and museums.

I remember one day in particular, when we were shown round the Hermitage. Neither my father nor I knew very much about pictures, and museums and the like had never drawn me very much. But once we got inside the Hermitage, it looked as though we should never get out again. When we had seen examples of the old masters, including Rembrandts, when the whole of the Vereshchagins had been examined and the histories depicted had been explained, when we had passed the Repins and a score of others, mother showed no signs of flagging.

She had always suffered with her legs; she had a multitude of the minor complaints which attend women with large families who have persistently refused to have doctors at their beck and call, but her interest kept her going. The pictures held her and nothing would stop her from listening, patiently, to all that the guide could tell her about them in his halting English.

At one point father drew me aside.

"Don't you think mother ought to rest?"

"Yes, but how to get her to?"

I approached my mother, ruthlessly breaking into a long explanation.

"You must be tired. I think you ought to finish this room and then go back to the hotel."

"Oh, but we haven't seen everything. And the guide explains so well."

"But I believe dad's tired!" I persisted.

"Well, we can sit down for a bit and then go on."

So we sat for a bit, the guide withdrawing to the room set aside for smoking, several galleries away.

Then we set off again. But my father was frankly bored. He understood the value of pictures, he liked them in small doses, but like me, he had never made a study of them. He turned to mother.

"Look here, Bessie, you can't go on any longer. You'll get knocked up."

Mother turned to him with one of her sweetest smiles and gave in as always to his wisdom. We bade farewell to our guide, who insisted on having father's autograph, and departed.

It was the same everywhere we went. My mother was having a real holiday and she absorbed everything she saw.

We visited a textile factory while in Leningrad. We were accompanied by a woman in her early thirties, who was a member of the Leningrad Soviet. To all appearances she might have been one of the textile workers herself, still working in the factory. The only difference was that she carried a brief-case of papers.

We went from room to room and found the women busy at work. Some of them offered us shy smiles, some of them were frankly curious, but they kept to their work. In those days, delegations of workers from foreign countries pouring through the factories were not a customary thing. But later these Russian workers became accustomed to visitors from foreign lands in the form of workers' delegations, who had come either to the May Day or October Revolution celebrations.

Our guide from the local Soviet stepped up to one of the women, who was watching a weaving machine.

"*Posvol'tye, odnu minutochku*" (If you please, just one moment), she said to her, politely. The woman stepped aside and left her machine still running. One of the threads broke, and I was amazed to see how rapidly and deftly our guide stopped the machine, fastened the ends, and set everything in motion again, before you could say "J^{ack}: Robinson".

My father smiled.

"You're a weaver, I can see," he said.

"Yes, until last year, when I was elected to the Leningrad Soviet," she replied. "Of course I am not so dextrous now, but I would soon fall into the stride again."

"And which work do you prefer," pursued my father.

"I liked weaving," she replied wistfully. "I liked the women I worked with," and she turned to the woman whose place she had taken. "Nina and I had worked here ever since the factory was set in motion after the revolution. It was not so easy at first, working *in* the Soviet, with all kinds of men and women from different walks of life. We don't always see eye to eye, yet we have to find the best solutions to the problems that arise. I spent much time studying in the evenings, too, before I mastered all it was necessary to know about public works and local affairs. Leningrad is so much bigger than just one factory."

We chatted a little more standing there by the machines. It seems that she had joined the Communist movement when still quite young, had had considerable experience during the civil war, and had grown very astute and shrewd in consequence.

Her modest approach to her work was a pleasant thing; her understanding of the need in politics and economics for just such women as herself was also a great asset; she had thrown her heart and soul into everything she did.

There was nothing here of the careerist. She had been elected to the Leningrad Soviet on her merits. It was another

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member of the local Soviet who told us about her. It was she who had done most inside her own factory to get the cr&ches properly organised for those weavers who were mothers; it was she who had fought down all opposition and got good dining-rooms set up and working well. For it was not easy for those working on the works committee to decide which improvements should come first. It was she who had supervised and inspected everything as a member of the factory committee; it was naturally to her that the working women turned, when the elections took place.

When we visited one of the sessions of the Leningrad Soviet our eyes were opened to this young woman. We had never, from conversation with her, dreamed what a power she was in that body. She was a splendid speaker, putting her case in a few words, but with grim determination to see that her proposal went through. Many were the improvements in town life that had to be made in those days. The resources at the disposal of the Leningrad Soviet were not great. It was no easy problem to decide which undertakings to enter into first, and which to leave to a later date. But here, indeed, was a woman who put the human side before all others, and we left that session feeling that the women of Leningrad, at any rate, had a good, solid supporter.

I remember father saying afterwards that it was good to see a Httle petticoat government at last. For several of the members of the Leningrad Soviet were women.

I thought of the befrilled petticoats that have a hand in administration in England to-day, and of the hundreds of wise, working women who have no say at all in the conduct of life.

One of the days in Leningrad we spent visiting Peterhof and the famous fountains. It was a Gala Day in the Soviet Union, the day specially set aside for the "Osoaviakhim" organisation, a society fostering knowledge among the people of all appertaining to aviation and chemistry. It has a very big membership, running into several millions, especially

among the younger generation, and the members are given every opportunity of understanding everything possible about civil and army aviation, chemical warfare, anti-gas protection, parachuting and so on. In those early days, little was done regarding parachuting and actual flying; but visits to museums, lessons in handling the rifle and shooting practice, knowledge about gas warfare and particularly anti-gas precautions, as well as civil and army nursing, all came under the auspices of the Osoaviakhim.

We set out by car to Peterhof, arriving about half an hour before lunch time.

As we entered the gardens, I saw a young girl with a collecting box. She was collecting for the British miners. Later I saw several others.

The gardens were glorious in their natural beauty; there was, in addition, a great spirit of festivity in the air and flags and festoons hung in great abundance.

Part of the lower floor of a wing of one of the palaces had been thrown open to the public as a restaurant and dinners were served there. It was a large, low-ceilinged, long-windowed sort of lounge room, with French windows straight on to the broad, gravel-covered terrace outside.

But we were escorted to a room upstairs; it was not large, and decorated in Empire style, with lots of white plaster columns and gilt cornices, huge central candelabra, great mirrors over the two large open fire-places, and a big round table, covered with linen and silver and cut glass, spread festively for the English visitors.

It was all very resplendent, but the informal attitude of the men and women who trickled in one after the other and were introduced to us as officials of the Leningrad Branch of the Osoaviakhim Society—some of them in naval, some in air, some in army, and some in civil aviation uniforms—set mother and me at our ease at once. Of course, father was never at a loss. It never seemed to matter whom he met, he was always just the same: natural, totally lacking in any sort

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of embarrassment or obsequiousness, friendly and open, with perhaps just a little sprinkling of caution. A public man has to be cautious at all times.

I remember, when the meal was at an end, there was a little celebration, some speeches and, before father realised what was happening, the greatest honour that the Osoaviakhim Society could confer on him, was his. He had been made an honorary member of the society.

Then, indeed, father's caution was uppermost, as he looked not without suspicion at all the uniforms around him.

But he remained cool and natural and frank as always.

"I say, you fellows," he said with his most charming, embarrassed grin. "You can't do this to me. I'm all against warfare, poison gas, bombers and so on. I really can't be a member of your society you know."

"Oh yes, you can," they replied. "After all, it is to promote the knowledge of these things that our organisation exists. Warfare, poison gas, aeroplanes do exist. The people must not be left in ignorance of them. Ours is an educational society."

"Then it isn't all destruction, of course," my father replied, understanding the truth of their words.

"No, and everybody knows that by becoming an honorary member of our society you do not relinquish your principles, which have always been against bloodshed. Ours is a peace-loving country; we shall have no wars of our own making. But it would be absurd for our people to remain in ignorance of the weapons used by their enemies. Surely you will agree?"

My father accepted the honour graciously, made a short speech himself, and the ceremony was over.

I am inclined to believe that had he lived to see these last few weeks of slaughter of working men and women in Europe, he would have even more appreciated belonging to a society of the Soviet Union which taught young men and women of that country to learn all they could about modern

warfare and modern anti-warfare. He would have agreed that the Soviet Union could not afford to remain defenceless against modern air and chemical warfare.

There were many other visits made in Leningrad; my father saw many people in his hotel. And at last we left **for** Moscow.

In Moscow the daily round was a little different, and we were there for not more than a week.

Moscow being the centre of the Soviet Union contained in it most of the central figures in the political life of the country. Among others, my father met Chicherin, Stalin, the Litvinovs, Madame Kollontai, Karl Radek and others. He also talked with the members of the trade union movement.

The trade unions arranged a little banquet for my father and mother. It was curious to watch my father in particular. All those present partook of the vodka and wine, which is an essential part of any Russian banquet. My father, the strict teetotaler as always, took no strong drink. Yet his spirits ran as high as those who did. He had an extraordinary capacity for appearing intoxicated, merely because of his high spirits. He grew almost boisterous at times.

There were neither speeches nor discussions. Most of the Soviet trade union leaders present had been in England and attended one of the trade union congresses in the previous year. They knew my father's position and appreciated it.

Of my father's visit to Stalin, I remember very little. I was reticent about asking him what had occurred. True, he did say to mother in my presence that the conversation had been very interesting. He had repeated to Stalin the conversation he had had several years back with Lenin, and apparently Stalin had said pretty much the same to him as Lenin had said before him. They respected my father's honesty, but could not agree with his opinions regarding the way in which Socialism would come in England. And it is easy to believe that Stalin no doubt seconded Lenin's advice to my father:

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"All right, George, you can always go back and try your method."

It has always been a very sad thing to me that my father could not see that financiers and rich industrialists will never relinquish their hold on the good things of life, will never agree to work for salaries, like the majority of the people, so long as they can live lives of luxury and take the lion's share of the good things of the world. But I have written of that already.

While my father visited persons of note, I took the opportunity of taking my mother on short walks to places of interest: to the Red Square, to St. Basil's, to a few of the shops.

During these short periods, when alone with my mother, I was perhaps happier than at any other time. For one thing, being the youngest daughter of a large family, I had really never known my mother or thought of her personal feelings. I had merely looked upon her as somebody in authority who never seemed to allow me to do the mad, scatter-brained things I was always wanting to do as a girl; who perpetually pulled me up for dirty shoes, no gloves, and my habit of never wearing a hat.

There in Moscow I saw her differently. She was calm and happy, freed from the endless burden of running a house. She put all her freed energy into watching, trying to understand, shedding her sweetness and charm on all and sundry. And she never forgot for one moment that everything she was enjoying had been built up by working hands in spite of the destruction and ruin wantonly inflicted upon the Russian Republic by the Allied Powers.

One day we set out to visit the Litvinovs. I was not very keen on going; when I set out for Moscow, I had determined to make no use at all of the fact that I was my father's daughter, and had avoided meeting those of the Russians in high places with whom my father was acquainted. But there was nothing for it now.

We arrived at the house of the erstwhile sugar millionaire, whose name I have forgotten, but whose house had been confiscated during the revolution. It was now one of several other houses taken over by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, and in 1925 the Litvinov family occupied some of the rooms. The house stands on the embankment of the Moscow river, opposite the Kremlin, and to-day is the residential quarters of the British Ambassador to Moscow.

The house was quite out of keeping with the surrounding architecture. I have no knowledge as to the style of architecture, knowing little of such things, but it was neither feudal, like the Kremlin, nor modern; neither could it be called Empire. The sugar king had built it to suit his own requirements, and it was ornamental enough in its way. It consisted of a longish wing, with two shorter wings at each end jutting towards the river. There were high, ironwork railings joining the two shorter wings, thus forming a front yard where several cars could, if necessary, be parked.

It was a mid-morning visit, merely for the purpose of renewing an acquaintance my father and mother already had with the Litvinovs. It would therefore be short.

We entered the main hall downstairs, the massive door having been opened by a young woman looking very much like an English parlourmaid. Madame Litvinov, an Englishwoman by birth, had brought a little of England to Moscow with her. That was only natural.

The hall was of panelled oak, the staircase broad and of oak, too. We entered another oak-panelled room upstairs. It was not very large. Altogether, what I saw of the house reminded me of the sort of home one is given to understand is used by the landed gentry in England. It was definitely on English lines, and one almost expected to see plate-armoured figures in odd places. But there were none.

The wife of Litvinov came forward to greet us. I had last seen Maxim Maximovich Litvinov at The Hague, several years previously, when, as the shorthand-typist sent from

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the Russian Trade Delegation to the Russian delegation to the Hague Conference in 1921, it had been part of my work to take letters from him. I remember that he had dictated a letter to me in French, and although horrified at the mistakes I was likely to make, I had not demurred, but done my best. Upstairs in the hotel I remember how I had implored the Finance Expert, whose French was perfect, to get me out of my dilemma. Fortunately for me the Finance Expert was quite familiar with the terms of the letter and so my reputation was saved, and I took down to Monsieur Litvinov a letter in French which was perfect and at least worded well, though it may not have been precisely in the wording he had dictated to me.

I remember how there, in the Sugar King's house, as we call it in Moscow, I reminded Monsieur Litvinov of this incident. I was not good at small talk, and I had to say something.

He was highly amused.

Madame Litvinov hovered over mother, in her English way, and Madame Kollontai, whom I had not expected to see there, but of whom I had already heard a great deal from Valentina, when still in London, chatted with me a little. I remember feeling embarrassed, partly because I thought her such an admirable woman, partly because I was conscious of the fact that though I had been almost a year in Russia, I had not yet dug myself into the country as I had wanted to.

My father talked over current affairs, but I noticed there was no serious delving into problems either Russian or English. It was just a friendly visit, an exchange of impressions.

As we departed, Madame Kollontai drew my father aside, and in a stage whisper which she evidently intended me to hear, assured him that I would be all right in Russia, and that if ever I got into difficulties, I was to be sure to go to her for help. It says a great deal for that country that I never had to make use of that very kind offer.

On the way back I told mother something of Madame Kollontai as we, living in Russia, knew her. She was a woman very much engrossed in women's affairs; she knew thousands of working men and women almost intimately. She was one of the women in Russia to whom hundreds of others turned to for help, when in difficulties of a family nature. She had written a number of novels on family life.

Father's interview with Radek on another occasion was quite different. We went to him in the afternoon.

In those days Karl Radek had rooms inside the Kremlin. We took the car to the Spassky Gates, walked over the moat up to the guards, where we were challenged. It was sufficient for us to tell our business, and we passed under the archway of the Spassky Tower, into the Kremlin, the old fortress of Moscow.

The streets were cobblestoned and narrow. There were very narrow pavements at the sides. Grass grew here and there between the stones and cracks and at the foot of the buildings. It was all, then, very old and little changed over many years. There was an assortment of buildings inside: some very old wooden buildings, some newly constructed modern buildings, like the Military School. There was the great palace, which has been described many times by writers, and the churches.

But we had come with a purpose and did not loiter.

Radek's rooms were on the second floor; we climbed up a narrow, old staircase and knocked on the door.

Radek himself, side-whiskered and bearded, opened the door. I had seen him before, and somehow I have always connected his appearance with that of the sailor Smee, in *Peter Pan*, as played in English theatres. Despite the semi-military jacket he always wore, Radek was slovenly in appearance, and he never cared for his hands and fingernails. Perhaps it was his perpetual handling of old and grimy books that kept his nails in permanent mourning.

The first room we entered was a library in itself. It con-

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tained, besides books, a large desk Uttered with more books and papers, and a divan, which had obviously only just been vacated. Radek did most of his reading stretched out on his back, and his chief work and pleasure consisted in reading and following the news in the foreign as well as Soviet press. He was a journalist to the backbone.

We passed through to another room at the back. Here were less books, but books still remained the predominant feature. Radek's wife was a doctor, very skilled, and she kept her medical knowledge up to date. She was not at home at the time of our visit.

After the usual greetings, Karl Radek explained that this was his wife's study and that he had purposely brought us into it because it was in better order than his own; it had not the strong smell of pipe smoke about it, and he thought Mrs. Lansbury would prefer it. Mother thanked him with a smile. Her gratitude at this concession was not misplaced, for the smell of Radek's pipe was something even I found it difficult to stand, although I was a smoker myself.

There was the usual exchange of opinion on current international affairs, and Radek showed a keen interest in the information my father imparted to him about the General Strike. It was good for him to have first-hand knowledge of various incidents. But here again the conversation was mostly superficial. My father was a guest, on holiday, not on business. This fact was appreciated by the responsible people in Moscow who met him, though the rank and file Russians took every opportunity of discussing fundamentals with my father.

At one point, we were interrupted when tea appeared. Radek knew much of the world and he knew, too, that the English drink tea at five o'clock, and five o'clock it was. It was brought in by a young woman with a red kerchief on her head. It was she who saw to the comfort of Radek and his wife and child. Unfortunately we did not see the child, for she had not returned from school. I was sorry, for the

visit would have been more interesting both for my mother and myself if she had appeared.

The time came for us to depart, my father congratulated Radek on the progress in the country since his last visit and meeting with him, and we left.

My mother's remarks on the way back were amusing.

"Well, I must say that for an important man, Radek lives simply enough. But he doesn't look cared for."

I smiled, knowing Radek. It was not such an easy thing to "care for" him. He was untidy in his habits, irregular about meals. He was a bookworm first and foremost, and nothing mattered so long as he was reading. Moreover, he was a great individualist and a bit of a crank.

Some of this I told my mother, and she shook her head. Radek had certainly failed to impress her. I could guess why; she had a horror of deviations from the normal and of cranks. I could sympathise with her.

Personally I, too, had never warmed to Radek. He was always scathingly sarcastic and cynical; he could tell jokes against his best friends and enjoy them; he had an unpleasant manner, on the few occasions when I found myself at the same table with him in a restaurant I sometimes visited, of telling somewhat shady jokes in the Russian language, which he knew I understood, and ending them up *in* German, which he knew I did not understand. It always seemed to me a stupid habit. If the joke were shady and told in my presence, I felt he should have had the courage to get it all out in Russian. If he was ashamed of the joke, then why tell it at all. Consequently I never learned to feel at ease in his presence.

But Radek was indeed a character. He knew everybody and about everybody almost. He knew almost everything as well. When speaking he appeared never to think whether what he was saying was at all helpful to those to whom he was speaking, nor whether it might shake their faith in something good. He seemed to talk in public places for the sake of talking and for the applause he obtained from **the rather**

fatuous young men who seemed perpetually to surround him during the year when I happened to come fairly frequently across his path.

I have often wondered how he has changed; whether hardship and age have not perhaps softened his cynicism and made something better out of the very brilliant, very able, but far too much flattered, spoiled man in his forties, which was Radek as I knew him.

Late one night, we bade farewell to Moscow, and set off in a first-class carriage for the Caucasus. This was a journey quite different from my journey "hard" to Sverdlovsk; moreover my parents had all the benefit of my previous experience of Soviet travelling.

The second day in the train was interesting, because at the longest halt of the day, we decided not to take our meal in the dining-room of the station, but to picnic in the carriage on what we could buy from the peasants. It was the sight of the splendid array of Ukrainian dairy produce that made us take this step.

The peasants brought their wares to the carriages and sold to us from the platform, through our open window. We bought two young spring chickens, still warm from the oven and cooked to a tasty light brown; there were very young cucumbers, sweet as apples; there were bottles of fruit drink made from raspberries; there were the raspberries themselves and cream, and milk scalded to a light brown in the oven. We bought some of everything.

There was also bread and butter to be had.

In her usual way, mother had had the forethought to bring paper serviettes, and there was nothing for it but for us to use our fingers. It amused me to see my mother, who was so very particular about the way meals should be taken, enjoying hers there with the rest of us, despite the absence of knives and forks. It was always good, afterwards, to hear mother describe that meal to friends and relatives in England and say how much she had enjoyed the fare of the Ukrainian peasants.

My father spent some of the time on the journey playing chess with anybody who would take him on; he always lost, because it was many years since he had played, and the Russians are good at chess. But he never worried at losing, and it passed the time away.

The ever-changing scenery from the window was a source of delight to me and my mother: the green fields and cattle through the Ukraine, the coal and dust of the Donetz Basin, the blue of the Sea of Azov, and finally the mountains and valleys during the last part of the journey in the Caucasus.

We changed at mid-day on the third day at Mineral Waters, the centre of the Caucasian spas and terminus of the direct route between the Caucasus and Moscow.

From there we travelled on a draughty little train, on which all the windows were let down, so that it was almost like travelling in an open car. The partitions between the carriages were about five foot high, so the breeze blew right through the whole coach. It was a slow train and stopped at each spa.

We finally found ourselves at Yessentuki, our destination. It was a sort of oasis of green trees in the wide plain which lies between Piatigorsk, huddled in the centre of five mountains from which it takes its name, and Kislovodsk on another range of mountains.

It might almost have been a station halt in the backwoods of America, except that the train was so small. It puffed bravely out of the station carrying on its passengers to Kislovodsk and intervening villages.

We passed down the boarded platform, through a little buffet such as is to be found on every station in the Soviet Union, and out into the wide, white, chalky roadway, shining brilliantly in the sun.

We were met by a coachman, dressed in a most dashing red blouse, tight at the neckband and wristbands, but with very full sleeves. He wore rather baggy blue trousers, tucked into the top of his high leather boots. Around his waist was a

broad, yellow scarf, and on his head a shaggy, black, lamb's wool cap, cocked at a jaunty angle. He might have been Taras Bulba himself. He shook hands with my mother in a manner which was both gallant and attentive. He shook hands with my father and myself. He invited us to step into his equipage.

There was a wild look in the eye of the nearest horse, and there were four of them all told. A proper four-in-hand, but very shaggy-looking.

We were hardly seated when he heaved himself lightly into the box-seat, cracked his whip and we were off. As usual my father and I sat tight, not quite happy. My mother enjoyed it. Those horses set off at a terrific speed, scattering dust far and wide on all sides. I was tempted to ask our interpreter to reduce the speed for us, but thought better of it. So long as my mother enjoyed it, father and I would have to make the best of it.

A Cossack is never so happy as when his horse is at a gallop. Our Cossack driver was enjoying himself, and I even felt he was showing off, for we took corners at what seemed to me a terrific speed, and the coach heaved and swayed, and I was definitely nervous. But when the house, in which we were to stay, came into sight, there was a last crack of the whip and the horses fairly shot forward. As usual, we pulled up in grand style, the horses almost sitting down on their haunches in their effort to obey the rapid command of the driver.

It was not without a sigh of relief that I extricated myself from the carriage.

My mother was delighted. Father was quietly thoughtful and obviously a bit shaken. So was I.

At the gate of the house stood the doctor. I knew it was a doctor, for he had not changed from his white coat, welcomed us warmly and accompanied us into the house.

We went straight to the room which my parents were to occupy. There were two iron bedsteads with spring mattresses, I was thankful to observe, and spotless counterpanes;

there were two easy chairs of wicker, thoughtfully provided because they were easily movable to the veranda of the adjoining room, smaller still, which was to be for me; there was a small table by the beds with a profusion of flowers in a vase, giving just the lovely touch to the room which we women like so much. There was a small dressing-table and a wall cupboard.

Opposite this room, on the other side of the corridor, there was a pleasant dining-room, with a table that could sit about a dozen people. The table, I noticed, was covered for four.

Upstairs was a regular bathroom, hot and cold water and everything else that could be desired. On the roof was a place for sun-bathing. Downstairs, in a little recess opposite the kitchen door there was a hand-ewer, which was very convenient for washing between meals.

Nothing could have been more convenient for my parents, and they were frankly pleased at the prospect of having a real holiday, together, away from the family, for almost the first time in their lives.

Actually the house could hold twelve visitors. It was specially set aside for persons who required extra quiet, for whom the ordinary sanatorium regime, where there were many more people about, would have been too exacting.

I shall never forget that first evening, which was typical of many subsequent ones. We had been shown the spa building where we would take our respective baths and the wooded "park" where I would go to drink the waters. Arrangements had been made for the water for my parents to be brought specially to them, in view of their age. We had enjoyed a very simple, well-balanced supper. And in the cool of the evening, we had moved wicker chairs and stools out on to the balcony of our room and were taking in the fine, cool, evening air. It was very quiet, except for murmuring voices of passers-by.

To the left, behind a clump of trees in the gardens of the building opposite, there rose in the blueing distance the calm

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peaks of Piatigorsk. As we sat, there came to us on the breeze, the soft singing of a group of men and women on a terrace not far away. They were singing in harmony, in the informal way any Russians gathered together do. At first it was a little unsteady, but as they gained confidence, and each member of this untrained choir accustomed himself to the voices of the rest, the singing grew more steady till in the end it was as nearly harmonious as natural, untrained voices can be. They sang their own folk-lore; they sang revolutionary songs of the civil war period, songs which had no boundaries but had sprung up from the united, spontaneous efforts of a number of nationalities all thrown together in the common cause of revolution. I knew many of the tunes already; later some of them were sung, with other words, by members of the International Brigade during the Spanish fighting. Such tunes never die, and many who had visited Russia had carried them away with them to foreign lands.

Both father and mother were enchanted, and this singing, to which we often listened in the evenings, was something we all carried away with us.

Even in those few months that I was in England before my father's death, when I happened to tinkle on the piano when visiting him, he would say: "Play that tunc they used to sing in the Caucasus/" It was one he particularly liked and remembered; it was "Stenka Razin".

Of the ordinary round in the sanatoria in Yessentuki I will not write. So much has been written of them already that there is no need of a scientific description. I want more to give the spirit of that haven of rest to which so many working men and women in the Soviet Union have access.

In Tsarist days, these sanatoria were built for wealthy noblemen, merchants and the landed gentry. No working man set foot on them, except as a servant of those privileged ones. But the new world that has been laid at the feet of the Russian and other peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union is something splendid, which has been won by the people

through their own great efforts. It is now theirs, and nothing can take it from them. It is there for all who work in that country. And, since there are none who live in idleness in the Soviet Union, everybody has an opportunity of enjoying the good things of life.

So when I was there, all the big white buildings were filled to overflowing with working men and women in need of rest and medical attention.

True, in those days, since private trading still existed, there were a few places kept open for private patients, although, in fairness to the public at large, these few were reserved for sick people who could afford to pay for their treatment, and a charge was made on them for lodging and medical attention. They were people of the old world, still clinging to their old method of making a livelihood by buying and selling for gain. It was only fair, therefore, that they should pay for what privileges they obtained from the new world.

Among those recuperating was an old Bolshevik who had been an emigrant in America for several years. With him my father could speak freely, for he spoke perfect English. He had worked mostly on archives since the revolution, and at the time we met him he was in charge of the archives of the Communist International.

I mention him in particular because he had a strong personal regard for my father and could talk to him on an easier footing than most. But the discussions they had on the fundamentals of the labour movement led them nowhere. They each tried to prove their point, the Russian on the basis of the fact that it had worked—the Bolshevik method—in Russia and could work elsewhere; my father on the basis of the fact that England is not like Russia, and so different methods should be used. They talked and enjoyed each other, but they talked at loggerheads, for neither would agree to the viewpoint of the other. Only history will ever prove conclusively who was right.

While in Moscow, my father had been examined by some

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of the best doctors, and it was on the basis of what they found in him that we were packed off to Yessentuki, where the waters were particularly suited to him.

My mother had refused in Moscow to be examined. She had never liked doctors. But the local doctor, who was a very charming Armenian, and had won mother's heart during the first two days, was finally allowed to pass a verdict on her health. It was fortunate that all she required was baths of water from a spring which was also present in Yessentuki, and waters which could easily be obtained from Kislovodsk, hard by.

As for me, I was prescribed mud-packs for what was left of an operation for appendicitis, the wound of which had been giving me a little trouble, and baths for the nervous system in general, and some of the waters, which I found unpleasant.

Our doctor was a dark Armenian with big eyes, heavy-lidded and long-lashed; he was stout in the middle and of medium height. He was very quiet *in* his manner, but very persuasive and gentle. He early sized up my mother's dislike of doctors and set himself out to help her all he could, trying not to let her notice that he was doctoring her. He certainly succeeded.

It was the same common sense and devotion to work of this and many another doctor throughout the Soviet Union which contributed much to that faith in Soviet life which grew in me with the passing of those thirteen years. It contributed, too, to the confidence I gradually began to have in myself; for the difficulties of a foreigner in a strange land are always great, and this great new world was something that perpetually set the brain in motion. So I found myself a nerve patient several times during my stay there. The doctors in the Soviet Union gave me of their best, as they gave all their patients, and the advice I had from them has stood me in good stead ever since.

There was a miner from the Donetz Basin with whom I

made friends for the duration of my stay in Yessentuki. He used to come and play croquet with my father and myself and others, in the front garden. He was forty-five years of age and had been in the revolutionary movement from boyhood.

He would practice his fifty odd words of English on me whenever an occasion arose, and I felt drawn to him more particularly, perhaps, because he was so interested in the miners' strike in England and so understanding about things in general. He followed the miners' strike carefully in the trade union newspaper, *Trud*, and I think I disappointed him a little by the little knowledge I had of British miners.

It was at the initiative of this miner that a special concert was arranged for my parents. There was nothing stiff or formal about it. The performers were men and women patients from the sanatoria around. And quite a lot of good talent was discovered right there on the spot, from professionals down to people who had never performed before.

Here, again, a collection was taken for the British miners, and we saw one more demonstration of spontaneous solidarity with working people abroad.

One afternoon our jolly, fat doctor came in just as we were finishing lunch.

"It is my off-day to-day. Might I take your daughter to the mountains?"

My heart sank; mountain-climbing was not in my line, as I had discovered three years before, when I arrived at the snowy belt of a Swiss mountain in Miirren, and had been afraid to climb higher. I saw no reason why I should reveal this weakness.

But my mother answered for me, and there was no escape.

Under his arm, the doctor carried a weird-looking instrument, and catching my mother's eye, he smiled, heaved it up on to his rotund stomach, and strummed a few notes, pressing it close to his body and shaking it gently to obtain **the** correct vibration.

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It sounded not too bad, but I am conservative, like all ignoramuses, and find it difficult to take in new music.

The doctor fussed about to make sure that my parents had everything they should have, and then we set off.

It was a cooler day than we had yet had. The sun shone brightly, but there was a goodly breeze. We went to the station and took a train.

At the stop before Piatigorsk, the name of which I have forgotten, we left the train and set off again on foot, across open country, towards the lower slopes. These we then began to climb steadily. I felt it was time to reveal my weakness after all.

The doctor listened patiently. He asked me exactly what it was I felt when up the mountains. He dismissed the idea that I was afraid and put my weakness down to a natural enough phenomenon with certain types of people. I felt comforted, but I have never made up my mind whether he spoke truly to me. I did not suffer from the usual kind of vertigo and dizziness. It was something in the pit of the stomach that gripped me when at a height.

He assured me we would not climb any great height and I put my confidence in his word.

About one-third of the way up there were buildings with rambling unkempt gardens in front, surrounded by a fence. On several of the buildings there were crosses and domes.

The doctor pushed open the wicket gate and I followed him in. We sat at a rough wooden table, with benches on either side. For a short time we sat and rested; a sharp wind had dropped to a gentle breeze; we were hot and weary after our climb.

A bearded, long-haired, unkempt-looking man approached us. It was almost impossible to tell his age. He wore the long, brown, home-spun habit of the Russian priests, and on his head was a battered hat, rather like a trilby. Were it not for the habit, I should have taken him for a tramp. On his bare feet were sandals.

He offered us tea; after a somewhat embarrassed exchange of greetings, and retired.

"We're going to have tea here? But it's a monastery," I said.

"Yes, this is a monastery. True, since the separation of the church from the state, these monks and priests have to rely on religious-minded folk for their upkeep. I must say it looks as though the members of their flock do not provide for them very well."

Way back in England I had often thought of the church, and the fact that churches in England are subsidised by the state. It had always seemed unfair to me that part of the government revenue from taxation, direct and indirect, should go towards the upkeep of churches. I for one was not a believer. Besides me, there are literally thousands and thousands of people who are not Church of England. Why should they help to pay for the upkeep of the church? Not only did this apply to non-believers, but also to hundreds of other sects, who had no grant from the state. It always seemed to me that the church, like any other organisation, should live by the work it performs, and that those who believe in religion, should see to the upkeep of the church and its officials.

As we talked, the doctor used many quotations from the New Testament to show that the Christian doctrine, as originally preached by Christ, was quite different from the doctrine, so tied up with finance, capital and governments, that is preached at the present time. I was surprised at his erudition.

"Then you know the New Testament?" I asked.

"I have been through a long process of education," he smiled in reply. "Here in the Soviet Union we are taught comparative religions at our universities. We learn philosophy as part of our education. We believe, here in the Soviet Union, that the people must know the truth about religion and decide for themselves. After they have studied

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comparative religions, if they choose to believe one of the religious doctrines, they have every right to. We consider that the evil of religion only begins when it is forced upon people against their wills, when people are frightened into believing in God, when people are forced to help pay for the upkeep of churches whether they are religious-minded or not. That is why here in the Soviet Union the church has been separated from the state. The church lives on in so far as there are people, whether of the Greek Orthodox, the Mohammedan, the Tolstoyan or any other religious leanings, who are ready to support it, including the provision of material support for its upkeep and the upkeep of the servants of the church. That is the difference between religion in the Soviet Union and in other countries of Europe."

I knew that, but was interested to hear it put so simply.

At that point the tea arrived. I noticed that the doctor rinsed each glass from the boiling water in the tiny samovar, before he filled them with tea.

He passed a glass to me. The tea was good and refreshing.

While we sat, one of the monks came to the doctor and whispered in his ear. My friend rose and went away with him, having first excused himself.

I sat and enjoyed the landscape, my thoughts far away.

I thought, in the peace of that afternoon, of the lies spread throughout the other part of the world, about Russia and the Bolsheviks being symbols of anti-Christ, about religion having been ruthlessly stamped out *in* the Soviet Union. I thought of the pomp of "civilised" churches, of the evil lives so many of the wealthier classes lived by virtue of their ruthless exploitation of working men and women, of colonial peoples—yet how many of them piously attended the "civilised" church. What humbugs they must be. I thought of wars, of the futile prayers sent up by both warring sides to the same God, imploring Him to give them victory. What a folly it all was!

I thought of these monks and priests in Russia, eking out a

miserable existence on the pittances provided by their flocks, added to by whatever they might earn by the work of their hands. If there really had been a Christ, were not these men, however misguided I might think them, perhaps nearer to that first Christian than all those wealthy bishops and archbishops of England, with their money invested in bonds, whether they were war bonds or munition bonds or any odier bonds?

There can be no answer forthcoming from the "civilised" Christians of the orthodox churches of Europe. They too bear the responsibility for all the horrors of war to-day.

The doctor was absent for what seemed a long time, but at last he returned.

"One of the priests was sick," he explained. "I have made him comfortable, but it is a hopeless case. He is eighty-one and cannot live, but he will not suffer very much now. I found an old woman there, reciting incantations, muttering and waving her arms about. There was a poultice of herbs, which could only give him more pain. But I shall send a nurse over to make sure she does no harm to him. He will at least die peacefully."

"But why won't he live? Could you not take him down to one of the sanatoria?"

"He is too ill to be moved; it will be only a matter of days. If only we could rid these people of their superstitions, their horror of modern science. They have let everything go too far, almost putrefaction has set in."

"But could he not have gone to the clinic?"

"Yes, the clinics are free and open to all. But they prefer their holy waters, their herbs, their idols and prayers. It is useless to get them to see the light of day. They do not believe in science and doctors."

It was not difficult to accept.

We finished tea and set off again, down the hill. Across the valley we tramped for about an hour, then climbed the hill we had reached. The sun was lower in the sky. It was nearing

six o'clock. I wondered what would come next. The doctor had talked of music.

We reached a belt of the mountain where there were huge rocks and bushes at intervals. There was one rock, beautifully flat, warm from the sun, jutting out horizontally from the hillside. We scrambled on to it and seated ourselves at the far edge. The grassy slope behind us formed a comfortable rest for the back. We heard shouts. I turned and looked in the direction of the voices. Bearing down on us from above were several people. The doctor sprang up and shouted back in Armenian.

Soon they reached us and, after introductions, settled themselves comfortably with us. They carried instruments; they were young; some of them were Georgians, and one was the doctor's wife. She was intensely beautiful in the Eastern way; her oval face was perfect, her sallow skin unblemished, her teeth pearly and splendid. She had a fascinating smile.

So this was the surprise the doctor had prepared for me.

The music began. One or two of the young people sang.

The scent of the scorched grass was very sweet. Cows lay on the slopes below. Before us, as ever, were the mountain peaks, and, far distant, Elbrus lifted its proud head in all its grandeur.

The music was haunting and entrancing, but I cannot honestly say I liked it. Had I been forced to listen to it in a concert hall, I should have been miserable. It spoke a language quite apart from any musical language I had known. It sang out, it implored, it bewailed; it was exacting and at the same time sensuous. It was even a little embarrassing the way these people threw themselves into it.

There were lullabies, love songs, prayers, but all of it was weird.

They played for a long time, while the sun grew redder, the mountain snowcaps turned pink, and a chill breeze reminded us that we should be on the move.

"Did you like it?" the doctor was asking me.

"Yes, but it is difficult for me!" I replied fairly, but was very conscious of the complete inadequacy of my appreciation. I said no more.

Neither did the doctor press me to say more. He probably understood my dilemma better than I did. Instead he went headlong into a description of how whole families at holiday time used to go up the hillside with their instruments; how they roasted whole sheep over an open fire; how they would eat and drink wine and make merry with music far into the night, under a starry sky. He spoke so well that I was spellbound.

And so another day ended.

My father spent a great deal of his time exchanging views with all and sundry. Sometimes I felt it was too much for him and that he was not resting. It was my mother, however, who put me right about it.

"Mum, don't you think I ought to stop people perpetually discussing things with father?"

"Why?" she asked.

"It must make him very tired. For after all, it is useless for the same arguments to go on every day about the dictatorship of the proletariat and the violent overthrow of the capitalist system. Nobody will convince father that he is wrong."

"Never you mind," my mother replied, soothingly. "Your father would not talk if he didn't like it."

"But perhaps he doesn't like to say anything," I persisted.

"You don't know your father," was her humorous retort, and I observed the twinkle in her eye.

"Do you really think he would say so, if he didn't like it?"

"Of course he would," my mother reassured me.

"And what about you. It must be trying, all these discussions."

"On the contrary. You forget, Violet, that I used to go to economics classes with your father at the old Ethical Society

A VISIT FROM MY PARENTS

in South Place. In those days before you were born I used to take part in discussions of this sort. I find it all very interesting to be in it all again. Father used to be hot-tempered in those days. Now he argues more quietly, that is all the difference."

"So you are enjoying it all?"

"It's the loveliest holiday I've had for many a long day," was her rejoinder.

My mother never ceased to turn her mind back to that holiday in the Soviet Union; she would seize upon every possible opportunity of talking about it. Neither would she ever hear a word against the Soviet Union; not only because of what she had seen on that trip, but because she assiduously followed events in the Soviet Union until her death. My father never ceased to impress upon me that my mother was a staunch supporter of "Russia", as he always called it.

The time had almost come for my parents to sail back to England. The journey back to Moscow was uneventful. But arrived in Moscow, there was one thing both parents wished to do before leaving the U.S.S.R. We visited the Mausoleum one day, when it was closed to other visitors. My mother was very proud and affected at seeing Lenin lying there in state, simply dressed as in life. She had been touched before by the long queue of visitors who daily waited in the Red Square. My father was more accustomed to tilings rare and strange. I was glad I had broken through my prejudice against going and had joined them in their visit. Since then I have been several times, when it has been necessary to conduct friends of mine visiting Moscow.

But what probably touched my mother most in Russia was the splendid care of mothers and children. A mother of many children herself, and one who had never had such assistance from the state, she could appreciate the advantages of a society where women were cared for as the weaker sex, although the expression was never used.

The absence of luxurious toys in the kindergartens never worried my mother. She, widdi most ordinary mothers,

knew that a healthy child is amused most with simple things, with blocks and hammers and nails, with a rag doll and a box for its bed. The toys she saw were better than many she had improvised for her earlier children. She could see the children were happy. She had an instinct about children and understood them. She knew too that children who are afforded the opportunity of "doing things for themselves"⁴ are also among the happiest. And she was delighted, when visiting creches and kindergartens, to see the little ones putting down the plates, or ladling out their own soup, with all the seriousness and care of which they were capable.

It requires ordinary simple people to understand the splendid things that are taking place in the Soviet Union. When all the truth is the property of the working people of other lands, they will undoubtedly seek to learn much from the Soviet Union, and put it into practice in their own countries.

CHAPTER SEVEN
RUSSIAN RELATIVES AND OTHERS

AFTER THE DEPARTURE of my parents for England, I looked round again for some form of work. I had decided to stay in Russia for just as long as I could, and I wanted to be lost among the Russian people of Moscow.

Through an English acquaintance I found work temporarily, translating short letters, written by young pioneers in Russian to young Communist pioneers in England. These letters were short descriptions by these young Russian people, between the ages of eight and sixteen, of the sort of lives they led and their interests. They were written from children in different parts of European Soviet Russia, who sent them to the Young Communist International office in Moscow for despatch by post to England. It was merely the translation that was done in the International *Office*.

Besides this work, I did a certain amount of English typing for commercial offices.

It was during this period that more or less by chance I first met Igor Mikhailovich Reusner, whom I married in the following November 1926. He was the son of a Professor of Law, who was also an old Bolshevik. Igor Mikhailovich himself had been the secretary to the first delegation to go to Afghanistan after the October Revolution to set up diplomatic relations between Russia and that country. On his subsequent return to the Soviet Union, Igor Mikhailovich had continued his study of Eastern countries and at the time I met him was lecturer in Eastern History at the Sun Yat Sen University in Moscow.

I met him by chance in a restaurant.

It was curious, in those days, how different restaurants had their particular clientele. For instance there were Jewish

restaurants, Persian, Chinese, Caucasian, where mostly people of these respective nationalities were to be found. It was partly things of this sort which made Moscow unlike any other city.

There was a vegetarian restaurant, which happened also to be the headquarters of the followers of Tolstoy. Many of the vegetarians of Moscow frequented it, but there was always a large peppering also of cranks, who could easily be distinguished from the general run of Muscovites by their rather weird, "comfortable", square-necked clothing and sandals in the case of the women, and by a tendency on the part of the men to wear their hair too long, to grow beards (which as a fashion vanished with Tsarism), and generally to have the appearance of rather effeminate, affected "simple-lifers".

They were, in fact, the prototypes of similar cranks to be seen on the streets of London. Perhaps I can be forgiven for the antipathy I feel towards the rather definitely individualist, elbowy people of the world.

I found the sight of very dusty feet protruding from equally dusty sandals and of lank, greasy hair on the heads of men who could so easily have kept cooler by trimming their hair, and of soup trickling over soft-downy beards, something that definitely did not agree with my idea of taking food in clean surroundings.

As a general rule, therefore, I stuck to the simpler, typically Russian dining-rooms frequented by office and industrial workers.

There was one really pleasant restaurant, right in the middle of the boulevard which runs between the Arbat Square and the big Church of Christ the Saviour, which in 1926 still stood on the banks of the Moscow River, commanding a splendid view of the Kremlin.

The little restaurant I have in mind consisted of a wooden building right among the trees of the boulevard, to which one gained access by steps at each end to a covered terrace. One could take meals either in the one large room inside, or

OH either of the terraces at each end of it. Tables were covered with coloured cloths and the chairs were rounded, wicker ones. It was a leisurely dining place, and those who frequented it were writers, poets, musicians, professors, doctors, journalists, and the like.

It was here that Manya brought me one day, and I observed that Karl Radck occupied a table, together with two other men. For once he was not surrounded by his set of admiring young people, who sat at his feet and listened to his interpretation of international events.

As we sat taking dinner, the younger man from Radek's table rose and came across to our table. He stood, resting one hand on the back of the spare wicker chair, and said simply to Manya:

"Won't you introduce me?"

Manya flushed, as always, and introduced him to me.

He took the spare chair, chatted with us for a few minutes, asking the usual questions of me as to how I liked Moscow, then rose, bowed politely and left us.

Manya told me all she knew about him, pointed out to me his father, and dismissed the subject.

The father was an extremely handsome, well-built man in his early sixties. He wore a pointed beard and looked the real professor. The son wore a "goatee", which I thought affected. Later he was induced to part with it. His face was tanned and hard. His eyes, I had noticed, were of the rather hard, pale-blue kind common among Russians. He appeared muscular, though he was slight in build.

It was three months after my first meeting with Igor Mikhailovich that I joined forces with him and made Moscow my home.

That I never registered my marriage either with the Soviet authorities or the British was due simply to the fact that had I done so I should automatically have lost my British nationality. Such is the British law. Though my mind was made up about marriage, it was not, as regards nationality. For all its

system, which I dislike, I love England as the land of my birth. The question of changing my nationality, in my eyes, had nothing at all to do with the question of marriage. I had never agreed with the principle that an Englishwoman on marrying a foreigner is forced to take the other nationality. Why could not the boot be on the other foot?

Our home consisted of one room in a big house near the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour on the Volhonka. As a lecturer at the Sun Yat Sen University, Igor Mikhailovich was entitled to accommodation in the hostel set aside for lecturers in the grounds of the University.

In the spacious semi-basement of the hostel a young man and his wife, of peasant origin, were in occupation. They had chosen a much bigger floor-space in the semi-basement rather than a smaller room on the ground floor. The husband was the janitor attached to the University; his wife performed any services she chose to accept from the tenants. It was, for her, a method of earning extra money, and she was paid for any work she did for us.

Before my arrival it was she who had prepared coffee for Igor Mikhailovich in the mornings and had at rare intervals even prepared lunch at mid-day for him; she also tidied his room and fetched water for him.

After my arrival, however, she still continued to help with the harder work.

The room we occupied left nothing much to be desired. It was rather a glorified edition of Manya's room; glorified in the sense that the room was larger, the furnishings were a little more luxurious. The curtains at the window, for instance, were of a rather superior, silken material and were hung professionally on brass rods, with the usual decorative end fittings. The two windows, both on one wall, were very large and high. The room itself was lofty.

A huge Afghan carpet hung on a side wall, concealing effectively a door which, if unlocked, would have opened on to the room next door, occupied by other tenants. Along

this wall, away from the windowed outside wall, was a brass-fitted, iron single bedstead. It was made up with linen sheets, pillows heaped high at one end, and covered with an embroidered square which in England might almost have been an afternoon tea-cloth.

On the back wall, alongside the bedstead, were the washing arrangements, closely resembling those I had been accustomed to elsewhere.

A heavy mahogany and tapestried screen partly concealed this "bedroom" corner of the room.

A desk in another corner, near the right-hand window, and a divan covered with another lightweight Afghan carpet formed the remaining furnishings, together with a square dining table and chairs at another end of the room, which we regarded as our dining-room.

But the part of my new home which would have struck horror into the heart of any Englishman visiting Moscow at that time was the corridor. Actually it was a very wide corridor, but as I knew it it was narrow, because all along one side, between the doors, were little tables on which kerosene and primus stoves stood. The fact was that, owing to what was originally the kitchen of the house being occupied entirely by the young people I have already mentioned in the semi-basement, there was no room left for cooking purposes for the remaining tenants.

It struck me that people with intelligence would have arranged things differently. There could be only one explanation for it. Here, again, was the same sort of individualistic attitude to life which the Bolsheviks were so keen to eliminate.

For there was no great shortage of housing accommodation in Moscow in those days of 1926. What had happened in this particular hostel was this:

Originally the rooms had been occupied by single young graduates who were now teaching at the University close by. So long as they were single young men, everything went

well. Nadya, the young woman of the semi-basement, had readily prepared a huge samovar of boiling water for the whole lot of them in the mornings and they had gone to her for tea, much as young men would go to a buffet. They each had their own supplies of the minimum required for breakfasts and suppers, kept conveniently in their own little cupboards underneath the "kitchen" tables, or strung up equally conveniently between the double windows. They manage for themselves, as young bachelors will, and every tiling in the garden had been lovely.

When they married, the situation had altered. Whereas young men are ever ready to take their meals out of doors in dining-rooms, some young wives have very different ideas. So the long corridor kitchen evolved itself, and brought with it all the inconveniences.

Much of this I gleaned from Nadya, who complained bitterly of the changes. It had all been fine, she explained, until those women arrived.

I remember often smiling with Igor Mikhailovich about Nadya's attitude. She was so comfortably housed with a husband and a small son and a good kitchen range; yet she could not see how much better off she was than the rest of us. To her, the young men should never have brought in wives to spoil her affairs.

I must say that I never really became accustomed, in the early morning, to the sight of these sleepy-eyed, tousled young women, attired in a variety of kimonos, each struggling with primus stoves for the purpose of boiling water for breakfast tea or coffee.

For days I was nervous about passing through the corridor. So many pairs of eyes fixed themselves on me, and I went through a period of unsociability and unwillingness to speak to anybody at all. I went, also, through a period of dislike of these weird wraiths who haunted the corridors. I felt I could show them how better to organise their kitchens.

It was a long time before I really satisfied myself that they

were doing the best they could; that it is not easy to make a corridor keep tidy if it consists of tables of varying heights and sizes, and if bins of kerosene and pails and wash-flannels had to be confined in close quarters, and if people would cook at all hours of the day.

No wonder the Soviet authorities were all in favour of communal kitchens for people at work, whether they were Red Professors newly graduated and lecturing, or office girls who had married them.

What one had above all to remember was that this sort of living was only to be found in the towns. And even in towns, what I had encountered in this my first home as a married woman was probably the worst to be found. I soon learned, as I got to meet more people, that most had fixed abodes with kitchens in the right place, like Many a; that this sort of hostel, with temporarily arranged "kitchens" was not by any means the common rule.

Who were the people who lived in this way?

They were mostly students who had graduated and were willing to put up with any inconveniences of this kind in order to remain in Moscow and work, or who had not been fortunate enough, as yet, to find the sort of homes they wanted. The onus of providing homes for the lecturers and staffs at universities lies with the management of the universities. It was, even then, a question of expense. A university is not a money-making concern; the grant it has from the government was not large in 1926. And the grant had to be used on essentials first and foremost. These hostels were all the particular university in question could afford to provide.

The young students were not full of initiative themselves as regards home-making. When studying they had been housed in hostels where their food was provided in airy dining-rooms. They had slept with fellow-students in dormitories. No problems of housekeeping were allowed to interfere with their main job of studying. So, when left to

their own resources, after leaving the universities, **these** young men were not cut out for home-makers.

However, there was one thing I always found pleasant and that was to pass through that inferno of "kitchens" and then open the door of my own room and meet the tidiness and pleasant airiness inside. Not that I was tidy by nature. It was merely the contrast. I found, moreover, when I finally conquered my hostility towards the neighbours and paid visits to them, that the same pleasant surprise met my eyes on opening the doors into their rooms. And one thing that corridor did for us all. It forced us, in self defence, to open our windows wide, twice daily in the winter months and all day long in the summertime.

We did not remain in that room long. The death of my husband's mother, and her request that we should help fill the gap in her husband's home when she left, sent us hurriedly to the home of the old Bolshevik, where we lived for several months.

During those few months on the Volhonka I had tried my hand once more and studied as an outside, non-stipendiary student at the Sverdlovsk Communist University just off the Tverskaya Street in Moscow. I found the lectures and classes on what was comprehensively termed "Natural History and Zoology" the most fascinating piece of study I have ever made. There was a splendid combination of theory and practice, under the leadership of a relation of the famous Academician Zavadovsky.

There was much reading to be done. Elementary zoology was not difficult for me, but it was all so much new terminology, new words, and as such was very useful. It was **a** privilege to be allowed to learn the Russian language this way, and I appreciated the fact.

In one of the practical lessons, I had occasion to observe the reactions of one of the students, and the incident should give the lie to the belief that Communists and Bolsheviks **are** hard and blood-thirsty.

Our teacher was a woman, pleasant enough in herself, but not expansive. I was a little afraid of her, regarding her as a "blue stocking".

One day we all congregated in the laboratory for dissection. Our subject was a fluffy, white stray dog, chloroformed and ready for us to use for dissecting.

Among the seven students standing round the table was a young man from Siberia, who had been through the civil war fighting. He had often told me tales, much like those told me by the coalminer from the Donetz Basin whom I had met in the Caucasus.

The lesson began. Everybody was attentive, and one of us was told off to do the actual dissecting. The teacher had herself opened the animal and pinned it out.

We examined the lungs, the heart; the heart was removed; we went on to other organs and finally came to the genital organs. All the time the parts were being explained, and here the teacher indicated a small growth in the womb, stating that it was a foetus. There was an outburst from just behind me and I turned.

Our good friend from Siberia, Vanya, a man of about thirty, had turned and was fleeing from the room. His mate hurriedly followed him.

The rest of us were called to attention and the lesson continued. When the academic hour came to an end, we trooped out to the common room downstairs to hear the rest of the story.

Vanya had gone home. As his friend reported it, he had found the whole dissection of the dog trying enough. Although one of the most valiant in the heat of the civil war, he could not look at deliberate, cold-blooded killing, as he put it. It hurt him to know that the dog was being killed, and more that it was a pregnant dog. He had tried to stick through the lesson, but his feelings had got the better of him and after the uncontrollable outburst, he had left the room **and departed** for home.

I found it difficult to understand Vanya's reaction, though I realised there must be some explanation. Perhaps it is the same explanation to be applied to all anti-vivisectionists. The only difference, however, is that Vanya realised the necessity of vivisection *in* big things, like medicine and experimental science. He knew that without new knowledge the world cannot progress. Consequently, he did his utmost to overcome his own personal weakness, and tried, on subsequent occasions, to laugh off his feelings.

It was in March of 1927 that we transferred our belongings to the home of my father-in-law. During their lifetime, Mikhail Andreyich and his wife, Yekaterina Alexandrovna, lived in half a flat. They had three rooms and the use of kitchen and bathroom. The other half of the flat was occupied by another family.

It is interesting here to note that although Mikhail Andreyich was an old Bolshevik, one of those who helped to draft the First Soviet Constitution, and a professor, and although his home might have been considered one of the best to be found in Moscow among people of his type, yet it was nothing very special. It was small, fairly comfortable, and had a bathroom. But there was neither gas nor geyser. Right there in the centre of Moscow, in a tremendously large apartment house owned by Count Sheremetyev in Tsarist days, as late as the year 1917, there was no gas laid on at all. Yet there are people in Great Britain who forget the backwardness of Russia before the revolution, and have a tendency to sniff at those splendid improvements which are provided for the people to-day. The Russia of 1926 had to be compared with the Russia before 1917. Such a comparison showed that the people living in the Soviet Union had progressed relatively far more than the people of Great Britain in the same period of time.

Moreover, there are people who have come back to England after visiting Russia and have told the people of England lies about the disparity in living conditions between the

"privileged" Communists, or Bolsheviks, and the ordinary intellectuals and working people. They have brought back tales of how intellectuals have insufficient room to turn round in, how they are cramped and given no opportunity of developing their talents.

To them one can only say that intellectuals of the kind they refer to, namely people who were intellectuals in Tsarist days and remained in the Soviet Union after the revolution, form a very small percentage of the total population, and that they can develop their talents as much as any other individuals; but they are not entitled to regard themselves as special creatures with a right to better conditions than the rest of the people. I personally have known intellectuals who, in Tsarist days, were accustomed to a fairly comfortable existence, economically speaking, but who found no difficulty in developing their talents in the Soviet Union, no matter what conditions they found themselves in. The best example I could cite would be my husband, because I knew his mode of life best. He had studied at the Leningrad University before the revolution, but he finished his education at the Military Academy and the Institute of Oriental Studies, which are both Soviet educational institutions. Together we went through a number of difficulties, but his loyalty to the Soviet regime and faith in it brought both him and me through all the trials.

And now, to those who have lied about the Soviet Union I can only say here that it is their own small-mindedness and inability to understand, or unwillingness to try to understand, what is going on there that deprives them of the right to be considered interpreters of that life.

And now, to come back, after that digression, to Mikhail Andreyich Reusner, my father-in-law. He was content to go on working and giving his best to his country. He was not only an old Bolshevik, a member of the Russian Communist Party, but an intellectual. I do not say he was satisfied with his position. Had he been satisfied, he would have been unfit for the work he had set himself with other Bolsheviks:

namely to make happy lives for the peoples of the Soviet Union, to provide them with good homes, opportunities, peace and prosperity. He lectured to university students on Law, the Constitution and the Rights of the people. He was also a specialist on comparative religions and had written several books, pamphlets and articles on all those subjects. He was something of an historian as well and, in general, one of those rare people who, from childhood, have followed a life of study and work. He originated from the Baltic Germans, and had all the strictness about discipline and self-discipline to be found among the Germans. Never a day passed without him performing his exercises, taking his cold bath, and generally bracing himself for the day, although he was over sixty.

He was equally exacting in his demand that others should be so disciplined. The students with whom he came into contact knew that with Mikhail Andreyich it was never wise to be late or dilatory. Similarly, in the house, if the salt-cellar was not on the table, the girl who did the housework was called upon to give an account of herself.

Because of this, together with his charming manners and great care of his person, he was often dubbed a *baryn* (gendeman of the manor), which was perhaps one of the worst terms that could have been used about a Communist.

The term was wrongly used, however, and I knew it, although often, when angered about little things around the house, I felt the term was a little justified, and could share the attitude of his students. When I became closer acquainted with Moscow students and the degree of self-government extended to them in their daily lives, together with the shiftlessness of the less reliable of them, I came to the conclusion that it was all to the good that there were a few professors about of the Mikhail Andreyich stamp. Certainly discipline was something that was necessary in strong doses.

But for me, this move into the professor's house did not bring a great deal of happiness. I had come from a home

where there had been many children, where the housework was performed by my mother and any of the daughters who happened to have the time and opportunity to assist. A domestic servant in the house was a rare occurrence and usually ended in confusion for all concerned. My own mother had often been called by us a *hausfrau*, because she, too, was exacting about the performance of household tasks. But at home, any disciplining that had to be done was done between mother and child. I have always found the relationship between domestic servant and mistress one which I cannot solve. After years during which I have performed a considerable amount of arduous housework, I cannot help seeing the side of the domestic servant. So the disciplining of domestic servants has always been a task at which I have shied.

There *in* Moscow, I found *it* irksome having to keep in order a very good girl who, without a doubt, had gone slack and lazy after the death of the mistress of the home. I remember many sore occasions when I was ready to throw up everything and depart. I had married Igor Mikhailovich, but had not calculated on marrying a whole household. I tried, gently enough, to get Igor to see my difficulty.

"But, Violet, it is quite simple. Polya is paid the regular trade union rates, and has many extras besides; she must do her work properly, just as my father does his, and I do mine."

"Yes, but I'm doing nothing at all, or not much."

"You are learning Russian, and you have your hands full keeping Alesha in order. He will go all to pieces if you don't hold on to him."

Now Alesha was another problem. He was a young waif, a homeless, parentless child who had been brought to Moscow by my husband's sister, already deceased, and left to the care of her parents. On the death of the mother, there was no woman in the home to care for him. Now he was my concern.

So here I was, with a twelve-year-old foster son as well, and I undertook the work of training him, not with a very good grace.

Moreover, in those days, I failed to see that all these problems which troubled me so much were just the same as those which burdened hundreds of other young people in the Soviet Union. I was not the only person with a waif on my hands. There had been others, like Larissa Mikhailovna, whose hearts had warmed to those orphans, who had taken them into their homes, and had found the problem of training them very difficult.

Furthermore, the sense I began to feel of the lack of permanency about conditions was one I shared with many others. Since great things were happening, a whole system was changing, it was natural that people's lives should undergo changes as well. The general trend was for the standard of living to rise and improve. We could see it all round. But at times, as individuals, we found ourselves faced with problems we had not bargained for.

So it was with me. We would talk over these things, Igor and I. I would try to understand this state of flux, and Igor would try to understand my perplexities, remembering that I came from a country where everything seems all too permanent and changes are something very out of the ordinary.

One evening things got so on top of me that I had to go right into them with my husband. I was ready to throw it all up, I felt so useless.

"This really can't go on, Igor. It is all beyond me," I began.

"Why, what is the trouble?" he asked.

"Well, I'm not used to being housekeeper. I can't run the house better than Polya does alone; she knows it. Even the things I can do better than she does, she refuses to do in the way I want."

Igor was bewildered. His mind was on other things: his lectures, his students, even his wife, but not domestic affairs.

"But can't I help?"

"No. I know enough Russian to get some sort of job. I must go to work."

"But there are so many things you can study: social ser-

vices, party life here. Go to the local union offices and see how our trade unions work. Why should you go and get a job?"

"I don't feel I can do the things you mention. I would rather study them gradually, by being a worker myself."

That was how I felt. I wanted to work with ordinary people in some ordinary office. And finally I did go to work, but it was hardly in an ordinary office. I worked as a shorthand-typist in the offices of the Communist International; and I found myself side by side with the children of *emigres*, who had lived in England but returned to Russia, after the fear of pogroms was removed, when the Bolsheviks came to power. Three out of the four other shorthand-typists were Jewish of Russian parentage, but born in England.

Still, on the whole, during those months in the cultured atmosphere of that flat, I had many opportunities which I missed. One I made use of with much pleasure. Weekly we visited the Moscow Conservatory of Music on a season ticket, procured in advance. There I heard first-class music, side by side with all kinds and conditions of men, from factory and office workers to some of the statesmen of the Soviet Union. I rarely saw the seat of Maxim Litvinov empty. Apparently music is one of his hobbies.

It was while living in these surroundings that I was introduced to Alexander Vassilyevich Chayanov and his wife, Olga Emanuilovna. The husband is of interest, merely because he later joined in an opposition move to throw out the existing Soviet Government and set up a new one, in which he himself was to be the Minister of Agriculture. He was not one of the driving forces in that opposition, but he gave it his strong support.

At the time of which I am writing, however, he never by a word revealed any feeling of opposition to the Soviet Government, neither did any of us suspect him of having any such leanings.

He came with his wife to dinner. He was middle-aged, of

medium height and rather stout. He had small, humorous eyes, and a face perhaps more obstinate than cruel. His manners were perfect and he treated me with a respect which was nothing if not flattering. I took a dislike to his wife immediately, but later changed my feelings to an indifferent sort of interest, which could not be called dislike.

Olga Emanuilovna was rather too young for her husband, but by marrying him had gained a continuation of the comfort she had enjoyed before the revolution as the pampered only child of wealthy Jewish parents. After that she had gone on the stage and been fairly successful. They had been married for about five years, and already Olga did not disguise the fact that her marriage was one of convenience. Her husband was inordinately fond of her, but she had never forgiven him for taking her from the theatrical world and making her a mother of two very splendid-looking children. Apparently it had been part of the contract that she should leave the stage.

Personally I could never understand her complaint. When I met her, she was already too old to go back to the stage, and the general opinion in the theatrical world was that she would never have been first-class in any case. I cannot imagine Olga Emanuilovna being satisfied with anything less than first-class.

Professor Reusner had tried to interest her in a study of the theatres of the world, and had lent her books on the subject from his big library. She would try to argue with him about the Marxian approach to the theatre in a manner which I thought nothing short of ridiculous. But I understood little of it, so perhaps my judgement of her in that respect was a little hard.

The husband, Chayanov, was the director of a big agricultural experimental station at Petrovsko-Razumovskoye, not far from Moscow. He was a very good specialist in his line. Before the revolution he had been a Social-Revolutionary, a member of that section of the Russian revolu-

tionary movement in Tsarist Russia that had believed in adopting the terrorist method to change the world. Since the revolution, however, he had taken no obvious part in the political side of affairs, naturally enough. The method of his party had not brought the revolution and the freedom of working people.

His conversation in those days consisted mostly of the theatre, music and the arts generally, their preservation under Soviet administration and development. He was also something of a collector of porcelains and prints. He was proud of his collection and invited us to go and see it.

It was several weeks later that we set out by tram to visit the Chayanovs at Petrovsko-Razumovskoye. Arrived at the tram terminus, we walked through park land, past the buildings of the agricultural colleges, to the address we had been given.

The house was a two-storeyed building in wood. It had only recently been built for people working at the experimental station.

We were ushered into a large room, which served as study and drawing-room. There were prints on the walls and glass-fronted cabinets full of porcelain cups and vases, plates and so on. There was a large dining table, a convenient-sized desk for working purposes, and a variety of chairs and a divan.

There were two other rooms besides. One a very cosy nook, done out in chintzes, which contained another small divan and an escritoire of an antique pattern. Everything in this little room was the genuine article. It was Olga's own room, her special sanctum.

The third room contained two cots for the boys, and a bed for their nurse.

There was a fair-sized kitchen, and the lavatory even contained a print of the sort readily obtainable in Paris, but which would likely enough cause some confusion if hung on any wall in England. I doubt whether the censor would allow me to describe it. Personally, not having been born in the

seventeenth century, I was not able to give it all the appreciation its author considered it worth.

The whole atmosphere of that flat seemed to breathe of "preciousness". I was surprised and not a little bored at being expected to look at and admire the pieces of rare porcelain and original paintings and prints in which they took such a delight. Here was the Soviet Union, barely healed from its wounds, yet the Chayanovs could sit back and discuss rare pieces of porcelain, rare prints and paintings and the like.

There was an atmosphere of this "preciousness" even around the children. The mind of their mother seemed to be fixed on obtaining all possible luxuries for them, on worrying about their education, which to her mind had to be something special and distinct from the education and upbringing of the ordinary Soviet child. I was not a little disgusted at what seemed to me the total inability of these Chayanovs to see things at long range, to take a risk with their belongings and their precious children like all other Soviet citizens did. Much of their time must have been spent on worrying over these things, and on searching round junk shops in Moscow to find pieces to add to their collection.

I found it hard to believe that if a man were really throwing his heart and soul into the work of helping to build up the country, he could have so much time to spare on rare bits of art. But I did not, then, understand the mentality of the specialist.

Both the Chayanovs had recently returned from Paris, where the husband had been sent on business. I remember how difficult I found it to appreciate the flimsy black evening gown which Olga proudly brought from her wardrobe for my special inspection. She had bought it in Paris and it was indeed a beautiful affair, and loving good clothes like most women, I could well appreciate the thing in itself, but failed to understand why she bought it.

I wondered, moreover, where she could possibly have the audacity to appear in it in public. There were no places in

Moscow that I knew of where a woman could appear in such an evening dress without arousing indignation if not suspicion.

It has to be remembered that as yet the only fashionable dresses to be obtained in Moscow were from little shops run by one-time aristocrats who obtained the silks and laces for them by underhand means: smuggling, speculating and the like. From time to time places of the kind were raided by the militia. The Soviet Government took steps to prevent speculation and smuggling. Trade with foreign countries was a government monopoly and prices were fixed. Shops which charged exorbitant prices, or which illegally obtained materials for such apparel, were naturally brought under the law.

Since not everybody could obtain beautiful clothing, what was officially produced in the country was kept for people who intended going abroad and mixing with foreigners; nobody in the Soviet Union in 1925 would have denied that fashionable clothing is an essential for people who have to work abroad, side by side with foreign diplomats and industrialists.

The Bolsheviks understood, with the best, that in the world beyond the Soviet borders, a man is judged first by his clothing and then by his brains and actions. This is a terrible thing about the capitalist world, but so long as it is so, persons of importance from the Land of Soviets will submit to convention, if only in self-defence. In that they are justified.

And so, what struck me about that Chayanov home was that the comforts of these people, their own desire to be different from the common herd, their own position, came before everything else.

I came away from that first visit to the house feeling that there, at any rate, was a specialist in the real sense of the word, but I doubted whether he was giving all he could of his brains to the government.

However, I was indebted to the Chayanovs for the only glimpse I ever had of Otto Yulievich Schmidt, the hero of the Chelyuskin epic, and now Director of the Kara Sea Route, the centre of which is in Igarka on the Arctic shores of the Soviet Union. I remember being struck by his strong, shapely face, his merry black eyes, and his huge beard. The conversation round the table that evening mostly turned on the religious practices in Russia in Tsarist days, on Rasputin and his power, on more domestic things such as the recipes used to make the splendid fare which burdened the supper table, and simple things of that sort. For it was round about Easter time, and Easter cakes and dishes were being offered us.

Otto Yulievich was connected with Chayanov temporarily by virtue of some joint piece of work in which they were both interested, connected, as far as I can remember, with the production of the Big Soviet Encyclopaedia. Olga Emanuilovna, who among her other attributes was a good hostess, had pressed her husband to invite him. She was proud to be able to have such an important person at her table, although in those days he was not yet the great Chelyuskin hero, but only a prominent Soviet citizen and Party official. The invitation had been issued and Otto Yulievich had accepted.

Beyond their general high level of culture, I would have said there was little in common between Otto Yulievich and the Chayanovs. Moreover, I knew Otto Yulievich by repute to be a serious member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a staunch supporter of the Soviet Government in all its policy, and a strenuous worker, rarely to be found except at his working desk.

There was no talk of things political as far as I could judge, although Alexander Vassyilevich did expand a good deal on the success of his work at the experimental agricultural station. That was natural; he was very proud of his achievements and he was skilled at his work.

It was only a year later that I learned that as a member of

a newly formed peasant group, part of the Promparty (Industrial Party), he had conspired with others, notably Professor Ramzin, a specialist in industrial affairs, to organise, with the help of the kulaks, an uprising of the peasantry against the Soviet Government. According to the plan of this uprising, when it was completed, Professor Chayanov was to be the new Minister of Agriculture in the government that would be set up.

Fortunately for the Soviet Government and the country at large, this plot was discovered and Chayanov's lust for power, privilege and comfortable living was forcibly curbed. He found himself sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

After our first surprise on hearing of his arrest, we came to the conclusion that the mode of living of the Chayanovs was such that when it became clear that in order to industrialise the country with all possible despatch certain sacrifices would have to be made by all sections of the population, even including the specialists, he found it not to his taste to support the government which introduced such measures as rationing.

The thought had often crossed our minds that specialists of the type of Chayanov would work honestly for the Soviet Government for just so long as they remained in a privileged position and were economically better off than the rest of the population. We knew too that the time would come when other specialists, young Soviet specialists, would give of their best to the country out of love for their country, and with no thought of any special, additional gain to themselves.

It would have been pleasanter for us personally had Chayanov remained loyal to the Soviet Government. Somehow it is not a pleasant thing to have accepted hospitality from those who afterwards turn traitor to all the principles one holds most dear. We know, for a fact, that his wife suffered a great deal through his treachery, for she had known nothing of the plottings. And the affection I ultimately felt

for her arose precisely out of her courageous attitude during those days following her husband's arrest, when she was torn between her loyalty to her husband and the grim facts which were laid before her of his treachery.

It was not difficult to understand that a man with, Chayanov's individualistic outlook and early political leanings could easily fall victim to plots against the Soviet Government, when that government was forced to take the Soviet people through dark days. And the years between 1929 and 1933 were very difficult years.

I lost sight of both Chayanovs after that period. But since Professor Ramzin, who was the central figure of the Prom-party trial, was released a few years later and is now again working as a specialist, it is likely that Chayanov is also taking part in the work of Socialist construction again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOME LIFE

UPON THE DEATH of my father-in-law, Mikhail Andreyich Reusner, there were more changes to be faced.

The home which we had shared with him was ours no longer. It had been his home for so long as he lived, but on his death, the dwelling space had to be allotted fairly, part to us and the remainder to whomsoever it was thought had the greatest need for it. This was a question outside our scope and one for the House Committee and the local authorities.

Knowing that we could not hope for more than two of the rooms at the outside, for we had made other arrangements for Alesha to share a room with a student, and expecting our first child, we were disinclined to see the old home changed and decided to get right out of it and look for rooms elsewhere.

It was again Autumn, in the year 1927. Moscow had filled up considerably during those two years since I first arrived. Not many rooms were available, and naturally they would be the worst that were standing empty.

We decided to take rooms outside Moscow, a little way up one of the main railway lines; I was accustomed to travelling for as much as three-quarters of an hour to and from work. I had done as much living *in* London. I assured my husband, who was dubious about the long journey to work, that I could well undertake it.

On the other hand, much of Igor's work kept him at home, preparing lectures and writing articles; he did not lecture every day of the week, and I considered that the fresh air of the country and the extra space we would be able to occupy, would contribute much to help him recover from the blow of the loss of his entire family almost in the course of two years.

Another consideration which decided us to adopt this course was the fact that we had some particularly comfortable furniture which we would have found it difficult to house in two small rooms, as they were of the cumbersome type. Igor, into the bargain, had perfectly legitimate sentimental reasons for wanting to retain it.

New flats were already going up in Moscow, but not fast enough, and those available were mostly for workers in industry.

Three stations up the line which runs from Moscow to Stolpce, on the Polish frontier, there is a little village called Nemchinovka.

We set out one fine day, alighted from the train on to an attractive, gravelled station and set out to look for rooms. It was October; the road along which we walked from the station was rough and dry, with deep cart-ruts in it.

There was a nip of frost in the air, the trees were leafless, but it was the countryside and I have a great affection for it. There was not a flower, however, although I searched the grassy banks. Igor smiled as he saw me.

We tried at several *dachas* (cottages), but none of them had rooms.

We walked on rather aimlessly, enjoying the air; we skirted a pond on the right and turned up a broad, grass-covered road. On either side of the walk were dry deep ditches hidden by long grass. We were later, in the spring-time, when the snow and ice thawed to see the sense of such deep ditches.

A largish wooden bungalow on the right attracted us, and to our joy we saw the notice pinned on the gate *zdayutsia komnatyi*—rooms to let.

Rather nervously and furtively we pushed open the gate and walked hesitatingly up the path to the side entrance. For us this was a totally new undertaking.

We knocked at the door.

"*Kto tarn?*" (Who's there?), was the customary response,

delivered in a mellow, somewhat husky, middle-aged voice from within.

We looked at each other and grinned. Our names could mean nothing, even if we gave them.

We knocked again and waited.

The door was opened by a hearty, round woman of middle height, her face fat and shining, crow's feet round her cunning little eyes. She crossed her arms just below her bosom, cocked her head on one side and putting on a serious stern expression said:

"What do you want?"

"You have rooms to let?" my husband asked.

"Yes, but can you pay for them?" was her response.

We grinned again at the question, the while the woman eyed us carefully.

She turned and entered the house, telling us to follow.

"You're not Russian," she said to my husband.

"Yes, I am; born in Tomsk," he readily replied.

"But you have a strange way of speaking," she persisted.

"You think so," my husband replied, suavely, I thought, for him.

True, Igor Mikhailovich had a guttural "r" unusual in Russians and this shrewd old woman had not missed it.

"What do you do for a living?" she asked again.

My husband calmly replied that he lectured in universities and wrote books.

The woman appeared satisfied, even pleased.

We had entered the rooms she wished to let. They consisted of one large square, very light room, and two tiny rooms giving off from it. Like most rural houses in European Russia after the-revolution there was, *dsiQtricJj^hjd n^*. Through French windows, the larger room gave on to a glass-covered terrace, into which the sun shone brightly. We opened the doors and stepped into the warmth of it. It was a sort of conservatory, without the plants.

"What is the rent for the three rooms? And what about the terrace," my husband asked.

"Not a copeck less than 100 roubles will I let it for," she replied, "and the terrace goes with it."

As rents went, this price was absolutely preposterous. As we saw it, we could pay the rent if we never set foot outside the house to visit a theatre or cinema, if we never had a bottle of wine any more so long as we lived there, if we gave up any idea of buying clothes for the time being. Still, this was a temporary business. Already we were putting money by each week to buy a share in one of the new co-operative houses in Moscow.

"Do you like the rooms?" Igor asked, turning to me.

"They could hardly be better and more convenient," was my reply.

We examined the conveniences. The lavatory was on an outside wall and could be approached without going outside the building. This was a rare convenience as Russian cottages went. The well was towards the end of the garden. This was well built and strong; we would obviously have no trouble with it.

We returned to the house. The landlady showed us her own room. It was almost too small to hold her and contained a single bed which took up almost the whole of one wall; it was piled high with mattresses and pillows. The window-sill was thick with palms, cactuses and flowering plants of the hothouse variety. There was a small table against the wall, one comfortable horse-hair, high-backed armchair, with antimacassars and cushion complete, and two Windsor chairs. She puffed herself into her armchair and offered us the others.

"Well, what have you decided," she asked, coming abruptly to the point.

"How long can you keep them open?" my husband asked.

"I intend letting them as soon as possible," she replied unhesitatingly.

"Can't you reduce the rent?" we asked again.

"Not to be thought of," she replied. We realised we were up against a woman who dictated her terms and stood no bargaining.

"All right, we'll move in the day after to-morrow," was my husband's retort. "I suppose you would want an advance?"

"Twenty roubles will do and the rest when you come in. You pay in advance, of course," was her reply.

Now, to a number of readers this may all seem strange. First, because there is so very much misunderstanding current about the economic system in Russia. Apparently there are still people who think that the workers have only to seize power and set up a government and the Socialist state comes of itself. As I have explained in *My Four Years in the New Economic Policy period*. Private ownership of the means of production was indeed gone for a time. Industry was socialised. Private distribution of the necessities of life still remained, as a very small percentage of the whole distribution; this was essential until such time as the co-operative shops would have grown strong. In addition, there were still to be found peasants who still owned their wooden houses in rural parts, who had no occasion to live in the whole of them, and who willingly made a living out of letting out rooms. Here again was a hangover from Tsarist days. Here again was something transitional; it was good there were rooms of this kind to be obtained for people who had a special reason for wanting them. It was bad, in the eyes of the Soviet authorities, that working people like ourselves should pay more than the stipulated one-twelfth of wages in rent. This 100 roubles was more like a third of our joint wages in those days; and it was not correct, according to the Soviet system of management, that anyone should pay such an exorbitant rent.

Still, there was as yet no law against the letting of these rooms by their owners, and if there were fools who would

pay, or people who were deliberately ready to forego other pleasures for this one pleasure of having extra floorspace, then it was up to them to get their rents as low as possible for themselves.

In point of fact, it was our landlady who was taking the risk, for if at any time we had found ourselves not in a position to find the rent money, the law would have been on our side, at least to the extent of demanding that we pay one-twelfth only of our wages to her, which would never have been difficult for us, whatever our circumstances. In subsequent conversations, when we became more closely acquainted with her, our landlady, Varvara Nikolayevna, admitted as much herself, in her inimitably direct and humorous way. She was a rare old soul, very philosophical about life, and actually extremely intelligent for an old woman who had had almost no schooling at all.

We settled in comfortably enough. When we had hung our carpets and arranged the room, it was very cosy. The first little room we fitted with a bed for the girl whom we had yet to discover to help keep house for us. The other room we fitted with a camp-bed for visitors. Ultimately it would be necessary for the child.

Our little kitchen table was accommodated against the only window in the kitchen. I never discovered why we were given that privileged position under the light from the window. True, Varvara Nikolayevna lived almost entirely on soups, which she cooked in a big brick oven, one of the real old-fashioned Russian kind. If you can imagine an ordinary open fireplace, set in the wall at elbow height, and a sort of shield like a half-moon, to fit in front, as a door, then you have an idea of the sort of oven it was. The fuel, always wood, was laid down straight on the brickwork base. It was allowed to burn through, leaving red-hot embers, which were swept to the back and one side. The shield-like door was then fitted in and a lid closed at the top, as in the Dutch stoves, and the oven was ready for anything.

Personally, I never managed to use it. I always waited until Varvara Nikolayevna decided to make soups or stews, and then accepted her invitation to put my cast-iron, enamel-lined cauldron-shaped vessels inside for soups, or my casseroles for stews. We shared the cost of the wood; the labour was usually that of my girl, Olga, but the supervision and brain-work was entrusted to Varvara Nikolayevna herself.

When the oven was not in use, we did our best with our primus and kerosene stoves.

As the months went by, and I found it difficult to get to the Moscow baths, we would use the big oven to heat huge pails of water, and I found myself performing my ablutions in a slipper-bath. This part of life in that cottage I found trying, but, as with most inevitable inconveniences, I became accustomed to it.

I made it my business, almost as soon as we were installed at Nemchinovka, to investigate the shopping possibilities. We found in the village everything we would require, but we could not entirely rely on the co-operative shop, much as we would have liked to.

The local co-operative store, which I had every reason for wanting to support as the store of the future, was not of the best. On the other hand, the stalls and shops of the private traders—relics of the past which were soon to vanish—always seemed to have in stock just those things which I could not obtain at the co-operative. Consequently I had to shop at both.

This local co-operative store lacked all sorts of articles which I knew for a fact could be obtained in the next village up the line and also in Moscow. That year there was no lack of any of the usual necessities like rice, tea, coffee, the best flour, and so on. Neither were potatoes scarce. Yet when I interviewed the local shop, I found the rice of extremely inferior Duality and mingled with *psheno*, a grain widely used by the Russian people. I think we call it millet. The price of it is much less than half the price of rice. I found, too, that the

quality of the flour was inferior, but the price of the best flour was being charged. Moreover, there was a regular period in each month when kerosene could not be obtained at all in the co-operative shop.

What struck me as curious was that all these things could be bought quite easily all the time at the shops of private traders; only slightly higher prices were charged for them.

I chatted with Varvara Nikolayevna about it.

She had been the wife of a wealthy peasant who had kept the village store in Tsarist days, not in Nemchinovka itself, but in another village in the Moscow province. Everybody who had studied anything of the life of the Russian peasant in Tsarist days will know that these shops grew rich on the credits they allowed poor peasants, charging interest for the convenience of being allowed to buy on credit. *Tfajs system je»sts..tOTdayjiu „Chnja** India and other *agrarjari* countries,, existed in Australia in the days when my own father and mother emigrated there, and exists to some extent in England, especially among pawnbrokers and the like.

On this system Varvara Nikolayevna and her husband grew rich. She was well aware of all the tricks of trading.

Varvara Nikolayevna had no particular reason, therefore, for loving the Soviet Government, which was doing its best to free the people from exploitation of this kind.

She knew, on the other hand, that I was a strong upholder of the Soviet regime, and that in England I had been a member of the same International as these Bolsheviks whom she eyed with suspicion. Still she personally lived comfortably enough even then, but she had her ear ever ready to catch on to rumours, and her tongue ever ready to pass them on.

Varvara Nikolayevna always did her best to make me believe that the co-operative shop could not compete because working people do not know how to trade. How could they? It was an art, a trade; only traders could do it.

I tried to argue with her, but it required so much explaining, and I felt hardly called upon to go to such efforts.

One day I returned from the co-operative in a tearing rage. I had obtained no kerosene, moreover the private shop was closed for the day.

"You know, it's damnable," I said to her. "They've got no kerosene again in that shop."

She chuckled her husky sort of chuckle and drew on her cheap mahorka cigarette.

"Well, what do you expect. The workers don't know anything about trading. They can't count properly."

I flounced from her presence. Maybe they couldn't count in her day, and she had no doubt cheated them often enough. I had no patience with her.

She left her room and stood at my door, amused at my discomfiture.

"You can borrow some of mine," she said, placatingly.

"What I would like to know is where you got it. You had none yesterday. You borrowed from me," I retorted, still angry.

"I sent Olga round for it last night, when you were out," she insolently replied. "I knew there would be none to-day."

"But how did you know?" I asked, ignoring the fact that she had sent Olga on errands, which was not part of our bargain. Olga had enough to do, and was going to evening classes as well.

She chuckled again.

"You'll learn, one day," she said.

I was frankly annoyed with her. There was something definitely wrong, but I didn't know what it was.

My husband was occupied on his book, and I never, during those months, worried him with domestic affairs. He might, had I turned to him, have found the solution to the mystery. As it was I only discovered several weeks later.

One day as I entered the co-operative store, I saw a notice pinned up; it called all interested to the comrades' court, to try the manager of the co-operative store, accused by some of the clients of mismanaging the affairs of the shop. I made

up my mind to go. But as luck would have it, I went down with flu and was deprived of the pleasure.

In another little room, off the kitchen, there lived a woman of forty, a spinster, soured, rather dull-witted, extremely ugly, but very good-natured. She worked in the "Bolshevik" biscuit factory on the outskirts of Moscow.

She agreed to attend the court. She came back and told us all she could remember of it. Her story was a little difficult to follow, but as Igor interpreted it, it was as follows:

The manager of the co-operative store had been selected to occupy that position by the members of the local Soviet. He was a local man, had little to recommend him for the job but his skill at figures and his own pushing manner. He had worked previously as a book-keeper.

For a little under a year he had held the job as manager of the co-operative store. During that period, apparently, he had succeeded in robbing the pockets of the members of the co-operative in divers ways. The thing I remember most was what had cut across my own household affairs. First, he had definitely been selling second-rate flour at the price of the best. Secondly, he had obtained enough rice to stock his shop for the period between stocktaking, but he had deliberately sold a portion of it to the private traders wholesale and at a higher price than the wholesale price it was sold to him; he had then mixed the remainder deliberately with millet; he had sold the remainder of the *psheno* at the right price, but had systematically given short weight, by tampering with the weights. Altogether he had managed to feather his own nest very prettily and helped to provide the articles which private traders, along the road, could easily sell at high prices at times when the co-operative inevitably ran out of stock.

As regards kerosene, he had supplied the local private traders in the same way, out of the generosity towards them of his own heart.

His crime, in the eyes of the public and the Soviet author-

ides was very serious. It was not only merely cheating the public and embezzling money. It was the political side that was so serious: he had undermined the prestige of the co-operative system, the system of the future; he had made it appear that the co-operative system would not work, but that the private traders knew the job of distribution best. Rumours had been widespread round the village concerning the incompetence of workers to manage affairs. In the minds of some, this idea had been taken further to mean that the Workers' Government, the Soviet Government, could not satisfy the people properly.

That was a crime indeed, and the manager of the local co-operative shop did several months in prison, and more months under surveillance. I do not remember the exact sentence, but it is sure that it was long enough to teach him a lesson, and that what he learned in the second period, in a house of correction, probably brought him round to a more reasonable frame of mind regarding the Socialist movement in general and the aims and objects of the Soviet Government.

Things went smoother after that, and it was only very rarely, when I wanted something very special, that I resorted to the private shops.

During these months, from October 1927 to the end of April 1928, I travelled to work each day, returning every night. As the winter wore on I found myself setting out in the dark and returning in the dark. It was not a very pleasant business, especially in view of the fact that I have always had a horror of the dark. Sometimes I could return with Igor, and always he accompanied me to the station in the morning, but there were walks home some evenings when I went through terrible emotions. Still, the fact that I could make myself face the darkness to my mind says much for the healthy life I lived, the good conditions under which I worked, and the general occupation of mind which was mine. I worked only five hours a day, being specially allowed to work one hour less, partly because of my pregnancy,

partly because I lived so far away. Concessions of that kind are often made in the Soviet Union. The personal side is taken very much into consideration. Neither were my wages docked for the hour I did not work. True, whenever I could find some way of making up that hour I did. Sometimes I was allowed to take work home; I always had my typewriter by me. A seven-hour working day in an office is light enough; a six-hour working day seemed to me, in those days, almost unfair, when there was so much to be done.

But there were so many compensations. It was during the earlier months at Nemchinovka that I tried ski-ing. I had given up skating the previous winter as a hopeless recreation for me. I feared nothing on earth as much as falling suddenly on the very hard *ice*. Ski-ing was quite another thing. If I fell, it was into soft snow. And I liked it for the speed with which one could cover the deep snow, which was not traversible in any other way. Without skis I should never have reached the fine forest, eight miles away, nor would I have tramped farther than the outskirts of the village. I loved the regular Sunday morning run, after breakfast. It was good to ski over softly undulating snowfields, through the woods and to other villages. But I never learned to take hills. It was unwise for me that winter, and subsequent winters I found my hands too full to ski at all.

Olga, who kept house for me very well, although only seventeen, was an orphan. She much appreciated the opportunity of running a small home entirely independently, without much interference, and she became very devoted to us. She devoured a cookery book, which we had discovered in one of the second-hand shops in Moscow, and she took a delight in surprising us with some dainty or other. It was fortunate that she was so interested; I often wonder what would have resulted had it been my job to train a girl to cook. I was no cook myself. Her coffee *blancmanges* would have graced the table of the most fastidious; and the way she insisted upon making us ice-cream in the middle of the winter

was something that never ceased to send our visitors off into peals of laughter. Yet the inside of the cottage in the heart of winter, when the snow lay high outside and there was consequently no windy draught through the floorboards was a very warm place, as we grew to appreciate. After a good Sunday dinner, ice-cream was not, in practice, such an absurdity as it sounded in theory.

In January 1928 there came to visit us a foster-brother of my husband. He was a commander of a submarine in the Soviet fleet and a very fine fellow, both in looks and character. He had been a protege of Igor's mother, Yekaterina Alexandrovna. She had taken him into her family by adoption at the age of thirteen, and had kept him with her until the civil war fighting took him away to the fleet on the Volga, as a volunteer junior seaman. He was little over seventeen at the time, but had insisted on going.

He had been officially adopted and bore the name Leva Mikhailovich Reusner.

When I met him he was a hale and hearty young bachelor getting on for thirty. When in playful mood, he would knock gently on the door of the landlady's room, give her his most charming smile and courteous bow, invite himself to sit with her and enjoy a smoke, and then subject her to every form of teasing he could think up. He quite bowled her over. After he had been with us a week, he could twist Varvara Nikolayevna round his little finger.

Leva Mikhailovich, the submarine commander, was a young man who knew exactly what he wanted, how to get it, and what to do. He seemed never to be at a loss. But he was a young man of high principles and devoted to his work. Widi him the fleet came first, and everything else was subordinate to it.

From the first he criticised me. First it was because I did not make my husband help in planning the domestic affairs; next, it was because I had a habit of allowing people to say things with which I did not agree without arguing it out

with them. He had some regard for my judgement and assured me that I could do much for the Soviet Union by good example, if only I would assert myself more, and also offer my criticisms. We had related him the story of the co-operative manager, and he had not understood why I had taken no steps to fathom the mystery.

Leva was another natural leader; he led by virtue of his splendid example, his perfectly disciplined mind and body, and his firm good habits. Strangely enough, he had no ambition to speak of. Yet he carried off the Order of Lenin, and was most embarrassed to find he had it, because his submarine was selected as the best disciplined, best ordered, best manoeuvring, best torpedo-firing in the whole of the Baltic Fleet.

He had a passion for the arts, for music and pictures. There was little he did not know about museums and picture galleries, the theatres and ballets, the literature and architecture of Russia, as amateurs go. And he knew, too, a great deal of Western European culture. In fact he was an extremely accomplished young man.

He insisted upon my helping him with his English; he would concentrate on pronunciation. In this sphere he was particularly hard on me. If ever I let a word go, the pronunciation of which he was doubtful about, he would pull me up.

"I said that incorrectly, didn't I?" he would ask.

"You did," I promptly replied.

"Then why didn't you stop me?" he asked again, and his lantern-jaw looked very grim.

"I pull you up so often, Leva," I humbly replied.

But his humour got the better of him each time. I was forgiven.

Once he lectured me more severely, about not asserting my rights.

"Look at the way you treat Olga! Why, she lives the life of a lady. Why should you ever draw water yourself? There are men about, too!" he added, eyeing Igor.

I explained that if I drew water from the well, it was because I liked to do it. Indeed, that was the truth.

"I don't believe you. Besides, you have other things to do. You've lots to learn."

"You mean teaching you English," was my malicious reply.

And he was forced to smile again.

One day we were faced with a difficulty. Olga had fallen sick, which was a tragedy indeed.

Igor fetched the doctor; Leva and I hauled home the shopping. Varvara Nikolayevna sat back and cursed Olga for a malingerer, and jibed at the men for allowing petticoats to set them to menial tasks. In her day women knew their place, and so on and so forth.

There arose the question of dinner. Should I ask Varvara Nikolayevna to come to the rescue. We had arranged to ski the next morning, for it was Sunday.

"Why ask her?" said Leva. "I'm not a seaman for nothing. You can go offski-ing with Igor in the morning. I'd enjoy cooking a meal."

It seemed wrong for the visitor to cook the dinner.

"Oh, I can manage, I think," I said, lying, for I had never discovered the secret of the oven, and I had a joint to cook. Besides, I did not relish the idea of cooking in that heated atmosphere, feeling as I did.

"Oh, no, you don't!" he put in. "I will cook the dinner, and Varvara Nikolayevna", he added, raising his voice that she would hear, "will be glad to assist a Commander of the Soviet Fleet!" She had pushed open her door. He clicked his heels, saluted, and stood at attention.

Varvara Nikolayevna was charmed and chuckled to herself at the prospect.

The matter was out of my hands. The commander would cook the dinner. It was decided. There was nothing for it.

We went ski-ing.

At mid-day we found the meal ready. It was extra-

ordinarily well prepared. I never discovered to whose brains we were indebted, those of the commander or of Varvara Nikolayevna. Two days later Leva returned to the fleet.

The months passed by and on April 30 I signed off from work, taking with me six weeks' wages to carry me over until the great day when my child would be born. Office workers in those days were given three months' leave of absence from work; the usual rate of pay was given in two parts—six weeks in advance on the day absence began, the other six weeks as soon as the child arrived.

The six weeks went by quickly, partly because a relative from London had come to stay with me for a while, and I had company.

It was early in the morning of June 18 that I decided I must be off to the maternity hospital in Moscow, where I had signed on to have the child. Actually any hospital for maternity cases would have been the same, but I particularly went to this one, as the doctor I had been attending for the previous seven months was a director of that particular hospital.

I caught the workmen's train to Moscow at about 5 a.m., accompanied by Igor. Arrived in Moscow, we took a drozhky, thinking it would be the quickest way. It may have been, but it was the most uncomfortable in the circumstances and I should have known. The major part of the big boulevard "B" which surrounds Moscow was still mainly cobblestones, although some parts of it had by then been asphalted.

We changed from the drozhky to a tram.

Arrived at the maternity hospital, I left my husband outside, and a little apprehensive of how things would turn out faced the inevitable and entered.

I gave my papers to the clerk and was handed over to one of the nurses. The papers, incidentally, consisted of a written pass to that particular hospital, provided me by the clinic I had been attending, together with the records and health charts.

I was taken to a warm shower, given a cotton nightdress, dressing-gown and slippers, and led into a ward. Here there

were about eight other women, in varying stages of preliminary childbirth.

I felt a stranger and indeed, in many respects, was still a stranger. I took possession of the bed offered me and waited.

A doctor appeared. She took my pulse and temperature. She looked very young and my heart sank a little. She asked me how I felt and I merely said I was all right.

"But have you no pains?"

"Oh yes, plenty," I replied.

She smiled.

"Then you're not 'all right'," she persisted.

"Well, there's nothing wrong with me. I have to have pains."

"That's right," she said comfortingly. "I asked you because I want to know what you are thinking. You see some women are afraid when the pains come. Don't worry, everything will be all right."

Her gentleness and soft words quite overcame me. I found my eyes filling with tears. Lest they should be misconstrued I turned to the wall as she walked to the next woman.

True, I did feel very far away from anybody and everybody and her understanding words had been too much for me. How careful they seemed to be here, in the Soviet hospitals.

I was left alone for some hours.

Finally I called over the nurse. She in turn called the doctor.

I was moved into another ward, on to a high sort of bed, probably like those used in similar wards in other countries. Here, too, there were other women. I counted them—five, besides myself. One woman was causing some commotion.

My own feelings, however, prevented me from bothering much about her shouts. It was a curious thing how that concentration on my "own case" blotted out almost everything else in the room.

During a moment of relative peace, the woman in the bed next to mine whispered:

"Is it your first?"

"Yes," I replied. "And you?"

"Sixth," she replied. I was surprised. Lying there, she looked no more than thirty, but she was probably older.

"Then you know what to expect," I whispered.

"The first is not so bad," was her reply. "It's the ones that follow. Each time the afterpains are worse. But you won't suffer. You're big and strong."

And so the process went on. My own doctor from the clinic looked in.

"Ah, you're doing fine, I hear," she said, and I was almost annoyed at her exuberance.

"I'm all right," I replied.

She moved away, and from time to time returned to see how things were progressing. There was a medical student and ward sister always available, besides three nurses, coming in and out as required.

It seemed a long time until midnight, when the doctor was called in and my son was born.

Then things began to hum.

They slapped the child, then held him up for my inspection as he cried. They carried him over to a side table on which were various bottles; they rubbed him down with some lotion, they did things to his eyes, they rolled him this way and that as they swaddled him, in fine linen, as the Russians swaddle their babies still, when they are tiny. They tied a metal disk on a long piece of soft tape and hung it round his shoulders, like a mayoral chain of office; they tied bits of oilcloth gently round his wrists. They showed him to me again, then took him out. Never for a moment, since he had been born did I take my eyes off the operations with him. For this was the moment I had feared. What if there, among a lot of other babies born around the same time, he should be confused with the child of other parents! This was the thought that had worried me, and I had been too proud to ask about it. Now there was nothing to ask, for on **the**

metal disc slung round his shoulders was my name and the date of his birth; on the little "bracelets" round his wrists was my ward letter, bed number, and my name.

Two men appeared with a stretcher on to which they lifted me. I was wheeled out of the ward, down the corridor, into a lift, and taken on to the next floor.

Here I found myself taken into a new ward—the third. There were three other beds besides mine. All the women were asleep and apparently my arrival did not wake them.

"Well, good luck!" said one of the men, as he moved out of the room. He was middle-aged with an extremely kindly face, weatherbeaten and a little wrinkled. I noticed his hands were rough and gnarled, but he was very gentle in handling the patients. I got to know him fairly well, for besides helping to move patients, he also carried messages and parcels to the women from their relatives.

It was good to be in a real, softly sprung bed again. My second pillow was removed, and I was asked to try not to sleep until the doctor had been *in* to me again.

Almost at once my doctor appeared.

"Well, how is *mamasha*?" she asked, familiarly.

I wasn't sure whether to resent the *matnasha*. But after all, there was nothing for it. I was now, indeed, a *matnasha*.

I merely grinned.

"Have they brought you tea?"

"No," I replied hopefully.

"It will come in a minute. Meanwhile let us see what damage there is."

She found everything in order.

"Is there anything you want?" she asked.

"No, but do you think I will sleep? I'm not a bit tired."

"Are you a bad sleeper then?" she replied, surprised.

"No, but I'm just not tired. I feel as though I could get up and go out."

"That is just excitement. Take your tea, and then, when the lights go out, you'll sleep all right."

She was right, and I slept so deeply that when at five o'clock in the morning people stirred in the ward, I felt I had had no sleep at all, and wanted to get back to my slumbers.

After this first ordeal and subsequent ones, I have often thought that if a woman is normally well cared for during pregnancy, if she has just enough work and just enough food, if she is not overtaxed with work or overtaxed with worries, the whole process is an easy enough business.

No chloroform in whiffs were offered to me; I did not even think of anything of the sort. Actually I learned from the women in my ward that chloroform and instruments are only used in special cases. Moreover, additional nourishment is given to women in the wards who are in particular need of it. It was not, in the main, difficult for the doctors to decide on these points. Since almost every woman, if she uses the rights extended to her under the Soviet administration, is expected to visit her doctor at least once every month during pregnancy, the doctor has every opportunity of watching her state of health, of keeping a record, of prescribing for the women during pregnancy, and of passing on her knowledge to whatever doctor may have the case in hand when the child is born. Like the other women, I had visited my doctor and had brought in with me, to the maternity hospital, the findings of my doctor, so that whoever had charge of me would know what to expect and what to prescribe.

Actually, in my case, there were no extras provided nor special medicines forthcoming, for the simple reason that I was a normally healthy individual.

But for many years Soviet doctors have been experimenting on painless childbirth, and in the year 1937 methods began to be used to mitigate the suffering of women during childbirth and even to eliminate all suffering. I cannot go into them here, for a good description of these experiments could only be given by a professional. Suffice it to say that problems of this sort are ever foremost in the Soviet medical **world**.

And so at five o'clock the next morning a nurse stood by my bed with an enamel bowl balanced on one hip and a jug of cold water on the other. With difficulty I found my soap and washed as best I might in a semi-recumbent position, while the young nurse poured a stream of water over my hands. I managed face and hands and let it go at that. After all, I could not really be dirty, although I might not feel fresh.

We were always afforded an opportunity of washing the face and hands before meals and before our infants were brought to us at feeding time; it amounted to about nine times a day.

I was rather pestered with questions during breakfast. When had I arrived? How had they not noticed? What had I wanted—boy or girl? What had I got?

Then, just before six o'clock in the morning, the first of a round of six daily amusements began. There were weak sounds of infants' voices, far, far away in the distance. They mingled with the hum of the lift. Then the lift doors were flung open and voices could be heard, loud and lusty.

The noise grew louder as something was wheeled towards the door of our ward. I raised my head as the door of the ward was flung open. I could just see the end of a sort of trolley on which were laid about a dozen babies, all, as far as I could see, identically swaddled.

A nurse came briskly and smiling into the room with a good-morning greeting, carrying one infant on each arm. She presented one to each of two mothers. A second nurse brought in the odd one. These were special nurses. Their duties were connected specifically with the goings-on in the babies' ward, and we only saw them when they brought in the infants to be fed.

The meals in the hospitals were extremely plain. The minimum of good nourishing food was given, a fair amount of milk, plenty of weak, milky tea and sometimes weak coffee.

Relations and friends were allowed to bring in certain extras daily, at special times. The time was usually around six o'clock.

Although I never asked the staff, I am pretty sure that the time for bringing in extras was arranged in the evening so that the mothers would take the hospital food rather than the mixture of little luxuries and fruits that their relatives brought in.

For one thing, the meals were scientifically planned, and specially adapted to suit mother and child, whereas the food brought in from outside might be tasty enough, but valueless or even dangerous. All parcels, before coming to the mothers, were passed by the doctors; if the food were not suitable it was handed back politely to the relative who had brought it and a reasoned explanation given for not allowing it to go to the mother.

I found the hospital diet sufficiently satisfying and good. True, when there was pearl-barley in the soup I did not like it. Neither did I like a huge plateful of milky semolina with butter for supper. But I could not deny that the food was nourishing, and it seemed to keep me well and strong. I do not deny either, however, that there are all sorts of things I might have preferred, as being more pleasant to my palate. But that is hardly the point, if the appetite is normal.

The size of those parcels brought to the mothers from relatives was something very surprising to me. The amount of black and white bread some of the women could consume in a day, especially the peasant women, was a constant source of astonishment to me. The hospital obviously provided insufficient bread, to their way of thinking; they were used to large quantities of bread and their relatives saw to it that they got it. If we remember that no fee is charged in maternity hospitals and that the food also is provided free of charge, and the lodging—then the Soviet doctors may be forgiven **for** providing only as much bread to each patient as they **considered the** women required. **There are always to be found**

differences of opinion regarding the quantity of bread that should be consumed, when a sufficiency of other foods is available. But habit is not easily broken.

I found writing letters a pleasant way of making the time pass after the fourth day, when there was little of new interest for me. There were plenty of books available from the hospital library; but I never read Russian at such times, finding it too tiring.

There is one strict rule in all Soviet maternity homes, and that is that no visitors are allowed, except in serious cases, when the women are treated according to the ordinary hospital regime and allowed visitors according to the seriousness of their state.

On the whole I could appreciate the rule, since it reduces the risk of infection being brought into the wards. Moreover, the minimum period in the maternity hospital is eight days, the maximum three weeks, according to the progress of the mothers. A woman who has not recovered her health and strength at the end of three weeks would automatically have become a regular hospital case and transferred to another ward, away from the convalescent mothers.

So the period without visitors is not long, and the company of other women of all ages in the wards, together with the changing shifts of nurses, sisters and doctors, not to mention the infants, who after all are only visitors to their mothers in Soviet hospitals, all tend to help the time to pass rapidly enough.

a splendid thing, the mother as a ^{priyjs}ged.^{^ex\$ox})j^{^<jv}tkmg special care and solicitude. And the great thing about, italiis out she is not considered a mother, tied for lifeto housework and babies, if a young woman has set her Tieart 'onTfcareeri whether of medicine, art, engineering or anydiing else, then marriage and childbirth do not necessarily deprive her of continuing to reach her goal. Everything is done in the Soviet Union to help that young woman fulfil her obliga-

tions as a mother and at the same time continue to go forward and reach the heights she desires.

I remember with what relief I first used the privilege extended to all nursing and expectant mothers, as well as invalids and the aged, of entering a tram by the front door at the drivers' end, and occupying seats specially reserved for them. From 1936 onwards, moreover, whole carriages on the tramlines were set aside specially for children on rest-days. The children were delighted. They gazed overjoyed at the Mickey Mouse drawings, at the model animals on little shelves, at the brightly coloured baubles which jangled from the ceiling to please the eyes of the littlest ones. Half the burden of travelling by tram was eliminated for the mothers and others travelling with children, and it was an additional pleasure to see how the older children chatted together and amused themselves, while the mothers could discuss and admire the development and ways of their children, quite undisturbed by them.

This is something I have never met anywhere else in the world. It is a tiny development, but it is typical of the details to which the Soviet authorities turn their attention. They have time for these little details now, though in 1925, when I first arrived, and even in 1933, there was too much to do in other directions. But the special seats for nursing mothers on the trams were allotted even before 1925, when I arrived.

And so, as an office worker in the Soviet Union, in the year 1928,¹ I found myself enjoying the splendid facilities and privileges extended to mothers over there.

For all the most careful medical attention I was given, for everything connected with the birth of my son, not a penny of the expenses was paid by me directly. The cost was born from a special fund set aside by the state for the purpose; my wages were paid me from a special fund set aside by the trade unions and state for the purpose.

Neither did I pay my trade union contributions during

those months of leave of absence; but my book was stamped up so that I should not lapse from the union.

Actually I was in a Soviet maternity hospital three times, and the last time I had leave of absence, in 1937,¹ I found myself with four months leave with pay, because office workers had been put in the same category as their sisters in the factories. Previously, women in offices and others not on manual labour had been allowed three months in all.

I did not make use of the free milk supplied because I am not in the habit of drinking it. Our trade union organiser was a little taken aback when I refused to accept this gift.

"But I don't like milk," I said.

"But you must drink milk for the child's sake," she hinted.

"Does the cow drink milk? Yet she can produce enough for her young. Good water and grass seem to be enough?"

I remember she smiled and shook her head. She had never looked at it that way. Neither had I for that matter, but it was a good enough argument, thought out on the spur of the moment, in self-defence.

By way of comparison perhaps I could mention that when the time came for me to go again to the maternity hospital in 1937^{at 4^a «^m*^on} April 21, there was a splendid institution at my service. All I had to do was to phone to the nearest garage and demand a taxicab. This was provided at only one-third of the normal cost, and taxis in Moscow are not expensive now; in fact, three of us travelled the distance for little more than what it would have cost us to pay for three tickets by bus.

A rule had been brought into force that pregnant women had first call on taxicabs, and that the reduced rate was to be charged. The garages, open all night, were obliged to respond immediately to such a call.

Of course there is an efficient ambulance fleet for difficult cases. The taxicabs are merely a convenience for those who can safely be taken by friends to the maternity hospitals.

And lastly, it is a splendid thing to contemplate that since the countryside of the Soviet Union was collectivised, since the collective farming system has brought its measure of good buildings, homes, hospitals and the like to the peasants, much more extensive medical facilities are to be found throughout the Soviet Union even in the far-away Arctic and Far Eastern regions. It is good to realise, too, that every mother has an opportunity of knowing all there is to know of the best method of rearing children. It is safe to say that the number of children now born in unhealthy conditions in the Soviet Union would form such a small percentage that it would be only a fraction of a unit of the whole.

What better tribute could there be to the correctness of the whole economic system. For to set up such a vast network of medical facilities and other social services costs vast sums of money. It is only possible out there because there no longer exists any section of society that takes more than its fair share of the good things of life and squanders the wealth of the nation.

It must not be thought, however, that every mother is a perfect one. There are mothers who do not want to feed their babies, even when the obvious advantages both to the mother and to the child have been explained. No compulsion is exercised in this respect. On the contrary, if, after a mother has been thoroughly persuaded, she still persists in wanting her child fed artificially, all the facilities are there for her. Special humanised milk is prepared daily in huge kitchens, under the surveillance of members of the medical profession; it is scientifically prepared and a variety is made to suit the varying requirements of the infants. Doctors prescribe to the mothers the most suitable milk for the children. Should the child not thrive, in spite of all efforts, then further medical attention is given. Everything is done in the Soviet Union to ensure that every baby lives. Is it surprising that the child mortality is ever declining in the Soviet Union?

CHAPTER NINE

GREAT CHANGES

IT WAS GOOD to bring my son Leva, named after a fine Soviet submarine commander, back home to the little wooden house in Nemchinovka. I had still almost a month of rest of the recognised three months' leave of absence extended to all mothers; in addition I had the right to take my annual holiday. So altogether I had before me fine prospects of enjoying almost two months' rest with nothing more to do but to care for my son and watch him grow.

Those were perhaps the quietest, most peaceful days I have ever had in my life.

There could have been no better environment for a newly born child than the garden, where he spent hours on end open to sun and air, and the big green-house, with the doors flung back, where his cot stood on rainy days.

There was little rain that year. Mostly it came at night. What rain did fall in the daytime came in short, sharp storms with thunder and lightning. We would set out for walks in fine weather and return soaked to the skin. But the changing skies, the sunsets, the storms, all combined to make those days very beautiful ones.

But the holiday period passed. With them passed the little home in Nemchinovka. We had gone to it with forebodings; we had grown to love it very much. It was not without a feeling of reluctance that we turned from the countryside back to the town.'

The whole cause of it might be said to be my son. But perhaps that is unfair. We could have remained there, had I agreed not to go back to work. Nobody would have criticised me for taking such a decision. But to me, it seemed the right thing to do to continue helping all I could to build

Socialism in the Soviet Union. I have always followed my own conscience in matters of this sort, the more so when by acting in that way, I have had the full agreement of those closely connected with me. In this case, my husband supported me in my desire to throw in my lot with the rest of the population. The Five Year Plan called for the help of all those who had faith *in* it. There was plenty that even I could do. I went back to office work, to be among the rest.

To work and to nurse my son would have been impossible at Nemchinovka. But in rooms near to my office, everything was possible for me.

A nursing mother in the Soviet Union has the right to be absent from her work for half an hour twice during working hours each day. So at ten o'clock and at two o'clock I absented myself from the office. My son's feeding-times were strictly observed, and no matter how important other work might seem to me, it was dropped if it came into conflict with feeding-time. Somebody else had to attend to it. There was never any question, never any friction. It is a rule strictly observed, and woe betide any manager or senior member of the staff who tries to interfere with a nursing mother's rights.

I was fortunate in having found the services of a splendid nurse to care for my son. I never once knew a moment's care or worry, and my son flourished as a child should. In the winter months, he was the marvel of the neighbourhood. Many an elderly woman would rate me or his nurse for having him out in the air so long, when the temperature was low. We adhered to the advice of the doctors. Cold air is not harmful to a young babe if it is swaddled well and protected from the wind. We were very proud of this son of ours, Igor and I. He stood all the cold we subjected him to, he slept and took his food, and rarely cried at the wrong time.

In 1929 there came great improvements into our own living conditions which coincided with great changes all over the Soviet Union. There was not a human being in the Soviet

Union who did not play some part in these changes, which concerned not only industry, but agriculture as well.

During the years 1927 and onwards, a new area on the outskirts of Moscow was cleared. It had been a dump, with one or two wooden houses, very wretched, where working people lived and endeavoured to rear their families under Tsarism.

In the place of this dump there grew up a whole settlement of workers' flats, six storeys high, one of many symbols for all who saw them of the changes going on in the country.

The district had a splendid record of revolutionary action. It was the Krasnaya Presnya district, and along the Barrikadnaya Ulitsa (Street of Barricades) not far from the area being cleared, stubborn battles had raged between the revolutionary workers and the Tsarist troops, and the barricades at the Ploschad Vosstanye (Place of Revolt) had been the last stronghold of the temporarily defeated workers in 1905.

Their spirit was not broken; it remains strong in the hearts and minds of men and women in the Krasnaya Presnya district of Moscow, some of whom remember those historic days of revolutionary 1905.

In the Krasnaya Presnya district of Moscow, there stands not five minutes from a flat into which I moved in 1929, the Trokhgornaya Textile Mill, one of the biggest of its kind in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It was built as far back as the eighteenth century by a mill-owner, Prokhorov. The workers of this mill took an active part in the revolutionary struggle. Many of them had perished when the December 1905 uprising was suppressed. On the site where the Tsarist troops shot down the workers, a tablet was set up in 1923 with the inscription:

"You were the first to raise the banner of revolt. We carried it onward to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We pledge ourselves to carry it onward to the triumph of World Communism."

Those workers have not broken that pledge. The Trokhgornaya Textile Mill is always to the fore in the effort to build Socialism. It was one of the first to launch the loans for the government during the First Five Year Plan, when ways and means had to be found to industrialise the country, which could not bind itself to the will of foreign powers by entering into loans with them.

The Trokhgornaya Textile Mill was foremost in the work of making Krasnaya Presnya one of the best administered districts in Moscow.

It can, moreover, be recalled that when the Spanish Fascists, aided by Italian armed fascist units and German armed Nazi columns, together with the warplanes, bombs and tanks of Italy and Germany, spread suffering and destruction among the Spanish people, who were striving to uphold democracy and freedom in their own country against their own fascists, it was the women of the Trokhgornaya textile mill who initiated the collection of funds for the women and children of heroic Spain. It was their proposals that were followed with enthusiasm up and down the whole of the Soviet Union. Together with other sections of the vast Soviet community of nationalities, men and women in all industries, offices and on the fields, planned to care and provide for the women and children of Spain who were brought to their shores in Soviet ships, away from the bombings and destruction.

And so, partly because of the fine revolutionary tradition of the district, I was particularly proud to have an opportunity of occupying one of the small percentage of flats there set aside for office and other workers, the great majority being for industrial workers.

To-day, these flats cannot be reckoned among the best to be found in the Soviet Union. Far from it. But when built, they were a vast improvement on the former living conditions of the area and even on the living conditions of the sort I have described hitherto.

If the description of these flats leaves the reader cold, I shall not have succeeded in explaining my point: viz., that all spheres of life in the Soviet Union are constantly on the move in the direction of improvements all round.

To understand the Soviet Union at a specific period in its march forward, one must see much that is bad, whether in actual life or merely in the minds and actions of individuals, as relics of the past which are gradually disappearing; one must see much that is good as part of that future which will inevitably belong to the people of the Soviet Union. Those thirteen years I lived in Moscow proved to me, beyond all shadow of doubt, that the bad is passing away, the good is growing and flourishing with every day that passes.

Our removal from two rooms in the heart of Moscow to this region in the environs of Moscow beyond the outer walls of the town was effected in the usual ramshackle way. Transport for individual purposes was far and away behind the rest of the development of the country. We hoped for fine weather, we trembled a little for the fate of our furniture. The two carts we had hired at some cost from a private peasant, who charged what he pleased, were open to sun and rain. Our possessions were covered somewhat carelessly with all too inadequate pieces of tarpaulin and some sacking. The roads were not good, either, even though by then a large number of the main streets of Moscow had been paved with granite blocks. One or two had even been asphalted.

So the main part of the journey, down the Nikitskaya (now renamed Herten Street, after the great liberal writer of the middle of last century) and the Krasnaya Presnya, *the* main street of the district into which I was moving, was over good roads made of granite blocks, laid fan-wise for greater durability.

But the turning in which our previous rooms had been situated was still paved with the old cobblestones. The road to be traversed from the Krasnaya-Presnenskaya Zastava (which marked the old gates of the town) to the new

dwelling-houses were no better than thoroughly bad country roads. Fortunately, however, the day dawned bright and clear, and the removal was completed with very little mishap beyond a few broken crocks.

We had chosen a flat on the third floor, not because the rent would be any lower (it was based on the usual regulation—one-twelfth of our joint wages), but because we preferred to be out of the dust from the roads. The flat consisted of two large rooms and a smaller one. Through the French windows of one of the larger rooms, we could step out on to a balcony, which ran along the two outer walls of the room. This corner was a real delight, having a broad window on each of two sides, so that it was always filled with light. The second large room had an even broader, high window along half the outside wall. We kept the broad, slate sill of this window beautiful with flowering plants, in the Russian fashion. The smallest room had a window almost too large for it. And so, the whole flat was light, even the kitchen.

The ventilating system was of the best. We appreciated this fact more especially in the winter months, when the large windows were sealed up with putty and only the little *fortochka* was ever open to air the rooms.

The flat had another advantage over the old houses, relics of Tsarist days. Gone was the Dutch stove, which, however much it was an improvement over the English coal fires, was nevertheless a troublesome affair to deal with. In its place was central heating. The central heating apparatus was in the cellar of each block; huge fires, fed with birchwood, did the work.

In these cellars, too, were separate cubicles, separated by wire netting and fitted with a door and padlock. Here each flat had its own cubicle, in which trunks and the like could be kept. It was like having a boxroom.

So all the rooms of the flat were free of lumber, they were warmly heated, except for one short spell about which I shall tell later, and they offered a large prospect of comfort to us.

Moreover, all piping, whether for drainage or for the water-supply, was carried through the centre of the flat, which meant we never once knew what damage a burst pipe could do, although the temperature in Moscow is known to drop over thirty degrees centigrade below zero.

In the flat I had lived in at the home of Professor Reusner there had been a bathroom. The water had to be heated by means of a fire under a spiral contained in a long painted column of tin. The affair was known as a *kolonka* stove, literally translated a "column" stove. The kitchen range there had been similar to that in the house where Manya had her room.

In these workers' flats, too, the kitchen stove was for me something of a white elephant. It looked almost like any English kitchen range, built of cast iron, comfortably small, with oven and hot water tank alongside, with little brass tap to draw from. Those who read this book and were adult before 1908 will recognise this sort of range and hob; in England, though, where coal is the standard fuel, they were built for coal.

My little Russian stove in the new flat had to be heated with long pieces of chopped pinewood or silver birch. It was for this reason, and because I found it difficult to manage wood fuel, that I never really learned the art of putting the stove into operation.

Another drawback to the flat was that the bath water also had to be heated with smaller blocks of birchwood in the fireplace beneath the "column".

All the wood belonging to us was kept in our cubicle in the cellar, whence we brought up a supply each day.

I must confess that it was something of a blow to find myself in a new flat but to have to continue using those anachronisms, the kerosene and primus stoves. Still, ever since I had been in Russia I had used nothing else, and I soon recovered from my early chagrin. After all, the rest of the flat had such splendid advantages over anything I had yet experienced.

The nurse who cared for my son while I worked thought nothing of heating the bath. Many of the womenfolk, including herself, had been accustomed before the revolution to heating such baths for merchants, industrial magnates, the landed gentry and others who inhabited the hotels and flats of Moscow. For my nurse, it was a treat to be allowed to use the bath at all. And she was only too grateful that my husband willingly carted the wood, for all he was a lecturer on oriental history.

As regards the absence of gas-cookers in those flats, the time had not yet come when gas could be laid on to this outlying region. Russia, at the time of the October Revolution in 1917, was little more than a feudal country, and even Moscow, the second most important city in the land, had no gas laid on in the hotels, houses or flats. Even in that big house *in* which Professor Reusner had the three rooms of his flat there was no gas, although to all outward appearances, the house had been built on relatively modern lines, long before the revolution. It was only a few years previous to 1929, when I went to my new flat, that gas was introduced in all the hotels of Moscow, and there were one or two big houses, near the respective hotels, which had also been fortunate enough in having gas laid on at the same time. It was not yet the time for introducing gas in all homes.

All through those years between 1929 and 1938 when I lived in the Krasnaya Presnya district, the proposal for the installation of gas-cookers was included in the "instructions" of the people of the district to their local District Soviet. Each year a reasoned explanation, showing on political and economic grounds why the time was not yet ripe for such improvements, was given at the annual meeting of electors, where the departing delegates to the District Soviet gave a report back to their electors, and new delegates were elected. While I was there, these elections took place at open meetings, the vote taken by a show of hands. It was only later that secret balloting was introduced.

At the last meeting before I left the district, a definite promise had been given for gas to be run to the area within a definite space of time. It is highly probable that the kerosene and primus stoves have been banished for ever in that workers' settlement, but I am not, at the moment, able to confirm this.

I would like to mention something of the difficulties we tried to overcome during that period.

As industry expanded by leaps and bounds, while transport facilities over that enormous territory included in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics lagged somewhat behind, it became essential to economise as far as possible with wood fuel. There were other goods far more essential to industry and the general needs of the people, which had primarily to be carried by the freight trains available. Timber is cumbersome freight; consequently, every means had to be explored to limit the use of wood as fuel.

And so, during one winter in particular, I rather think it was the winter of 1930, though I cannot be sure now of the exact year, we found our hot-water pipes really efficiently warmed one day and only luke-warm or even cold the next. I was a little worried at such a sharp change in the temperature inside the flat, more for the sake of my small son, who spent a large part of his day indoors owing to the severe cold outside.

I went one day to the manager of the House Committee, one of several set up to deal with problems as they arose over the whole area of new houses where I lived.

"Good morning, comrade," I said, as I entered.

"Good morning, comrade," was his reply, and he offered me a chair.

"And what can I do for you?" he continued.

"Well, the heating in our flats, and in those of the neighbours, as I understand from my friend next door, has been very bad during the whole of last month. We want to have an explanation. We find it difficult to know how to dress our

children when the temperature indoors changes so sharply. Can't something be done to see that the pipes are at a steady temperature? Sometimes they are so hot you can't touch them; at other times they are almost cold."

"But do you not follow what goes on in the country?" I was asked, somewhat curdy I thought. For I was not in the best of tempers.

As far as I could, I did try to follow the movement of affairs in the Soviet Union. I even dared to pride myself on the fact. It was difficult enough, too. There were so many changes, one could hardly keep up with the trend of events. And on this particular point, I felt that in a country where there are such vast forests, surely there could be no shortage of wood.

"Of course I follow events. It is not so easy though. I am a student and a mother and a translator, and I find so little time to watch everything ..." I stopped. I was getting into a state where I should next be indulging in self-pity. That was not at all the impression I wished to give. I knew what was going on in the country and was proud of the people; it would never do to give a false impression, just because something was troubling me.

"But did you not see in the papers, comrade, that we must economise to the full in the use of wood? You could not have failed to see that we are having some difficulty with rail transport."

I knew all that. I simply had not connected rail transport difficulties with my own personal difficulty. That was a mistake one could easily fall into. Still, I was not quite satisfied.

"I understand we have to economise, but why can't the pipes be heated uniformly each day," I pressed.

The manager of the House Committee sat more comfortably in his chair and lighted a cigarette. He offered me one, and I accepted it willingly, though I felt a bit mean in doing so. After all, cigarettes were rationed.

"See here, comrade, please try to understand that we have

engineers and technicians who understand these things better than you do, and for all your learning."

He was obviously a bit nettled or he would never have jibed in this way. Moreover, it was only later that I discovered I was not the first irate housewife to make the protest. Many of us had doubted the efficiency of those in charge. Perhaps we all had a tendency to look too much for inefficiency or sabotage... . Not all previous managers of the House Committee had been as good as this one.

"Excuse me a moment," I hastened to put in my word. "I apologise if I have hurt your feelings by coming here, and if it is any comfort to you," I added with my best smile, "you almost managed to hurt mine by alluding to my studies the while regarding me as a bit of a fool. But you cannot deny we are all a little justified if we imagine something may be wrong. Not all managers have worked as hard for us here as you are working. And so, all of us would be glad if you would explain to us why you cannot arrange for the flats to be heated at a uniform temperature every day."

I tried to be appeasing. I wanted his explanation.

"All right, I will explain," responded the manager, feeling more at home after my words. "If we heat the fires moderately all the time, burning less wood all the time, then some of the flats will have cold pipes all the time, others will be mildly heated, the rest will be very hot. And that—all the time," he emphasised the last words.

So that was the reason. It lay in the technical installation. If that was the only way the apparatus worked, there was nothing for it. At least we all shared the same trouble, whereas, if the fires were heated only moderately all the time, there were some flats that would be overheated all the time, others that would have no heating all the time. I was satisfied.

I thanked the manager most graciously and then left the little room which he occupied for half the day, going through his papers, interviewing housewives and tenants, listening to complaints and suggestions.

During the following summer months, we lived in a whirl of sand and dust; there can be extremely high winds in the summertime in Moscow. Trenches were dug all along the road which ran from the Trokhgornaya Textile Mill by the side of the park, and along the streets which joined our different blocks of flats.

Even on this little question of the dust, we women in our new flats were annoyed. We turned again to the manager of the House Committee. He might have some suggestions; we had none, we merely had complaints.

"Can't something be done about all the sand and dust blowing about," asked one of the women, when we had trooped in. There were four of us.

"Yes," added another, "how do you think we can keep our houses clean? It is terrible the way the dust whirls up in clouds off the rough ground between our houses and the gardens by the Lakokraska Works." These were the oil paint and varnish works nearby. Actually we had another complaint to make about that as well.

The manager smiled at us. He was pretty accustomed to our periodical visits. It was rare that he could not meet us halfway. His expression, that day, was a mixture of kindness, admiration and worry. He had such a burden of responsibility on his shoulders.

He fixed me with his eye.

"Now it was you, wasn't it, comrade, who came to see me in the winter months about the heating. What do you really want me to do now?"

I flushed a little with embarrassment. The women had, indeed, hurled themselves upon him; I felt I would have been more diplomatic in my entry. Still, I stood my ground with them.

"Well, see here; how would you like to have your children literally eating dust? And it is like crossing the Sahara on a windy day, to go out into the streets. Can't something be done?"

"Well, this is the position," he began, and settled himself in his chair as customary when he wanted to explain something carefully.

"First of all let me tell you that those trenches are being dug so that instead of having your hot-water pipes heated from fires constantly devouring large quantities of wood, which it is quite unnecessary to transport here from far away, they will be heated from the waste steam from the factories round about. You will see the difference next winter; you will not come bothering me again on that point."

His eyes twinkled, he almost chuckled to himself; he was no doubt pleased with this new project, which was indeed a splendid one, for which we were very grateful in future winters. But he had not answered our question yet, about the sand and dust.

"But we came here to-day about the dust," repeated another of the women. "We know the roads are being watered twice a day. What about getting them watered three times a day, during these hot months, when everything dries up so quickly. It would be good to have water on the street during the children's school lunch-hour. They like running in their *trusiki* (short running pants) under the play of the hose-pipe. It does them no harm, either."

This was a new aspect of the matter. I had never thought of it. I was even dubious about the salubrious effect of very cold water from the main on very hot Uttle bodies. Yet I had seen young children under the hoses, and the children seemed not to suffer. They must be hardened httle animals.

"All right, my friends," the manager was saying, "just listen to what I have to say. You've got your good flats; I have told you about the improvements you will have next winter. As for the dust blowing from the dry, waste land, have you seen young men and women surveying there recently?"

I nodded. None of us could deny the fact that we had seen young men working with lengths of twine, apparatus on tripods, measuring tapes and the like.

"Well, those people", he continued, "are already beginning the work which will help rid the area of dust. What I mean is, the gardens will be continued right over the waste land, almost to your front doors. But the most we shall be able to do this year is to sow grass to keep the dust down, and to turf some parts of it. The men are out digging to-day. Unfortunately, that is the best we can do this year. And next year, a whole garden will spring up on that waste land." And it did.

But there was another grievance we had. The Lakokraska Works was a great trial to those of us who were sensitive to unusual smells. As for me, I cannot say the strong smell of turpentine and varnish really worried me. And on the subject of smells, I always found it difficult to understand how a girl, straight from a peasant home reeking of cabbage soup and makhorka tobacco, not to mention damp clothes drying round the old Russian stoves, and herrings, and cucumbers, should find the smell of a good strong carbolic disinfectant offensive to the nose. Yet I knew many peasant girls who were almost turned sick at the smell of cleanly fluids like disinfectants. Even in the maternity hospital, too, I had observed that these peasants disliked the smell of the ward, after it had been sweetened with a wash-over with water and disinfectant.

But to come back to the story. Our small deputation of women wanted to register a protest about what they considered the obnoxious smell exuding from the Lakokraska Works. Exuding is hardly strong enough; it positively flavoured the whole neighbourhood for a good mile round at times.

The manager of the House Committee thought this was going a bit too far. But the women had heard of smoke-consumers; they were being introduced in all large factories, to prevent the air of Moscow from being laden with soot. They had every reason to believe that some bright inventor could discover something to cope with the smell of the local

varnish works. At any rate, they could lodge the complaint and hope for the best.

The reply was short.

"If you don't like the Lakokraska Works, then you had better look for rooms elsewhere. You don't think I can get it moved for you?"

Yet, when I returned to Moscow in 1936, after a short stay abroad, I attended the next meeting held of the district electorate. To my astonishment, I discovered that the matter of the Lakokraska Works and its unpleasant smell had been brought before the District Soviet, and that investigations were being made for the discovery of a site outside Moscow, where it could produce its varnishes and paints at a distance from the population at large.

Here again, I have every reason to believe that by the next time I go to Moscow, I shall find the Lakokraska Works missing.

And that is how the smaller things get done. That was how the smoke-consumers found their way to the factories of Moscow. That is why there is nothing like the soot and dirt in Moscow that I found, to my horror, in London, when I returned.

We all knew that it was our own particular job, as citizens of Moscow, to make our voices heard about every phase of life that caused those around us discomfort or trouble. We in the Krasnaya Presnya district were particularly fortunate in having a splendid manager on the House Committee; also in having a splendid delegate to the District Soviet in the form of an elderly woman, who had brought up nine children, who remembered the days of 1905 when she was a small child, and who still took a serious interest both in the Trokhgornaya Textile Mill, at which she had worked until she was pensioned off, and in the locality in which she lived. It was people like these who got things going. They are to be found all over the Soviet Union. And they, together with the rest of the population, who know by now full well that every

reasonable and possible improvement will come their way for the asking, do their utmost to see that the country is kept in order, and their delegates to the Soviets do their duty by the population.

That is how democracy works in the Soviet Union from the bottom. It is only one expression of it. One could cite thousands.

But when a country is run this way, there is a feeling of confidence among the people which nothing in the world can shake. It is with that feeling of confidence that the Soviet people are building Socialism, have arrived at Socialism in the political and economic sense. There remains only for them all to become Socialist in mental outlook. That is something which takes time, but all the pre-requisites are there already.

The feeling of comradeship between neighbours during those very difficult days was something beautiful to witness. Take, for instance, the "no waste" campaign. It brought me into closer contact with my nearest neighbour than I should ever have arrived at had life been smoother in those days.

The "no waste" slogan first caught our eyes in the little local newspaper, published at the initiative of the Trokhgornaya Textile Mill workers by the District Soviet. An article explained that those who would go to the trouble of collecting potato peelings, vegetable waste and so on, in special buckets for the purpose, would find themselves in receipt of tickets which once a month they could hand over to a little shop, specially opened near our flats, and obtain in exchange a portion of pork, merely for the cost of carriage.

We all turned to. I found that by co-operating with my next-door neighbour, the mother of a small boy with whom my son frequently played, we could fill a bucket in two days. For each bucketful of "waste", we received a ticket. At the end of the month, with the fifteen tickets, we went along to the little shop, which had previously hung out a notice to the effect that it would be open on a certain date. We found

ourselves handed 5 lb. of pork in exchange for those tickets, and the price we paid was so absurd that we both laughed long and heartily at the idea of having to pay at all. But we overlooked the fact that the men, from the collective farm some thirty miles out, who had brought in the meat had to be paid their wages. And it was this small cost that we women were paying for; naturally, spread over the whole of us, it amounted to a very small sum from each individually.

In the winter months it was all very simple. We kept the pork outside in the snow and it lasted us almost a week, cutting off portions of it for each day's meal. Moreover, during that week, the work of cooking was pooled. The neighbour, Nura, agreed to cook in our flat; in exchange, Polya, my nurse, took charge of her younger boy, took him out for walks, and kept him out of the kitchen. Nura was a housewife in the fullest sense of the word; she did not go out to work, but preferred to stay at home caring for her two children. Her husband was a mechanic.

The week when there was pork about was a really interesting one. It was a change for Nura to cook in different surroundings, especially as she was not particularly fond of her mother-in-law. The old, old story!

It was good for the children to take their meals together; they were much less finicky; we used to call it "going to kindergarten"; and the joint supply of toys supplied them with added amusement.

Both Igor and I did our utmost so to arrange studies and lectures that we could be at home and partake of the "fatted calf" as well, on at least one day in that week.

It was all very merry and pleasant.

In the summertime it was not so simple. Then, the meat could not be kept, so the day on which we went and collected it was a great day of feasting. Only people who have really had to tighten the belt can know what fun it was to share in this way.

Then my English friends came in useful. It was often pos-

sible to invite them in to share the "Sunday dinner". They rose to the occasion by presenting Nura and myself with some little parcel from their own rations. Actually, the foreigners in the Soviet Union had much better rations than the rest of us. I could hardly call myself a foreigner in those days, having lived in the country for over four years. Consequently, when ration books were given out, I never mentioned that I held a British passport. I knew all the tricks of the trade about Russian cooking; there were few Russian foods that I could not take; black bread was by then as appetising to me as the white. So I passed as a real Muscovite when the ration books were handed out.

Nevertheless, I was not above accepting gifts from those of my foreign friends with whom I was well acquainted. It was sometimes rice, sometimes semolina, sometimes coffee or tea. But it was never butter. I have yet to find the Englishman who will willingly relinquish his hold on butter. Except those who are not sufficiently in funds to buy it.

And so, in exchange for a thoroughly well cooked English "Sunday dinner", my foreign friends would help Nura and myself out and make living easier for us. It was good to have coffee, which long ago had gone off the market, and could only be found in shops for foreigners.

But I shall never forget the evening when I found myself forced to entertain two English visitors, who had turned up quite unexpectedly. I had nothing to offer them but bread, *povidla*—the only "jam" we could obtain in those days, made of fruit pulp with very little sugar, and brown in colour—and tea, which I must confess I grudging them.

Fortunately beer was obtainable. I offered them the choice, after hearing that another English friend was about to arrive, bringing what he promised would be fresh herrings.

Now I pride myself that I can make a thoroughly appetising dish of fresh herrings and mustard sauce. I awaited the arrival of my friend, all the happier because the others had agreed to take beer for supper.

There was a knock on the door, and the bright, shining, happy face of a man, who looked very much like an overgrown boy, thrust itself through the door I opened.

"There you are, my dear!" said he, handing me the fish.

It was neatly wrapped in white paper, and even had a string tied round it. It was a fair-sized parcel, and my experienced eye rapidly gauged that it would suffice for all concerned. That is, if it really had been fresh herrings.

Unfortunately, it turned out to be what we call "red soldiers" in the East End of London: dried, smoked, very salt herrings. I had never handled them in my life. Moreover, I knew, from hearsay, that the preparing of them causes a great deal of unpleasant smell.

Still, I made the best of a bad job. I prepared them somehow; I hardly remember now what I did with them. I only remember the smell.

I sent out for beer.

I had to forego any supper at all. I could hardly drink tea and eat bread and *povidla* if my guests would not. They all stood solid behind the "fresh herrings" and the beer.

There was much laughter and much leg-pulling. After all, a grown man really ought to know the difference between herrings, fresh and smoked.

But I, as hostess, was exonerated. I could hardly be blamed for having faith.

We had assistance during those difficult days in all sorts of unexpected ways.

I remember, for a short period, I had a young peasant girl working for me, whose brother had studied consistently when the opportunity had come his way, and had graduated from the engineering school. He was working in an aircraft factory, and, as Doshia reported to me, was enjoying life to the full. He was a bit of a woman-hater, even at the early age of twenty-eight, though I never enquired deeply enough to discover what had so turned him against women. Consequently he had never married.

During the years of the Five Year Plan, he was earning good wages, he had good rooms near his factory—about sixty miles outside Moscow—and on his day off he would bring himself to Moscow, dump his parcels in my kitchen, and go off to enjoy all the Moscow sights.

One day Dosha came to me with a request.

"Don't be angry with me, Valentina Georgievna,"* said she, in the apologetic way of all peasant girls who have not been in Moscow long. "But would you allow my brother to have a 'shake-down*' on the kitchen floor on the eve of his rest-day. You see, he wants to have a full day in Moscow. He can get off from work in time to arrive here at midnight. If he can stay here that night, and the next, he can then have a whole day here, and return to the works in time for the third shift the following day."

It seemed to me a reasonable request. There were no hotels open to the general public in Moscow at that time. Only a few were set aside for foreign tourists, and the rest were occupied by men and women whose work took them travelling from one town to another, inspecting for particular branches of industry and agriculture, or reporting for newspapers. The rest of the hotels had long ago been converted into homes for the vast numbers of people who came to Moscow, as one of the industrial towns where there was plenty of work in the factories.

I readily agreed to Dosha's request, dunking myself, no doubt, a fine individual to be so kind.

The outcome of it all was that I found that by granting this little request to Dosha, on behalf of her brother, I was constantly being presented with some little article of food, which always seemed to appear at a time when I was in a quandary about what I should prepare for dinner. Sometimes it was tinned fish; sometimes tinned meat, only distributed among industrial workers; sometimes even a small supply of

•Domestic servants often clung to the use of the patronymic, and "Violet", with them, always became "Valentina".

butter. Once he insisted on presenting me with a supply of rice, which was well and truly appreciated,

I remember that at first I felt it was all wrong. If he was given those rations, then he surely needed them for himself. But I soon discovered my mistake. Workers in industry were the privileged section in those days. Moreover, a skilled worker could earn very good wages indeed. Meals provided in the factories were good, too, I was soon to know from my own first-hand knowledge. With such meals what, actually, did a young single man want with rations other than bread, butter, tea and sugar, liver sausage and other articles suitable for breakfast or supper?

So those days, when we tightened our belts, were not so bad. They brought pleasures and difficulties. They brought friendships based on common difficulties for a common aim; there was an exchange of opinion among the members of the whole population such as has never, probably, been known over centuries, except in that Land of Socialism.

It was a hard struggle, this change to extensive and intensive industrial development and the later change from individual small farming to large-scale collective farming.

It is worth while writing a little about it all. There were many factors, during the period of the Five Year Plan, which went to delay improvements in the living conditions of the people of Moscow and throughout the Soviet Union; and it would be unfair to judge of the rationing period or the general progress of the country without taking them into consideration.

There are very few people in Europe and America to-day, of those willing to show a serious and unbiassed interest in the Soviet Union, who will deny that the mere fact of the existence of a country, administered by working men and women, and administered successfully, has been a thorn in the side of the ruling classes of the old capitalist system, ever since the Land of Socialism arose to challenge the rest of the world, and show an example of the new world.

This thorn in the side has caused the ruling classes to react against the Land of Socialism all along the line.

The reaction of the capitalist world to the new world of Socialism has varied, according to the stability of the governments of Europe and America and the degree to which the working people of those countries have realised the advantages of the Soviet working-class system of government.

When the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Government made a separate peace with Germany before the end of the last war, in 1917, they did so to save further bloodshed for the peoples of the former Tsarist Empire, and because they were not interested in the secret treaties by which that Empire was bound. In consequence, the Soviet Government was accused by the Allies of letting them down. It was put about that the "Russians had betrayed".

And so a weak country that was trying to bring in a new order of society, where working people were no longer exploited by a few, but could have a fair share of what they produced, found itself forced to fight not only against rich men, unwilling to give up their privileges inside the country, but also the united efforts of the Allied countries.

By dropping out of the war, the Russians, representing all the peoples now in the Soviet Union, had upset the calculations of the Allies. But the working people and peasants in Russia, who had never wanted war, did not consider it their business at all, if the war plans of the Allies, or the Germans for that matter, were upset. They wanted bread and peace, and for bread and peace they would fight. They had set out on the path to Socialism and no ruling class in the world was going to stop them.

It was a courageous step, a step which no other country in the world has yet followed successfully. Moreover, those peoples of the Soviet Union have had no reason to regret that step.

Russia, in spite of being weakened by the war of 1914-1918, and the civil war and intervention that followed, sue-

cessfully defeated Allied intervention. And the Russians have never forgotten the help they had from the British workers, who through their Councils of Action demanded that the invading Allied troops be withdrawn from Russia, and Russia left to solve her own problems without interference.

As the Soviet Union grew stronger and flourished, a living example of the great benefits which can accrue to the people as a whole when profit-making for a few has been rooted out, the ruling classes of the other five-sixths of the world beyond the borders of the Land of Socialism were given much food for thought.

As workers' delegations came back to their respective countries and reported on the advantages of the Soviet, Socialist system, the anger of the ruling classes of the old world grew still stronger.

And so all the tremendous apparatus of propaganda, controlled by the ruling classes, was put into operation to dupe and misguide the people outside Russia and make them believe that cruel, bestial things went on there, that the Russian workers were no better off than hitherto, that working people in general were incapable of running their own country, without the brains of capitalist managers and directors and the like.

The lies against the Soviet Union have been so consistent and so foul that it is no easy matter to disillusion the minds of ordinary people, and to make them see the real truth.

The truth has, fortunately, repeatedly been told to the people of Britain; but it has been offered by people who have no big bank accounts to subsidise their efforts at producing newspapers, journals and propaganda literature. Moreover, these people, because they speak the truth about the Soviet Union and working conditions both there and here in England, are deprived by the dictatorship of the rich, of the industrial magnates and millionaire newspaper owners, of any opportunity of printing the truth in the big newspapers, or of speaking the truth through the medium of the British Broadcasting Company.

The dictatorship of the privileged, the moneyed, the propertied, is a very real thing. Unfortunately the average man or woman is only too unaware of it. But the hope of the future of England lies with the advanced working men and women of Britain, who will seek out the truth for themselves no matter at what cost to themselves. Of such stuff are working people made.

Efforts have been made all along the line to crush the Soviet Union. When intervention failed, other underhand, spying methods were used. We have proof of it in the trial of the English engineers in Moscow in the year 1933. I felt ashamed to be English during those days.

We have further proof of it in the betrayal of Trotsky and others. They plotted with foreign diplomats, when they found they had no support in their own country; they plotted with them to overthrow the Soviet Government, which had the fullest backing and support of the whole of its own population.

The Russian people felt no qualms when traitors were brought to book; they knew only too well, on their own backs, the extent of privation those acts of sabotage and wrecking, those subversive attempts of "leaders" with no following inside the Soviet Union, in league with foreign diplomats to overthrow the Soviet Government, had brought upon the Soviet people. Without all that interference and plotting, the Soviet Union would have advanced much farther along the road of Socialism and much earlier.

British working men and women, it seems to me as I write, will one day have to take with the same philosophical understanding, the punishments that will have to be meted out to those in their own camp who have deserted. They are not unaware already of the significance of the countless desertions they have already witnessed from the ranks of their own labour and trade union movement.

It was only outside the Soviet Union that an outcry went up against the "shootings of their own comrades", meaning

the punishments meted out to men who had been in high positions in the Bolshevik Party and Soviet Government, but who had failed in their trust.

To-day it is not so difficult to understand these things, when the name of Quisling has become a byword for treachery. But the people inside the Soviet Union were never thrown into confusion by the firm steps taken by the Soviet authorities on their behalf against all traitors inside the country.

And so, to sum up, five-sixths of the world has been mobilised in one way or another against the Soviet Union ever since its birth. Five-sixths of the world, through the ruling classes and most frequently against the will of advanced working men and women, have never ceased to do everything in their power first to deny the achievements of the Soviet Government, next to put a spoke in the wheel by wrecking activities, wrecking of fine new machinery, bought with the loans of the Soviet people to their government, then to overthrow the government from inside by subversive efforts of foreign diplomats, engineers and the like in league with oppositionaries inside the Soviet Union, and later, to urge first one and then another country to make war on it.

The attempts to foment war on the Soviet Union have been very numerous: by the Japanese through Mongolia; by skirmishes on different European frontiers, and finally on the Finnish border.

There are few serious-minded, progressive people in Britain who have not by now arrived at the real meaning of those attempts at war on the Soviet Union. Moreover, the majority of them are thoroughly convinced that the Soviet Union has no interest in wars, but desires only to build up a land of peace and prosperity for all Soviet people.

Hence, it was with all the hostility of the outside capitalist world as the background, that the Soviet Government came to the conclusion, in order to safeguard the future of the

peoples of the Soviet Union and their peaceful development towards that Socialism that was their goal and for which their best sons had died in civil war and intervention, that the country must make a huge effort to obtain absolute independence from the outside world of capitalism.

The First Five Year Plan was launched with this aim in view.

Before it was launched, the Soviet Union was in a precarious position as regards its economic existence. It was dependent on hostile capitalist countries for heavy machinery, the means of production as it is called, and for a vast number of imports such as motors, tractors, engines, metals, high quality steel, not to mention articles connected with the light industries: textiles, clothing, coffee, cocoa, tea, instruments, typewriters and so on.

The Soviet Government realised, with the unabating hostility around it, that the screw could be put on at any moment and the country would be in a very disadvantageous position from the viewpoint both of providing for and protecting the population and of building Socialism, which, after all, was the whole meaning of the October Revolution of 1917. To rely on foreign countries for its means of production would, at some later date, have meant the inevitable abandonment of all plans for building Socialism, and the probable crushing of the Soviet Union as a free, democratic country. It was impossible to make the building of Socialism dependent on the whims of foreign governments, on their willingness or not, as circumstances arose, to trade with the Soviet Union or to transact loans.

In order to hold its own against all attacks from other countries, this Land of Socialism had to catch up and surpass those other countries in all spheres of economic life. With the birth of the new Soviet Government, it had far surpassed them in political life. But one of the elementary teachings of Marxism is that politics without economics is mere fantasy.

So the Five Year Plan set a big task on the shoulders of the Soviet people; the country was to be industrialised, equipped with the finest modern heavy machinery; it was also to have collectivised agriculture, equally splendidly equipped with the finest modern agricultural machinery and implements.

There were those in the Soviet Union who did not believe this tremendous step was called for. They said the strain on the people would be so great that there would be revolts, especially among the peasantry. They said that the Soviet Union could safely rely upon the working people abroad to put pressure to bear on their governments should difficulties arise in the future.

Those who formed the majority of the Soviet Government and the Communist Party, put their faith in the people in the towns and the poor and middle peasants in the villages. A country that had come through such struggles in the past, could not afford to risk going under. There was to be no risking. The people of the Soviet Union would be told the position, and they themselves would take the decision.

The Plan was launched.

For us in Moscow, who had keenly followed the arguments in Party meetings, which everybody was allowed to attend, who had closely followed the newspapers, who had argued among ourselves with our friends and workmates, the decision was made.

For me, knowing all the truth about intervention, having been closely connected with the Councils of Action, through my work on the old *Herald*, knowing the difficulties abroad for the militant workers and the half-hearted ways of their leaders, the situation was clear. The Five Year Plan was something that had to be fulfilled whatever it cost.

Actually we expected greater difficulties than we met. And what with the excessive shortage of such things as soap and boots, that resulted partly from the cunning works of kulaks and the wrecking activities which made our hearts sore, bringing as we knew additional burdens to the people, we

had difficulties enough. But the spirit behind the people was the finest I have ever witnessed. With all the grouching and grumbling that we all fell into at times, we never flagged in our faith in that plan and our belief that it would alter the whole position of the Soviet Union in its relation to other countries. To-day, the strong position of the Soviet Union is obvious to everyone.

The great slogan I have carried back with me from the Soviet Union rang in our ears during all those years: "There is no fortress a Bolshevik cannot take." I find myself using it here, whenever my enthusiasm lands me into some piece of work which is almost beyond my powers. The word Bolshevik has been used as a bogey to frighten the souls of the timid and ignorant. That, in itself, is an indictment against all who lie and slander the Soviet Union. To me the word Bolshevik signifies something very splendid.

The Plan was launched, but money was required by the government to buy all the heavy machinery required from abroad. There was no question of suitable credits in most cases, nor of obtaining loans from foreign powers. It would have been too risky.

Moreover, money was required to pay for the work of engineers and technicians from abroad, who would come to the Soviet Union to instal this finest of complicated, up-to-date machinery, and to train Soviet engineers and technicians to use it.

To the appeal of the Soviet Government, the people responded readily, understanding for what purpose it was required. Lottery and interest-bearing loans were launched.

Much has been said abroad about how the Russian people were forced to buy loans. I can only ask those who say it to prove it. Personally, I bought loans willingly; I canvassed in my office for loans, and similarly found willing buyers.

There was another means by which the government raised money to pay for the machinery from abroad. The people of the Soviet Union were invited to supplement their

rations by buying from the *Torgsin* (Trade with Foreigners) shops with any gold they had at their disposal. They flocked with their gold and the goods they obtained were a fair and proper exchange.

The *Torgsin* shops were required, moreover, for the foreign experts who came to the country with the new machinery. Articles could be bought in direct exchange for foreign money, and the prices compared favourably in most cases with prices abroad; in some cases they were even more favourable.

And so, great changes came to the country.

It was a big risk the Bolsheviks took in taking on the services of foreign experts. The trial of the British engineers proved that to the hilt; moreover, the calumny that has been spread by a few of the imported specialists, whom the Soviet Government found it necessary to deport to their own countries because of their subversive, counter-revolutionary activities, also proves this point.

But the spirit of those who led the revolution, and of the population that had carried it through, still lived and flourished; the Soviet people were well aware that they would have to keep their eyes and ears open for any sign of counter-revolution. It is because this is true that Communists are convinced that the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the period when working men and women are forced to show no quarter to their class enemies, is absolutely essential after the first step in the revolution has been taken, namely, the overthrow of the old regime.

On the other hand, the Soviet Government did all in its power to conclude fair contracts with the foreign engineers. They were provided with homes far and away better than those that the majority of the Soviet people themselves enjoyed. They were provided with ration books which gave them an abundance of good, nourishing food. Moreover, the *Torgsin* shops provided them with any further luxuries they might require. Special schools were opened for those who chose to

bring their wives and children with them. It was to help provide textbooks for these schools that the Foreign Workers' Publishing House was set up. It published, also, explanatory literature for these engineers. A newspaper in English was launched, and another in German, and a third *in* French.

Those engineers who honestly stood by their contracts, regardless of any political views they held, who did not besmirch their industrial professions by interfering in the internal affairs of a foreign power which offered them fair wages and conditions for honest work, performed a splendid service in helping the building of Socialism, of which some of them may not even now be fully aware.

And yet, there are those who looked upon the Soviet Five Year Plan as something in the nature of Goring's "Guns not Butter" programme. The Goring "Guns not Butter" programme was part of a plan of imperialist expansion to increase the wealth of a small exploiting minority and one which did not aim at raising the standard of life of the whole population through the building of Socialism.

The Soviet Five Year Plan was something quite different. Without it, the people of the Soviet Union would have remained at the mercy of foreign powers, their government would have been forced to trade or not trade, according to the whim of foreign powers. How many times has Great Britain alone broken off trading relations with the Soviet Union? And for what reasons?

The Soviet Five Year Plan was part of the building of Socialism; without it, the Soviet Union would still to-day be without those tractors and harvesters which bring such joy and prosperity to the peasants, such an abundance of food to the towns; without it the Soviet Union would not have a modern army, fully equipped, with all those lethal weapons which she must have to prevent other countries from attacking her. Was there not some good reason why Hitler's Germany stayed its hand, when almost on the borders of the Soviet Union?

In a capitalist world, a Worker's State has to be armed.

This chapter would perhaps be incomplete without a little explanation about trading in Moscow during those years.

The private traders who acted previously as middlemen between the towns and villages had by now ceased to exist. There could be no traders selling chocolate and confectionery, textiles, dresses and coats, and the like. The co-operatives had grown strong enough to undertake the work of distributing commodities to the population, and private trading of that sort had died a natural death. The traders themselves had found sufficient opportunities, in a country where there was no unemployment and industry was developing with huge strides, to turn their abilities in other directions. Not all of them, however, turned their efforts to honest work. It takes many years of prosperity before all people think in terms of the community first and their private gain second.

Besides the network of co-operative shops, there were still the open markets, to which peasants from outlying districts brought in their wares daily and sold them at the highest price they dared to charge. This price was not officially regulated in 1929, and the townsfolk were hard put to it to get the peasants to see their viewpoint, to sell their goods at a fair price which would have brought them in sufficient to keep them at a level which was far above the level of peasants in Tsarist days. But here again, the whole age-long tradition of the individually producing peasants was to make the best possible living for themselves as individuals. The rationing in the towns gave them an opportunity which brought out their worst, money-grabbing instincts. One could hardly condemn them for that. But we of the towns grew almost to hate their attitude, which was so different from our own.

Still, the dictatorship of the proletariat continued to act in favour of honest working people, giving their best to society as a whole and taking whatever that society could afford.

The period of rationing was the swan song of the money-grabbing, each-for-himself attitude of the peasants.

Through the newspapers, through the local village Soviets, through the cinema, the Soviet educational authorities up and down the country spread its message of communal life and the advantages which accrued when all worked for the advantage of the community. The educational bodies, Communists, their assistants in the Young Communist Leagues, and even in the children's pioneer organisations did their utmost to explain to the peasants a better way.

The government set up machine-tractor stations in parts of the country where some of the peasants, who had learned long ago from their worker-brothers at the front in the last war, and who also had been trying to set up a communal system of agriculture, were faced with difficulties owing to the opposition of the kulaks and the more ignorant peasants.

The machine-tractor stations undertook a splendid piece of work, supplying those peasants who were willing to undertake the experiment of collective farming with selected seeds at stable prices, with agricultural machinery of the tractor and harvester type on loan, and so on.

These stations were set up in every sphere of agriculture, and when the first harvests were reaped, when the peasants who had gone into the first collective farms, who had drawn their regular wages, throughout the periods of sowing and reaping, returned to their homes after the harvest laden with their share of it, apportioned to them through the collective farm administration (consisting of peasants of their own selection), the proof of the advantages to each individual peasant of the collective system of agriculture was there for all who wished to see.

And what, really, did it all amount to?

The individual peasant could harvest his own strip of land by himself with his family. Nobody paid him wages, neither did he pay the members of his family for their labour; on the other hand, although he too could buy selected **seeds from**

the government, and, provided he was not a kulak exploiting the labour of other peasants, could also obtain all the advice which agronomists at the machine-tractor stations willingly gave him, he was deprived of the use of labour-saving machinery of the tractor and harvester type, on the simple grounds that they could not work on his little strip of land. Added to this, he could only put into his strip of land the labour which he and his family could provide. In so far as he had to cart his produce to the market, and spend time there selling it, his labour was wasted. From the money he made on the market, he had to pay fares on railways and trams.

There were other minor troubles for him. The townsfolk resented the fact that peasants dragged their earth-soiled sacks of potatoes on to the city trams; there was constant friction between silk-stockinged young office women and peasant women with their baskets, which had caused damage to the stockings.

In fact, whether one looked at it from the economic point of view, or from the angle of the personal comfort of the peasant, there was nothing to be gained from individual Farming, if the other road to collective farming was open.

To put it in a nutshell, the individual farmer had all the disadvantages, from the point of view of marketing the products, that any small shopkeeper running a small green-grocer shop in London is faced with in competition with the big chain stores.

After the first harvest many peasants flocked into the collective farms; peasants, even under Soviet administration, may still be little educated, but they are by no means fools.

But there were other, ignorant and dark, forces at work as well.

During this whole period of the First Five Year Plan, the kulaks were hostile to the Soviet Government. They were cunning, with the cunning born over ages of a profit-making, exploiting system of farming, such as was in existence before the October Revolution in 1917.

They were aided in this hostility by opposition **elements**, who were later discovered even inside the Soviet governing bodies and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They were aided, too, by agricultural specialists of the type of Alexander Vassilyevich Chayanov, of whom I have written.

The kulaks had studied neither economics nor politics; they knew little about labour movements, though they knew what revolts were, and knew that in the past peasant revolts had sometimes been successful; they had a reactionary outlook and retained it. To them, the departure of the landed gentry, resulting naturally enough when their lands were confiscated, removed the upper strata of the agricultural population, a strata which had oppressed just these kulaks and inflicted burdensome taxes on them. In their eyes, the Soviet Government, which curbed them as the remnants of **a** system of exploitation which the whole of the people were fighting to abolish for ever, was now their enemy. The kulaks did everything in their power to put a spoke in the wheel of the plans of the Soviet administration.

They worked through the local authorities. Many stories came to us in Moscow, from friends who had worked on the machine-tractor stations, from people whose word we could not doubt. In addition, many cases were reported in the newspapers of kulaks brought up for trial. It must not be forgotten that the peasants had often had to suffer severely at the hands of the more brutal kulaks, consequently the kulaks became isolated and were spurned by the rest of the peasantry.

There were cases where the local chairman of the village soviet, a peasant who had had his eyes opened to the advantages of the collective system, and who took steps of an administrative nature against a particular kulak, was later found in a ditch with his throat cut. The terror wielded by kulaks, fighting for their right to exploit others, was serious, but it was not allowed to go far. At the first signs of this kind, there was **a** wholesale round up of all doubtful kulaks.

Even this was not enough. When the kulaks found that open hostility proved useless, when they saw that terror was too dangerous for themselves, they tried underhand methods. Rumours went round villages: join the collective farms, why not? But don't be fools. Kill off your cattle first, sell it as meat on the markets first. Feather your nest, for the collective farm may fail. You must have something to fall back upon for a rainy day.

How carefully every peasant, the world over, strives to put away for that rainy day!

It was a clever rumour, and it was put out at a clever time, and in places where ocular proof of the advantages of the collective system had not yet been given; in fact, in the majority of the villages of the cattle-breeding regions of the Soviet Union.

Were those simple peasants to be blamed for believing the rumour?

Certain it is that thousands of them acted on it. They killed the hen that lays the golden egg, then offered to join the collective farms.

The result was a shortage of meat which threw all planning temporarily out of gear; a shortage of leather that did the same. It was with difficulty that the Government succeeded in obtaining part of that supply of meat and skins for leather.

But when faced with such disastrous counter-revolutionary methods, which are calculated to throw large sections of the population into greater difficulties than they had bargained for, the Soviet authorities acted swiftly and ruthlessly. All kulaks were removed from agricultural regions and put to work where they could do no harm.

No blame could be put upon the heads of the misguided peasants, who heeded the rumours of the kulaks. It was enough that they were compelled to reap the harvest of the wrong step they had taken, in a collective farm composed of too many peasants and far too little cattle. But even so, with the educational authorities to assist, with films showing what

all this amounted to, and specially demonstrated to **the** peasant population, and with the help of the Soviet authorities, once the collective farms had been formed, these peasants who had come into them with empty hands, realised **the** advantages of the collective farm system.

Thus the last barricade of counter-revolution was overcome. With the end of the kulaks, and their removal to places where they could do useful work, the people of the Soviet Union were free to progress, perhaps a little more slowly than they had at first expected, but none the less steadily.

With the change-over to collectivised farming, the disparity between town and village disappeared. The men working on the fields found themselves enjoying together with their womenfolk all the advantages of close comradeship that their working-class brothers had enjoyed for years past.

I will not again turn here to the foreign press on the subject of these changes. Suffice it to say that never a good word found its way into the official news columns of the big daily papers, and that every lie that could be found or invented was printed instead.

Seeing and meeting people from all sections of Soviet society, listening to all they related to me during those years, I believed what they said, since it coincided with the general opinion of the majority of the people, and with the news and reports published in the Soviet newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, which I had no occasion to disbelieve.

What is more, I am firmly convinced that had I gone to **the** Soviet Union "untainted" with a Socialist upbringing, I should still have returned now to England filled with a determination to defend a country so much maligned and lied about.

CHAPTER TEN

SOVIET STUDENT

I HAD FOUND life in an office interesting enough. I had belonged to my trade union, had attended most meetings, had even for a period acted as trade union organiser while working with the Foreign Workers' Co-operative Publishing House. As trade union organiser, I was one of the "Triangle" (a committee to be found in all offices and factories and other institutions in the Soviet Union, consisting of the Communist Party organiser, the trade union organiser, and the business manager). The "Triangle" had to do everything in its power to solve the difficulties brought to it from the staff meetings, or by any individual who had trouble from which he required extricating.

As trade union organiser, it was my job to help solve problems such as housing accommodation for members of the staff, dining facilities, ration books, payment for overtime work and the like.

The question of the dining-room for the staff and the selection of food, more suitable to foreigners than that usually provided for Soviet citizens, was no easy one. The Russians regarded soup made from dried fish, with cabbage, tomato puree, slices of salted cucumber and other typically Russian products, very suitable and nourishing food, as indeed it was. The foreign workers, more particularly the English and French, did not find such food pleasing. I found myself listening to complaints and suggestions, and was frequently the person particularly asked to emphasise certain points at the "Triangle" meetings.

The reason for this was clear to the English staff. As a foreigner myself, my taste should be closer to theirs; I should

be able to explain such things and do my best to get changes made in the food produced in the dining-rooms.

But the Russian cooks were not always pleased with us. They could not understand why we should be so finicky. Part of my work was to help both the Russian cooks to be more amenable, and the English staff more tolerant. Finally we arrived at some measure of satisfaction all round, but it was no easy task. Moreover, we managed to obtain an extra ration of white bread for the diners, since black bread was not appreciated by a number of foreign workers.

On the question of living-rooms as well, we carried out a considerable amount of work in the "Triangle" meetings. According to existing regulations, the management was obliged to see to the living accommodation of the staff.

In our particular sphere, there were more difficulties than usual.

Many of those who came to work at the Foreign Workers' Co-operative Publishing House had originally come to the Soviet Union as tourists, and, having looked around, had seen an opportunity of staying in Moscow, provided they found work. Their interest in the country urged them to seek work.

There were a number of tourists who were very suitable for work in the newly formed Publishing House, which produced books of assistance and interest to the foreign engineers and technicians who had come to the country with the heavy machinery ordered from abroad. The Publishing House also undertook the publishing of textbooks on languages, for the young Russian generation who wished to learn English, French and German. Several tourists, who remained to work, turned out to be good proof-readers, editors and typists; others had first-hand knowledge of technical work: printing and composing.

The difficulty about housing them was due to the fact that as tourists they had Uved in the "Intourist" hotels provided for foreign visitors. When their tours were over **and** they

should, officially, have returned on the other half of their tickets to their own countries, they no longer had any right to remain in the hotels. There was neither room for them nor money available in their own pockets to pay for hotel accommodation. It was always possible for them to share rooms with friends, temporarily. I myself offered temporary accommodation to a charming young American girl. But it was quite another thing to remain in temporarily provided rooms and trade indefinitely on the generosity of friends.

So it was part of the work of the "Triangle" to press the management to hasten with the provision of rooms for these people.

It is interesting to note that at "Triangle" meetings, the Party organiser and trade union organiser could always outvote the management side, if they acted in concert.

I was sorry, in some ways, to leave the Publishing House, when an opportunity again afforded itself for me to turn to books in a more serious vein than hitherto. I accepted an offer to attend classes, lectures and conferences at another higher educational institute. In doing so, moreover, I fell in with the long-expressed wishes of my husband.

Maliciously I told him that no doubt he felt he would have fewer perplexities to extricate me from, fewer political problems to explain to me, after my going through a course of study.

There were several factors which contributed to make my resolve to study difficult.

For one thing, I preferred not to take the stipend, but to continue translating at piece rates at home, and so at least in part "work for my living". The little translating work I accomplished seemed to me to be my contribution to the work of the country; and at the same time it brought me in a sufficiently good income. Moreover, at the institute other students of my year would have to learn English, whereas I should be free from those classes.

I found the pull of the institute very strong, but on the

other hand, living in Moscow in the heart of my family, I found the pull of the home equally strong. The other students, with rare exceptions, lived in the hostel provided. If they were married and had children, the wives and children were left in their homes, in other towns of the Soviet Union, sometimes as far away as Baku and Odessa. The students came from all parts of the Soviet Union.

On the whole, however, I had every opportunity of making full use of all the institute could give me.

I was fortunate at home in having acquired the assistance of a thoroughly reliable nurse. True, there were many sides to her character which made her totally unsuitable for her work with me later on, but for the time being she was as near perfect as a nurse could be.

Polya was a believer, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church; but she had long ago ceased to attend church, except at Christmas-tide and Easter. I once asked her why she never went to church.

"Well, really, Valentina Georgievna, I don't feel the need for it. There was a fine upstanding priest at the village church in the Tula Province, where I used to live. But here in Moscow I have not found a priest I wanted to talk with or listen to. I rely on my own daily prayers...."

I was profoundly surprised, but it was hardly my business, holding the views I do, to press her to find a suitable priest. Neither did I consider it my duty to show her that if the Greek Orthodox Church is good enough, then the priest should be good enough too. I am not conversant with such things.

However, Polya continued to wear her silver chain and crucifix, which never seemed to leave her neck, even when she bathed in the Moscow River in the summertime, and to cross herself before taking food, when passing a church, or if alarmed.

She took great pains with my young son. She had cared **for** him from the age of one year, and he had kept well and

happy. But she tended to treat him as though he was something very precious indeed, she almost worshipped him, and there were times when I had to chide her because of this attitude. Her method, when he began to run about, went all against everything I had ever read or picked up about the upbringing of the young. For her, he was a child that had to be waited on hand and foot. Moreover, she pandered to his every whim. I remember going into the nursery one day and finding she had cut his bread and jam up into Uttle pieces, and was presenting it to him on the end of a fork.

"But why can't he take it up in his fingers and eat it off a small slice?" I asked.

"He won't eat it that way. He doesn't like his hands to be sticky; it makes him shudder."

"What do you mean, he won't eat it? I'm sure he will. Children are not afraid of sticky hands."

"I have trained him not to be untidy. He likes to have clean hands."

Clean hands were all right, but a little jam on the fingers of a small child is hardly dirt. I was frankly horrified.

I wondered how he would handle earthworms when they came his way, whether he would grow into one of those sickly, bookish sort of children who are afraid of live things. I determined to do all I could to prevent it.

As I tried to read the material set for the conferences, thoughts of this sort were constantly gripping my mind, preventing me from concentrating. I was so afraid Polya would make a "little girl" of my son. I found myself debating as to whether he should continue at home, or whether I would put him into a kindergarten. I hesitated to take him from Polya, who was really a very good nurse in other ways. She implored me not to send him to kindergarten. And all through those two years at the institute, I kept the child at home, though I often felt he would be better at kindergarten.

Many were the arguments I had with Polya. It was the old training against the more modern. She had learned a Uttle in

Tsarist days, but much of what she had learned was useless now.

She was of the opinion that the son of an English woman and Russian intellectual was something above the ordinary. She did all in her power to keep my son from mixing with other children. She had a horror of the "rough" children, as she called them.

She would call to him not to run, for fear he would fall and cut his knees; not to mention the damage to his clean clothing.

By the time the boy was nearly four, the climax came and Polya simply had to go. She had changed little during all those years; her pampering had produced a child who knew his will was stronger than hers. I was not so much worried about that; it was the thought that if she remained there would be constant upheavals. I was quite determined that my son, Lefly, should take his place with other boys, no matter whether their fathers were road-sweepers or engineers.

The new work Polya found changed her completely, but of that later.

Meanwhile, even with a nurse to care for Lefly, things were difficult enough.

There was the shopping problem. All the food and other household articles we required, during the rationing period, had to be bought at one particular shop, at which we were registered. The ration books were obtained, in our case, from my husband's place of work; previous to obtaining them, we had had to produce a statement from the House Committee, which indicated how many people there were in the family, and which were children.

The staffs of whole enterprises or institutes or factories were attached to one particular shop. The shop used by the staff of the institute, at which, incidentally, my husband lectured, was close to the institute, but very far from my **home.**

To send Polya shopping there would have entailed a journey on a tram for her and my small son. It was quite impossible to think of such a thing, to my mind. Leffy's airings could not be spent in trams and shops. So here was a real problem, and we had all to put our heads together to solve it.

Eventually we combined with Nura next door, as we did in getting the pork. Her family consisted of husband, wife and two small boys, one Leffy's age, the other an infant.

By dint of pooling our shopping and joint arrangements for getting the children taken for walks and generally looked after, we managed well enough.

Nura was about twenty-eight. She was rather retiring and had not made many friends. Moreover, she was constantly in hot water with her mother-in-law. I believe she enjoyed the comradeship which sprang up between us, just as much as I did.

And so we solved the shopping difficulties. Sometimes I was roped in, sometimes Igor, sometimes the women managed it without us. And there was never any trouble; never any question of "being put upon" and the like; we were all too fully conscious of the fact that the government was doing its best in difficult circumstances, and that it was up to us to show some initiative.

No one who lived through that period will deny that the crowded trams, the queues in the shops, which were very frequently due more to bad organisation than lack of food, and the high nervous tension under which we lived caused some suffering. Old women of the mischief-making kind, who for no real reason of their own had not kept in step with the rest of the population, made trouble now and then. There were others, whom I have already mentioned, who deliberately did everything in their power to undermine the efforts of the Soviet authorities and make it appear that the difficulties were a natural part of the Soviet system.

But the majority of the population, an overwhelming majority moreover, stood firm. They understood because

they knew the truth; they were determined to see the **period** through, whatever it cost.

I still believe that the Soviet people did not suffer at **all** from lack of food and clothing. Foreigners trying to live in the country, which at the best of times was vastly different from their own, did suffer in some cases. But it was suffering more of a mental, nervous order, more because they could not have things they were accustomed to, because they did not bother to understand what was going on, and remained there on sufferance. I speak more especially of the wives of specialists. Their husbands at least had an interest in their work. The wives were thoroughly handicapped. But all that was no fault of the Soviet system.

As for the students, their shopping difficulties were few. For one thing, although they had ration cards, they mainly used them for obtaining tea, sugar, bread and cigarettes. All meals were provided in the institute and the hostel. In this respect, again, their minds were free to concentrate on their studies.

The term was from October to the end of May, and between June and September they enjoyed their vacations, following their own inclinations in the matter. Their stipend, paid over the whole year, was sufficient to maintain them during the vacations, although many a student found three months' vacation a tedious proposition, and turned to industrial work for some part of the time. For any work they performed, they received wages in addition to the stipend.

It is exceptional for a student to be accepted into the higher institutes over the age of thirty-five. The question of married or single does not enter into account. If a married man from any town in the Soviet Union, with the willingness of his wife, desires to study, provision is made for his wife and family, if necessary, by the organisation, usually trade union, that supports his application. The separation of husband and wife lasts over a period of between October and May for four **years, in the particular institute I have in mind. If the student**

sees his studies through to the end, and it is rare for a student not to, then he or she is in a position to spend four months of the year with the family.

This is something which may seem impossible to the normal husband and wife in countries other than the Soviet Union. But the great thing there is that the wife and child are thoroughly well cared for, no matter what circumstances they are thrown into, and from my experience I can safely say that the number of homes wrecked by separations of this kind is so small as to be negligible. The breaking of family ties is not part of the system in the Soviet Union, as hostile tongues have been inclined to state. Moreover, public opinion against home-wrecking is very strong, and also there exist, in the Soviet Union, laws and regulations to prevent any light attitude towards marriage, whether the marriage is registered or not.

It might help to mention here the Comrades' Courts, bodies set up by neighbours or workmates to consider the case of delinquents. There, public opinion is freely expressed, and it is no comforting thing to have your meanest side hauled out before a meeting of neighbours and workmates, intent upon showing you the error of your ways.

This is a spontaneous form of democracy, far more calculated to keep the ideals of Socialist society uppermost in the minds of the people than any court of law.

But to return to the students. There was a very large percentage of them from industry, a smaller percentage from villages, and not more than about 10 per cent from offices among the First Year students, in 1930, in this particular institute.

Only four hours of the day (the academic hour being forty minutes) were spent actually in class or lectures, with perhaps two afternoon conferences a week. But the reading material was considerable, and a student who at a fairly mature age went to study for the purpose of changing his work and specialising in another branch, found the working day pretty full.

Personally I rarely managed to get through all the reading set. Actually there was some excuse for me, if only because I was reading in a foreign language and studying subjects that I had never tackled in my own language.

So it was mostly my own fault, my own dissatisfaction at my own progress and a feeling I could never throw off that I ought to have been able to go through the curriculum successfully, that spoiled those years for me. Somehow, whenever I have found myself undertaking any form of education, I have always suffered from the feeling that if I applied myself more, I would manage better. Still, I cannot be counted among the assiduous scholars; the practical problems of life draw me far too strongly.

I could keep pace with the other students as regards economic geography and European history, if only because I had been through these subjects before.

I was not alone in finding economics and dialectical materialism incredibly difficult, and we all struggled together with these subjects, helping each other where we could, arguing where we could not see eye to eye on a point, and generally furthering our knowledge in a sufficiently healthy manner.

The weekly conferences were extremely interesting, but I never overcame my unwillingness to stand up and take the floor. Time and time again I felt I had some contribution to make, but delayed too long; either another student put forward my point, or the conference came to a close before I could gain courage enough. Only twice did I agree to make the "report" or dissertation lasting half an hour which was followed by discussion; once, I remember, it was in the economics class and the next time was in my second year, when I more boldly put forward an analysis of the position, as I understood it, of the peasantry in colonial countries.

I am inclined to believe that the first contribution was a successful one; but judging by the discussion that took place around the second, and the way I tied myself in knots trying

to answer the different points, I am inclined to think that effort was not a brilliant one. I comforted myself with the thought that had I known the sort of attacks I would get, and been able to go away in a corner and prepare the words and phrases for my reply, I might have managed fairly well. It is no easy thing to argue in a foreign language on a subject which requires a great deal of preparation. My report was not bad, it seems; it was merely incomplete, and being incomplete, my rendering of the position was naturally neither clear nor, on some points, correct. Hence the criticism.

In those days, when interest in economic and political affairs inside the country ran high, there was often a great deal of scrapping at Party meetings, which all students could attend, and trade union and general student meetings. It was healthy scrapping which cleared up a number of misunderstandings; the meetings were interesting because one could size up the students and form opinions on their individual traits. It was not difficult to discover the different types.

Some of the students were men and women who naturally made a good job of whatever work they undertook; true to their natures, they would make a good job of the education offered them.

In the main they came to study because they felt that without further knowledge they could not proceed with their aim of giving to the country the best of which they were capable.

Some had been dissatisfied with the work they were doing; they aimed at making teaching a profession and came to learn all they could. Some of them might even go on to the Institute of Red Professors.

Of course, as everywhere, there were the climbers, determined to get ahead of their fellows, no matter at whose cost. As is the case in every sphere of Soviet life, these types were curbed by the persuasion or protests of those with whom they worked. They were hauled over the coals for their individualistic, often ungenerous, not to say egotistic, attitude to life.

In a country like the Soviet Union there is no room **for** "brilliance" for the sake of brilliance. A "brilliant" scholar who has no interest in those around him, or displays no willingness to make his "brilliance" useful to society, is **not** encouraged. Abstract erudition does not help mankind to progress. And so a "brilliant" scholar is trained early in his career as a student, to work in with the more backward students.

It must not be imagined, however, that a drag is put upon the more capable student. That would be swinging the pendulum in the opposite direction. The important thing is that a generous and helpful attitude to others is encouraged among all students.

One or two students dropped out after the first year. It is natural that not everybody can judge of his ability to make good in new surroundings and new conditions.

I knew one or two students who had been somewhat over-persuaded to take the facilities open to them and join the institute. They themselves had been diffident about it; but wanting to do all they could, to give the best they had, they had stifled their qualms and undertaken the course.

Marina was one of them. She was only twenty-four; she was also very shy and had only recently married a young man working at the machine-tractor station near her village. She was a peasant girl who had come brilliantly through her course of study at the "Workers' Faculty", something in the nature of the Soviet secondary school, having prior to that had only a short course in a village school. The educational authorities in her village held out high hopes; she was so interested in everything that went on; she had even been elected to the village Soviet.

She was small, pretty in the round-faced, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed peasant way. She wore a red kerchief on her hair, even during lessons, and dressed like many of the Young Communist girls of the day in a fresh white blouse and navy **blue skirt**.

I found her very likeable, and during the intervals between classes, we were usually together.

At the end of the first term, she came to me with her problem:

"You know, Valya," she said, "I'm in an awful mess. You know, I don't think I can go on with it."

"Go on with what, Marina?" I feigned ignorance, though I guessed at her trouble.

"Well, it is so different here without Vaynka. He always helped me; without his help I can't go through with all this reading and studying."

"But what about the other students? They would help you," I suggested.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't like to ask them. When Vaynka used to help me, I found it easy. After all... I loved him and he—me. It was different. We naturally helped each other. I don't like to ask the other students. There is nothing I could do in return."

"But you don't have to return all the help you get in this life, Marina," I pressed.

I was at a loss to know what else to say. I knew so well how she felt. Things of this sort do not worry all people, but there are some, more introspective people, who are con-standy up against their own feeling of not being helpful. They often hesitate to ask for help, when they most need it.

"But one of the girl students would help you. What about the girl that shares your room?"

"Oh . . . her!" was Marina's response, and I understood the inference.

I remembered that Liuba was her room-mate. She certainly would never have helped, if she could avoid it. Naturally, Marina would never ask, neither did she want the whole matter brought out before the whole of the students. Marina was an independent-minded little person. And I felt she would never any more lean on anyone but her Vaynka.

"Marina," I urged her, "stick it out for another year. I felt like you did at the end of last year. I'm glad I didn't throw it up. Besides, you've got brains. You can do it."

But she didn't. Perhaps it really was all too hard for her.

I remember our conversation the day before she left for home.

"Well, Marina, so you didn't take my advice," I greeted her, trying to make my voice sound cheerful, for I was indeed very sorry to see her go.

"I couldn't face wasting another year's money spent on me out of the money of the people," she said, apologetically I thought.

"Surely that was not your real reason, Marina?" I queried. "It isn't so much you know, not for one student out of the whole of the country's revenue."

"I suppose not. But then, if I can't make good, why spend it, even if it isn't much," she continued.

"And what does Vaynka think," I continued, changing the line of approach.

"Anyway, he at least will know that I have been doing my best, and not roaming the streets of Moscow, enjoying the sights," she added, somewhat bitterly.

I did not pursue the point. I felt she was making a big mistake, but I could hardly read her mind. She probably knew what was best for herself.

In the class to which I was attached, there were six men and myself. Among them was another "misfit", Zelezinsky. He, too, as it happened, was from the Ukraine. And he, too, had failed to stay the course.

The reason, with him, was a simple one. He had a natural gift which drew him gradually away from all else.

Actually, we other students found him very trying. He had a splendid singing voice; also fair waving hair, an aquiline nose, a charming, though rather effeminate smile and good pearly teeth; eyes, perhaps a little too closely set, but otherwise pleasant. In fact, he was the born handsome hero.

He would trill or hum snatches from opera, while we sat in class waiting for the lesson to begin.

He was bantered and cursed, but it had no effect on him.

It was his conceit that mostly tried us. Not so much that he was a fool at languages, for instance, as that he utterly failed to realise the fact. He and I were constantly at loggerheads; for one thing he had an American friend who helped him with the pronunciation of English words; he plied me with questions, too. And the really annoying thing for me was that though he would ask for my help, he would perpetually point out to me that my pronunciation was wrong, because his American friend did not pronounce words as I did.

It was useless to try to explain to him that there was a vast difference between English as spoken by an Englishman and English as spoken by the American; the more so if the American came from Chicago and the Englishman from London.

So life at the school had its little ups and downs, not to say amusements.

There was one amusing episode, engineered by myself. My patience was at an end, and I felt justified in causing Zelezinsky some annoyance for a change.

Before the English class, I deliberately coached him in the totally incorrect pronunciation of a number of words. The lesson was a new one; he had not consulted his American friend, either.

He was asked to read a passage; he chose the one I had coached him in, which was what I expected.

There was a tittering, which grew into louder jibing and an excellent display of wit on the part of the other five men. The teacher and Zelezinsky were the only ones dismayed, and it took some time to restore order and curb the laughter.

When it was all reported to me afterwards, I was not sure whether to be ashamed or pleased. But Zelezinsky was an ungrateful creature, and had he been a little more apprecia-

tive of my help, and a little more ready to believe what I told him, he would not have suffered the ignominy of being made a fool of in public.

His love of music was the thing that drew him finally from the institute to the Moscow Conservatory of Music, where I understand he made great progress. Personally, I never saw him again.

But the students who gave most trouble were those over-ambitious beings who were determined to rise high and who frequently displayed a degree of egotism and lack of consideration for others that was not compatible with the general spirit of the country.

There was a lad called Koslov, I remember. He was not in my year, but we all knew him well. If he could gain special advantages for himself, he never hesitated to take them, even if by doing so he had to be thoroughly unscrupulous.

I learned to know him mostly from the regular monthly meetings held to discuss personal problems and difficulties, or to settle any friction that arose between the students and the management. If matters could not be solved at our own meetings, we took them to the more official trade union meetings, or to the "Triangle".

It might be mentioned here that the students, the lecturers and members of the management all belonged to the same trade union, on the same basis of "industrial unionism", which holds good throughout the Soviet trade union movement.

One day Koslov surpassed himself. We were called to a special student meeting of the First Year students. A glance at the agenda showed only one point: "Case of Comrade Ivanova".

Comrade Ivanova was a woman student; she had lost her husband a year previously; she had a young child, who lived in the care of her mother; she had heard that her mother was ill, had absented herself without permission from the institute, had brought the child back to the student hostel.

She had no relatives in Moscow with whom she could leave it. The grandmother of the child had already been removed to hospital with appendicitis.

Short of packing up her studies, going to live in her mother's rooms, finding a nurse for the child, and seeking work anew herself, there was nothing that Comrade Ivanova could do.

Comrade Ivanova, from the floor of the meeting, explained all this readily enough. She explained, too, that in the institute her child had not slept well in its strange surroundings; the girl who shared her room had found it difficult to sleep, and difficult also, during the early evening, to work with the child pattering around the room. Altogether, Comrade Ivanova had not met with the comradely assistance she expected, and she finished up her short speech with a few home truths about men and women who would be all the better for having children of their own to care for.

For me, this was an extremely interesting meeting, and I determined to put a spoke in, if I got the chance. It was obvious that there had been some pretty serious friction, or the meeting would never have been called. Moreover, there did exist a rule that no children were to be housed in the student hostels; a thoroughly good rule, but like all rules, meant to be broken in extraordinary circumstances.

A young man, very tall and thin and dark, asked for the floor.

"Comrades, nobody will deny that in bringing her child into the hostel, Comrade Ivanova has, in a manner of speaking, broken the regulations. And first I want to deal with her position. After that I shall have a few words to say regarding the attitude of certain of the students in this connection.

"Now we all know comrade Ivanova as one who abides by all regulations, who applies herself to her studies, and in general is a person whose behaviour is beyond reproach.

"Comrade Ivanova finds herself in a difficult position. She

has explained it to you and there is no need for me to repeat her story.

"What I want to ask is: What are we going to do about it? That is the first problem before us, and we have to settle it here. Arising out of the problem, and only after we have settled it, we will deal with the attitude of certain comrades which, I may say here, has revealed their total inability to cope with a situation similar to many others which may arise in future in the course of their daily work, and regarding which, two of them, as Party members, would be expected to display a little initiative."

The speaker was the Party organiser of the Second Year students. His last remarks referred to Koslov and another, both students of the Second Year. Neither of them was present, but the Second Year Party organiser considered it his duty to be present, since he felt himself responsible for the behaviour of Koslov and the other student. They had both fallen below the level at which they were expected to conduct themselves.

The meeting grew more interesting. When Soviet citizens indulge in self-criticism, it is always a remarkable piece of honest weighing of pros and cons. There is perhaps nothing in the world quite like these spontaneous meetings, called quickly together, to solve some problem which brooks of no delay.

A young woman took the floor.

"The point is, are we going to allow the regulations to be broken or not? We shall have people bringing in their relatives and friends whenever they like. We must be firm on this particular regulation, otherwise everything will go wrong with our work. And, if I may say so, I consider that Comrade Ivanova could have used a little initiative herself, before bringing the child to the institute. Surely she could have found a woman to mind the child."

I weighed these words during the pause before the next speaker rose. I was angry at them; they showed a complete

lack of understanding of the needs of children. And the whole attitude of the speaker jarred with the kindly approach of the former speaker. She, too, was a Party member, though a very young one. There was a bit of a stir and some whispering among the students. The chairman was forced to call the meeting to order.

Meanwhile, my thoughts raced on. How could one leave a young child to the care of a woman one hardly knew? Even for half a day, let alone for a whole night, perhaps more. Besides, it showed a complete lack of understanding of the position. I knew how difficult it was, in those days of industrialisation, to find women ready to fall into a job of nursing children at a minute's notice. Most women were either wives and mothers themselves, or were in good, safe, interesting jobs in industry or offices.

The next speaker was already talking, but I had missed all the beginning. It is difficult to concentrate when one's feelings are aroused.

"... and I think the best thing would be for us to instruct the management to investigate the possibility of getting Comrade Ivanova's child into a kindergarten. I would suggest the five-day kindergarten, where the child can sleep at nights as well. On the sixth day, our rest day, Comrade Ivanova would be able to take her child back to her mother's home and care for it herself. I am sure she would want to. We all know Comrade Ivanova; she has always spent her free time with her child.

"I propose therefore that the matter be solved in this way, subject to Comrade Ivanova's approval. She may, of course, prefer to have leave of absence to care for her child until her mother is recovered. But for the sake of her studies, I should say the kindergarten would be best. And, maybe, for the child, too," he added, not without a side-glance and a smile towards the place where Comrade Ivanova was seated.

The next speaker supported the previous one. He made one addition: that a student should be appointed to be re-

sponsible for passing the decision on to the management, **and** seeing to it that the management arranged things with despatch.

There had been more arguing and talking than given here, but this was the spirit of the meeting. The resolution was passed; Comrade Ivanova too preferred the kindergarten idea.

The organiser of the Second Year Communist Party Group then took the floor again.

"I think it is not necessary to go into the details of what occurred last night. It is enough to say that there was a disgraceful exhibition of individualism, of callousness and even, I might say, cruelty in the attitude shown towards Comrade Ivanova by some of our students. The institute as a whole has been disgraced. Had we not called this meeting, things might have become worse. It would have been pretty bad, comrades, if our institute had been mentioned in the newspapers as an example of one where the students are incapable of dealing with such small problems.

"As regards the behaviour of certain Party comrades in the hostel, as reported to me by Comrade Ivanova, I should like to suggest that this meeting leave the matter in the hands of the Second Year Party Group. The attitude reported was anti-Party, anti-comradely, ungenerous in extreme, and not worthy of comrades holding Party cards. If this meeting agrees, our Party Group will discuss the matter at its next meeting, and will report back its findings to the next students' meeting."

This was agreed to and the meeting broke up.

It took just two days to arrange for Comrade Ivanova's child to be accommodated in the kindergarten of the "Amo" motor-works, nearby.

As for the Party comrades who had so readily stood up for regulations, when circumstances dictated that they should be waived, they found themselves severely trounced in their own Party Group, and but for the pleading of Comrade

Ivanova herself, might easily have found themselves outside the ranks of their Party. It is a great privilege to belong to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; it is also a great responsibility.

It was natural, in those days when every single member of the population, who had the interests of the community at heart, was pulling his weight with the greatest enthusiasm, seeking out all sorts of means of inspiring each other to do more and better at their particular job, that the students should also be caught up in this spirit and should try to adopt some of the methods for improving work, as introduced in the workshops.

Men and women in industry were aware of the great changes that were taking place. They realised that they had thrown themselves headlong into a keen competition with advanced foreign countries; they knew that the aim was to make their country completely independent of any dictation or coercion from abroad. They talked, too, about "catching up and surpassing the capitalist countries of the world" in all phases of industry and agriculture. It was a keen competitive battle, and those who stood in the forefront of that battle were called "shock-brigaders". The finest skilled men and women in industry banded themselves into brigades and set themselves the task of getting the utmost out of the machinery with the smallest expenditure of time and energy.

In one of his speeches, Stalin had said "We must learn to master technique".

And so, these students, who knew they had to learn the utmost possible in the four years at their disposal, also found themselves searching out for the best ways of mastering the technique of learning, of assimilating the maximum knowledge, and keeping fit at the same time.

There were to be no more students who roamed Moscow in the daytime, after the four hours at lessons, and sat huddled over their books in the small hours of the morning. Those **who called** themselves the "shock-brigaders" brought in **all**

sorts of regulations to help students apportion out the work they had to do, in the most efficient manner discoverable.

And so, whereas in the past, a student was only obliged to be at the classes and the conferences, and for the rest of the time was free to roam at large, being merely trusted to apply himself to his task, now a large degree of order was brought into the institute.

The need for economising in electricity also brought the students up against the necessity of doing the main part of their work during the day. New industrial plants set up in and around Moscow, requiring a considerable amount of electricity to keep the motors running, put a great strain on the existing power-houses of Moscow.

The different shock-brigades in the institute did everything in their power, with the assistance of the lecturers and consultants, to divide the reading material into sections which an average student could cover in one day.

Those students who fell in with these new plans made such progress that already after the first month there was a marked improvement in the character of the conferences and considerably more interest displayed by the more dilatory students.

Personally, I too found that left to my own initiative I worked rather at sixes and sevens; there were so many other pulls on my attention. By planning my work, setting myself a quota for the day, I did not turn so readily to the things I found easy, leaving the more difficult sections of reading to a later date. I even found that by sticking to the timetable we drew up, I could almost cover the whole of the material required to be read.

None of us, out there in Moscow, imagined we had struck upon anything at all new. There are thousands of students the world over, who, on their own initiative, set themselves quotas and stick to them. But the general run of such students belong to what is known as the "studious type". Very few of those Moscow students, many of whom had come straight from manual labour in factories, could be

called "studious types". But by their method of working, once they got down to it, they proved that no such type really exists, and that any person, with the will to learn and the aim before him, can become as "studious" as the "studious type".

Not every student fell in with the plans of the shock-brigaders. There were, indeed, some who had a natural bent for learning, and did not feel the need for any special incentive or encouragement. I, for one, was not one of these, however; consequently I welcomed the shock-brigading method, and as far as possible fell in with it, without actually joining the brigade.

There was another idea that came straight from the workshops and which, I think I am right in saying, does not exist voluntarily outside the Soviet Union.

In the factories the old skilled workers had taken under their wing any new young hand in whom they took an interest. Their help was given spontaneously, out of the goodness of the professional hearts of men who ached to see the awkward "left-handedness" of the new men, and women, too, for that matter. The older workmen taught them all the tricks of the trade; those wrinkles which are usually only learned after months of experience and floundering.

Under capitalism it is often the case that a workman on piecework who has arrived at a high degree of skill and output will not hand on his little wrinkles to another workman. He has at the back of his mind the fear that if all the workmen begin to put out the same quota as himself per day, the "boss" will merely lower the rate of pay all round. It is common knowledge that that is precisely what does happen.

But in the Soviet Union, where industrial and agricultural production is not made for private profits for the few, where the country is organised and administered by working people on behalf of all who labour, there, no matter how big the wage fund is, the workers continue to be paid at the rates stipulated, and the greater the output, the larger their wages.

And so, this friendly assistance, at first given spontaneously by old skilled workmen, grew into a great movement which spread all over the country into all spheres of life, and the phrase was coined: *vzyat na booksir*. That means to "take in tow". In other words, the skilled workers "towed" the others with them, till such time as they learned to swim freely themselves, learned to run the machines well and get the most out of them.

We in the institute thought this a splendid idea, as so many other sections of the population did. There was a splendid opportunity afforded for this sort of thing in educational institutes. There were always students who swiftly assimilated all that was put before them; there were always others who had to pore long over their books before the light dawned on them. Often an advanced student, if he chose, could help a more backward one, by explaining in his own simple language something that was couched in difficult language by writers of the books we read in.

I myself had a splendid opportunity of helping students with their English. True, I had no bent for teaching, nor ever have had; but I could at least go over their exercises and try to explain to them where they had floundered.

There was one student of the Fourth Year in particular, who required assistance, because he was soon to go abroad for work in one of the trade delegations. He was very keen to be able to speak a little English before he went. His written EngUsh was splendid, but hke all difEdent people, he found conversation rather different. He had had little practice in speaking the language.

Moreover, being a Fourth Year student, he was in a particularly favourable position for affording me assistance. So we agreed to "tow" each other.

Nikolai, whose second name I regret to say I have forgotten, had been a railwayman before coming to the institute; he was about thirty-four when I met him. He was rather a sad young man, whose wife had decided she would prefer to

leave him and go back to her mother, many years previously, and I rather think he had never recovered. He was attending the lectures of my husband, as part of his work at the institute, and, as he lived in the same block of flats as we did, he frequently came in to consult Igor Mikhailovich on points of difficulty. So he was almost a family friend.

I think, looking back, that I probably owe more to him for what I have learned of Marxism than to anyone else. Without his help, I am pretty sure I would have been completely at a loss. For one thing, it was he who absolutely insisted that I make it a habit to take notes while I read. It was he, too, who never allowed me to pass over something I did not understand, without consulting either himself or one of the regular consultants, available in every educational institute.

Moreover, he never waited for me to seek him out. He was a very sensitive individual himself, and realised that I would be very careful of wasting his time; so he made a point of seeking me out, at least once a week.

I agreed to give him regular assistance before the last day of each week, which is usually the "summing-up**" lesson of the week where languages are concerned.

The exchange of assistance worked very well, and I was glad to feel that I was walking in step with the rest.

Nikolai, moreover, became my staunch supporter in the institute. Several months passed before I noticed a certain estrangement between some of the students and myself. There were one or two, and notably among them our old friend Koslov, who had regarded any of my absences from classes as something in the nature of taking advantage of my position. My position, in so far as it differed from that of the other students, was merely that I did not live in the hostel, and therefore could not be checked up on, should I not turn up at a class.

There were inevitably occasions when I missed lessons, either because I was down with 'flu, or because my son was off colour and I hesitated to leave him with nurse, feeling I

could care better for him myself. There were other occasions, when Polya herself failed to turn up to take charge of him, though they were very rare.

It was a third student who brought to me the story of how Nikolai had stood up for me, when Koslov and his friends hinted that I played truant. There had been much amusement among the students over the whole incident. Some had made jokes to Nikolai's face that he heartily resented. There had been quite a fracas, it seemed.

But Nikolai was a stout fellow. All the jokes in the world, even when connected with an Englishwoman and the wife of his own pet lecturer, could not upset his equilibrium. Besides, there were few who did not know of Nikolai's unhappy marriage, and still less who did not know him to be very sound on matters of the sort.

So Nikolai not only helped me in return for the help I gave him, but he turned out to be something in the nature of a protector.

And sometimes, among all those bantering, high-spirited students, I felt indeed that I needed one.

And so, the hard grind of study was willingly and happily undertaken by these students. Moreover, everything was done to ensure that no student should become completely divorced from the life of other working people. For two weeks, between terms, in early January, they went on "practical work" as it was called. What it actually meant was that every student packed up his studies for two weeks and had an opportunity of applying himself to totally different work. Sometimes they went back to the work they had left. Sometimes they chose to try their hands at something else. There was plenty of work in a land where there is no unemployment, and where industry is expanding constantly.

Thus, students in the Soviet Union are guarded against the dangers of a purely academic atmosphere, divorced from the important events and changes that are going on around them, outside the walls of their educational institution.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A BRITISH DELEGATION

IN THE SPRING of the year 1932, a new surprise came my way. It was in early April that I received an invitation to act as interpreter to the British Delegation of workers which would shortly arrive *in* Moscow for the May Day celebrations, and would afterwards make a tour to several parts of the Soviet Union. The invitation to me to undertake this work came from the All-Union Council of Trade Unions, through their Delegation Commission.

Looking back I cannot understand why I was so surprised to have the offer made to me. After all, I had lived in the Soviet Union long enough to understand the language sufficiently well for interpreting purposes; moreover I was working on translations, true not independently, and my translations always had to be carefully edited. But I had had sufficient opportunity to arrive at some understanding of what was going on in the country; in addition, there was every reason to believe that I would understand my own fellow-countrymen. Actually, from the point of view of those who invited me to do the work, I was a fairly suitable choice.

Nevertheless I was surprised and at the same time overjoyed. I would have an opportunity of travelling with my own fellow-countrymen to places I had never seen before; it would be my privilege to explain to them all I could of what we would see; and I would inevitably learn a great deal myself of those changes about which I had heard so much, but the actual workings of which I had experienced, so far, only in Moscow.

I realised, nevertheless, that the work was not going to be easy. I had been able to follow the foreign press to some ex-

tent in the library of the Publishing House and of the institute where I had been studying, which together with the left papers also took in the official English papers like *The Times* and of course the *Daily Herald*. Although I did not read these papers at all systematically, nevertheless I could not fail to realise the tone adopted towards them about the Soviet Union. I knew that most newspapers wrongly interpreted the defects to be found in the life of people in the Soviet Union. I knew it would be no easy thing to unburden the minds of the delegates; there would inevitably be in their minds all those stories put round by hostile writers. They would want to see for themselves, and some of what they saw would seem to confirm the defects of which they had read; personally I hoped to be able to provide them with the true meaning and explanation.

But it was not without some feeling of my own inability to explain the position that I agreed to undertake the work. I knew full well what I would be up against. I determined to do my utmost to make those delegates see, at least, as much as I saw myself of the good side of life in the Soviet Union, and to try to imbue them with the same faith in the building of Socialism there that I possessed already myself.

I knew, too, that because of the great distances between one point and another, I should spend many hours with those delegates in the train and that it was then that I, as the only English subject to hand, would have put to me all the questions and perplexities that filled their minds.

I comforted myself with the thought that I could only explain as much as I understood myself. What I did not yet understand I would not try to explain, I would have to admit that I did not know. Our combined brains and efforts would of a surety find the answer to all the problems. I was not wrong in taking this comfort. Moreover, I found the delegates very ready themselves to find the right interpretation of all they saw; they were stalwart members of the British labour movement, they did not themselves entirely

believe what they had read in the British press, and were only too eager to seek the true, working-class explanation of all they saw.

My job turned out to be somewhat easier than I had anticipated.

At a meeting called by the Delegation Commission before any of the delegates arrived, we were told what we were expected to do. It was explained to us by a big official of the Soviet trade union movement that we had been chosen because of our ability to translate, that we would find ourselves up against difficulties in translating technical expressions connected with the machinery and so on. That we were not to be daunted by these difficulties, for since the machinery would be on the spot, the workmen from abroad, who understood machinery better than we did, would be able to understand without words. The plant, old and new, would be there for them to examine.

We were warned against glossing over anything we ourselves did not understand. We were to be the medium through which the delegates would talk with workmen and managers and trade union officials. We were all qualified to translate, it was our job to translate carefully and conscientiously.

We were not to let our own enthusiasm get the better of us and expect our guests to be as enthusiastic as we were, without explaining all we could to them. These delegates would in many cases be skilled workers, living in fairly comfortable conditions in their own countries. It would be incorrect to show them improvements which might appear to them to be no improvements at all, because they would compare them with their own living conditions, for instance. We should show the delegates life to-day in the Soviet Union, show them what it had been, show them the road on which the people of the Soviet Union were travelling, try to give them a glimpse into the future.

This was all elementary to me, particularly as I, myself,

through my own experiences, had worked this all out for myself in advance.

The official particularly impressed upon us that building Socialism is no easy task, and that foreign delegates might just as well see the difficulties confronting the Soviet people and be given an opportunity of understanding them.

It has been easy for me, now, looking back at a time when Socialism has indeed triumphed in one-sixth part of the world, to show in the pages of this book how the country arrived at the degree of prosperity and peace that is to be found there to-day in the year 1940. But for me, in those days, when the country was going through the most difficult part of the change to Socialism, it was not simple, and leaving that meeting I felt all the magnitude of the burden I would have to carry with me on that trip round the U.S.S.R.

I could only do my very best. That was all I had to comfort me.

Perhaps two weeks passed, and the delegations began to arrive: French, American, Dutch, Swedish, German, *Chinese*. . . . The British delegation was one of the last to arrive.

All delegates were housed in the Grand Hotel, the same hotel at which my parents had stayed when in Moscow in 1926.

They disposed themselves among the rooms allotted to them, sharing with those to whom they had been drawn. They had had plenty of time on the ship which brought them from England to Leningrad to make friends and get to know each other's ways.

When I met the British delegates, I found they came from mines, railways and factories. In addition, four delegates were added to our group. They had travelled from far-away Australia. One was an elderly woman, interested in local administration; another was a school-teacher. There was an elderly man who had already found the journey from Australia too much for him; he cracked up completely after the

week in Moscow and was only allowed by the Soviet doctors to take the trip with us as far as Kislovodsk in the Caucasus, where he was to stay and have treatment for some internal trouble from which he suffered. Actually he remained there for several weeks and was left behind when his fellow-delegates from Australia returned to their own country. The fourth Australian delegate was a young man who had been through several periods of unemployment. He had a particular interest in this land where unemployment had ceased to exist.

On the very first morning, the delegates, in consultation with the guide in charge and the two interpreters, of whom I was one, drew up a plan of what they would like to see.

It was here that I came into conflict with the guide. He was an elderly man, closer to sixty than fifty. He had rather the schoolmaster manner, which upset one or two delegates from the start. Personally I could understand the feelings of those grown men and women, unused to being shepherded about, accustomed to discovering things for themselves.

I intervened in the meeting at one point when I considered the guide was being positively overbearing. He had told the delegates flatly that there would be no opportunity whatsoever for them to see the changes in agriculture.

Now to my mind, this was going completely against what we had been told at the first meeting of the staff, chosen to help the delegates. The delegates were to be given an opportunity of seeing all they wanted to. True, the heavy list of places they wanted to see of an industrial nature rather cut out any possibility of fitting a collective farm into the programme,

I said as much to the delegates and proposed that at times when the coach we would travel in was shunted into a siding, there might be a possibility of seeing something of the agricultural developments. It was left at that, but the guide seemed dissatisfied at my intervention. It is true, that I should have taken no part in the meeting. The drawing up of the plan was the business of the delegates in conjunction with the

guide. I was merely an interpreter. But I could not see dissatisfaction among the delegates on the first day without trying to clear the air.

The meeting ended harmoniously. But one or two of the delegates remarked to me afterwards, as we walked along the corridor to the dining-hall, that the "old man" seemed in a huff and was rather testy. I explained that there was not such a vast number of people to be spared from industry in those days. Languages and people who knew them were required there. He was probably a good old stick, and between us, provided the delegates did not hide their dissatisfaction, but brought it out into the open, we would manage to work harmoniously and see all we wanted to. The team spirit, therefore, was there from the start. To help create it was something I could certainly do.

Thus, the tour was decided upon: Dnieprostroi, Donetsk Basin, Caucasus, Baku, and a steady run back to Moscow, during which the delegates would have an opportunity of collecting together all their impressions, making their notes, and so on.

It was decided, that the week, which included May Day, should be spent visiting places of interest in Moscow.

The first day went off without a hitch. The morning was spent taking a quick tour round Moscow, when the guide, who certainly knew his Moscow, pointed out places of interest. The afternoon passed similarly. In the evening we visited one of the numerous theatres.

The next day went in much the same way, except that the delegates had an opportunity of investigating the housing and seeing the museums.

Then the great day dawned, May Day 1932. I little knew the disappointment I personally was to suffer.

On the Eve of May Day, we translators had been notified that we would receive by messenger, at our homes, the pass required to allow us on to the Red Square, where the march past of the troops and the display of the might of the Soviet

Union as well as the processions of Soviet citizens, all in their workshop, office or institution columns, would take up pretty well the whole of the day.

Normally, we interpreters slept in the hotel, but it was understood that we might have our own family affairs to attend to, and for this reason we were off duty during the second half of the eve of May Day, and spent the night in our own homes.

I waited for my pass, and waited in vain. It never came.

At six o'clock on May Day I set out on foot for the Red Square. The trams, which only ran between seven o'clock and nine that day, to assist people to get to their places of work *in order to assemble for the demonstrations*, were not yet running. I hoped against hope that I would manage somehow to get through the cordon of militia that surrounded the Red Square.

I arrived at the cordon and approached the militia man on duty. I showed my credential, which said that I was an interpreter to the British delegation at present in Moscow.

The militia man eyed me, not without suspicion. For all he knew, the real interpreter held the correct pass, and I had somehow got hold of this credential. I felt thoroughly uncomfortable.

"What do you want?" he asked, firmly but politely.

"I want to get on to the Red Square," was my prompt reply.

"But your pass, please."

"I haven't got one. Look here, the credential says I am the interpreter to the British delegation, and I must get on to the Red Square. How can we leave the British delegates without interpreters?"

"You should have thought of that before," was his reply, though he showed no sign that he doubted my word, which he probably did. Why not?

I was furious. It was through no fault of mine that my pass **had not arrived. What** should I do?

"But my pass should have been delivered to me last night at my home. It didn't arrive." My explanation sounded feeble even to me. The militiaman must have been highly amused. He merely lifted an eyebrow.

"Listen, comrade," he said, very firmly and gently. "Perhaps you are telling me the truth, but I have my instructions. Moreover, we are not allowed to discuss matters while on duty. Our job is to examine passes and allow through those people who hold the official pass. I cannot help you."

Although I knew he was right, I had to vent my anger on somebody. I flounced off without thanking him. But I quickly recovered and saved my anger for the time when I would ultimately appear at the hotel and discover who the criminal was who had deprived me of my pass.

Not to be on the Red Square! I had looked forward to it so much. I should not witness the parade of the Soviet mechanised units. I would not see Voroshilov cantering on his mare across the Square. I would not hear him when he read the oath and it was echoed by strong Red Army voices that resounded all over the Square.

I had listened in on the radio the previous year, as it was all transmitted over the wireless. I knew what I was missing! I had never had, nor have ever had since, the opportunity of being present at the march past of the Soviet troops, though many a time I have marched through the Square with my fellow-students and fellow-office workers. But that was quite different, albeit very inspiring.

So that was that. I walked slowly back home, working out the speech I would make when I did find who was to blame. As I went I passed men and women, in holiday garb, some dressed in their native costumes, hurrying to join their contingents. I had no contingent now. I had no idea where our students would be meeting or at what hour. I knew, too, that by the time I arrived home, Igor would have left to join his contingent!

But Leffy was at home, and the thought of him made me

hurry my footsteps. There is little bad without good. LeffY loved demonstrations and parades, like all children.

A mother is a fortunate being, she has so many compensations. That day LeffY threw all thoughts of my plight out of my mind. We brought out his red flag, we bought him a pioneer badge, we let him riot in buns and sweets, for May Day is a great day, and even in those rationing years there were always specially good things to eat on May Day and November 7; there were vans and kiosks stocked with good things.

LeffY played demonstrations in the park with the other young standard-bearers. It was a moving sight to see the grandson of my father singing the tune of the *Internationale* with the other toddlers, although the words were all jumbled up.

Polya, too, had been glad to find herself free on May Day. She had refused to take the day off, when she found I would not be available; to her mind, a mere man would not be able to cope either with the care of LeffY or the other household jobs.

I spent a good day, playing with my son, preparing his meals, arranging for a specially good supper for my husband, when he would return very tired from marching through the streets; he would be glad to find me at home, although as disappointed as I was myself that I had not been on the Red Square.

Incidentally, it might be worth while mentioning here that many a wealthy foreigner, arriving in Moscow, has tried to buy a ticket for the Red Square Parade on May Day or November 7, and has found that none were available—not for all the money in the world. There are some things that money cannot buy. The Red Square has a limited space for sightseers.

The next day I discovered the culprit. There had been nothing wrong with the organisation of everything connected with entertaining our British guests. One individual

alone had defaulted, and it was our guide. On him I vented all the fury of my disappointment. Even then, it seemed to me that he was not aware of the enormity of his error. It was only later I decided that perhaps it had all been deliberate.

And so, with the best organisation in the world, if one cog in the machine is faulty, the effect as a whole can be temporarily spoiled.

During the next few days we enjoyed visits to the factories. I remember we visited the *Krasnyi Proletarii* (Red Proletarian) Works. The delegates were interested in it because it was a works, representative of many others, which had the old pre-revolutionary building and machinery all restored and working, but in addition had a large extension equipped with modern machinery and built on modern lines.

On paper I had read of improvements of the kind. To see them was something different. The old building had been constructed without thought for the hundreds of workers who would spend the greater part of their waking hours therein. There had been no eight-hour working day in Tsarist Russia. The ventilation had been bad, the lighting impossible.

The new part had all the advantages of a thoroughly modern plant. Moreover, it held the dining-room, which catered for all the workers, whether attached to the old or the new buildings. In the different departments, as well, there were small "buffets", where food and drink could be obtained in the shorter breaks.

It was the delegates themselves who most appreciated the new building, the manner in which the machinery had been installed to suit best the men employed on it, and the care taken throughout old and new wings to provide all possible safety measures. The fact that all working men and women in the Soviet Union are provided, free of charge, with special protective clothing was also welcomed by the delegates. These British men and women could not fail to see improve-

ments which placed the Soviet men and women in a more advantageous position than themselves. For the guide and interpreters there was little to do but enjoy the privilege of seeing. Machinery and workshops and those employed there almost speak for themselves. The British men and women were well alive to the fact that Soviet workers are under no restraint; there is none of the bullying attitude towards the workers on the part of foremen.

Our guide, however, was difficult and testy. It was not an easy thing to keep the delegates together. Naturally enough, if one of them was particularly interested in a piece of machinery, or wanted to lag behind and chat with one of the workmen, they dropped behind. I often lingered behind, myself, to interpret. The guide pulled me up several times for lingering.

Not to have allowed the delegates to linger would have given a degree of confirmation to those rumours current abroad that visitors were allowed to see only as much as the authorities allowed them to. That they were only shown the good side and not the bad. That they were not allowed to talk with Soviet workmen . . . and so on. There was going to be no opportunity on this delegation, if I knew it, for the delegates to confirm such rumours. Moreover, I felt the strength behind those words delivered to us at the first meeting of those who were to assist the delegations. We were to hide no difficulties; the delegates were to see everything, within the tour, that they wanted to see.

Again I was not satisfied with our guide.

Once we lost the Australian delegate. The guide turned on me, not hiding his anger.

"Don't you know that the delegates must not be allowed to amble all over the works?"

"But no harm can come to them. And they won't interfere with the work. They are workmen themselves and understand these things." was my hearty retort.

"We have to work to programme; there is much to be

seen; we have to be back at the hotel for dinner at the right time."

All that was true, but the delay was not so great. I saw to that. Moreover, even if we left the Australian delegate behind, the management of the works would be tickled to death at the chance of trotting out a car and sending him post haste back to the hotel. Such things had been known to happen, and nothing but good had ensued.

"Look here," I replied. "I know all that. I'll fetch him along. He can only be in one of the departments we have already visited."

I found him, searching for something he needed.

"Say, comrade," said he, "aren't there any conveniences round this way. We passed many earlier on, I know. Would you just tip me off when we come to the next?"

I tipped him off after a few minutes. He tipped off others of the delegates. There was another delay.

"Now where are the rest of the delegates?" demanded the guide. Again I was the guilty party addressed.

I grinned. Perhaps my grin was a bit facetious.

"If you would only use your imagination!" was all I replied.

It was a rough reply, but for once the guide showed some human intelligence. As for me, I am afraid I had begun to augment those little difficulties already, to see in them something more than just stupidity on the part of the guide. Yet, my natural feelings made me sorry for the old chap. Still, I felt it was not going to be easy down south, if he continued in this way. The delegates were even getting a little fidgety at all the bickering.

"What is all the shindy about?" they would ask. I honestly explained the facts, but did not put my own interpretation on the guide's behaviour.

We visited other factories; the delegates would point out any defects they noticed. I remember in the *Sert* i Molot* (Sickle and Hammer), the great iron-works, where they

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found heaps of scrap-iron in the yard. To them it was an untidy sight, and they suggested that the yard should be cleared.

We interpreters felt that the whole works was spoiled by the untidiness of the yard, and we had torn our stockings, both of us, on the scrap-iron, so we felt it all the more. Moreover, we knew that there had been appeals for the careful collection of scrap-iron. The broken-down porticoes of iron work in the front of the older houses of Moscow had already been taken down and the scrap-iron used.

Somebody in the *zerp i Molot* Works had not given sufficient attention to these things. As we went over the works we came to a department where the wall newspaper was particularly attractive to the eye. We stood round and translated parts of it to the delegates. The eye of the other interpreter was caught by some mention of scrap-iron in the yard. She translated it for the benefit of the delegates. It contained the whole story of the efforts of the men, whose job it was to clear the yards and keep them tidy. They had certainly kept the needs of the country before them. The management were the delinquents; they had not given sufficient attention to the transport question, which in those days was still a knotty problem. But with good organisation the scrap-iron could be cleared. The workers themselves had pointed the way; they were insisting that the management come into line, and there was some special criticism of one particular manager.

So it was always. The initiative was often shown by the rank and file workers; the administration of factories was in working-class hands and it was often the management that had to "toe the line".

There were many little things of this sort which attracted the attention of the British delegates. They never hesitated to criticise where they could. Their criticism was always helpful and to the point. It was not difficult for us, this job of translating and guiding.

I remember on one occasion coming to a wall newspaper in another factory. At random one of us, I forget now which, translated one of the items of news. It was a notice from the management that from a certain date the amount paid per unit for turning out some part of machinery would be lowered.

"Oho," said one of the delegates, "a reduction in wages?"

He seemed as unwilling to believe the truth of it as I was. We took our questions to the management.

Prior to entering a works and also at the end of a visit, the delegates always had an opportunity of meeting the management and the representatives of the "Triangle", who would explain the nature of the works, give figures of wages and output and general conditions and afterwards, at the end of the visit, explain any questions put forward.

At the end of our visit we put the question.

"How is it that the men in one of your departments are faced with a reduction in wages?" I asked, translating literally the question of the delegate concerned.

"That question cannot be answered in two words, comrades," was his introductory sentence. "I want you to try and see one of the difficulties we of the management together with the trade union are faced with in connection with the production of new parts of machinery being made for the first time in our country. Such machine parts have never been made here by Soviet hands before. We found ourselves with the problem of fixing the rate we would pay, per unit, to the men on this work. After experimenting the first week we fixed the rate of pay, which would compare fairly with other rates for machine parts concerning which we have had large experience. For example, say a man turned out 10 units of this new machine-part in a week, for which we paid at the rate of 10 roubles a unit. He would get a monthly wage of 400 roubles, a fair wage, and any extra for additional parts he produced in the same way.

"Now after a month's experience on this work, we found **the men had so mastered the technique of the job, that they**

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were turning out 50 units a week with ease. Moreover, many were turning out still more. In addition, there were signs that in the course of another month, their output would be much higher than that. We were faced with a big problem. The men themselves, through their works committee, brought up the matter.

"It was obvious that our original estimate of 10 roubles per unit was ridiculously high in the circumstances. It put the men working on the new machine parts in a highly privileged position among their fellow workmen.

"The 'Triangle' considered the matter. During the discussions, the men themselves were highly amused at what they referred to as 'our inefficiency' in providing individual workmen with such wages at the expense of the rest of the community. So the 'Triangle' (consisting of one delegate from the trade union, one from the party organisation, a third from the management, be it remembered) set to work to discover the proper rate of pay, more in line with the pay of other workers up and down the workshops of the Soviet Union.

"The mistake we made was of paying one section of workers more than the country could afford and more than they were entitled to as their share of the good things produced by common labour. It had to be rectified with despatch. On paper, it is a reduction of wages; in actual fact, too, it is a reduction on the previous wages. But we all understand why it had to be done.*

I believe the delegates understood and were satisfied with this reply.

Yet, it is little things like this reduction in pay per machine-part which has given rise to so much of the rumours spread about the workers' conditions in the Soviet Union. A little incident of the sort, discovered by an unintelligent and hostile journalist, would have been the subject for huge front-line streamers in foreign newspapers: "Russian workers forced to accept lower wages!" and so on.

It is not surprising that those of us who have lived in the

Soviet Union have learned to turn a blind eye to those glaring headlines.

So the days passed, and the time came for us to go southwards.

The British delegates with their attendant staff were accommodated in a whole coach, a sleeper, of course. There was nothing special about it; it had all the usual comforts and conveniences of a wagon-lit coach and it was to be our home for approximately three weeks. Whatever else we did, wherever we might go, we would return each night to our "sleeper" home.

There would be days when we would not have a hot meal, because the coach would be on the move; there were still no dining-cars on trains over the route we would take. In fact, in 1932, as far as I remember, dining-cars existed only on the trains running between Moscow and Leningrad and Western Europe and on the Trans-Siberian Express to Vladivostok. We should not be using those routes at all.

So we took on board with us a goodly supply of bread, caviare, ham, salaami, breakfast sausage, fruit, chocolate and cigarettes.

It has to be remembered that the Soviet population was on rations. But guests from foreign countries were given the best the country could afford. The hospitality of working people is always something splendid; the Soviet Workers' Government was not different in this respect.

The delegates were under no illusions about the privileges afforded them, if only because we, who translated for them, never disguised the fact that because we were with them, we were rather living on the fat of the land, enjoying little luxuries that the average Soviet working man and woman did not enjoy during those years. The delegates knew we were not "pulling wool over their eyes" nor "hiding the truth", nor engaging in anything else of the sort, when they realised they were fed on a greater variety of good things than the average Soviet citizen enjoyed.

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We enjoyed our "picnics" in the coach, and in the evenings when we were "on the move", we would squeeze into one carriage and talk over things or sing our favourite ballads. The ballads were a wonderful mixture: airs from opera, *Danny Boy*, *Every Nice Girl loves a Sailor*, *Tipperary*, even the Boer War songs, of which I only knew one: *The Boers have got my Daddy*. There was a strong EngUsh flavour about it all, but we found the Australians joined in, too. The Welsh miners, of course, were the great singers, but those of us less talented did not let them have it all their own way, and sometimes there were groans from the Cockneys when *Danny Boy* came up too often.

So the time between sightseeing passed quickly enough, even though we were sometimes confined for long stretches in the coach.

We arrived at Dnieprostroi one bright sunny morning and our coach was shunted into a siding, while the train that had brought us so far went off on its way.

We were welcomed by members of the local soviet, the local trade unions and the Communist Party. But it was the trade union leader who usually took charge of us when we were to see industrial undertakings.

We were taken off to the Central Club and given a short talk about the construction work going on along the banks of the Dnieper. We were told how the Dnieper had been diverted from its course. We interpreters were kept busy, keeping up with the flow of information.

We then trooped out to see the dam. It was a beautiful piece of construction work, splendidly poised, wonderfully efficient. It is beyond me to describe it all.

We walked across it, some parts of it being still under construction. Sometimes we were on boards and planks, at other times we walked over the hard, smooth surface of the road. We were halted and called together at one point; one of those accompanying us had something of interest to show. He had lived in the litde village that now lay at the bottom

of this new arm of the Dnieper, formed where the river had been diverted from its natural course. He described the village life, simply as he had known it. It was easy-going translating him. When he had finished, we were left with no alternative but to agree with him that such a village was better down there at the bottom of the river and its inhabitants housed elsewhere.

We walked on to *the* end of the dam. We were taken into one of the wings to see the turbines. Below there was perfect order, the kind of order and efficiency typical of the electrical power station: no smoke, no coal-dust, no dirt. The huge turbines were beautiful to behold and I could understand those writers who think of machines as human, and write of them in that way. We saw one turbine at work. I cannot describe it; it has to be seen by the layman for him to appreciate it.

The delegates were obviously greatly impressed.

In the afternoon, we toured the surrounding plants. We saw huge works, some not yet in operation, others only half built. Some were already at work, the electrical driving power already being provided from the great turbines we had already seen. There were large, first-class laboratories, where the finest tests were made of the metals produced. The production was largely durninium and aluminium articles.

We saw only the early stages of this piece of construction. Nobody could deny, after seeing all there was to see of Dnieprostoi in 1932, that great things were in store for the future. That was all the delegates were required to see and know. Some of them made very careful notes of all they saw and heard.

From this vast area covered by the different plants, some of which we had visited, the bus drove us to the new blocks of flats. They stood among avenues of very young, newly planted trees that would soon provide cool shade in that flat and barren stretch of almost virgin soil.

The drainage system in the houses was not completed and

the delegates were disappointed to hear of it. Nobody expected them to know by instinct that the people occupying those flats were satisfied with what they had, not because they had obtained already all they required, but because they had been provided with just as much as they had been promised. They were confident that the rest, as it became possible to get the work completed, would also come to them.

As for me, although it was a disappointment not to be able to show the delegates perfectly equipped houses, I was satisfied in my mind. The homes of those workers were a vast improvement on anything they had had before. Electric lighting, central heating, light rooms, good ventilation, water-supply, all these things had not existed in the villages of Tsarist days. Dnieprostroi was a new town, only just born. It would soon develop into a first-class town, comparing most favourably with any other town in the world.

Moreover, I knew that this was not the last delegation to come to the Soviet Union. As other workers came in their delegations, they would be able to report back on further improvements and developments.

The day passed. I remember how when we first arrived we had chafed in that club hall because we were kept waiting twenty minutes before being given the introductory remarks we needed and wanted so much. By the end of the day, we had seen so much that those first twenty minutes were completely forgotten. Only now, eight years later, do I remember our impatience.

It was almost dark when we returned to our coach. Not long after, the coach was hitched on to a train that would bear us off to the Donetz Basin. We supped from our store and retired to our bunks.

We arrived in the heart of the Donetz Basin, after passing through a fair section of the whole mining area. Many of the delegates had never been near mines before and it was the miner delegates who pointed out to us the things they recognised so well from the carriage windows.

The train pulled up at a small station. We left the coach and entered a rather dilapidated looking bus, which had been sent to fetch us. There was hardly room, but we managed to squeeze in.

It drove us over rough open country; the road was a cart-track, the journey very bumpy and we finally arrived at a coal-mining village. The roads between the wooden houses were wide. We walked round the village, noting the co-operative store, the post office, the drug-store, and the market place, all very similar to those in any Soviet village. It was pleasing for me to listen to the exclamations of the delegates as they came across things which struck them very much as they had struck me in the village of Nemchinovka.

We bundled again into the bus and after a few minutes arrived at the new town. Here were two-storeyed houses, some in wood like the house Professor Chayanov had lived in just outside Moscow; others were built of brick.

We were taken to the central office of the management of all the pits in the neighbourhood. There we were given the usual talk about the locality, its history, the aims being pursued there. Some of the coal-seams had been worked for years, others were newly opened up and being worked on modern lines.

As our time was so short, the delegation split up, some visiting the old mines, others the new. I found myself among those who were to visit the new pits.

We were conducted to the bath-houses and cloakrooms. There we were provided with a complete outfit apiece of miner's special clothing. We found it very amusing decking ourselves out, and some of the women presented strange spectacles. We were also offered a lamp apiece, and it was only when we returned to the surface after going down the mine that I realised we had made no use of them. The mine was electrically lit.

We entered the lift, and it was again only the miners who noticed that it was a vast improvement on the usual "cage"

±nc remainder of us were entering a mine for the first time in our lives.

It seemed a terribly long journey down that shaft, and it was not a very pleasant feeling to be going so far down into the bowels of the earth.

Arrived at the bottom, we found ourselves at the end of a broad corridor. Moreover, it was high enough for the tallest man I could imagine to stand erect in. It was propped with heavy beams in the roof, the floor was quite level. In fact, it seemed nothing like I expected a mine to be. I had fully expected to find myself crawling on my hands and knees more or less from the outset. So much for the ignorance of the layman.

To the left, as we stood, there was a door, through which we all trooped. Inside everything was white. I immediately recognised the usual atmosphere of an *ambulatoria*, or what I suppose we would call an infirmary. There was die little box of record cards on the registrar's desk. There was the usual young girl, in white overall and white kerchief on her head. She looked up. She had the simple, homely face of so many Russian peasant girls, but there was an alertness not usually present in the peasant type. She greeted us and turned to bring the doctor from an inner room.

There was nothing particular about the doctor, except that he was very young, too. But he was fully qualified and had graduated from the Kharkov medical school.

These two formed the complete staff of that tiny "infirmary" down in the mine.

As we passed out and along the corridor, one of the miners remarked to me:

"If there were an accident in this mine those two would have a job, managing by themselves."

It was a piece of healthy criticism. I had thought as much myself. But we had not yet seen everything.

Further along the pit after some minutes walking we came to another room to the left. Inside it was painted in white.

The personnel consisted of another nurse and a medical student. This was a first-aid depot. We passed several more first-aid depots of the kind as we walked through the mine.

We were informed by the doctor that down there, in the bowels of the earth, they had sufficient equipment to deal with all the accidents that might befall a miner. Even operations could be performed, if necessary down there. There was only one drawback, in the doctor's estimate, and that was that he got no practice. The injuries which occurred were of a very minor character, and he found his work somewhat dull. Still, as he hastened to add, there were the regular inspections of the miners, and the work of watching their health. And he hastened to add that the medical attention to the men did not end down there. There were plenty of medical facilities up on the surface. Where miners were concerned, the medical facilities had, of necessity, to be duplicated. It was hardly to be expected that a sick miner in his home would come down the mine to consult a doctor, and vice versa. The miners, called upon to do perhaps one of the hardest jobs that any workman can do, were to have the best that it was possible to give them.

I cannot describe those pits in detail. Neither do I even remember the figures given us of the size of the one I visited. It took considerable time for us to arrive at only one face, and when we arrived there I found none of the "glamour!" of the miner's life. The two men we found at the face, using up-to-date boring machinery of the best quality, bent over their work, or stood at it, according to the seam they were working on. There was nothing, however, to prevent them from straightening whenever they felt inclined to.

Moreover, all the haulage was mechanised, and there was electric light throughout.

I remember particularly that the miners in my group were deeply impressed. After all, they should know best what

mining is and the conditions in the mining industry in South Wales where they came from.

We hurried back to the lift and began the ascent. Arrived at the surface, we walked out of the gloom and blinked in the sunshine. It was almost blinding. We felt warm, and gladly accepted the showers offered us.

Neither was there anything to find fault with about the showers. The bathrooms were large, each worker had a locker for clothing and valuables. Every miner, on finishing his shift, can present himself at his home as clean and tidy as an office worker.

We luxuriated in the warm water, and felt refreshed by the cold, as we washed from ourselves not the dirt of the mine so much as the dirt of the railway journey.

We indulged longer than we should and found the men outside waiting for us. We took in good part their healthy remarks about the time it takes women to titivate. Fortunately the guide had gone down the other pit, so perhaps I avoided a short lecture on "delaying".

The bus took us back to the club-house of the miners, one of several in the neighbourhood. It was not large, not one of the most modern, but it was comfortable and contained a good library and games room. There we were regaled with a good hot meal, but what I remember most was the wine we were given. It looked harmless enough; it was made locally, from the grapes of the previous year's harvest. It was of a pinkish-yellow colour and neither sweet nor quite dry. The flavour was pleasant.

What we did not know about it was its potency. We only discovered that afterwards, when we were out *in* the sunshine. As usual, I had taken it warily. After all, it was my job to interpret and I could hardly afford to risk being tipsy on the job. The delegates had nothing of the sort to worry them; they were not working, they were guests.

It was not so much that they were tipsy as high-spirited. **I felt rather like a mother** curbing her young, when they in-

dulged in merriment at times when I thought they should be paying more attention to the "work" in hand.

In the afternoon we visited a number of medical institutions, and some homes for aged miners, suffering from all the ailments caused by long years of hard days down *the* mines. We saw too the creches and kindergartens.

Finally we returned to the railway station and our coach. It was already hitched to the next train that would take us on further.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A SUBVERSIVE GUIDE

THAT EVENING, IN consequence of the "madness" of the delegates and our general high-spiritedness of the afternoon, we interpreters were again subjected to a short lecture.

Our guide, who seemed to be devoid of any sense of humour, pointed out to us that we could be good comrades with our British guests, but that there was no need for us to be familiar.

We were incensed, but we kept our feelings beneath the surface. What was the good of arguing.

Still, these little lectures delivered in the privacy of the carriage which our guide occupied alone, more I felt because nobody particularly wanted to be with him than because he was entitled to a whole carriage to himself, and partly because our delegation was a relatively small one, did cause some feeling among the delegates. They would naturally enough miss us from the evening company and the singing and chatting of the evenings. They naturally failed to understand why we and the guide should suddenly shut ourselves up in a carriage with the bolt drawn. What secrets could we have from them?

They were right; there were no secrets we had from them. It was their trip; they had the right to discuss all the plans and any alterations.

We hastened to put everything right, but we could not do so except by being a little disloyal to our leader. Still, they had observed enough to understand. They, too, had not found the guide very amenable.

However, the climax came in our relations with the guide when the train pulled up at a little wayside station one afternoon at about five o'clock and the coach was shunted into a siding.

Our guide made no attempt to hustle us out. On the contrary, he informed us that we would wait in the coach until the next train came for us; moreover he gave us no idea as to when that would be.

This was preposterous. I decided that whether it was breaking discipline or not, I was not going to see the delegates wasting time for nothing.

"But perhaps there is something here we could see. And surely you can find out when there will be a train to hitch us up?" I asked the guide.

"It will be better to wait," he replied curdy.

"But could you not see the station-master and find out when the train will come?" I pressed, still very politely.

"I think it is not necessary. Maybe we shall not have to wait long."

"But you don't know," I pressed, losing my patience. "I know you are the guide, you've told me so, many times, but a guide has to show initiative in emergencies."

"This is no emergency," he replied.

It was too much. He might be an old man, and my mother's early training had taught me that we should respect the aged, but he was not behaving as those who had put him in charge of the delegation would want him to behave. I had no doubt on that score.

Together with the other interpreter we deliberated. Again, we returned to the guide. I was finished for the time being, and I did not want my hasty temper to have a chance of displaying itself.

"If you will not see the station-master," my fellow-interpreter declared, "then one of us is going to."

There was no reply, and I sallied forth.

The station-master was delighted to see me. He settled himself down in his chair for a lone talk. The minutes ticked by; I was in no mood for amusing him, however much right he had to it. Suddenly I broke in on a remark of his:

"See here, do tell me when the train will come to take us

on to Kislovodsk. I want to show the delegates something of the neighbourhood."

He took the hint as a healthy-minded individual will.

"At ten o'clock, comrade," was the prompt reply.

"Then I'll get the delegates and we'll go for a walk," I said, throwing him my sweetest smile and hastening away.

He was a good old railwayman. I would have enjoyed chatting with him, but I had other work to do.

Outside I still had doubts. Suppose he had made a mistake? Supposing I and the delegates missed an earlier connection? That would have been disastrous and I would be responsible. I would verify the information. I approached the little office over which was the inscription "OGPU".

I knocked on the door and entered a tiny little station room, without waiting to be summoned.

"If you please, comrade, I would like your assistance," I began, somewhat hesitatingly. For all I knew, the man might be up to his neck in work.

"And what can I do for you, little citizen?" was his reply in the usual courteous fashion of the Soviet official.

"Well, the fact is, the British delegates in the coach in the siding are rather keen to take a walk."

How lame it all sounded! I continued, more explicitly.

"Our leader does not know when the train will arrive to take us on to Kislovodsk. I wanted to make sure that it will come at ten o'clock as the station-master says. If I were to make a mistake it would be terrible."

"But where is your leader? Why does he not see to these things? You, I take it, are one of the interpreters?"

"Yes," I replied, trying to sound more like the modest part I ought to play.

I felt I was getting the guide into hot water. After all, the state political department officials are only supposed to be resorted to when things are going drastically wrong. I had merely intended to confirm the time of the train, not bring **out the** whole story of our trouble with the guide. Still, the

brick had been dropped, and anyway *esprit de corps* was all right perhaps, in its right place. My job was also to see that the delegates had a good time and saw all they could.

I found myself reporting my woes to this very kindly young man.

The outcome of it all was that the OGPU official very kindly informed me that if I would take the path which he indicated and follow it across the fields for a matter of two miles, I would come to a new collective dairy farm. True, it was a bit late in the day, but somebody would be there. He himself would gladly conduct us, if we would like him to come.

After the last few days in the company of our guide, I was only too glad to have an opportunity of talking with a normal Soviet citizen again. I felt I could speak for the whole delegation and certainly for the other interpreter. I readily agreed to his offer.

I rushed back overjoyed to impart the news to the gloomy delegates. What is more, I decided to confront the "enemy", for so I had begun to regard him, with our intention.

He was not happy at being thwarted, but since we had roped in the services of a Soviet official, and had faced him with the accomplished fact, he could hardly cross us.

We passed only one man as we went. He greeted our guide and passed on.

Soon in the distance we saw buildings. As we drew nearer we distinguished that some were of wood, others of brick, and the sweet smell of cows mingled with the scent of the warm grass.

At first we found nobody about. The OGPU official took us into the nearest building.

The large wooden gates at each end of it were thrown back. It is possible they are never closed in the summer months. The building itself was of brick, very long and lofty. There were large windows set high up along the whole length of each wall.

There were broad stalls, divided only by a rail, and in each stall was a splendid cow or bull. Their names were indicated on a little metal plate, each attached to the woodwork to which the rails were fixed: "*Dunya*", "*Nadya*", "*Byelyinka*"; and the names of the bulls "*Hercules*" (which reminded me of porridge, for the patent name for porridge oats in the Soviet Union is "*Gerkules*"), and a number of other Greek names. Without doubt somebody at the farm had read Greek mythology!

There were many experiments on foot in those days. It has to be remembered that the question of providing the population with sufficient meat was one to which the agricultural departments were turning their whole attention. There had been a wholesale slaughter of cattle and young animals in some parts of the country owing to the ignorance of the peasants and the activities of kulaks. So here we found that experiments were being made in artificial insemination, which aimed at the speediest possible production of cattle. All the details concerning the different cows and bulls were to be found in the office of the farm, to which we later turned our steps.

But meanwhile, we were taking stock of the conditions in which the animals were housed. We had proof that everything was on very modern lines. There was a cleanliness about the whole place that left nothing to be desired. One of the delegates said, humorously, that there should be no housing shortage here, even if the whole village was burned down. That was going a bit far, but it was how it had humorously struck him. Even the cleaning of the shed—it could hardly be termed a shed, it was so palatial for animals—was done mechanically, and not in the shiftless, untidy fashion usual on small farms.

We went through the dairies and here again we found all the cleanliness and practical hygiene which resulted from the use of all the modern dairy equipment the country could provide and which it obtained at great effort and cost.

The manager of the collective farm, an elderly peasant whom we found in the offices, had obtained the position by sheer merit. He talked of the animals as though they were his own children. He told us of some of the difficulties he and the other farmers had faced during the winter months, which had been severe. At one time he had been cut off from forage supplies, and although they had done all in their power to keep the animals well fed, two prize English bulls, that had been bought at a very high price from England, had perished during the winter. One could see his agony as he told the story. It had been a great blow to him and his fellow collective farmers, not only because it meant a breakdown in their plans, but because they had a real affection for the animals. Here we saw the difference of the new spirit.

As he talked, another young man appeared, as if from nowhere. A delegation from abroad always attracted Soviet people. He had heard the news from the station-master that the delegates were at the farm. He hastened across to greet them. He turned out to be the veterinary surgeon. He explained much to us about the experiments in artificial insemination and we were duly impressed.

Finally, we were invited to try the milk.

We had had very little milk on our travels. Perhaps it was the hot dusty evening, perhaps it was because it was new milk, but ice-cold from the cold-storage cellars. It was certainly delicious.

We slowly ambled back to the station. I was immensely satisfied. Not only had we enjoyed a good walk in country air, but we had seen something of collective-farm life and the new world in that sphere. Moreover, we had no other opportunity of seeing the agricultural developments, and we would, indeed, have missed this opportunity but for the interpreters' persistence.

We did not talk much that evening. We were tired and turned in to bed without delay.

The next point we arrived at was Kislovodsk. There I was on territory I knew. When my parents visited the Caucasus in 1926, we had taken a trip to Kislovodsk by train, and travelled by horse and carriage to the beauty spots of the neighbourhood.

There is little that need be written about it. We spent the morning visiting sanatoria; a visit to one of them took us part of the way up a hill, which plays a big part in the regime of some of the patients suffering from heart trouble. These patients have to adhere to a very strict regime. They are only gradually allowed to climb hills. At first they can attempt only just so much of this hill as the doctor prescribes. As they grow stronger, they may be allowed to walk to a greater height, and so on. The road rises at a very steady gradient and brings one out to the top of one of the lower hills of the Caucasian range.

We dined in one of the sanatorium dining-rooms and took our choice of food from the menu prepared for the patients. We dined early, for we had breakfasted very early. Moreover, the room had to be cleared after us for the patients when they came back from their various cures.

In the afternoon, we walked up the hill I have mentioned, well shaded with trees that had long ago been planted *m* avenues for the pleasure of privileged and wealthy patrons visiting the sanatoria in Tsarist days. Now the horny-handed sons of toil felt the full benefit of them. There were villas on either side of the road. Some of them were attractive, others were expressions of the somewhat bizarre taste of ignorant merchants of Tsarist days. On the whole, they had all been sufficiently well built to act as splendid sanatorium accommodation, when the necessary alterations had been made to suit a generation with simpler, more modern tastes.

As we climbed, we left the buildings behind and found ourselves out on the green, grassy slopes of the hills. Huge boulders here and there told of geological changes. Lizards darted here and there in the sunlight over the rocks.

We rested up there on the hills, seated on a rock, as I had

sat six years previously on a similar hillside near Piatigorsk, not so very far away.

I caught up one of the lizards, and it retaliated by snapping at my thumb and leaving a red, three-cornered mark on it, which was not the way I had been taught that lizards protect themselves. But I had not taken it by the tail. I dropped it hastily. Some minutes later I tried another. It was a beautiful creature, bright green, the colour of young lime leaves. I laid it on the front of my dress, where one might pin a brooch. I turned to the others for admiration. The poor creature must have been petrified; it stayed there until I removed it and let it go to a more natural element.

The day had worn on; it was nearing the time for us to return to our train. We took a shorter cut down the hill, slithering in parts, because the paths were steep. We swung freely through the main street at last, and drank of the Narzan water from the closed-in spring in the centre of the town, not far from the station.

We began to feel scorched with the sun, and we compared our different colourings, when we were again in our coach. Our gift from Kislovodsk was packed at the end of the coach. It consisted of two or three crates of Narzan table water. We would appreciate it on the next part of our journey, for we were finding the hot sun parched our throats. It would be hotter still before we got to Baku.

I do not remember how long it took us to cover the distance from Kislovodsk to Baku. I know there were at least two delays, when we were shunted into a siding; there may have been more.

But the journey on the whole was very pleasant, first because of the beauty of the Caucasian mountains, but later, as we crossed to the shores of the Caspian, because of the new interests which filled our attention. On the left of us, as we rode, facing the engine, was the Caspian itself, its colours constantly changing. Sometimes it was a dark, steely-grey colour and then litde waves, foam-crested, **gave it an angry**

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appearance of turbulence. At other times it was a calm, deep blue, when the sun shone brightly, playing on the water and making, for the imaginative eye, a vast armada of tiny silvery ships. From time to time we saw steamers on the horizon, but we never once saw the distant coastline of the other side.

On the right-hand side as the train passed on, there were a number of sights to be seen. It was almost like dropping suddenly into the East. Whitewashed houses, with straw thatched roofs; men in striped, many-coloured gowns, and large, broad-brimmed white felt hats. Others with the *tibiteika*, litde brightly coloured skull-caps, on their heads. They were swarthy types, some clean-shaven, others with moustaches and tiny beards, very black in most cases. The women were sometimes dressed in long gowns, but more often work shirts and loose blouses. They too had the white wide-brimmed felt hats or skull-caps.

But what made the whole scene strikingly picturesque and different were the camels we saw from time to time against the background of wild hills. To the Englishman, camels in large quantities always savour of the East. We felt the proximity of Persia, Afghanistan, eastern countries the names of which are known to every English schoolboy. It was all a striking change from what we had seen hitherto.

And at last we steamed into Baku.

Here there was so much to be seen that we had planned to spend two days there. To have imagined it possible to see anything in less would have been nothing short of idiocy. As it was, we had a hard job and we should never have succeeded so far, had not the delegates put themselves to all sorts of inconveniences in order to do so. For two days we hustled from one part of the town to another, we snatched hurried meals and finally left Baku with a sad feeling that there was a great deal left unseen.

In Baku were the oilfields: world-famous, envied by many a foreign oil magnate, and at one time the property of foreign capitalists.

In Baku was the old town, of immense interest to all interested in ethnography; but we could only take a hasty glance at it!

In Baku were splendid oil-refineries, such as we could not hope to see elsewhere!

We arrived early in the morning; we had been warned the night before that we should have to be up and doing early if we wanted to make the most of our time. We were prepared for anything after our long and restful journey along the Caspian coast. We were all up and breakfasted by 6 a.m.

At the station we were met, as usual, by those who were going to be responsible for our entertainment and had drawn up a plan already of what we would have time to see. But Baku was a very special city; it had been through great trials in the past, and in the heart of it were to be found many men, now old, who had been through all the struggles before 1905 and after, and had been fortunate enough to be still alive to tell the tale. In Baku we were to be the guests of really unique personages: revolutionary fighters of Baku of over forty years' standing, who could tell us all we wanted to know: the Old Bolsheviks.

The Society of Old Bolsheviks was composed of all those revolutionary fighters who could boast of having been active in the working-class movement since before 1905. Incidentally, Professor Reusner, of whom I have written in a previous chapter was a member of the Society of Old Bolsheviks; also Boris, whose discussions with my father in Yessentuki my mother had so much enjoyed.

We could not have been put in the hands of more charming and solicitous hosts, and perhaps that is why we found it very hard indeed to part with the good friends we made in so short a time in that much-envied town.

We were taken to a bus, one of very few that coursed the streets in those days of 1932. The tram was the commoner vehicle.

The bus took us straight to the oilfields, a huge forest of derricks.

My description can be only impressionist. I do not remember exactly how we approached the oilfields. My attention in the bus was often distracted, and rightly, for I was not a delegate but merely the interpreter, because from time to time I was called upon to translate the narratives one of our hosts was telling to those of the delegates sitting near enough to hear. I only know that when we alighted from the bus, we found ourselves standing very close to a derrick, on soft, black ground, and that the softness and blackness and oiliness of that ground seemed to increase as we approached it.

As usual, my inattentive mind strayed to the bright brown boots of one of the miners, which I had noticed he kept very clean all the time we had been travelling; I wondered if he would feel very sore at the complete ruination of them. Needless to say, the others did not appear to notice such minor things.

We tramped over those oily stretches, sometimes crossing the impassable bits on boards or even bridges, with hand-rails. We saw the old machinery, side by side with the new. I cannot describe it. It would take months of study to be able to write about such things, much less to understand the whole process thoroughly. It was perhaps the only industrial enterprise, too, where our British workers found themselves at a loss to ask questions of a technical nature or to make comparisons.

The delegates asked questions here and there as to the hours and conditions of work and the wages paid.

The work was not easy; it was hard tramping over the oilfields. Special clothing was required by the workmen, and on all these questions the foreign delegates met with replies which satisfied them. Comparisons were offered between conditions in 1932 and conditions before the October Revolution in 1917. We had every reason to believe the infor-

mation we were given. There cannot fail to be improvements for working men in a land run by workers, where no profits go to a few, and more so when industry is run by their own countrymen and not by foreign capitalists who have little care and less interest in the people of another nation whom they are exploiting.

From the oilfields we carried an alarming amount of oil-laden mud into the bus, which took us off again, far back to the town and through it to the old homes, typical of those in which the working inhabitants of Baku lived in olden days. As we travelled back, we wondered how those workers had tramped day after day from their homes through the town and over the oilfields to get to their particular derricks.

We approached the old part of the town. Some of the houses were still in occupation, but the majority were in ruins.

The old houses had been built on the hill-side. They all had flat roofs and lay in terraces. Sometimes one house leaned against the house in front a little lower down the hill. Sometimes there was a passage between, but not wide enough for any vehicle to pass. Many of them consisted entirely of the one room. The outer walls were whitewashed to give partial protection from the glare of the sun. They reminded me of pictures of houses in Jerusalem in children's books based on stories and parables from the New Testament.

But this was 1932! These were the homes in which men working for British capitalists were allowed to live despite the huge profits they provided out of the labour of their hands. It required the advent of the October Revolution to clear them away; it was taking time to get rid of the remains of the former system; no industrial workers now lived in those houses, though a few people still occupied them. It was taking time to provide the vast, dense population of Baku with good homes. But the process was going forward rapidly, not only in Baku but throughout the whole of the Soviet Union_n

It was inevitable, in such a vast country, with such huge tasks, that something of the old should still remain in 1932.

We entered the bus again and were driven off to another part of the town. Along a new road, through which we drove, with young trees as usual planted along the pavements in avenues, we saw new two-storied houses, much resembling suburban villas, each with a garden apiece. We passed through perhaps a dozen streets of houses of this type. Two families occupied each house. They had a freshness about them, these houses, that was like suburbia; there was nothing suburban about the spirit of those who lived there.

We did not enter any of these houses, but hurried on to the outskirts of the town, where huge blocks of flats similar to those in which I lived in Moscow afforded homes to many hundreds of industrial workers.

We entered one. It differed little from those we had already seen in Moscow. As usual there was electric light. As usual, so far, there was no gas laid on. But the water-supply and drainage, the bathrooms, ventilation and central heating were just as perfect.

We did not stay long; there was no need. Besides, Baku had more things of special interest to reveal. Moreover, we had not yet dined, although it was well after mid-day.

The bus hurried us off to the "Intourist" hotel, not far from Baku station, where we took a very hurried meal.

The bus, our every-ready servant, was waiting for us outside when we had finished.

We set off at a great rate, through the narrow streets of Baku old town, over the cobbles, over granite blocks, and finally climbing, as we approached the hillside, and crunching over the wide gravel roads of the new town.

We drew up at a huge club-house. It was one of the six new clubs specially built for the Baku people. There were other clubs in the town we had passed, established in large converted buildings, but we had seen such clubs in Moscow,

and we were keen to see in Baku those things we would not find elsewhere quite the same.

The club-house was very large. It had a huge hall, as is usual in all clubs: the hall had its stage, with pleasing curtains and safety curtain, and its screen for films. It had its own first-class projector and operators. There films were shown every evening when there were no concerts or theatrical performances or meetings. There was something on every night, and frequent lectures on subjects of interest.

There was a dining-room, because it must be remembered that throughout industry in the Soviet Union, machinery was being put to the highest pressure; in most factories there were three shifts working each day and those who were on the night shifts might want to use the club-house in the daytime, and the dining-room, we were told, was in constant use.

There were rooms for study, and the classes held there covered a multitude of interesting subjects: history of Baku, history of the working-class movement in Russia; first-aid classes, the *Osoaviakhim* classes; classes on comparative religions and several others.

There was the "Lenin Corner", a room set aside, as in all clubs, for those who wished for quiet reading. It was very large in this new club and the whole atmosphere and furnishings were conducive to concentrated study. Moreover, a variety of newspapers in a large number of different languages were carefully filed on sticks. For the population of Baku consisted of many different nationalities. It was a truly cosmopolitan town.

There was a library with a choice variety of books: Russian and European classics, technical and scientific books, novels of contemporary Soviet writers, works of Soviet and Tsarist poets. The books were in several languages: Armenian, Georgian, Russian, Hebrew, English, German, French and so on.

I remember nothing of the food provided for us at tea-

time. I can recall the samovar, probably because I was tired of translating and wanted drink more than anything else by that time. I remember the heat of Baku had been a little too much for me that day, and that my head ached. For me this was a most unusual thing.

After tea we went round the rest of the club. We found the games room, and there was little enough lacking there: billiards, chess, draughts and dominoes, the great pleasures of Soviet people.

I do not remember enquiring about out-door games. True it was that there were people playing volley-ball in the field alongside. Moreover, I am pretty sure that football was played in Baku in those days. Being a town on the shores of the Caspian, water sports would be indulged in.

On the whole, it was a splendid home of culture, and the people of Baku, with whom we came in contact, were very proud of their new clubs and always made a point of asking us whether we had seen them.

The bus took us into the town, and on the left side of the town facing the sea, we were taken to peep at another club. It was similar to the first in many respects, so we hurried through it as the day was wearing on. But the great pride of this particular club was its huge terrace, with deck-chairs, trestle-beds, wicker tables and chairs, all there for those who chose to sit at their leisure gazing over the sea or to Ue and bask in the hot sunshine!

It was already the cool of the evening. We felt the pleasure of this terrace at that time of the day more, perhaps, because we were truly tired and the restful beauty of the sea and the waning sunlight calmed our over-excited minds and bodies. It was good to rest there; I could have stayed for hours.

We were hurried off again to a quick supper and the next part of the programme. We were to see the first act of a play at the Jewish theatre. Every nationality represented in Baku **had its theatre**. I had seen this particular play before, acted in

Moscow, and I knew the plot. It was a very funny comedy and brilliaiidly acted, as the Jewish race can act.

But when the curtain dropped on the first act we hurried off again. We were only able to have glimpses of some sides of life in Baku. And actually, for the delegates, tired as they probably were, to sit through a whole show performed in a foreign language which even their interpreters did not understand, would have been too much of a good thing. Our hosts had realised that, without our telling them.

Then came the last part of the day's programme. A visit to a second theatre, where we would see the second act of an Armenian show, at the Armenian National Theatre. There we could appreciate the fact of the theatre existing itself, but we were completely lost in other respects. For not only was the language incomprehensible but the manner of acting something totally unfamiliar. Armenian acting, for the layman, is as difficult to understand as Armenian music. But the people present thoroughly enjoyed it, as witnessed by the great applause when the curtain fell, in which we also joined. We might not understand, but we were very appreciative.

And so our first day ended in Baku. We were quite exhausted but thoroughly satisfied that we had seen everything humanly possible in the time.

I awoke in the morning with a feeling of pleasures to come and the memory that I was still in Baku. I litde knew what a really hard day of work we interpreters had before us.

In the oilfields, we had seen the crude oil running along open channels to the pipelines. We were to see what happened to it after that.

We set off, refreshed from a long night's rest, and arrived at the oil-refineries.

Here we met a young woman, who took charge of us. She was one of the directors of the works; she spoke a few words of English; she had worked right through the oil-refining industry from the bottom rung of the ladder. I was surprised to see such a young woman at the head of industry

and my surprise was shared by the delegates. She was very charming, she had a strong almost beautiful face, and perhaps it was the combination of this and her efficiency that astonished us more almost than anything else in Baku.

She personally conducted us through every process of the refineries. I cannot hope to describe anything of the technical side. All I can say is that the oil production of the Soviet Union must be in expert hands. For one thing, this industry was the first to fulfil the Five Year Plan, in something like eighteen months less than the time stipulated in the plan.

We watched the refining and distilling with unskilled minds. Here again, we were in deep water, and could not hope to take in the whole of the different processes, or to draw comparisons with any works of the kind in our own country.

But after walking round with the woman director, we could not but admit that women in the Soviet Union are among the foremost brains of the country in every sphere of life. We had seen women occupying high places in other parts. But this beat everything.

From the refineries we were conducted to an open square, where a number of men and women from the works had arranged a gathering for all those who wished to meet the British delegates. There, messages of welcome were given by representatives of the Baku people and the British delegates were invited to ask questions. There was a good exchange of experiences between these workers from such vastly differing countries.

One or two of the British delegates addressed the crowd. They gave their impressions of what they had seen in Baku; they thanked the working people for their warm welcome and hospitality. I was proud to hear them as they spoke with the enthusiasm of men whose hearts have been deeply moved.

The translation of these speeches and questions took some time. I suffered agonies at the work I had to do. Speaking in public is something I am not cut out for, but it was easier for me to translate into Russian the speeches of the British

workers, and I undertook that rather than the reverse. The translations of the Soviet speakers into English was carried out by the second interpreter.

It was late when we finally arrived at a little restaurant on the water-front and dined. It was cool there and pleasant, after the heat and the work translating in the blazing *sini*.

There were two more visits we paid in Baku. One was specially arranged because the Old Baku Bolsheviks had heard we had a garment-worker from the East End of London among the delegates, and they wanted her to see a factory where women worked happily in good and healthy conditions. It was an old factory, and we found over a hundred women in a large, airy room, working at electrically-run sewing machines, turning out parts of garments. They worked a seven-hour day in most cases, which, incidentally, as compared with other European countries, is a very small number of hours for the type of work they were doing; they were paid at piece rates, more being paid per unit for complicated work and less for the simpler pieces.

It was strange to see so many women with long hair, many of them with it dressed in numerous little black plaits all round the head, Armenian-fashion. There were all sorts of little points about their dress that marked them as Armenians, Greeks, Georgians. Many of them were Eastern types; there were even some Persian and Turkish women. Together they made a very pleasing spectacle.

They, too, had their factory dining-rooms, club, criche and kindergarten, like their sisters in Moscow. They, too, enjoyed all the advantages extended to women in the Land of Socialism.

Here everything had been done to bring improvements into what was a factory of the old type. The windows had been enlarged, the ventilation improved. Electricity had been installed for lighting and as power to run the sewing-machines. There had been nothing of the sort in Tsarist days.

Outside in the yard, where we met a new shift of women coming on to work, we were fairly mobbed. They clamoured round us wanting to know all about us. In the end, they were persuaded to send their representatives to interview the delegates in a more organised fashion. We entered a largish office with these representatives. The delegates were fairly pelted with questions. It was almost with difficulty that we extricated ourselves finally, having given the best possible answers of which the delegates were capable. All this conversation had to be translated from the one language to the other. It was another bit of really hard work.

There was one more place we visited; without going there we could hardly be said to have seen Baku. It was the gardens, in the midst of which was a memorial to those twenty-six Baku commissars, the flower of the revolutionary fighters of Baku, who were so foully shot when the working men and women of Baku were trying to hold on against the combined attack of Russian and foreign landlords and industrialists. We translated the inscription for the British delegates. As I read, my eye caught a happy sight in the distance, where a large number of toddlers were paddling in the pool made by a fountain some fifty yards away.

As we walked away, I thought of the French Communards who He buried in the Père Lachaise Cemetery. I thought of the Kremlin wall and the revolutionaries buried there. I thought of the monument to the dead in Leningrad; the memory of those who died to bring into being this great new world of Socialism would for ever remain in the hearts and minds of all true Socialists.

But the Baku Bolsheviks had no intention of sending us back with sad memories. Socialism was triumphing in the Soviet Union; in some spheres it had triumphed already. They had prepared a splendid send-off for us; they were going to show us how the people of the Soviet Union can celebrate an auspicious occasion.

We were invited in the evening to a special banquet pre-

pared in honour of the British delegates by the Society of Old Bolsheviks of Baku.

We arrived, left our hats and coats in the vestibule, and entered the dining-room. The table was a joy to behold and beautifully arranged down to the smallest detail.

There were no formalities, no conventions to be observed. Instead, we were welcomed by a band of good hearty honest folk intent upon entertaining the British guests in the finest manner possible.

The food was excellent and the wine and vodka flowed.

Now vodka is all right for those who can take it. I even went beyond the limits of my work to warn the delegates against it, or at least to "go easy" with it. I think they must have taken my advice. Certainly they all behaved very well to the end. Or is it they have good heads, these representatives of the British working class?

There was little Igor had not taught me about the relative strengths of Soviet wines and spirits. And there were one or two things I had learned about Soviet etiquette. If I was shy and backward, I would be surrounded with the attentions of all these hospitable people near to me, and would find myself being pressed to eat and drink more than I wanted.

I plunged firmly into the meal, setting the example to the rest. I noticed that the second interpreter knew a thing or two as well. We exchanged winks.

From that time onwards, we were left severely alone, since it was obvious we needed no pressing. And from that time onwards we left the vodka severely alone, and drank only as much of the wine as we wanted to. So, as one might say, the tone was set, as far as we were concerned.

When everyone was feeling fully at home, and the first inevitable stiffness had worn off, the toasts began. Every toast had to be translated, and I and my friend arrived at the same agreement as before. I would translate from English into Russian; she would do the rest.

I think it must have been the buoyant atmosphere of real,

good comradeship that kept me up that evening, for I was dead tired even before the banquet began. Yet there were many short speeches, and they all had to be translated.

It was amusing too. When either of us made a gaff, there were loud bursts of merriment from those Old Bolsheviks who knew both languages. They chipped us for our ignorance of the Russian language, and we and the delegates accused them of using the spirits from the oil-refineries to make the wine more potent. We had a good opportunity at the end, however, when an Old Bolshevik rose and in halting, solemn words offered a vote of thanks to the two interpreters. We were a bit overcome at the honour of being noticed; we had not been brought to the fore in this way on any other occasion. We hid our confusion by paying him back a little for the "gaffs" he made.

This may sound rude to the conventional-minded. It was not so in that little company. The feeling among us was very warm, and nobody understood why we responded as we did so well as those old, experienced Bolsheviks.

And so our two days in Baku came to an end. It was a good ending and a very warm send-off. We left with a feeling that we had formed a strong bond of affection with all those we had met in Baku; we could understand, too, a little of the happiness of those men who had come through so many hard and bitter experiences and had lived to see the culmination of their own efforts and the beginnings of the new world.

The journey back to Moscow seemed all too long, looked at in advance. We settled down, the next day, to planning how we should spend the time. A suggestion was made that we issue a wall paper, like those in the factories, in which we could give our impressions. Our intentions were good, but the wall paper's first issue left much to be desired. For one thing, we found there was not a single amateur artist among us. It was rather a solid-looking piece of make-up, when it finally got pasted up on the wall of the corridor of the train. We thought it a pretty poor replica of those fine, elaborately

decorated, well-cartooned wall papers we had seen so often.

We had set ourselves the task of putting up a fresh paper each day. To my memory we did produce a second issue, but after that, we found we preferred to chat over all we had seen.

In Moscow there were a few more visits to railway depots, to theatres, to museums and to the Mausoleum.

In addition, the delegate from the teachers of Australia put in some serious individual work studying Soviet educational institutions; but I was not her interpreter, so I cannot tell of that.

Neither did I accompany the delegates to Leningrad, where they would take the ship for London. Two interpreters were not required, and I preferred to drop out, keen enough to get back to my family and more particularly to my son, Lefly.

As for our guide, my fears concerning him were only too strongly corroborated three years later. He, too, even then, when he accompanied our delegation on that trip, had belonged to those subversive sections, who did all in their power to undermine the Soviet Government. It was not until 1937 that I read his name in the newspapers, as one of those brought before the court of law and tried for his anti-Soviet actions. The thought was confirmed in my mind that he sabotaged throughout. I have only mentioned in this chapter a few of those pieces of sabotage. With translators perhaps more efficient but less interested in the political side of life in the Soviet Union, he would have been able to sabotage more. No wonder he disliked his interpreters so much, and found difficulty in hiding his feelings.

I could feel no more sorrow for one who had had such a splendid opportunity of knowing the truth about the Soviet Union but who, for reasons best known to himself, preferred to act as he did.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I RETURN TO ENGLAND

IN THE AUTUMN of 1933, I was back again working at the Foreign Workers' Publishing House of the Soviet Union, doing regular translating work.

I had been through a hard year of work. Early in 1933 I had been one of those translators who worked hours of overtime, translating the proceedings of the trial of the British engineers brought before the Soviet Supreme Court for espionage and wrecking activities. It must be remembered that several of those involved in the trial spoke only Russian. The work had been a great strain on us all. With many an honest British man and woman in Moscow, I had been through a troublous period. It was an unpleasant thing to know that one's own fellow-countrymen had been involved in such a business.

My nervous system has always been my enemy, and now it had got the upper hand. Added to this, I was carrying my second child.

The Soviet doctor at the clinic I regularly attended whenever I felt in need of medical attention took me firmly in hand and packed me off to a rest-home, situated not more than fifteen miles from Moscow, but far enough away from the whirl of life.

I arrived one morning with my suitcase and was ushered into the hall of a regular country house, standing in about five acres of grounds, wooded at the back and set out in gardens and with a playing field at the front.

I was shown to the room I would occupy in company with two others. I was sorry not to be alone. I did not feel like being sociable.

I was then taken to the chief doctor.

I sat down in her reception room, smiled at her somewhat half-heartedly, and handed her my papers from the Moscow doctor. She was probably nearing forty, and had a firm, rounded chin, very steady eyes, and a pleasing expression in her face.

She put me through the examination to which nerve patients are usually subjected, and resumed her seat.

"So you are ill," she began, and I felt some sort of reply was necessary.

"Not really, I think," was my response.

"Then why have you come here?"

"Because I was instructed to by my doctor."

"Then you *are* ill," she persisted, "or he would not have sent you."

I was bored with the conversation, but did not say so.

"Well, my dear, we'll soon patch you up," was her next remark.

Still I had nothing to add to the conversation.

"Tell me, what is your trouble? Why did you first go to your doctor in Moscow?"

I related her the whole story. It was brief enough. No, I did not suffer from headaches. Neither did I feel inordinately tired, except when I really had nothing at all to do, or to interest me. Actually I didn't think I was ill. I just seemed incapable of concentrating on my work. I found people irritating. I wanted to get right away and see nobody for a time. I wanted, as I told her, to "run away".

"Suicide? Do you ever think of that?"

"Good lord, no," was my hearty response.

"But you want to run away?"

It sounded ridiculous, when she said it. How could I affirm her words. I dissolved into tears, probably of self-pity.

The doctor completely ignored me. But she looked at her papers. Then her next question came.

"And what else?"

"Oh, nothing." I had recovered myself.

"So that is all? But what about this baby of yours? Are you going to tell me you don't want it?"

"Why should I?" I again readily replied. "I like babies, at least, I like my own babies."

She smiled, perhaps at my qualification.

"That's all splendid. And we'll get you well in no time."

I nodded. Her remark seemed a bit superfluous I thought. She turned to her papers and examined the notes she had been making while she talked with me.

Finally she looked up, squared her shoulders and gave her verdict.

"Well, I know what we will do with you. Baths at a regular temperature every day. Regular meals, lots of sleep, some occupation if you like."

I told her I had brought some knitting with me. I was making Leffy warm gloves out of some old wool I had ripped from an old jacket.

"Then you can take your knitting upstairs at the times set aside for occupations. There is a woman in charge. She would be interested, too, in what you are doing."

I was not keen on displaying my knitting. For one thing, I am one of those knitters who never use a pattern. I would be at a complete loss to explain the intricacies of knitting in the Russian language. Moreover, I was not at all keen on sitting in a sort of "Dorcas society", with a crowd of other women. I decided I had better have it all out at once.

"Must I go with the others, when I knit? Is it part of the regime?"

"You may do as you please about it. Only you will not knit between 2 and 4 p.m. Those are the 'dead hours'; everybody has to rest, lying down on the beds provided."

That suited me. I tried it on further.

"I wish I hadn't got to share a room. But I suppose I must?"

"I'm afraid you must. Be sensible about it. It is better for you to be with others. You will see so for yourself."

Perhaps she knew best. At any rate, I had no theory about it.

It is hardly necessary to go into all the details of life in the rest-home. I found one of the women who shared the room with me not the best companion in the world. But I found, too, that having to listen to the tales of her "sufferings", which seemed to me chiefly imaginary, took my mind off my own condition. Moreover, the more I mixed in her company, the more I decided I was a thoroughly healthy individual.

I mentioned this fact to the doctor on the fourth day, when I found myself acting as a delegate from myself and the other woman in our room. I was petitioning for steps to be taken about our "pest", as we disgracefully referred to the "suffering" one. She refused to keep the window open as much as we wanted, because she had developed a bad tooth.

"I see you're improving already, if you consider yourself a healthy individual. But I won't pat you on the back yet. You'll have to stay out your time here, now you have come. I'll see about the windows. Of course they must be open all the time."

I thanked her.

"And, by the way, you mothers are all the same. If you would only stick to a sensible regime at home, you would never find yourselves hidden away in rest-homes. All you need is regular work, regular long hours out of doors, regular long hours of sleep. And blank refusals to do more than the hours of work stipulated by the trade unions."

That was plain speaking, anyhow, I thought. No injections of strychnine, no doping at all in fact. Just tepid baths every day, sleep, fresh air, and a strict regime. I knew in advance I would never stick to the regular fresh air or the sleep. Life was far too interesting, and there was far too much to see and do.

The days went by, and I adhered strictly to the regime.

After the first week, as I was sitting on a bench in the garden, knitting, a voice behind me said:

"Excuse me, may I sit and talk with you?"

I recognised the middle-aged man who had a place next to mine at the dining-table. We had never exchanged a word, merely nodded or smiled occasionally. I had long ago realised that he originated in that section of Tsarist society that in the Soviet Union is usually described as the "intelligentsia". I invited him to talk.

"My name is Eugene Verbitsky," he began. "May I know yours?" He spoke in the rather stiff and formal way that his type has never lost. Igor's manner of speaking changed little under Soviet conditions, though his outlook changed a great deal, and he learned to mix with people very well.

I told him my name, both the single and married. I also explained, knowing he would ask in any case, that I was English.

He was very interested and plied me with questions.

We chatted for a long time. Often the conversation turned on subjects about which I knew very little. Had I been an English University woman, I should have made a better conversationalist for him on literature and art. It was still more than I could do to support a conversation on literature and art. I explained my feelings on the matter.

He merely smiled and turned to the subject of music. Here, perhaps, I was on safer ground, but not much. I have always loved music, but have never studied it. In the Soviet Union, because good music is so easily accessible to ordinary people, I had heard a great deal. I loved Russian opera and especially my favourite: Tchaikovsky's music to Poushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. I had learned to appreciate Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, neither of whom I had heard in England. My ear had even been trained a little to appreciate some of the contemporary composers, Prokofieff, for instance. But to Dr. Verbitsky, I made no bones of the fact that I had no systematic knowledge of music.

I can see his smile now as I recall his remark when I said as much. It was a smile mingled with scorn.

3H *AN ENGLISHWOMAN IN THE U.S.S.R.*

"There used to be a lot of nonsense talked about music years ago, when people who called themselves 'musical' sat around and talked politely in their salons of things about which they knew nothing."

Rather superior, I thought, but he should know. He was one of those who "sat around". But no doubt he too appreciated the forcible wrenching off of that mask of gentility that concealed so much of the uncouth side of Russian society in Tsarist days.

Another time we talked of our respective "illnesses", as patients in a rest-home will. I braced myself to ask him how it was he, too, was tucked away in that rest-home.

"What about yourself?" he parried. "I would never have credited you with nerves!"

"Oh, me? The doctor says I'm like all mothers. Don't know when to stop working and can't organise myself properly."

"Well, in some ways my case is like yours. Neither can I organise myself properly. You see, I like to paint; I dabble a bit in music; I even compose a little. By the time I have satisfied all those more or less creative instincts of mine, I have lost a great deal of sleep and fresh air, very often. Some people cannot afford to lose their sleep consistently. So I get ill, as you do."

There is nothing so tempting as doing what affords one pleasure. I could understand his meaning very well.

"And really and truly you prefer painting and music to being a doctor, I suppose," I went on, hardly realising how near I had got to the truth.

"That's about it," he replied.

"Do you often spend your time in rest-homes?" I asked again.

"Actually, I suppose, rather a lot of time. You see, I happen to be a first-class surgeon. A surgeon must not have nerves. But I come from a family that is full of nervous disorders. Mine are not serious, but I am constantly under medical inspection. All Soviet doctors are, just like you and the rest."

That was an aspect I had not thought of.

"But you are more fortunate than me. You don't burst into tears."

"I am less fortunate," was his quiet reply. "I tend to burst into tempers. They are worse. Imagine a Soviet doctor losing his temper! It would be a terrible example to his patients. I have to get to a rest-home before I get so tired that I want to lose my temper/'

"We nervous subjects are rather like maniacs, I suppose, aren't we?"

"First of all, I would not call either you or myself a nervous subject. And as for the proximity of nerves to mania, that is a question that has yet to be decided," he remarked professionally, and he smiled, as though to banish such ideas from my head.

He talked a lot more with me on different occasions. He spent some of his working hours at the Institute of Experimental Medicine, and was confident that Soviet medicine had gone very far and would surpass all other countries.

We found ourselves forming something of a united front upstairs in the common room on musical grounds.

In the evenings, several of the patients would gather there to play draughts, chess and dominoes. There was a baby grand piano there, and several instruments.

On rare occasions Dr. Verbitsky would play short pieces from Chopin and songs from Schumann. Once or twice he sang some of Tchaikovsky's romances. But it was not often he had the opportunity. The more assertive of the patients preferred the guitar or the balalaika, and the rest showed no particular preference.

With so many "neutrals" about, I thought of a plan to get the piano played oftener. I discovered gradually all those in the rest-home who liked to hear the piano played. They took upon themselves, every alternate evening, to invite Dr. Verbitsky to sing or play to us.

It worked. The piano was played every evening for a short

period, and for the rest of the time the balalaika and guitar could hold the field. Dr. Verbitsky himself was willing enough to play chess with anybody who would take him on, and apparently his concentration on the game shut out the strumming, of which he was not fond.

For me it was a small additional pleasure, this music in the evenings. The doctor had a good baritone voice; he sang unaffectedly and melodiously.

I had entered the rest-home on October 3. I left it on November 19. I was feeling well and strong again, and tears were a thing of the dismal past. It was good to be home again.

For the next few months I remained at home, taking in translations from the Publishing House and sending them back when completed. I missed the company of those at the office, but there grew up a closer friendship with my friend Freda, an English woman, married to a Russian, who had lived in the Soviet Union since 1932. She, too, was in the same position as I was myself, for she was expecting her first child. We had much to chatter about in common.

This friendship lasted firm and strong till the day I left Moscow, and we were to go through many joys, for the country's difficulties were almost at an end, and the days of prosperity were very near.

It is of these days that I would specially like to write since Freda calls them back to my mind, perhaps more than anyone else there. She had come through all those difficult years much as I had.

The shops of Moscow were filling up rapidly with all the good things we had not enjoyed for some time, the fruits of those years of strenuous toil in the First and Second Five Year Plans. Together with the rest of the population of the Soviet Union we delighted in all the new shops that began to open. At first they flourished side by side with the old co-operative shops. Later there was hardly an old co-operative shop to be seen; they had all been replaced or rebuilt, and the shops as a whole became unrecognisable.

Goods appeared on the market which we had long ago dropped out of our household calculations: confectionery, sweet sugar-biscuits, fresh fruit. To be able to buy as much of anything as we wanted to was wonderful indeed. The rationing was finished for all time. With it had disappeared the *Insnab* (Foreign Provision Shops), the *Torgsin*, all those shops which were more or less outside our daily calculations, and intended chiefly for foreign specialists.

New shops selling dairy produce appeared. There we could buy all that we had been in the habit of obtaining from the shops to which we were attached with our ration cards, together with the little extras from private peasants on the open markets.

Now, on the open markets, side by side with the few remaining individual peasants, there were stalls of collective-farm produce. The collective farmers sold their goods at prices fixed by the management of the farm; it was rare to find that one collective farm charged more than another. On the other hand, the individual peasants, and their number was steadily decreasing, found they could no longer charge the high prices of former days, when they had held the field. The collective farms had come into their own. So all that remained now of individual farming died a natural death right there at the place where dairy produce and vegetables were on sale, in the markets. The doom of individual farming had been sealed at the very source, for the old farming methods could not hope to compete with the new machines. Moreover, nobody in the towns wanted to buy milk from cows kept in uncertain conditions, when they knew the collective-farm cows were housed and fed better and the methods used on collective farms were more hygienic than in the homes of the peasants, working individually.

Collective farming had triumphed. The collective farmers were sure of it, and nobody in the towns doubted the fact for one moment.

Improvements were to be seen all round, but nothing

showed up so much as these fine new shops. Freda lived in the centre of the town. She would telephone to tell me of all the new articles on sale. Not all the shops had everything as yet. The big shops, the new shops, were the first to be supplied. The telephone bell would ring:

"Hullo," I would reply.

"Violet, do come over," Freda's voice persuaded from the other end. "They've got the most marvellous aluminium saucepans in the *Univermag* (literally, universal shop, or in good American—department store), on the Petrovka."

"Oh, how much are they?" I asked warily.

"Very reasonable, I assure you, my dear," she replied.

"And you'll lend me the money, if you're lying," was my response. "I'm coming right over now."

Time and time again she would wheedle me away from my work on some excuse of this kind. She was perpetually on the look-out for the best for her son, whom she positively adored. As George was the same age, anything that was good for her son, was good for my George. And she never hesitated to rate me if I objected to buying it.

Without Freda, who was the born housewife, I should perhaps never have noticed half the rapid changes. I was never much of a shopper, while Freda loved rummaging round the shops.

And so life went on, merrily enough. But there was a huge cloud which hung over us all, in spite of our endeavours to forget it.

The trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and others, left a trail behind that it took some time to clear up. Living in Moscow during 1937, one could not avoid feeling the tense atmosphere. Many persons were arrested. In the university world, among students and lecturers, it was perhaps more noticeable to me than anywhere else.

There was never any doubt in the minds of all with whom I met that the country could not afford to allow at large people whom it could not trust, people who had joined the

counter-revolutionary camp, whether deliberately or because they had been misguided into believing they were doing the right thing.

And so, with all the prosperity and happiness there for all to enjoy, there was still work to be done.

I remember, in particular, the case of one young woman whom both Freda and I knew well. I remember the shock of hearing she had been arrested. She had committed crimes against the state that were positively hair-raising. She was arrested with others. She was questioned. It was obvious to us that only her ignorance had put her where she was; out of step with the rest of the population, in step with counter-revolution. She was not sent to prison, nor to exile. She was simply put to work in a factory with working women. She had previously worked in an office. She inevitably had to work as an unskilled employee, for she knew nothing of factory life.

I met her on Gorky Street not more than a couple of months after she was arrested. She came over to me, a little embarrassed, but otherwise naturally enough.

"Whoever thought of finding you here?" was my first remark, relief in my tone. For if she was now free, she must have been exonerated. It was a relief, not because to be in gaol is any great suffering to the individual, but because of the knowledge that if she were in gaol, she must be a counter-revolutionary.

"Well, I am here," was her reply. And to cover up the embarrassment she obviously still felt, she took out her cigarettes and offered me one.

"And you are doing well, Millie, judging by the cigarettes."

She broke right through the ice of preliminaries and came to the point.

"I was a fool. But I didn't realise what I was doing. You know, I didn't realise I was helping the opposition."

"Well, I thought as much," I said, encouragingly. "But we were all very alarmed when you got yourself arrested."

"Not more alarmed than I was. When you come to think of it, it is a terrible thing to be arrested by the authorities of a workers' government, isn't it?"

I saw no reason to reply.

"But, you know," she went on, "in a way I'm glad it all happened. I'm not so good in an office. But in the factory, work is different. You can get on. I'm a skilled hand now, and earning good wages. And nobody has ever thrown it up in my face that I was arrested."

"Why should they?" I enquired, rather priggishly I thought as the words slipped out.

"Oh, but the feeling ran very high! In a way, they ought to have lynched me," she went on.

I thought she was going a bit far. But then, I remembered the espionage and the wrecking, the slaughtered cattle, caused by the kulaks. Indeed, my own feelings had run high. It required a highly educated public not at least to "throw it up in her face" that she had been arrested.

"There are no people so generous-spirited as working men and women when they come into their own," was the only reply I could make.

She still had one sorrow. Her husband had been up to the neck in opposition activities. He had been exiled. She wrote regularly to him and was to visit him in the summertime for two weeks. She was very happy at the prospect.

She told me he would have to remain where he was and work there for three years. After that he would be free and allowed to go and work where he pleased. He was not in prison, nor in any sort of confinement. He was just not allowed to live in any town but the one to which he had been sent.

What sort of punishment is that? The only kind that works for the good of all concerned, including the criminal.

There was another case I knew of. It concerned one of the translators in the Foreign Workers Co-operative Publishing House. He had been one of the best translators in the

organisation, but it had been necessary to exile him, too, for one year. I do not know what occupation he had in the place to which he was exiled. The best occupation is usually to be thrown neck and crop into a factory full of healthy minded working men and women. I have no doubt that is all that happened to him. Since I have returned to England, I have heard that he is again working as a translator in Moscow, occupying a position similar to that which he left when arrested.

Moreover, it is common knowledge that Professor Ramzin, who was one of the first specialists in the Soviet Union to be arrested for sabotage, was to be seen, not many years later, occupying one of the most important posts in an industrial undertaking in Moscow.

True, these arrests marred the prosperity and happiness that we could have enjoyed wholeheartedly had they not occurred. But nobody in the Soviet Union regarded them as in any way excessive, unnecessary or brutal.

The method of correction, more suitable than punishment to a Socialist society, is the one most resorted to. It is rare that any man in that country pays the highest penalty.

As for arrested people, no stigma ever remains on them after they have been through the period of correction; they take their place again in Soviet society, and there is nobody to point a finger at them.

And so, that last year in Moscow, except for a slight shade, was one where wages were rapidly increasing with the equally rapid drop in prices. Freda's voice still came to me over the telephone, enticing me to be out and buying:

"Violet, there is the most wonderful cut glass in the *Khmstal* (meaning Crystal, the glassware and china shops) shop, the new one, on the Gorky Street."

"And what, may I ask, do I want with cut glass? I'm not giving a banquet yet!" was my pleasant response.

"But, Violet, they're beautiful, and they cost so little. Really, the price is quite reasonable."

It must have been, if Freda said so, for she was, moreover, a shrewd shopper.

"All right," I hurled back at her. "And now what do you want me to do? Don't you know I'm translating a text-book, and I'll never get it finished?"

"Please, do come," she wheedled. "And I'll make you a nice strong cup of tea, with milk in."

It was an old piece of bribery I was accustomed to. It had really lost its charm since there was so much tea about. Still, she certainly did make the best cup of tea procurable in Moscow.

And so she won again.

There was one other occasion when she phoned, her voice positively trembling with excitement.

"Violet, I've got some coffee!"

"Who sent it?" was my automatic reply. Sometimes we received coffee from our relatives abroad. Freda's mother kept her supplied at rare intervals.

"Nobody sent it. I bought it!"

"No, you're kidding!"

"Now, I'm not as mean as all that, knowing how you hanker after coffee. Truly I bought it. It's all over the place. But come over to me. We'll go and buy some."

I called in at my local shop on my way to her. Sure enough, there were real coffee beans, and I could hardly believe my eyes. But I continued on my way to Freda.

And so everything improved. Not only could one buy all the ordinary, everyday things of life, but the luxuries arrived too. Silk stockings, fine linens, cut glass, excellent perfumes which roused considerable interest at the Paris Exhibition in 1937.

But the shops were not all. The streets were paved with asphalt. All those tricky corners trying to the jaded nerves of the bus-drivers vanished in the course of a year. Huge, sweeping curves and open squares, very modern and pleasing to the eye, brought large sections of the town into line with

the modernity of industry and agriculture. The "B" boulevard, the outer ring round Moscow, completely changed its appearance. It became a wide, sweeping road with rows of trolley-buses coursing down it at what seemed an enormous speed. I thought often of that first journey of mine over cobble-stones, first in a drozhky and then in a tram, labouring my way to the maternity hospital in 1928. Now one could travel in a trolley-bus the same distance, in seven minutes; it had taken me forty minutes.

And the Moscow underground. I cannot say how many times Freda and I took our little joint family of three up and down, showing them all the sights, all the beauties of the different stations. It has been described thousands of times; I will not describe it again. It brought several parts of Moscow so very close, and made all the difference in the world to communications.

And the long trolley-bus routes right out of Moscow, over asphalted roads, for as far as seventeen miles.

Could all this have been achieved anywhere else in the world? Does the Soviet Union not deserve the admiration of all who are not too mean-spirited to recognise its triumph?

The Soviet Union I left was a country years in advance of any other country in the world. Think of those great achievements of world importance: the flight to America via the North Pole; the expedition to the North Pole and the drift on the ice-floe; the opening up of the great new Arctic sea-ports like Igarka; all those wonderful additional feats, which I will not enumerate.

And there was a riot of dancing and playing. There was a new burst of poetry and music and the arts. Soviet musicians and athletes were competing already with their contemporaries in foreign lands and carrying off prizes.

It was a grand country, this Soviet Union that I left behind, and for all the pull towards my native land, this England, I felt I could not help being broken-hearted at leaving

so many good friends behind, so many with whom I had been through good and bad.

Then why did I leave it?

It is not easy to explain. For one thing, I am conscious that many who pick up this book and turn its pages will shrug their shoulders and say that if I left the Soviet Union, there must be something wrong with it. I would prefer them to indulge in the shrug, if they must, and seek the wrong, if wrong there has to be, not in the Soviet Union or the system of government there, but rather in me, myself.

I first went to the Soviet Union to see and try to understand. In 1935, years before I finally made the break, I had decided not to stay. My intentions were no secret to those who knew me there. If I remained so long after that, it was because I wanted to "see it through", to see the complete change over to Socialism, the triumph of Socialist industry and agriculture. But I felt that my real work could only be in England.

As for my two sons, they are independent spirited children, like all children brought up in healthy schools and healthy surroundings. There was no reason for me to be sentimental about them and, being so, to put them into a position which would make life difficult for them.

The reasoning of the new world can find little understanding among the conventions of the old.

I left my boys in a boarding school near Moscow. Igor and I made the decision together. For the time being, it would be best. Their schoolmates were Russians, Ukrainians, Siberians; German children of Communist parents, brought there to be in safety from Hitler fascism and barbarism. To that school, too, were taken a number of young Spanish children, saved from the bombs of German and Italian planes.

In a very similar school I understand Paul Robeson has left his son for some time to be safe from the American colour-bar.

Last year my sons returned to their father's home in Moscow, and I am convinced that with him they are happier there

I RETURN TO ENGLAND

in the Soviet Union than anywhere else in the world. It would have been nothing short of cruelty to bring two young Russian-speaking, Russian-bred boys here to England, where feeling against "foreigners" runs so high even in peace time. With the Soviet Union's reputation ever at the mercy of its enemies here, no Soviet child could ever be happy.

Since war broke out last year I have been more than ever thankful for our wise decision. There is more safety in the Soviet Union against wars than anywhere else in the world. My sons are living in a land that will for ever strive to live in peace and prosperity, in a land which offers golden opportunities to the growing generation.

