People of the Steppes

THE KAZAK RIDES WITH A SMALL HOODED EAGLE ON HIS WRIST.

PEOPLE OF THE STEPPES

BY

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FOREWORD

THIS book, though it may provide propaganda for those who choose to misunderstand it, is in no sense a political work. People, good and bad, of all parties, are set down in it just as they appeared to the author, and when they speak it is with their own voice, not with his. It deals with a phase in the development of the Union of Soviet Republics which is happily past now, the phase of the first recovery from the famine and of the first great expansion of private enterprise known as the New Economic Policy.

In 1922 and the beginning of 1923, the period of the book, there was a second civil war in progress, bloodless, but more deadly and desperate than the fight against the armies of Kolchak and Denikin. This was the struggle against the old ideas, against the psychology of enslavement, against all the evil heritage of the past, which was being fought out in men's minds, in the minds of Revolutionary, peasant and small trader alike. To-day we can say that the new order is winning at every point on the battle-front and that the enemy is in full retreat. Yet it is important to remember that this was not the case when the book was written, and still less so when the events described took place.

RALPH FOX.

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PEOPLE OF THE STEPPES

PART I

TARTARY AND THE WAY THITHER

IN the summer of 1922 a little band of Anglo-Saxon oddities was islanded in a small town upon the far south-eastern plain of Russia. Pacifists, Socialists, faithful Christians, rootless Intellectuals, misunderstood and misunderstanding, they were engaged in giving relief to the stricken peasants of the district. These were men and women of the Russian plain where it reaches towards Asia, dark-minded, stubborn of frame and spirit, lazy and primitive, the black earth of the steppe mingled with their clay, their blood shot with the dark strain of Mongol conquerors and Finnish aborigines. Visible in them were the jutting cheek-bones and narrow eyes of ancient ravishments, but there was also the true Russian type, tall and fair-bearded, with blue eyes of wandering loveliness.

A little way from the town, across the swift and shallow river, rose a bare brown ridge which was the first of the uplands rolling to the Urals and the plains of Asia. From the top of this hill, if you looked north, stretched the great steppe towards Europe, bare and burnt after the harvest, its monotony only

broken by the exotic green cupolas of scattered village churches and here and there by a stretch of purple forest land.

"Not Europe, not Asia, but Eurasia."

When I had been there about a fortnight, there came to me one evening the head of our Mission, tall, thin, clean-shaven and well-washed, benevolent pince-nez balanced delicately on the bridge of his long nose. He explained that over a month ago one of the Mission had been sent into Asia with a large sum of money in order to buy a hundred horses for the peasants. Since then nothing had been heard of him save one mutilated and unintelligible telegram. Would I be willing to go and seek him and, finding him, to hand over more money to continue the buying? Indeed I was only too willing. I begged him to tell me where to go and I would start at once. But Russia is a great country and there was some confusion in his mind as to whether the lost one had been sent to Uralsk in Europe or Aralsk in Asia, by the sea of that name. After a little consultation and some poring over the curious telegram, we decided for Aralskoe Moré in Turkestan. It seemed from this fragmentary document that the wanderer was at some place near there called Bouz, of whose existence we could find no trace on any map.

At four o'clock the next morning, with Alek, a Polish interpreter, I took the Tashkent train for Aralskoe Moré and mysterious Bouz. We had with us some £3,000, but were unarmed, and when we too had passed into the unknown and for weeks no word was heard from us, they began to fear we might have suffered some hurt and lost the money, so that a third expedition was already being talked of when they heard from us at last. Yet in Russia itself news

travels with marvellous rapidity without aid from post or telegraph, and though our journey had only been decided on a few hours before, by eight o'clock the whole town knew whither we were gone and what sum of money we had with us. But Alek and I, slumbering in our coupé, were happily unconscious of the interest in our movements.

Alek was a Polish emigrant who had returned from America after the Revolution. He was thin and beardless, his chin and high Slav cheek-bones blue with shaving. His shaven head and horn spectacles combined to make him appear some tall good-humoured gnome, while his decent American clothes, khaki shirt, black tie and cloth cap gave him the air of belonging to some grotesquely superior civilisation among the simple peasants and nomads with whom we henceforth mingled, a Martian invested by the Ford factories of Detroit with the mysteriously terrifying superiority of modern science. And for all his kindliness and good humour he did terrify them not a little.

We lit a Primus stove on the floor of the coupé to cook our breakfast, while the train of red and blue steel wagons, their many-chimneyed roofs strange to my eyes, grumbled on over the bare downs. Here was Cossack country on the very marches of Asia, something wilder and freer than the plains behind us. It is the country of the Ural and Orenburg Cossacks, full of bandit legends of Pugachov and his like, and of memories of bitter fighting with the horsemen of the Kirghiz.

As we drew on towards Orenburg in the afternoon the chief conductor came and sat with us. He was a very old man, weary and melancholy, battered by a world he could not understand, tossed from one hand to another, too weak to protest, too wretched

to be resigned. Long ago, he said, he had been in America. Alek, looking at him from the opposite corner through black-rimmed spectacles, was surprised. This old man in the long dirty smock and worn high boots had lived in America, and for all the impression it had made upon him he might never have left his native village.

"You were how long there?"

He took off his uniform cap and pondered. "A long time," he answered. "Three years. Four it may be, but indeed I forget. I was young then."

"You speak English?"

"Ah no, I have forgotten. But America is a wonderful country, though they are all idolaters there. You are lucky to be an American (this to me), they are all very rich."

"But I am English," I protested.

"It is all the same," he replied gravely. "I have been in many States, English and American, New York, Chicago, Pennsylvania. English and Americans are all rich. Only we Russians are poor."

Alek, who was a Communist, was all afire to hear that Americans were idolaters. "Do you believe, then?" he asked the old man.

"In God's name, I believe. The world was a good place while men still believed, and a chief conductor was a man of some importance. Now hearts have changed and I go in rags."

"Where are you from?"

"From Vilna, where over the great gate was an image of Our Lady. All men passing through that gate were forced to uncover before Her; even the Tsar must obey. But that is no longer the law and the world has gone awry."

Alek was scornful. "You put down all our troubles

to the fact that men no longer respect Our Lady of Vilna?"

"Of course. The young men of to-day are mad and have no soul."

How far will credulity go? I resolved to try him. "Near my home in England, comrade, is the shrine of a saint called St. Wilfred. It is reached through a very narrow opening and it is said that those who cannot pass through and kiss the shrine are barred from Heaven."

He shook his head. "In America I never heard that story. Yet no doubt you are right, for in no country is the way to Heaven easy. Have you yourself kissed the shrine?"

I assured him that I had done so, and he left us convinced that I had won salvation, but that Alek was damned. In a while he returned to know if I would write him a paper to the American Relief Administration at Ak Tiubinsk, bidding them give him twelve pairs of boots. I explained that I was not an American, nor a member of this organisation, but he did not believe me, and went away muttering "Amerikanets, Anglichainin, eto tozhe sam" (American, Englishman, it's all the same).

We laughed a little over this curious, old-fashioned railwayman, who had been to the New World and returned untouched by the new life he saw there. Because he did not understand? Undoubtedly. But what was there to understand? Only a strident voice, not a faith. Besides he had a faith already. Alek had also emigrated when still a boy in order to escape military service, going to Detroit, where his eldest brother was already established as a storekeeper. When he landed he wore his red peasant shirt outside his trousers, in the Russian way, and everybody made

fun of him. He tucked in his shirt and made his terms with America, but they were only conditional. However, he prospered, married a Polish girl of good education and himself went to school to learn all he might in the night-classes. When the Revolution came in 1917, like all his fellows, he sympathised with the Communists, seeming to hear for the first time the echoes of a real faith beneath the bellow of Democracy. One night he had been arrested and taken to gaol, where they found on him a ticket for a concert in aid of the funds of the local Communist branch. That was all, but they kept him in prison for a month, two burly detectives questioning him every day to try to drive him into some compromising admission. At the end of this time his brother succeeded in bailing him out, and tired of life in free America, Alek demanded to be repatriated with his wife, a request which was as willingly granted. On his return he joined the Communist Party with some of the fervour of a religious convert who has at last found peace and safety in faith.

This and much else he had told me before we came to Orenburg. Here the rolling downs give place to flat country again. Outside the town is a green forest of birch and ash, where are little pools of lily-covered water, with here and there a clearing where stands a peasant girl amid a patch of melons and sunflowers, one round white arm shading her eyes as she watches the train draw slowly by, the declining sun lighting its windows with golden fire. At last we came into the station over the swift-flowing River Ural, down which were floating the wide rafts of timber. The station is a long, shabby building of stone, over the main entrance the Soviet device of crossed hammer and sickle and, in large red letters, the stern command

of St. Paul, "He who does not work, neither shall he eat."

On the platform a curious, coloured crowd. Pale-faced, suffering peasants, many still wearing their winter sheepskins, heaped up among their wretched belongings. They were mute, unmoving, the large eyes fixed and resigned on the broad faces of the women, above the tangled fair beards of the men. Little children, half-naked and browned with dirt and the sun, were scratching the vermin from their bodies, while occasionally one or other of them, with a stomach unnaturally swollen, would start a miserable, piteous wailing. These were famine refugees, returning home after the harvest to the villages whence they had fled in terror the winter before.

But Orenburg, like Moscow and Tashkent, is one of the great capitals of the steppe, the capital also of the new Kirghiz Republic, and is half Asiatic. We saw men from Khiva, tall and clean-limbed, in blue felt khalats, their heads crowned with beautiful round hats of fox-fur. There were Kirghiz in drab camel cloth, each one carrying his short horseman's whip, their headgear a summer one of white felt, in shape like an Elizabethan pikeman's helmet and embroidered in blue or red. Bokhara Jews, dirty but curiously dignified, wearing khalats of silk and embroidered skull-caps, hurried along the platform, kettle in hand, seeking the hot-water tap. Out on the tracks to the right two devout Sarts from the cities of the south, "divine Bokhara or happy Samarkand," had spread their carpets between the metals, and were saying the first evening prayer, calm and unhurried. The train might start without them, but the prayer would be finished, the reverences made, the ablutions completed in all comeliness and decency.

Two ragged Christian imps called out no good to them and one of the Sarts rose and caught them, the other never lifting his head. Chastisement was swift and severe, and the Sart, unperturbed, returned to his interrupted prayer.

The first bell clanged, and the noisy crowd, noisy, that is, save for those in misery and those in prayer, began to jostle back to the wagons, the refugees alone staying unmoved, waiting for the cattle-trucks that were to carry them back to the roofless huts in the north. The two Sarts made their last reverence to Mecca, picked up their carpets and, just as the starting bell rang, clambered back over the metals to the train.

Now the train, leaving behind the "spreading" river, the Yaïk, our Ural, drew out on to the great steppe, the home of the Turks and Mongols, the noblest plain in the world, mother of nations and conquerors. Kubilai Khan, Emperor of China and half the world beside, enclosed in his palace a little field which he sowed with the grasses of the prairie, so that his children might remember and be humble before the mother of them all. Just here we were crossing the Kipchak, "emptiness," "space," as the Kirghiz call it, or more absolutely the Otlag, the grass prairie, for they have a word in their rich tongue to describe every shape and form of the vast steppe, most lovingly, most exactly.

Outside the town, perhaps a verst away, stands the walled mart, empty now, where once the caravans from farthest Asia brought in their merchandise, great strings of camels winding over the plains to the little town at the foot of the Urals where Europe meets Asia. It is a hollow square of dull red brick, the walls straight and unbroken, but inside little covered booths

THE HERDS OF HORSES, BRIGHT PATCHES OF BROWN, BLACK, AND WHITE.

for the merchants are built on to it, while by the only gate, facing towards the city, stands a tiny chapel.

Beyond we come indeed into "Kipchak," the limitless emptiness of the desert, stretching as far as the eye can follow to the soft horizon, suffused in the pale glow of dying day. It is drab now, the grass withered and scorched, but in spring a blaze of beauty, when the grass springs up anew, the stunted trees burst into leaf and the tulip of the steppe, many-coloured and lovely, sings and sways in the gentle winds of the new year. Eulnek, they call it then, "flowering meadow."

For the first time I see, through the train windows, the round black tents of the nomads, shaped like broad beehives, and I whisper to myself that under just such a tent was Chingiz Khan born. Women in white headgear, their long smocks reaching to the ground, gazed with broad, expressionless faces at the train crawling over the steppe. Sometimes there passes a family on the march, the elders and children perched above their household goods on the beautiful shaggy bactrian camels, the youths on horseback, small, sturdy ponies. It is all strange to me and I feel a beauty of slowness and order in their movements, the eternal rhythm of a wandering shepherd life. Once or twice a herd of horses, bright patches of black, brown and white, fling up their heads in dismay at our approach and gallop away over the prairie. The Kirghiz love the coloured herds which roam upon their steppe and much mention is made of them in their poetry. Then darkness comes to shut all out, and our smoking serpent is alone in the empty world, winding over its metalled way.

The first division station on the railway after Orenburg is at Ak-Bulak, but we were not to reach it

without adventure. We were travelling in one of the old International sleeping-cars where between every two coupés is a lavatory, of course, in the case of these Russian cars, which had weathered the demobilisation and years of revolution, a completely dilapidated and disused lavatory. In our case the frosted glass window into the next coupé had a great hole in it. At Ak-Bulak poured into us through this hole an alarming hubbub. The occupant of the coupé, who must have been a Communist or some wealthy bourgeois, had been robbed of his watch and cigarette case, gold, both of them. Two men with Brownings at their belts, in the khaki uniforms and pink caps of the Cheka, boarded the car and went from end to end, scrutinising the occupants of each coupé. Following them was a third man in mufti, whose right hand plunged into his pocket and grasping there an automatic proclaimed him a detective. It appeared our wealthy neighbour, wishing to sleep, had placed these bulky objects rather incautiously on the little table which is by the window in each coupé.

It seemed clear that some prowler had abstracted them through the window at a wayside halt, but the stern detective very properly examined the lavatory with the awkward hole in the glass and asked us who we were. Alek answered, but instead of replying simply with the information required, plunged off into a long protestation of how it would have been impossible for us to have committed the robbery and finally offered for both of us to undergo a search. He could not have said anything sillier, but happily the Chekists seemed satisfied that the theft had taken place through the window and they left us in peace. Our plundered neighbour left the train here, an unpleasant-looking, bullet-headed fellow whose face

was not improved by the disgusted expression the robbery had printed on it.

I scolded Alek for his Polish excitableness, though it were as profitable to scold the Devil for his tail. In general he was a cute man, with intelligence above the average, a fact of which he was aware and not a little proud. Whenever he could he referred to the fact that he was " an educated man." All his learning had been painfully gained after his day's work was over and he had reason to be proud of it. He gave me a strange picture of life seen through the eyes of a Polish peasant in American cities.

Nothing Anglo-Saxon there. Busy factories where none spoke a word of English, each man doing his own little piece of work, over and over to eternity. Motor cars turned out so as to cover the world with uniform locomotion, jarring and rattling, built by Polish peasants in American Detroit, shaky and useful, perversely beautiful and cheap monstrosities. There were side shows, bakeries where good money is earned by working in white hot light the whole night through. No amusements here save gambling, drinking in the saloons, seducing little girls or spending sordid nights with Czech or German harlots in low brothels. There were two enemies, the millionaire and the Anglo-Saxon American, and both were happily represented by the bullying, ugly policeman, Irish, vile and venal. It was a world unlovely but vital, without grace or proportion, but having a strange and twisted beauty of its own, a beauty of machines and sweating humanity, of tall slender buildings sheering darkly up to sparkle and burst into flower upon the electric sky.

The second day dawned, bright with heat and dusty, and still the train was plunging on into the vast steppe. Sometimes we would see a thin river coursing with

difficulty between steep banks of clay, giving life to a few sad willows, "The willow worne of forlorne Paramours," but else no tree, no green, only the grey sparse grasses and the yellow crumbling clay. Then even this rare herbage gave way before a greater desolation, and now the steppe flowered only with the white bones of outworn camels, or slaughtered sheep, in truth the "hungry" steppe. Our passage became more difficult, for soon the wide horizon was bounded with hills, bare and wild, the Mougodjar mountains. Here we saw no nomad camps, though in places these hills give birth to fertile springs, but only fantastic shapes of clay, peaked or rounded, covered in places with boulders, and all empurpled in the dying sun.

The next day we were on clay steppe again, where grow camel thorn and stubborn roots of saxaul. Sometimes our eyes were caught by a glimmer of silver or blue, and we thought that at last it was the Aral Sea, but it was only the distant gleam of the salt lakes of Chelkar. Here it was like crossing the bed of a dried-up sea, for each table-land ended in an abrupt wall of cliff, extending for miles, as high as a hundred feet, and as we crawled down through gaps in the crumbling wall from one level to another, we felt we should find the Aral Sea at last like the last drop in a dried-up pool. When the last cliff fell away behind, we were in the real desert, among the sands, the "Koum" of the Kirghiz. Here was the beginning of Kara Koum, "black sand," only as yet indeed it was yellow, not black, rather a patch of "Kizil Koum," a red sand, before the Kara Koum commences. The line wound through great banks of it held together by those thin dry plants which will grow even in sand, holding the rare moisture in their deep roots.

But now we were approaching our destination, or

the place we had assumed would be our destination, and we felt the time had come to make inquiries. First we called the provodnik (conductor), an obsequious little man, his face all pale and wrinkled, with a ragged fair moustache and busy little brown eyes, and he, expecting a great tip, talked much, and Alek, the Polish-American, scornful new-world eyes twinkling behind the horn spectacles, questioned him. The thin little man answered glibly the tall big man. "Aralskoe Moré? Yes, that is three stations away. A great place for fish. Oh, such fish, comrade!" and the bright little eyes became quite ecstatic in anticipation of the fish he would buy with our tip.

"Yes, but horses," Alek cried impatiently. "Are there horses there? We are not come a thousand versts to buy fish."

The provodnik looked disappointed. "Not fish? Horses? May be, may be. Oh, yes, comrade, now I come to think of it, thousands of horses. But I will inquire. There may be other passengers who will know certainly." And off he popped like an obsequious little sparrow. A few minutes later he returned followed by another small man in a black jacket, with a black fur cap perched on the back of his head. He introduced himself as a merchant travelling to Khiva, and we felt that now we should get some information. First we asked what had all along been on our minds, "Is there such a town as Bouz (for we doubted it), and if so, can it be reached from Aralskoe Moré?"

The second little man pushed forward his fur cap and scratched the back of his head, his face a picture of woe.

"Alas! there is no such place that I know of.

But it may be the name of some Kirghiz encampment not far away."

We felt sure that this must be the case and so contented ourselves with questions on the state of the country, of Khiva and the way there, but the answers were sometimes far from accurate. Horses, we learnt, were little likely to be found in Aralskoe Moré, but, said our informant, at Khiva we should find them in quantities. He himself was going by ship from Aralskoe Moré (I saw him in imagination sitting on the poop of a schooner, hunched up in his black coat against the bulwarks, his mild eyes following the course of the stars in the velvet sky above the Aral Sea, his bundle of blankets and queer wares tied with rope and lying on the deck at his side). At Kungrad he was to land to complete his journey by camel, but there, he told us, if we came with him, we should find on the bazaar horses in hundreds, for does not Kungrad mean "horse town"? Indeed it does not, but we were then too ignorant to correct this bold etymology.

What a navigation that would be! I too in fancy was soon on the poop beside this shabby man, my eyes on the stars above that desert-hemmed sea, my ears lulled by the straining of the cordage, the flapping of the sails and the faint wash of the water past our keel. Islands would loom up darkly in the night, magically in the dawn, islands of the blessed, where no pain was, nor tale of pain. Then one day to cross the bar into the delta of the Oxus, to drop our anchor and swing the ship off a Khivan town, flowering in the Khorasmian waste!

Alack for dreams. In fact there are no horses to be bought on the bazaars in Khiva till the Kirghiz drive their herds there for the winter pastures, and Kungrad

is named from the great Turanian tribe of that name and has no connection with the Slav roots that appear so obvious to our friend (yet his mistake is a common one among the Russians of this district).

Soon through the window I saw a mountain with a hazy ring of silver at its foot and knew it must be one of those famed islands on the Aral Sea. An hour later we saw the sea on our right, first a long blue gulf, then a narrow lagoon with a little town of wooden houses clustered about its edge. The purple-brown spit of land barred our view of the open sea, but we saw the masts of ships, brigs and schooners, and knew that in the midst of the greater ocean of the Asian steppe we had come again upon our own familiar salt sea, with its ways that I could understand, ships and ship-craft, seamen and seamanship, so different from the camels and tents of the nomads, but in some wise perhaps not so unlike and in spirit as slow to change.

II We left the train hurriedly, and at once inquired of the station-master if he knew of an Englishman buying horses here or in the district. Yes, there was one now in the town, living at the Turksoyus, a large co-operative down by the harbour. Clearly then Bouz was only the mutilated termination of Turksoyus and our quest was ended before it had well begun. We packed our belongings on to a water-cart drawn by an unwilling camel and started to trudge through the sand to the town, first saying farewell to the little merchant bound for Khiva, who shouldered his burden lightly and set off to find the ship which was to bear him on his enchanted voyage.

It is a matter of two versts from the railway station to the town, a tiresome road over sand-dunes, but running along by the quietest, bluest, shallowest lagoon imaginable, upon which not a ripple stirs, and where the only movement is the slow heaving of the weed along the surface by the margin. Just outside the station are the graves of the Red soldiers who fell here fighting for the Revolution, marked by four red pylons and a little red wooden rostrum, a sight as common in Russia as the village war memorial in England, but here in Turkestan just a little unexpected. The town we entered by a great wooden warehouse, palisaded and surmounted by a crazy watch-tower from which was floating a tattered red flag.

Then the sandy, uncomfortable road skirted the bazaar and passed into the Russian quarter, a wide, straggling street of painted wooden houses, each roofed with tin, and each with a carved wooden gate leading into the yard. The only difference between this and other Russian villages was the sandy road, down which two Kirghiz were having a breakneck horse-race, while from time to time a straining dromedary dragged a water-cart disgustedly into the yard of one or other of the houses.

We came at last to the harbour, a second lagoon where wooden piers jut out into the waters, schooners tied up to them and unloading into the ramshackle wooden sheds built along the shore. It seemed hard to believe that one might take a motor-boat here and, crossing the sea into the Oxus, sail right into Afghanistan, into the heart of ancient Bactria, where still stands Balkh, "The Mother of Cities."

We found the Turksoyus, a wooden house by one of the piers, where a man came out and directed us to a little wooden cabin. I knocked at the door and without waiting for an answer entered in. A very hot unshaven man in a collarless shirt and flannel trousers was sitting on the edge of a plank bed smoking a pipe and reading *John Bull*. So perhaps my first question "Are you English?" was superfluous. It was the man we had come to seek, and he gathered up his papers, very old copies of *John Bull*, the *Crusader* and the *Daily Herald*, to make us room and welcome. I did not think he was as pleased as he might have been to see an Englishman thus tumbling unannounced upon him in the heart of Asia, but I know now that this was because he was a romantic, and it broke the dangerous spell of loneliness in fantasy under which he had been bound until that moment, for surely

nothing is so unromantic as another Englishman in a strange land, who can watch coming to birth all those wild thoughts and dreams that have never been indulged at home, can watch and understand all those most secret things one had thought could at last be safely brought out into the exotic light of Asia.

Over tea he described for me the situation, gratefully filling his pipe with the tobacco we had brought. He had been here a month with Ole Bill, his interpreter, but so far had only succeeded in buying twenty-eight horses, either on the bazaar or in the country around. He had returned but the day before from a week's trip in the country north and east, which had been almost completely a failure. The few horses they had bought Bill was collecting and was expected to drive in the next day. It seemed clear that a fresh start must be made in another direction, working perhaps in two separate parties. Would I then stay and take charge of one? This I decided at once to do, thereby achieving one of the ambitions of a short life—to live for a space in the deserts of Turkestan, though indeed I was ill-equipped for a long stay, having only my summer sleeping-bag and one change of clothes, such was the haste in which I had left my Russian town.

This new companion was a Socialist, had played a little with journalism, lived in a Tolstoian colony with peculiar people, and during the war had been in prison as a conscientious objector. I apologised for having served with the army, and since my service, like the traditional baby, was only a little one, it was allowed to pass. I found him nervous, for he had a habit of continually winking the right eye, and, as I have said, he was also romantic, so we were able to talk a little of the two greatest romantics, Herodotus

and Marco Polo, which was a blessed change from the Politics and Christianity of the Mission in Russia.

In time of flood you have seen a swollen stream break off a projecting spit of land and carry it swirling down the current till it dissolves into the unknown. So it was in the war, the insecure, the rootless were borne away on irresistible tides to be played with savagely till the blackness of some whirlpool swallowed them for ever. Such was my companion, of our race but no longer in it, impressed for ever on my mind, thin, not tall, face and chest browned with the sun, cheeks covered with black stubble, a collarless shirt, grey trousers, a pipe, a wink.

After tea we two walked round to the dark blue inner lagoon to bathe, wading far out into the warm water before it was possible to swim, loitering long there and then coming out to dry on the hot sand. Not far away Kirghiz and Russian girls were bathing too (the men here never seemed to swim, though most Russians are powerful swimmers), the sun gilding their white bodies with warm laughter, and as we lay on the beach gazing through half-closed eyes at the blue sky, I thought that for a brief moment we had slipped back into some golden age of bold innocence, or that we had in truth come to the lost Prester John's land which travellers in the Middle Ages were for ever seeking. (We were not far away, for that matter.) As the sun declined over the sea we roused ourselves to walk home, and in the twilight, after the great final glow of sunset, heard the thin tinkle of a bell as a camel moved down to the water's edge. Then turning we saw the light of a fire before the new-pitched tents of some wandering Kirghiz, come to rest for a night or two before going westward into the steppe upon their endless search for fresh pastures.

After dinner there was nothing to do but sleep, so I rolled into my blanket and lay on the hard wood of the pier, listening to the loud whirring of the hosts of mosquitoes and staring into the deep night made splendid with the gold of innumerable stars, such stars as you may only see in Asia, where the air is so clear that the transmitted radiance of their light is a hundredfold that we know in Europe. Just as peace indescribable began to wrap me into one with the night, the dogs of the Kirghiz settlement began their nightly song, and for an hour there was such turmoil of barking, of long howling of hound and mongrel, as to make it seem that all the dogs of Islam had suddenly joined together to bay the new-born, silver moon rising from out of the farthermost lagoon. Then there was sudden quiet and mine a dreamless sleep above the waters of this land-locked sea.

I woke again with the first light and plunged into the deep water off the pier's end, swimming out till I was floating in the warm lengthening track which the rising sun cast across the rippling sea. After breakfast Ursala, the Kirghiz broker who had been acting for us till now, came in with his partner. Ursala, a tall, broad-shouldered and rather grim man, who smiled rarely and never broadly, was wrinkled and weather-beaten of countenance, while his friend was his very contradiction, short, rotund, with broad, smiling face and a laugh for every occasion. I never knew this merry fellow's name and after we left Aral-skoe Moré did not see him again, but Ursala remained with us always, playing a most important part in our life. They had come to tell us there were likely to be horses on the bazaar that morning, so we all went down together shortly afterwards.

On this bazaar in small compass were found all the

peoples of the great steppe. Itself it is a row of wooden booths upon the edge of the desert, with lines of vendors squatting on the ground calling the wares spread out before them. The most part of them are women of the Kirghiz, small and sturdily built, with brown arms and unveiled faces, the prettiest of them sweet to look at as are some Chinese coolie girls, but the old and ugly hideous as wrinkled Laps or Eskimos. Here and there among them, in torn skirt and coloured blouse, was some dark-haired, wild-eyed gipsy, maybe from Samarkand, the home of the Tzigane race, or perhaps drifted down from Kazan and the steppes of the Volga. Russian women were common enough too, both old and young, but all had the same sturdy frames and free carriage of the steppe dwellers revealed by their scanty clothes and bare legs.

Here, among the women, the chaffering was for water-melons and denia, the sweet melon which grows to such perfection in Samarkand, for eggs and fruit borne in from the islands by trading ships, for matches, tobacco, soap, cloth and all the little necessaries of life. Farther away the Kirghiz galloped up into the crowd on their ponies, lifted off the saddles and offered the beasts for sale. But they were sorry specimens of horseflesh, ill-fed and covered with saddle sores, and the prices asked over-great, so that few changed hands on the bazaar.

As we went up to look at one, at once a crowd was about us, every man offering his opinion for nothing, and that so loudly that you might not by any means miss the advantage of his experience and knowledge. There were Bokhara Jews in the crowd, and some whose faces were horridly eaten away by disease, and these, maybe because they were shunned by all, were shriller and shrewder than the rest, for none is more talkative

than the outcast. However, in the horse-buying all became equally vehement, and most vehement of all the vendor. He asked four times the value of his mount and laughed scorn in our faces when we offered a sixth of his demand, turning to those about for confirmation of his words, calling on Allah above to witness the justice of his claims.

In time, as the cheapening proceeded, the crowd took up sides for vendor and purchaser, becoming so loud, so pressing, that you might hardly look into the beast's mouth, or feel its legs. Whatever the sex of the horse, mare, stallion or gelding, it was food for the ribalds in the crowd, and cheerful lewdness was bandied from one to the other. When at last the noise and press became unbearable we turned in anger to bid them be off about their own business and leave us to ours, cursed them for a dishonest pack of loiterers and called the virtue of their mothers to account. None took offence, for each took our words as applying to his neighbour, while the more officious took our part and bade the crowd disperse. For a time there was a pretence of peace, the kind of uneasy armed peace beloved of Europe, and we continued to beat down our bare-faced enemy. When he wished for his horse only half as much again as it was worth we stated our final price and walked off in disgust, calling down the wrath of God upon the cupidity of the wretch and of his ancestors.

We had gone perhaps fifty yards when a hand tugged at my sleeve. It was a friend of the vendor. He begged the Englishman to melt the hardness of his heart and to accept his price with a slight reduction, which, by Allah, was the lowest for which a horse can be sold without bringing most miserable ruin upon the owner and his children. He pointed to his friend,

who had the saddle on once more and was already riding away. In one moment he could fetch him back if only the Englishman would relent. But the Englishman does not relent, says the horse is but a sorry beast, which he may well do without, and so turns away again. For he knows (Ursala having whispered as much in Russian as broken as his own) that the horse will be there again the next morning, and sold at his price if he is still willing to buy.

As we walked away we met a strange figure walking down between the lines of booths. Short, a square, bewrinkled Kalmuck face, over which hung a long wisp of dry grey hair, little cunning blue eyes set deep, cracked lips between which yellow teeth were sucking vigorously at a short pipe. Clothes no less curious, a battered green felt hat, a dirty shirt open at the neck and collarless, an old blue coat and shabby trousers. It was Ole Bill, my companion's interpreter. In that gnarled and primitive ugliness not the most charitable heart could discover any gleam of a tenderness or a moral code such as the West has built up through long centuries. As soon seek it in a tree of the Congo forest.

He had just driven in the horses he had bought from the Kirghiz on the steppe and was coming down to look for his "boss." He grunted when he saw Alek and myself, the grunt became a snort when he heard we had been looking at horses, and he curtly told us we needed barley for the sick and thin beasts in the serai. (What were we doing with sick or thin beasts?) Barley they use here in place of oats, which are unknown, and even so we had some difficulty to get the horses to eat it, since they were accustomed only to the sparse desert scrub or reeds from the lakes.

We carried each a sack of barley home and outside

the militia house beheld a curious quarrel. A Russian woman was shrieking vile abuse at a poor Kirghiz girl she was dragging in to answer for some real or fancied offence. The high-pitched shrill voice never ceased its angry complaints, but her enemy remained stubbornly silent, maybe not understanding a word, her face dark and mute with that Oriental dignity which puts to shame our own ill-controlled outbursts. What the issue was I do not know, but probably the Kirghiz came off the victor, since the militia were her countrymen and certain to favour her. In India perhaps the result would be quite opposite, but man is so foolishly built that he may comprehend the idea of justice, and practise it never.

It soon became clear that our life too was not to be without storms, however peaceful this golden weather of summer's end, by this calm sea. I had heard much of Bill in the Mission, and all to his credit. He seemed to have cast a spell on people there, so that they were unable to envisage him straightly, as English people should have done. His past life had been mysterious, but legend said remarkable as well, and he himself was said to be the best worker and handiest man we had, though a little crusty and queer at times. Now he had been three days in the saddle, driving his horses, hardly sleeping nor eating, riding in that burning heat with only an occasional sup of dirty water to refresh him. Moreover, in secret he was bitterly angry because he had been forced to do all this alone, the Englishman who should have helped him having given up at the end of his first day's ride, remained for a week in a Kirghiz tent and come home a day or two ago in time to welcome us on our arrival. Bill did not tell me this till long afterwards, but all the time it was gall in his heart. Alek too annoyed

him, being better educated and more genial, and he was at once furiously jealous of him lest we should prefer his advice. But Alek was going home in a few days to Moscow, to spend a leave with his wife, whom he had not seen for a whole year.

Alek, unfortunately, was a Communist, and Bill loathed the Communists with all the venom in him, for they had twice refused to take him into the party. So whenever we tried to come to any decision on the future, Bill would refuse his aid, with a "Guess you know best," or "Ask Alek, he's an educated guy." His English was not easy to follow, for it was only a filthy jumble of American slang picked up on the road and in mining camps.

Eventually we decided that since we must now buy so many horses (a thousand), it would be simplest to seek the aid of the Turksoyus, our neighbours, in whose cabin we were lodged. They were a great organisation for trading with the nomads, with headquarters in Tashkent. A provisional agreement had already been drawn up before I arrived, and it only remained for us to confirm this.

They were a curious crew in the Turksoyus, working at all hours of the day and night, sometimes sleeping on the floor to wake at three or four in the morning and work their Remington typewriters with the noisy vigour of a machine-gun barrage. Every other night there would be a carousal; from the pier we would hear shouts and unmelodious song float over the water, the banging of crazy wooden doors and the thud of drunken bodies falling insensibly to sleep on the floor, or by the pier end. An old, old peasant sat all day outside their warehouse with a rifle in his feeble arms, a melancholy man with a long fair beard and mild blue eyes, the face of an aged idiot Christ. He never

spoke, but at night he would hand over his rifle to his grandchildren, tiny, half-naked imps, and silently cross to join the drinkers. The rifle was loaded, no doubt, but there is no fatalist so fatal as the Russian. In the morning he too would be lying helpless outside his hut.

It was a curious firm to trust oneself to, but at least we had never seen their chief drunk, and my companion, who had known him for a month, said he might be trusted. We went together to see him the next day, and found a small, slight man, with sallow Tatar features and sparse black moustache. He courteously offered us tea and cigarettes, and we had no difficulty over our business. Steklov (that was his name) was an interesting figure, the pale face and high cheek-bones, the deep-set brown eyes that masked some uneasiness of the spirit so that he never held one straight with them, but always looked a little past, to one side, the restless hands, small but well-shaped, all this caught the attention at once. His voice was gentle and rather low, not at all unpleasant, but without the obvious personality that will mark a man's character like a shop label so that you know at once how he will act or think in any situation. Steklov's voice seemed to come from far away, as though it were never the real man speaking but some other who was always there to protect the real self from the world's curiosity.

His personality impressed deeply, but it was an anonymous personality, a pseudonym. Nor did his clothes help, for they typified the work and not the man, being such as are worn by thousands of Communists and officials, a peaked cap, white Russian shirt, dark worsted coat and trousers and black sapogi, as the Russian topboots are called. Under his left arm was always tucked a black leather portfolio, and

so he might have stood for the portrait of a Communist anywhere. Yet we were not surprised to learn he was the most influential man in all the Aral Sea district.

Portrait of a scoundrel, one might say, and yet be wrong, for his nature was too infinitely subtle to be labelled crudely. In any case at the first I felt that here was a remarkable man, though unlovable, not "sympatichni," but no doubt a man who might be trusted. Sadly we were to be undeceived. Our chief act that day was to give him our money for safe keeping, as it was too large a sum to have in a wooden hut that could not be secured. At the same time he promised to make arrangements for a second expedition to the south, which I should lead. If we were successful the others were to join me, if not they were to strike out separately. At last then inaction was over and the day was near when I too might ride out into the vast steppe, stretching so hugely to the east and south, its horizon as enticing to the traveller as the sea's.

STRANGE TYPES

III THE next day Alek and I walked down to the station to try to get wagons in which to send away the horses we had already bought. It was difficult, for here in Turkestan our relief organisation was not known, and the writ of the Moscow Government ran with difficulty. Moreover, the summer of 1922 was the golden age of the N.E.P. man, or private speculator. Great fortunes were being made by these people, and bribes were needed before the simplest transport operations could be accomplished.

The station-master was drunk, but his assistant, a polite young man in a smart white uniform, saluted courteously and asked how he could help us. Alek explained that we must have at once six wagons free for transporting horses into Russia. The young man smiled sadly.

"Free? Nothing in Russia is free to-day."

"They are needed for famine relief. Our organisation has an agreement for free transport with the Government."

"I do not think it can be done, but I will telegraph to Kazalinsk to make inquiries for you."

This he did at once and soon we got the reply. "There are no wagons at Kazalinsk and in any case they must be paid for." The young man had done his duty. The responsibility of refusing us was transferred to his superior, so he bowed, smiled, saluted and prepared to close the matter. But Alek played

his great card now. His manner became stern, and pointing at me, whose face also set grimly, he thundered:

"You see the comrade here? He is a most important official, a Communist, and if we do not get those wagons it will be the worse for you."

The young man looked serious, and glanced with interest at me, who had not spoken all this while, and especially at my khaki sun-helmet, on which was boldly pencilled the dreadful skull and cross-bones device of the 17th Lancers. "Well, I will do my best, I want to help you," he faltered, "but what can I do?"

"Have you no wagons here?" (We knew he had.) His head shook sadly. "Ah, if you only had a paper, something to authorise me." What can be done without a paper in Russia?

Alek was positively triumphant. "A paper! Of course we have a paper, signed by the biggest men in Moscow, and I shall be sorry for you if you disregard it."

The young man was so impressed that he did not even ask to see our paper, but promised the wagons at once and the use of the loading wharf. We left one another all smiles, though whether he really accepted me as the terrible person of Alek's presentation I cannot say. At least my grim silence must have been impressive, though really it was only due to my ignorance of Russian.

We came home in the mid-day heat to learn that all was ready for me to start next day. Bill was sulking in the corner, cleaning a revolver, but he brightened up when he heard we had secured wagons, for that meant that Alek would soon be off and he would reign supreme again. He quarrelled with Alek about politics, since whatever his faults Bill was afraid of

no man and would have his say. Alek was a Communist, and did his best to defend what to him was a workers' Government.

"Workers' Government!" Bill broke in in savage scorn. "Say, I was in Moscow las' winter and stood outside the Foreign Office." (I picture him in a rabbit-skin cap, the flaps about his ears, wearing a transport driver's heavy coat, too big for him, the little pipe between his teeth.) "I see a guy drive up in a big automobile, wearing a fur coat, like a dam' millionaire. 'Say, who's that guy?' I ask my pal. 'Oh, that's Chicherin!' Ain't that feller just the same as any other damn bourgeois? Guess he never work in his life. Guess none of 'em ever work any."

Alek protested. Chicherin was working for them, the workers. He deserved the car, which, after all, wasn't his, but belonged to the workers, who lent it him. "Sure we lent it him," growled Bill. "Sure we lend ourselves plenty, don't we?"

Bill knew only one kind of work, the hard work of a man with his hands, twelve or fourteen hours in a day, grinding away body and soul, leaving only aching clay to tumble into a hard bed at the day's end. Working so, he had fought with life since childhood, wearing his hands to the bone, across three continents, only his bodily endurance between him and starvation. The others, clerks, managers, "bosses" of all kinds, the dim world of officialdom and intellectuals which he could hardly realise, he loathed as deeply as he despised them.

At the back of his mind what he had expected from the Revolution, though even to himself he hardly confessed it, had been the annihilation of that unnatural non-working half of humanity (how savagely he hated it, recoiling from it as from something dark and

impossible to understand) and then the abolition of labour. For him that was the only salvation for the working classes—the death of the machine, the murder of toil. Neither had been achieved and he was bitterly deceived, turning all his anger against those Communists who had seemed to promise so much. My English companion was a Romantic also, in a strange, distorted fashion. His view of war was romantic, in the opposite way to that in which it is romantic to the Chauvinists, that is, to him it was the manifestation of the Devil, to them, the manifestation of God, so he went to prison as a conscientious objector. He was unable to face industrialism, so became a Tolstoian Socialist; but, being a typical product of the system he hated, instead of going back to the peasantry, he went to a garden city. He had feasted on books of travel and adventure, and saw, not the Kirghiz, but a patriarchal family from the Old Testament, and later in Tashkent it was "Omar's moon" of which he spoke, not of the degenerate Sarts of the South, nor the warm life which is everywhere and in all climes the splendid reality.

The day after we secured the wagons I was to ride out with the new expedition, and we busied ourselves with preparations. The difficulty that stood greatest before us was our lack of an interpreter, for Alek was going home and Bill staying in Aralskoe Moré. Without much hope of finding what we wanted, we inquired if the township contained a linguist. Yes, we were told, the proprietor of the Restaurant de Paris spoke English well and would be delighted to leave the business to his wife's care and help me. The Restaurant de Paris in this desert by a forgotten sea! How exotic it sounded, what a vision of exquisite coolness and voluptuous languor it summed up!

We did not start on the morrow as arranged, but very soon after breakfast the door opened to admit an extraordinary little man, cringing, cap in hand, before us. His eyes were dark and lively, his face pale and wrinkled, the pallor accentuated by a ragged black moustache. His hair was sparse and unbrushed, and as he darted his apprehensive head from one to another of us, I felt he was afraid of being kicked and bidden to make himself scarce. Indeed all through the interview he did seem to be making himself scarce, shrinking, as it were, before our eyes, till we could see only a convulsive black coat, a pair of hands twisting a cap, and a little dark head with lively, fearful eyes darting from side to side.

My companion spoke to him at once in English. "Good-morning. I hear you speak English." The answer was most astonishingly the opposite of what the poor man meant—"Goot-bye, no." So puzzled, we asked, "Can you not speak English?" to which he answered "Goot-morning, yes," and therewith had given us all his vocabulary. Then we proceeded in Russian, but he was almost as difficult to understand in that as in English, yet slowly his story came out.

He was a Czech, one of those Prætorian legions whom in 1918 the Allies had induced to attack the Revolution. Like many of his fellows, he had preferred staying in Russia to repatriation, and had somehow drifted here, perhaps from the prison-camp at Kazalinsk.

"Can you speak German, then?"

"Alas! no; I am a Czech."

"How did you learn English?"

"Ah, in Alexandria, long ago. In the best restaurant in Alexandria I was a musician in an

Italian orchestra. There I met many English who came to listen to our music."

"Then you speak Italian?"

"Better than Russian, best of all after Czech."

"Tell me," I asked in Italian, "about your life in Alexandria. What instrument did you play, for example?"

He answered with enthusiasm, and in a strange jargon which is perhaps the Italian of the Levant, he told us his story.

In his native village he had worked in the tavern, but a thirst for travel had driven him to the sea, to Trieste. Thither he wandered afoot, playing on his fiddle from village to village for a bite of bread, a sup of wine and his rest in a barn. In Trieste a vagabond spirit made up of the restlessness of the landless peasant and the drunkenness of soul caused by his first sight of the blue sea drove him into an Italian orchestra then setting out for Alexandria. To the Egyptian restaurant came English soldiers, for as well as the thrilling beauty of the violins there were the charms of certain sirens in the service of the house, more compelling, no doubt, than the music. Then there was the war, mobilisation, desertion and long imprisonment in Russia. He had no country, for he owned no land, and he hoped we would honour him by dining that night at his restaurant, where we should have the best dishes, cooked in the European style. We accepted, the little figure drew itself up, smiled and departed.

In the evening we went there, surly Bill, Alek and we two Englishmen. It was a long, bare room, full of small trestle tables and spindle-shanked chairs, fly-papers hanging from the roof, viscous and black, and flies, supremely conscious of the superiority of

their breeding powers over the world production of fly-paper, arrogantly buzzing everywhere. There were one or two highly-coloured prints on the wall, one of them showing the latest Victor Emmanuel in melodramatic red and blue. In one corner was an Ikon, over the sideboard a newspaper portrait of Lenin pinned up, and resting beneath it a fiddle. Was it the same that had travelled from the Adriatic to Alexandria, from there to Galicia and the wastes of Turkestan? Its owner said it was so, and we looked with reverence on the resting instrument. What wild songs had it gathered on that Odyssey?

There was one other person in the restaurant, an old man, thin and querulous, with bloodshot, bleared eyes, a ragged moustache drooping over his foolish mouth. I think he was a neighbour who sat there always, out of privilege, but as soon as he saw us he became a stern customer, intent on showing the foreigners he knew as well as any man how to give orders in a public place. He called shrilly for the girl who did the waiting and demanded a glass of tea, with a great glare of resentment at us as we took our seats in the far corner. All the time we sat there eating our dinner he kept calling her complainingly with some petulant demand—I know not what—and glaring across at us as he did so.

We were provided with a cloth, a luxury denied the one or two other customers who came in, and mercifully the food was Russian, not cooked in the European style as he had threatened. As we ate, the little Czech took down his fiddle and rather timidly, with shy glances towards us, drew the bow across the strings. He did this three times, putting the fiddle down after each essay, before at last he prevailed on himself to play, indifferently well, a Czech folk-song.

True, he played almost as ill as he spoke foreign tongues, but that magic fiddle had a voice of its own. I looked through the windows across the sandy street, past the wooden sheds to the strip of blue water by the crazy piers, and all the wild notes stored up in its bosom came into my head and floated out into the golden light beyond. I heard the fiddle playing jigs and dances in Dalmatia, to peasants tired from labour in the fields, while the mountains listened darkly above the sea. It played cheap tunes to British Tommies in Alexandria, it sang of home and the mown meadows and the secure earth to tortured soldiers in the Galician forests and finally it jigged all across Russia to ease the yearnings of prisoners in the bare deserts of Asia.

Europe, Europe, how beautiful, how sad, how glorious, how ugly and how vile! As he played every country came to birth in turn, each with its own musical speech, its land wrought into shapes of splendour known and loved, every people with its peculiar faults, its peculiar glories, all living richly and mysteriously on field and in factory. Then all were thrown together in a tumult of blood and from that horrible explosion little fragments fell everywhere. Here was one of the fragments, this bird-like Czech, suddenly the centre of my vision, type of all the sad peasants left behind in the aftermath, slowly and patiently taking root again in the foreign soil, for life everywhere is essentially the same, and the song of his fiddle was that peasant shall always understand peasant, worker be brother of worker, while only the others, Bill's foes, seek strange enmities to fill their empty lives.

The music ceased. He would not play again, and we took our leave from the Restaurant de Paris. I

felt I was saying good-bye to Europe, for any hour now might find us riding out into the unknown waste of Asia.

Yet here in Aralskoe Moré there was a richness of life by the desert sea. Outwardly drunken mouzhiks and uncouth nomads, but in reality a web of life strangely woven. Next door in the Turksoyus office among those drunken clowns a girl of sixteen worked, a short, well-built Russian child with fair hair cropped close, like a boy's. She always went bareheaded, in clean white blouse and blue skirt, with a straight carriage and a look in her blue eyes of delicate loveliness, serious as thought, beautiful as love. What was she doing there? She never spoke to anyone and she alone kept regular office hours. She was perhaps the daughter of some exile, a Raskolnik * who had given up all for his faith, a friend of man and an enemy of the Church. Half the people here were Raskolniki or Cossack Old Believers, the other half exiled ne'er-do-wells and village drunkards, with a sprinkling of failed adventurers. They had intermarried, some even had nomad Kirghiz blood in their veins, and a curious race was growing up, a wild mixture of nobility and evil.

Meanwhile the expedition did not start. Not on the day promised, nor the next, nor the day after. A great man came from Tashkent, director of the Turksoyus, member of the Vsik, the Turkestan Parliament, a Communist and a Jew. He was all smiles and affability, approved our contract, had the only droshky in the town harnessed to take him to the station and drove away over the sand taking Steklov with him.

The sun still blazed. I began to feel a little unwell,

* See Note I at end of Book.

but we continued to bathe, to talk, to buy hay for our horses and to sleep. We watched the white-winged schooners put out to sea, or the little lateen-sailed fishing-boats skim little swift swallows over the water. One day we saw three masts and a funnel beyond the farthest reef. It was a steamer come from who knows where, for whence might she come on that desolate sea, where are no harbours known to seafaring man? On her masts were yards the like of which you saw in the days when steam was yet only an uncertain auxiliary. And how uncertain was everything in this strange land of Asia, for the very sea was there against all nature. Men talked to us of dredging work in the harbour, for which money must be raised, but all seemed unreal, untrue. To dredge a harbour in a desert!

Sand and sun and dust and wooden huts, the smell of curing fish, the masts and cordage of ships, a faint promise of marvellous islands over the blue horizon—how could it be true? "The Islands," they were always saying. Faces fixed themselves indelibly on my mind, anonymous Steklov, the old idiot watchman with his rifle, a certain tall young Pole with an angular, broad, red face, who was always grinning vacantly and would sit in our room and just stare at us for hours on end, the girl with the pure face, Bill, disgruntled and vile, cleaning his revolver, and my companion sitting behind his pipe and winking, winking. I did not wonder that all men here quickly drank themselves into forgetfulness.

Only the Kirghiz were at home, in their beehive tents, in their dark mud huts, so cool, where they sat down in the evening and sang the songs of their people to the melancholy throbbing of their two-stringed guitars, while outside the quarrelling mongrels

grovelled for offal in the streets. The steppe is their home, for good or evil, and they have their stoic saying, "The steppe is cruel and heaven is far." But we had no roots there and no philosophy could bring us consolation. Only I burned to be on horseback, to leave this ragged crew behind, breathe the free air in the company of men who were neither exiles nor knaves, but living their own life, contented in their old way, the way of their fathers since first their race was born of the coupling of the outcast Turk with the grey wolf "bitch of light," far away on the blue slopes of Altai.

Then on Sunday morning we heard all was ready to start as soon as I could be ready. This was at 6.30, in the first light, so at once I packed my blanket, scanty wardrobe, four loaves of bread and some tins of sausage into a soldier's kit-bag and took over the money, ten milliards of paper roubles, from my companion, stuffing them away in a haversack. But it was three hours later before Alek came in to say the horses were at the door and I went out curiously to see with what sort of comrades Steklov had provided me.

Someone said to me, "They look good fellows. That Jew seems to be an intellectual (sweet jargon of the Revolution) and the fat man looks a real good sort."

I shook off the glare of the sun as I advanced to greet them and instinctively spoke to the fat man first, hardly noticing the others, in fact, so remarkable a figure was he. He sat perched on a little long-tailed Kirghiz pony, his black-trousered legs tucked up into high stirrups, the round black cap of curling lamb's wool, which afterwards I was never able to separate from him, so integrally did he fit into it, cocked over his brown and slightly sweating brow.

"Yaganov, Fedor Ignaty'ich," he announced as I shook hands. A smile flashed in his curly black beard (the minute curls of his beard always connect themselves now with the curling wool of his cap), and I noted the expanse of white shirt protruding from his respectable black coat almost on to the horse's neck. But he himself had no neck in particular, just that round, remarkable head, enormous trunk and thighs and little legs tucked into the high stirrups. The hand and wrist, browned and hairy, which he offered to me gave promise of enormous strength. With him I felt I might feel confident.

We said good-bye happily enough, but I little thought it was to be nearly a month before I heard English spoken again, and mounting I rode away from the masts of the schooners, the familiar smell of sturgeon-curing, down the sandy main street to the edge of the town. At last I was free and away, on horseback again with all the unknown steppe before me. What did it matter if I knew only one word of Kirghiz and a hundred of Russian, that I was still not feeling very fit, and that for the first time the brilliant blue sky was clouded over and a cool breeze from the north was blowing through my thin shirt?

I was riding to the tents of the Kazaks.

THE TENTS OF THE KAZAKS

IV We rode into the yard of a house at the other end of the town to look at a horse some Kirghiz had brought in, a sturdy little bay, head and body too large for his legs according to our standard, but typical of his breed. This was the first horse I had bought on my own and with great joy I was to recognise him four months later among the Mission horses in a Russian village where I was working. Yet excited though I was, I instinctively gave myself into Yaganov's hands when it came to bargaining, since to have done otherwise would have seemed impertinence. The horse became ours, he invited me into his house (it was his house, it seemed) with a lordly little gesture of his short, brawny arm, lordly as from one lord to another, making a slight inevitable distinction between ourselves and those who followed.

We sat on some empty crates and watched the hens scutter across the floor, while his wife, a quiet, kindly woman, brought us a bowl of Kummis * to drink. I had leisure to observe my companions, of whom there were three besides Yaganov. The Jew I had spoken to for a moment in the yard in French, but all he understood was the one word "camarade," at which he smiled and repeated the word two or three times, as though to assure me we were to be "de bons camarades." He was of middle height, well built, with a slight stoop and a grave, observant face which

* Mare's milk.

recalled the young Napoleon's, especially in the sleek black hair falling over the rather broad brow. He had the eyes of a solitary, aloof as though life had made him so and not of choice, I thought. I learned afterwards he was one who had fought and failed, so that disillusion combined with native Jewish pessimism gave him a certain melancholy noble look at times.

There was Piotr, a rustic fellow from the Samara Province who was supposed to be a vet. and my technical adviser. Fortunately, we could not talk to one another, so I never suffered from his advice. He was a big man in early middle age, with a beardless, ruddy face and a lazy light in his blue eyes. He had developed a forward stoop through the effort of carrying his huge body. He was a mighty eater and a deep sleeper and when not occupied in the one way was busy in the other.

Our Kirghiz guide interested me most, for he was the first of the nomads with whom I had had any relations. He too was a man in full maturity, wearing a kalat of green velvet and the high-pointed hat with the great flap falling behind to cover the ears and neck which his people most affect, winter and summer alike. It is a picturesque affair of velvet lined with foxskin, tied under the chin with tapes. Our guide was well-built and fairly tall, with the slight arch of the legs which all these people have, being a nation of horsemen. His narrow brown eyes were wily in expression, but not unkindly, and his beard and moustache were only a few sparse black hairs on lip and chin. He did not speak very much, knowing no Russian, contenting himself from time to time with pointing the way across the sand-dunes or exchanging a few brief words in his own tongue with Yaganov.

We left the town at last, stopping near the railway for a sup of muddy water at the well, since that would be our last chance of refreshment till evening. The railway crossed, it was the desert, moving sand, in long ripples and dunes, the dry, white dust of life. On our left was a line of torn and rusty barbed wire, a long, shallow depression in the sand which had been a trench, and from time to time, bleached and white on the bleached white sand, hopeless desolation on hopeless desolation, a skeleton tangled on the wire. The scene of a battle in the civil war. All that was left of the hot blood of fighting men.

We rode on indifferent, leaving behind for ever the little town where the victors of that fight were ruling now, without a thought for the others whose skeletons made an unsightly litter on the wire. For only defeat is death; here where all things were bare to the sky there could be no doubt of it; and so it is more comfortable to suppose that the victor is always right.

As we rode over the last road of sandhills that shut out the sea, I drew aside Lazary Gregor'ich, the Jew, and tried to talk with him in my few words of Russian. He told me that before the war he had been a medical student in Petrograd, so I saw one way of widening my vocabulary, since a medical student must perforce have some Latin. In fact he had a very little and for some time we talked in a doggerel of Russian and Latin, with here and there an explanatory word of German or French.

As the day wore on into afternoon, the sun broke through and the clouds dispersed. Hills of purple rose up to the north and east, shutting us in, and we turned round to skirt their foot. Then more bare hills broke the horizon on our right and the sand

gave way to hard-baked, porous clay, yellow and dry like all else on this terrible steppe. Our guide rode in front, picking his way through the dry and broken maze, unaided by any track of man or beast, with no green tree or shrub to guide him through the drifting sand and over the crumbling clay. The Kirghiz are never lost on the steppe, nor do they need even the stars to guide them. They know the way, know every bump, every stone, every tortured shape of the desert, every piece of grey shrub or patch of dried salt where once was water.

Here and there we passed through sand again and little green-gold lizards darted with amazing speed from our horses' feet, leaving a tiny delicate trail in the sand. As for me, I thought I would grow dizzy watching the soft hoof-marks plod from the horse in front of me.

Here was only the dry skeleton of earth. Bareness beneath a bare sky. Land, land, land, for thousands of miles only land, bare like this, with human life a shifting, restless, infrequent thing like the very lakes and rivers, now running in full flood and giving life to great cities and empires, then shrinking to a salt trickle between crumbling banks, or dying away altogether, dried up in the encroaching sand.

"The steppe is cruel and heaven is far." Yet the nomads love the steppe as they darkly hate it, since man may never love where he does not also hate, never draw life from a breast whence he does not also suck in gall and bitterness.

Late in the afternoon we left the hills behind for a sandy tableland where only a few dunes broke the monotony, and with joy I saw we were riding towards a little collection of black tents, a Kirghiz village or aul. A few hundred yards away we drew rein and

our guide rode forward to give notice of our coming and ask for hospitality. The curs belonging to the aul came out in force to greet him till a woman's shrill voice quieted them, and in a few moments he signed to us to approach. So we galloped up in great style and dismounted to greet our hosts, myself no little stiff about the knees, for I had been riding the native way, with very short stirrups.

There were four tents, and giving our horses over to a young man we followed one of the women into the largest. A white-bearded patriarch stood at the back of this tent to greet us, while two of his women rolled out a wonderful guest carpet from Bokhara, on which Yaganov and myself were invited to sit. Gladly I did so and kindly Yaganov insisted on my using for a cushion his great pillow, without which, like a true Russian, he never travelled.

I gazed with wondering interest at these new surroundings. The black felt was hung on a framework of trellis, strapped together with camel-hair ropes and thongs of hide, while mats of rushes made an inner lining so that in the heat of summer the heavy felts might with comfort be lifted off. Through a round hole in the roof a patch of blue sky was visible, for the fire in the centre of the tent was not yet lit, though a bare patch of clay between four iron staples for the cooking-pot marked where it soon would be. Except in this spot the floor was covered with felts and carpets. Behind our backs was a little wall of chests, carven in entrancing patterns and painted in blue and red, where were stored the housewife's treasures and the valued things of the family. On either side of the tent was a wooden couch, barbaric in paint and carvings like the couches of Homer's world. On one of these reclined the patriarch among

his felts and skins, conversing with Yaganov as a great lord to his king in the soft, fluid tongue of the nomads. The sound faintly recalled the Welsh I had sometimes heard on holiday in early childhood, but not any other civilised speech I knew of.

The coming of an Englishman was something of an event in their desert lives and soon the tent began to fill up—first the women, one very old and shrivelled, then a nursing mother with a baby at her heavy breast, two young women and two or three tall lads with shaven poll and sunburned face and chest, the half-score hairs on lip or chin showing the beginnings of a riper manhood. None were seated save the young mother with her babe and the old man. He alone spoke, asking his simple questions.

"Was I married?" "How many wives had I?" and the like, nor could he understand why I was not married, thinking a bachelor of two and twenty to be a poor thing, no doubt, if not an immoral man. Next he would know if there were any tent-dwelling folk in England. I answered Yes, there were gipsies, the spit of those they had in Russia, or even in the south at Samarkand. At this he was interested and asked if one might ever see people like his own in England, and was disappointed to hear No. He smiled soon, in the queer half-simple way they have, and suggested I take back to England one of their tents to show the English the way the Kazaks live upon the steppe.

The conversation became too difficult for me, having only a vocabulary at the end of Forbes' Grammar to explain myself by to my interpreter, and I became silent, or exchanged remarks in our doggerel with Lazary Gregor'ich. I noticed three rifles standing in a corner of the tent and wondered if they

had been used in the rebellion against the Cossacks in 1916, but did not care to ask. Two of the girls carried in dry dung, argol they call it, and the old woman kindled a fire with the gnarled grey roots of the saxual, feeding it with dung till a red-hot, sharp-smelling little furnace glowed in the centre of the tent. Then they fixed the cooking-pot on the staples, a great iron cauldron, and set some water to boil. Kummis was handed round meanwhile to refresh us after our ride and the housewife began to slice up mutton for the evening meal, throwing the pieces into the water. Little cakes of dough she also made and flung into the pot to boil with the meat.

Meanwhile I dozed, the first touch of malaria on me, my sick mind busy with high-cheeked brown faces, strange clothes, women's white head-dresses, the soft tongue I could not understand, and lastly Yaganov, squatted solidly on his hams upon that priceless carpet like some great idol, talking no doubt omnisciently of horses and the English race to the Kirghiz patriarch.

They roused me when the meal was ready. The Kazaks, men and women, sat round the pot in the dim tent, for smoke filled all the upper part now, and the sun was set. Brown arms were thrust into the mess, or painted wooden spoons, while we dainty whites were given wooden bowls. The meat was tough and greasy and to me only the little cakes of dough were palatable, though they were gritty with sand, so I did not eat much. Not so the Kazaks. This was their only meal in the day and they finished all, drinking off the fat (even the naked babe, a girl child, drank the mutton fat), and cracking the bones for the marrow between their strong white teeth. It was all fantastic round that evil-smelling fire.

There was great dignity in that tent. The old man on the bed was straight and manly for all his years; the women, despite their flat faces, had solid beauty of form and the carriage of wild things, easy and free of limb; and the young men with their broad yellow faces, so silent before the strangers, but not stupid, and occasionally breaking into a little laugh, lighting their impassivity with a flash of magnificent teeth, they too had dignity of a different sort, the dignity of strong youth and ready muscle.

What a meeting of races in the wilderness! Through the blue smoke peered the high cheek-bones of the Kazaks, whose veins held the mingled blood of all the Turko-Mongol peoples, conquerors of the world, shepherds, soldiers, justice-givers to mankind, men who had made Asia in their day. They were like the dreams that an old story brings to birth, like the imaginings that rise from some old inscription found in the waste to bear sole witness to a high glory dead.

Fedor Ignaty'ich at my side, with his sanguine colour, round face and curling beard, his little brown eyes twinkling above his rather snub flat nose, he so clearly had the blood of these men in him too. Forays into the heathen country by the Cossacks of the Don and Ural, Old Believers who lived in freedom and sang Psalms in the old Slav speech before they rode into battle, horsemen and seamen both, holding the marches of Europe from the Caspian to the Urals, these were his fathers.

Then Piotr our vet., a real Slav with his dreamy blue eyes, huge physique and lazy mind, a peasant so much of the steppe that he seemed a part of the black earth itself, indifferent to all, to the contending tides of Cossack and Kazak on the frontier, to the

battles that raged from time to time about his isba of mud and thatch, heathens from the East, Charles of Sweden, Napoleon the Great with the faith of the new Europe marching with his bayonets, Germans and Austrians, Reds and Whites, all had passed over in turn while he clung to his black earth indifferent, or in sullen rage massacred the stragglers of those who had destroyed his crops.

Lastly there were the two horse-faces, Lazary Gregor'ich, the Jew, and myself, the Anglo-Saxon from the island in the Atlantic, we too had our strange and separate histories, and our despised long noses and oval faces were met together for an instant with these other peoples in a nomad tent upon the steppe.

Fedor Ignaty'ich turned to me at last and said, Would I sleep in the tent or outside on the steppe? The young mother had already crept with her babe under the felts on the second bed, the smoke hung heavy above and there would no doubt be four or five others to sleep here. I did not hesitate to say the steppe, and our party went out into the deep night to find a little wall of sand built up by our friends under the lee of the tent for our protection. We laid our heads on this, rolled into our blankets and fell into a deep sleep, under the brilliant stars, among the dark tents, in danger from the stumbling feet of goats and camel colts.

The next morning we were up early with a brilliant sun, and I was alarmed to find I felt no better, but decided to say nothing to Fedor Ignaty'ich, lest he turn back. Washing was simple, for a Kirghiz girl poured water into my hands from a brass coffee-pot with a slender stem, and I made the best of this. Water is gold in the desert.

A bite of bread, some thin brick tea with kummis poured in for cream, and we were mounting again, saying good-bye to our hosts and galloping off in the fresh morning air through the barking curs. It seemed to be the rule to gallop away from and up to each camp, but else we went at the swift amble of the Kirghiz pacers, which can be kept up, day after day, for as much as seventy or eighty versts each day.

I found from my compass we were riding now south-west by south and were well away from the sand country. Hard brown clay, the loess of the geologists, now flat, now folding into ridges or breaking into sharp escarpments that seemed cut with a knife on the dazzling sky. Once or twice we came to small auls and our guide rode forward to know if they had horses for sale. Generally they answered No, or if Yes, it was only some outworn beast that scarce bore up beneath the sun. Yet we saw everywhere the herds of brown and black and white, gay upon the steppe, fine beasts that scampered away at our approach with long whinnies, to which our own horses gave answer, tugging a little at the rein as though they too would be sharing that glorious freedom. Camels loomed up ungainly on the horizon from time to time, herded by some half-naked lad seated bareback on his pony.

At noon we had a drink of muddy well water and an hour's rest in the shady tent of some poor herdsmen, then we went on again till sunset, still without fortune in horse-buying, and my heart sank low. Two days and no horses! And I all the time fit to drop from the saddle. At this rate we might ride for a month without making up our tale, and I ventured to communicate some of this disquiet to my friends. Yaganov bade me not to worry, since the next day

or the day after we should come to a place where we might buy horses enough to provide all Russia.

I did not understand then, and they could not explain to me, but now I know that we were following the trail of the winter migration to the mouth of the Syr. There ride the tribes of the Little Horde from Siberia to find their winter pasture and we were crossing their trail between two migrations. The early ones from Turgai were already established, but the later ones from Siberia and the Ural had not yet arrived. Once there they would willingly sell off their surplus stock to buy their necessities on the bazaars to last them through the following year, at Kazalinsk, at Jussali, at Perovsk and Turkestan, the great bazaars of the Syr Daria.

Sometimes on our ride we passed the salt marsh formed by a dried-up lake, sometimes a glittering sheet of water showed which still resisted the thirsty sun. A flight of partridges flew up from one of these as we rode our horses down to rest in the comparative coolness of clear water. It was not so salty but that the horses might taste, though a little brackish for human liking.

I noticed on the top of nearly every high hill little fortress-like walls of clay. In answer to my inquiries they told me these were the tombs of Kirghiz whose wandering had ceased, for it is their fancy to be buried in a high place whence their spirits may gaze out over the limitless steppe where their children are riding still with the black tents and coloured herds.

Our direction was still south-west by west and in the evening we again came to rest in an aul of Kirghiz, poorer folk these than our former hosts, who could offer us no draught of kummis for refreshment after our hot ride. We would not trespass on their scant

store, so had our day's meal from a cold joint of mutton we carried with us and a little black bread, for my own store of bread baked in Aralskoe Moré proved to be uneatable, each loaf as heavy as a cannon-ball. Had we been starving we could not have swallowed it. Fortunately, I had some tea with me and we could give our hosts better cheer than they offered us.

We slept outside again, not so easily, for it was a cold, sharp night. Then at dawn we prepared for the third day's ride, due west now, leaving our Kirghiz host with his shrivelled wife and naked child standing in their rags outside the tent, or yurt as they call it, with something like gratitude lighting their sullen misery for the little tea we left them. Tea is life to this people, and in these bitter years of war and revolution had risen to such a price on the bazaars that even the rich might hardly come by it.

Still no horses. We made our inquiries at each aul, but knew beforehand what the answer was to be—either No or else some lamed and ancient beast whose life was near its close. We passed the white bones of many such on our journey, horses, camels and sheep, but most often camels. The hungry steppe, indeed!

Soon after our mid-day rest I saw a long ridge barring the horizon and what seemed like a white plume of smoke rising over it. For hours it seemed to hang there motionless whilst we jogged towards it, then a chimney became clear, thin and tall like a pencil, and the roof of a tower; it was a station on the railway. We reached it about five, riding a merry trot the last few miles, and found a station, in fact, and two stout stone cottages for the railwaymen, but no town or village anywhere to be seen. It forced

you to look around to seek for the reason of its being, only, however, to encounter sand and more sand, with perhaps a stretch of hard clay, a bare ridge or two, a black tent, but no settled home of men.

Yet by one of the cottages, like the sherbet of paradise refreshing my weariness, my eyes beheld a green melon patch, a cluster of tall sunflowers. But it was too late, for I was in a high fever and could take no more than a bite or two at the cool pink water-melon when we were seated inside. I lay down on the dirty floor and soon was tossing uneasily in sleep, half-wakened from time to time by a hen scuttering over me.

My companions must have been alarmed by this sickness, for in the morning when I woke and asked when we were to start again they told me that the Kirghiz guide had driven off our horses and that we should go by train.

"Where is this place we go to?" I asked.

"Kamishli Bash," Yaganov told me. "Near a thousand of the Kirghiz live thereabouts and we shall have horses as many as we please."

This was cheering news and over our breakfast of water-melon and tea Lazary Gregor'ich explained in our jargon that this was one of the places where we might catch the full tide of the migrating nomads and not be worried by the competition of the officials, peasants and speculators who were swarming in hundreds to the great bazaars.

Soon after tea a long train of red cattle-trucks came into Sapak, our station, half the cars filled with freight, the others with migrating peasants, crowded in like sheep with all their household goods, pots and pans, tables and chairs. Our party found a place in a less crowded truck and I stretched luxuriously on

the floor with my head on my sack of belongings. In the corner were two men of the Cheka in dirty khaki, unshaven and unkempt, their caps, of a pink like the inside of a melon, pushed back on their heads, revolvers at their belts. They had two women with them and formed a sort of family party feasting on bread and melons. On our side was a big, untidy sackman, or speculator, with a pale, timid little girl, and soon after we were completed by a ragged soldier and two more women. I wondered what sort of a hell that jolting, filthy truck was at night, and would have felt unhappy for the little girl if I hadn't realised she was probably used to some such life since she could first remember.

While we waited on the siding a big express from the south came in on the main line. Lazary Gregor'ich roused me up (not without difficulty) to come and look at it, for there, right opposite our miserable truck, was the state car of the Emir of Bokhara, one of its windows all starred and cracked by a rifle bullet, but still splendid with the great gold eight-pointed star of Bokhara. Armed soldiers of the Cheka stood about the steps, very smart men these with a real soldierly air about them, handling their rifles with the precision of fine training, and inside we could dimly see some well-dressed civilians seated at a table, but could not distinguish them. On the steps stood a lad of about fourteen in full Cheka uniform, pink gallifet breeches, shining top boots, a smart khaki tunic and a pink cap. Whatever was he? Perhaps a son of the fugitive Emir or the Khan of Khiva, though he looked Russian, perhaps the child of some high officer in the southern armies, it is impossible to say, but somehow unnatural and strange in his swaggering uniform, with those tall soldiers.

I pointed to the bullet mark, and Lazary Gregor'ich laughed and said shortly, "Enver Beg." For Enver Pasha, or Beg as they called him in Turkestan, was still unsubdued and fighting for his Empire in the south at this time, or so we thought. In fact, it is possible that very car was carrying then to Moscow the tale of his defeat and death, last of all the great Turkish adventurers. "In the land of Turkestan there is no lack of heroes. In every fathom of its soil there lie heroic men," says the Turki proverb.

Three or four hours we jolted along in that truck till at last we came to a station which they said was our destination. We climbed down and my three good friends helped me across a long stretch of sand to a low house of white-washed mud. How clean it was inside, and cool! Even the others, used to the desert life as they were, felt the contrast with the hot and dusty ride of the last three days, and Fedor Ignaty'ich, short and broad, walking with a limp that made the great body a little ungainly, turned to me with a smile and said, "Sdyes mwi kak 'gentlemen'" (Here, we are like gentlemen).

Mud-walls, reed-thatched sheds, lean-to's and stables surrounded the two yards belonging to the house, an upturned boat, flat-bottomed, with a transom stern, lying under one shelter, and on the door of a shed adjoining someone had sketched with chalks a schooner in full sail, all her canvas drawing and a little foam of water running along under her cutwater.

When I saw this my heart leaped and my fever near fell away for joy. What a thing to find here in an ocean of land, among a race of nomad shepherds! After that long, dusty ride in the desert it needed an effort to recall that the Aral Sea was still very near.

These schooners were the only craft the Russian colonists knew and the open sea they had never set eyes on, save for this shallow imitation in the west, just beyond the setting sun. But it was a sharp reminder that the Cossacks from the Ural are as fine seamen as they are horsemen. (None but a seaman would have drawn her so accurately, so lovingly, that dancing schooner.) They have sailed the Caspian and the Aral seas, they have navigated the great plain of Siberia on horseback to build their ships at last upon the shores of the Pacific and discover the Behring Strait before ever an English keel furrowed the Northern Ocean. They discovered Alaska and settled in California even before the first feeble efforts of our own race to cross the American continent.

Kamishli Bash is typical of their settlements. When the Tashkent train comes slowly to rest by the row of dusty green poplars in front of the station, it cannot appear to any of the motley crowd swarming on to the platform to buy salt fish or melons that this is a place a man would visit for pleasure. If they think at all about it, then it is only with feelings of pity for those whom circumstances force to spend a life there. Across a quarter of a mile of sandy desert they only see a line of mud-walled, thatched huts, at the near end the monotony broken by one of them being painted white (our house) and by a Russian log house with a green roof, the only substantial building in the place, while at the far end the line fades into a melancholy, roofless heap of crumbling walls. A place to be buried alive in, the inhabitants a handful of Russian colonists and railwaymen with no other society than that of barbarian Kirghiz, not a theatre or house of amusement nearer than 600 miles. If they all drink themselves to an early and violent death there can

be small blame to them, being thus cut off from all refining civilisation.

We settled down in our rooms; the hozain, a lad of sixteen acting for his absent father, came in to welcome me, clearly a little anxious lest I resemble those two strange puppets who represent our England in the world's comic papers, Curzon and Lloyd George; but, relieved to find I did not, he was genial and friendly. Then I went to my bed of planks in the next room and lying down there wondered a little what was to come of this new life, while I sweated off the day's fever into my wringing clothes.

STORM AND STRESS

AT Kamishli Bash our life was the routine of the trading Cossack. They wake with the sun, shake themselves, stretch and get up. A wash at a wall fountain in the yard and then the evil-smelling mahorka is stuffed into a pipe, or rolled into an elongated cone of newspaper and the most persistent of Russian smells is spread about for an hour or two. Mahorka is the waste of the tobacco plant, stalk and fibre, cut up and dried, and is distinguished by the stale, all-pervading, insistent smell it spreads into every public place or building throughout the Union of Russian States. Mahorka and the husks of sunflower seed are the trail laid by the peasant from the Baltic to the Pacific. At about eight o'clock, after much talk and no work, the samovar arrives and breakfast is made of tea and black bread, followed by water-melon I could not eat, but I had the satisfaction of seeing Piotr's red face up to the ears in a slice of melon. That man could snore as well as eat, like a great trumpet echoing through the thin mud walls. Yaganov despised him.

About ten o'clock there would be a great noise at the big wooden gates leading into the yard, and the Kirghiz, shouting furiously in their strange tongue, would drive a party of horses in for our inspection. Off came saddles and saddle-cloths. Yaganov's round hat was pushed over his forehead and his strong hands were forcing the beast's mouths open, dancing away

on his two short legs from the pony dancing on his four short legs.

Then started a duel of words in Kirghiz. "Kansha?" (How much?) "Iki Juz" (200) or "Tört Juz" (400) was the reply, the numerals referring to millions of roubles. That was the salute, as it were, before the fight began. For as sure as the Kirghiz called out his price the answer came from Yaganov in a string of uncomplimentary epithets applied to horse and owner. Out shot the chubby brown hand and "120" he would bid against 200. The Kirghiz would stare a minute, burst into a torrent of protest and smite away the hand, calling out vehemently "195."

So it went on, hand smiting away hand till Yaganov had risen to 150 and the Kirghiz had fallen to 170. Both stood to their guns abusively then, with a "take it or leave it" air, till a gesture of a short brawny arm pushed the round black hat to the back of Yaganov's head and he made as if to be away. Then the Kirghiz seized his hand, held it firmly and wheedled till Fedor Ignaty'ich with a sign of impatience withdrew his palm and shouted "160 and I finish." The Kirghiz drew back, gazed at him blackly, as at a hereditary foe, cried with monstrous vigour "165," smote his open palm again and held it, the clasp was returned and the bargain over.

There is an art in this cheapening so subtle, so full of infinite tricks of psychology that only a great artist can hope to be a success. You must be able instinctively to judge the meaning implicit in the flicker of an eyelid, to feel the sincerity in the touch of a hand, to read absolutely from the minutest physical signs all that passes in your opponent's mind. Nor is this all, for you must conceal completely your

URSALA BRINGS IN A PARTY OF HORSES FOR OUR INSPECTION.

own thoughts, you must never ponder or hesitate, but know your goal and make straight there with swift decisions and lightning thrusts. There are little tricks of the enemy you must be prepared to avoid. A Kirghiz will hold your hand in his, crushing the thumb most cruelly with a certain grip they know, and argue till you are forced to consent to his price, since pride and the rules of the game forbid you to withdraw or show pain. Of all this witty war Yaganov was a master.

Lazary Gregor'ich, in very clerkly hand, with a green ink, wrote out the raspiskas, or receipts, for each horse, containing its full description, and this the Kirghiz signed with a mark or in his sprawling Persian characters. After we had collected a certain number of raspiskas we took them to the Izpolkom, the governing committee of the Soviet, two or three uniformed Kirghiz in a mud hut, where a couple of old sabres and coloured posters of Marx and Lenin hung on the walls, and here the papers were stamped and the bazaar tax paid.

These officials were not easy to deal with, for when one or other of them made a journey to the district Izpolkom at Kazalinsk he would come back full of difficulties for us—our permits were not in order, or some new regulation had been issued which we were not observing. Then there were long arguments, often with threats of violence on both sides, and sometimes they yielded and sometimes not. In this latter case it was because one of them had sent in horses which we had refused to buy. In that case for the sake of peace we would take one of his least decrepit beasts, or if that were impossible make a slight present for the provision of comforts for these underpaid officials. Then the local branch of the Com-

munist Party, mostly Russian railwaymen, would hear something and send for an account of all sums paid to the Izpolkom, which I strictly furnished and hoped it might hang them, though unhappily it never did.

In all this double dealing Fedor Ignaty'ich was a noble help. We talked together as well as we could in the intervals of work or fever, thumbing the vocabulary of my "Elementary Russian Grammar" till it was well-nigh in tatters. He told me how he had spent all his life in this country between the estuaries of Oxus and Jaxartes, save for one short interval in his youth. His father was one of those Ural Cossacks exiled by Alexander II. under circumstances of terrible atrocity because they had refused compulsory military service and an oath of allegiance to the Tsar. As Old Believers they could not swear faith to a Tsar whom they considered little better than a heathen, whose fathers had betrayed the ancient faith of the Russian people. Moreover, Catherine II. had exempted them from individual service and when Alexander treacherously withdrew her ukas one and all refused to submit. Some were shot, others beaten and finally exiled across the hungry steppe into this barbarian country, but they never submitted, never recognised they were in the wrong by asking a pardon, but always demanded restitution. They are the Puritans and Ironsides of Russia, singing their grand magnificent psalms in the Old Slav speech, still retaining their old Communal primitive organisation, the old manners, the hatred of alcohol and tobacco, just as described in Tolstoi's "Cossacks." I have said they are Ironsides, but in truth there is something so wildly Eastern in them that it brings their austerity perhaps nearer to that of the Senussi.

Not very long now will this old life persist, the last relic of ancient Russia, for the Revolution, improved communications, modern education, the abolition of their military organisation are quietly breaking it down and in a few years the Old Believing Cossacks will be only a grand dream.

Yaganov's father made his home on the island of Nicolai I. in the Aral Sea, but his son for some offence was turned out of doors when only a lad of eighteen. He bought an old boat, repaired it, and soon had two more with five men working under him. He sold his boats and persuaded the men to come with him to the Black Sea, where they made a great haul and returned to Aralskoe Moré in a fair way to becoming rich. In a few years his business was the largest on the Aral Sea and he started trading with the Kirghiz in horses and wheat as well. His father died without ever having spoken to him since the day he left home.

That exile from his people stripped him of his faith, and now he smoked all day and drank all night. He pointed one morning to the Ikon in the corner of my room. "What do you think of that, Meester Fox? Good or not?" "Little enough," I answered briefly. He seemed surprised for a moment, but then smiled and said, "The Church is our enemy, but Christ is good."

"What is your faith, Fedor Ignaty'ich?"

"I am a Tolstoian," he said, with every accent of sincerity; and I believe he was sincere.

"Then you do not believe in private property or killing?"

He made a gesture as though he were shooting. "Killing is bad. Property is also bad." He reflected a moment and then added with a smile, "But I do

not believe men are good enough to do withou either."

I tried to look innocent and asked, "Have you ever killed anyone, Fedor Ignaty'ich?"

He smiled and the brown eyes twinkled, while he spread out his hands apologetically. "I am a man. They would have killed me otherwise."

But these conversations were not easy, for it took five minutes to say the simplest thing, though both he and Lazary Gregor'ich were very patient. Most of the time I seemed to spend on my plank bed sweating in fever, dozing or reading my only book, "Moby Dick." Half of this was finished before I left Aralskoe Moré and I was forced to ration myself to a few pages a day lest I be left with nothing to occupy me.

When I had finished my day's portion I would look through the little window at the sand without and dream of slender glasses of iced lager, of Sherry Cobblers and other cool summer drinks, almost hearing the tinkle of the crystal ice against the glass. Tea and water-melon, bread and sand, that was all our diet, and my sick stomach could face it no longer, so perforce I starved, though sometimes Fedor Ignaty'ich found me an egg or milk. Occasionally we had mutton and rice, but the sight of Piotr drinking the grease and cracking the bones with his teeth to get the marrow effectively took away my appetite, though I was breathless with admiration for the strength of his jaws.

Sometimes Yaganov roused me with a kindly "Meester Fox, loshadi," and I stumbled out to look at horses in the yard, but then as soon as possible stumbled back again. I had only a few grains of quinine, while chlorodyne and castor oil alike had

been taken by someone in Aralskoe Moré, Bill or Alek.

"Moby Dick" grew near to its grotesque close, at once to my relief and dismay, so putting it aside I would try to remember the books I would like to have had with me. They were very few—Rabelais that magnificent purge, "Tristram Shandy" and "Tom Jones," Charles de Coster's "Tyl Eulenspiegel," and, strangely enough, "Jude the Obscure." I tried to remember "Antony and Cleopatra" and suddenly discovered, what I had never realised before, that I loathed modern poetry. Tired of lying in bed, I would struggle to the window and gaze at the half-dozen wooden crosses foolishly stuck away in the sand beyond the railway track.

Those crosses began to obsess me. "Why are they so few?" I asked Fedor Ignaty'ich.

"Last winter the famine refugees got down from a train and pulled them up to burn for warmth," he answered. "Before then there were more than a hundred crosses. We stood here armed to prevent them from pulling our houses down."

I shuddered. These were the lucky ones too, rich peasants who had escaped. The poor stayed behind to die in agony, eating the thatch from their roofs, in dreadful madness eating one another. Their roofless mud isbas still stand in the villages beside the solid log houses of the richer peasants. This too in the only country in the world where the right of the poor to life has been publicly proclaimed and desperately asserted. What bitter ironist first said that God loved the poor?

Meanwhile our herd was growing and we began to be anxious about the wagons to send them home in. The station-master promised they would be here in a

day, Steklov promised they should come at once, the station-master in Kazalinsk gave his word that we might expect them any time, but still they did not come and every morning beheld an empty station.

" Promises reassure me, but death may come first;
When I am dead of thirst, what good is the drop of water which falls? "

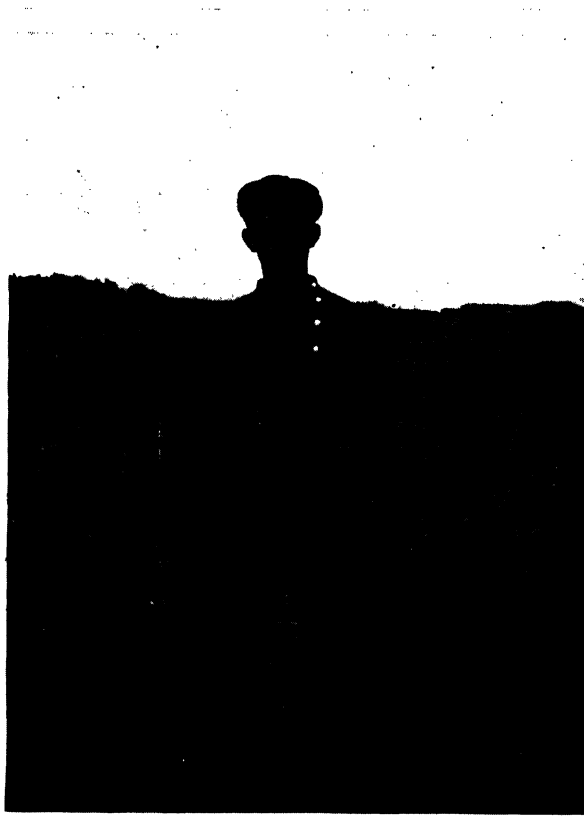
Piotr began to grumble that there was his land to plough in the north, that the weather was breaking (indeed the days were now grey and cold) and that the camel he had bought was eating its head off in idleness. We sent messages to the rest of our party in Aralskoe Moré to come and relieve me, but no reply came, and though we anxiously scanned each rare train from the north no familiar figure ever got down.

One day Lazary Gregor'ich went to Kazalinsk that he might hasten the sending of our wagons. He came back with heavy news for me.

" There is war," he said. " How war? " I asked. " War between England and Russia. England and Greece are fighting Russia and Turkey. There is talk of a holy war in the south to liberate Constantinople and the Kalif." " Do you believe it? " He shrugged his shoulders as though he did not much care, and smiled a little wearily. " If they want to fight, they will do so. It may well be true. At least it is true that English and Turks are fighting, for I read that in the newspaper." Small cheer this! But I would not be too greatly disheartened, so, thinking of the England that now seemed farther away than ever, and the events that had made me leave it, I sang to myself,

" Out upon it, I have loved
Three whole days together."

In those lines I found comfort, for even if I were to die



THE AUTHOR AT KAMISHLI BASH.

in this desert I could say them with conviction. And they say too that Sir John Suckling had a red nose, thinking of which I was also cheered. For our country of poets, of merry drinkers, of blithe lovers, of good-natured folk, can suddenly come very much to life in one at the lowest ebb.

We had spent all our money now, and as for wagons had another promise of their early coming, so, as it was impossible to buy more horses, I planned to travel home in them with the horses as soon as they came to us from Kazalinsk, and shake off my fever in hospital. The others insisted I must not do this, for it was a rough wayfaring of ten days or more, and it would be safer to go by the express, where I might be looked after if I became worse. I would not listen to them until I could be sure of someone from Aralskoe Moré coming to take my place, so Lazary Gregor'ich said he would go to fetch them thence. Two days after he left there came in during the afternoon No. 21, the mixed train, "Maxim Gorki," as it was nicknamed, and we went out to meet it. We saw Lazary Gregor'ich get down and then turn to help someone with his baggage. It was Ole Bill, alone. I welcomed him gladly enough, though I had rather my countryman had been with him. After this latter I asked at once. He had gone back into Russia, but for what purpose Bill did not know.

We had a council of war that night. Steklov had been unable to hand over to Bill the money we had put for safe keeping in his safe; what his excuse was I forget now, but he had promised that if Lazary Gregor'ich came back in a day or two he would give it to him. This was annoying, and Bill damned Steklov for a thief, to which we all assented. I was a little surprised at Yaganov's especially bitter denunciation, but

afterwards I learned that Steklov had been the agent in confiscating his business. Bill told us he had heard the Turksoyus was in debt for three trilliards, to which Lazary Gregor'ich assented, and though I did not know what a trilliard was, never having dealt in anything above a milliard, I felt the outlook was a sickly one for our money.

Bill was for going with his gun and taking the money by force, but I would not agree to that till we had tried all other ways. He seemed quite mad against Steklov, swearing he would shoot him like a dog if he did not hand it over. I found all this vigour of violent action refreshing like balm to my exhausted frame and became almost excited when Yaganov's great arm smote the table with clenched fist and he poured out a string of invective against Steklov.

"He made me sign an agreement," cried the furious Cossack, "and now he is trying to slide out of it. See here, all of you. Before the Revolution I was the greatest man in all this country and never in my life did I sign a paper for any man. My word was good enough, and the only man who ever broke his bond with me, I broke his head. If Steklov tries to cheat me I will break him too."

He was really furious, and I am convinced would have done as he threatened, had the necessity arisen. This remarkable man could neither read nor write, yet he had managed all his great business with its accounts by memory alone. From Kazalinsk to Khiva Russian and native alike had accepted his word, for they respected his wit and feared his heavy arm. But Lazary Gregor'ich intervened with another suggestion.

"The Revolutionary Tribunal from Tashkent are coming in a special train to-morrow to hold an assize at Aralskoe Moré. The directorate of the Turkrib are

to be tried for corruption. If Steklov does not pay threaten to bring him before the Tribunal also."

This pleased Yaganov, for it was the Turkrib who held his fishing business, and he saw here a chance of paying his enemies with one blow. But Bill grumbled mightily. "Much better shoot him," was the sum of his opinion, but he yielded in the end. Lawless though this part of the world was, I wanted no murder trials to complicate our difficult work. Horses were of more urgent account than justice to one scoundrel, though what Bill's grievance was puzzled me. I learned later there had been a drunken quarrel wherein Steklov had worsted him.

After our evening tea I went back to my bed, leaving the others to empty the samovar while they talked their endless politics. Fools in England say the Russian is so terrorised he may not speak of politics till he has tapped all the walls and looked under all the furniture. Would it were so! I never met one who did not talk from sun up to sun down on politics and religion if he got the least encouragement. Happily they are good talkers, the best in the world, else life had been intolerable.

In these evening discussions among our party even stolid Piotr was roused, and through the wall I heard their voices raised in high argument—Yaganov's starting low like distant surf, then rising into thunder, Bill's surly and violent, Piotr's loud and stubborn, Lazary Gregor'ich's vehement and modulated. Words were bandied about like tennis balls, "Karl Marx," "Lenin" (they all worshipped him), "Capital," "Communism," what did any of them know about these things, who could not read, save only Lazary Gregor'ich? They would wear themselves out, there would be silence for a moment or two and soon the

gentle throbbing of a guitar and the rich tenor of Lazary Gregor'ich singing a Sart love song would tremble through the thin wall, such a song as this.

" One evening, I went in to my friend's, treading softly, softly.
She was sleeping peacefully; I pressed her in my arms softly, softly.

I said to her: 'Give me a kiss.' 'What,' she replied, 'hast thou no shame?
Whence thou art come, return, treading softly, softly.'

Obstinate, I would not go. She seized my arm and repulsed me;
At last, seeing no other way, I crept away softly, softly.

I went, but unable to bear longer, I returned and cried out:
'Ah, cruel one, give me a kiss softly, softly.'

Impetuously she wounded me with her dagger,
And, treated so barbarously, I fled away softly, softly.

Revnak says: Since the world is full of clowning and folly,
Do not blame me anyone, but read this softly, softly." *

If he sang a Russian song the note would be more gravely sad than even this, for his was a melancholy nature. Often enough I fell asleep with " Stenka Razin " singing in my ears, and there is no song more wildly sad than the ballad of this Cossack bandit.

* Khivan love song, written down by Vambery.

VI EVENTUALLY Lazary Gregor'ich got back our money from Steklov, by using what threats or persuasion I do not know. Enough for me we had it and the work could go on.

Meanwhile night after night I would be wakened from my feverish doze by Bill coming in to bed. As he sat on the edge of his bed to pull off his cracked and broken boots and his two pairs of socks he would start talking to me, or to the wall if I did not listen, and for another hour I must hearken to reminiscences of his rascal life, for the only theme he ever enjoyed was the richly varied one of Vassili Ivan'ich Skorachevski, whom the world called Ole Bill.

He was by birth Rumanian, born of Russian or Polish parents, and presumably he led a life of commonplace virtue till on coming of military age he was called to the colours; for never a word did he tell me of his life before then, and as for his toils, sorrows, loves and joys till that time, I can only guess they were those of any Eastern European peasant, that is, his toil was heavy, his sorrows were bitter, his loves gross and his joys simple. With me he always began his life with the army, and I suppose that then for the first time the outer world thrust itself violently and unpleasantly upon his vision, rousing the passion of contempt and anger, the half-conscious will to be revenged upon and conquer it which have animated him since.

"Guess I didn't cotton to soldiering," he said. "So I cleared with all my kit and sold it to a Jew. They caught me, sure, but I slipped again and sold the stuff again and I was caught again and put in the cells. But you don't keep Bill in the cells, so I guess I went again and sold all my clo'es to another Jew, a third time. So after that I reckon the King thinks he got no use for me, and those smart guys give me a passport and tell me to clear out and they don't want me never no more."

But apparently his passport had no visas, so he forged these and was ejected with violence from Austria into Germany and from Germany into France. From there they sent him to America as a place cut out for one of Bill's talents. They say the revolutionary Charles Rappoport came to Paris in the same way. Without money or ticket he boarded a train, was duly and literally kicked off, boarded another, was kicked off that, and so by slow stages was kicked across Europe to his destination.

"I bin in every State in the whole dam' Union," Bill boasted. This experience had convinced him that the West alone was fit for a man. "The East was a pretty poor place; no good money there." He turned his hand to all things, cook, waiter, carpenter, sponge, pimp, revolutionary, informer, lumber-jack, hobo, all the thousand callings of the New World, and of every one he became, he said, a master. Mostly he worked as a handy man in the Western mines, for that was a position to flatter his vanity. To be asked to do anything that might turn up and to be able to do it quickly and well was work to be proud of.

"Sure my boss think a whole heap about me. That's 'cos I never drank whisky no more than I could hold. Once a month now I go to that boss an' say:

'See here, Boss, guess I'm crazy for a drink to-night,' an' he say: 'All right, Bill, you go get some whisky and be as drunk as you darn please to-night, but I want you back to-morrow.' He often give me money to get drunk, 'cos he knew I never get drunk without I tell him first."

I liked the idea of this monthly debauch, aided by authority, for it showed a broad view of humanity in those Western States. How well many of us would work if we knew we should receive every encouragement to release, at least once a month, the life pent up in us by labour! The Boss had other reasons for trusting Bill, for he was in the I. W. W. and at need could be relied on to give information against his fellow-workers. Bill gave me the impression that he was the power behind the scenes in half the mines on the Pacific coast. But that was life to him, for he was of those who must be king or die.

Nevertheless he fought with the miners during the bloody strike in Colorado, having a certain large indiscriminate taste for blood and a passion for easy plunder. With more than his usual allowance of winks and sucking at his abominable pipe he told me how they did for the scabs and guards in their pitched battles, burned men alive in the mine buildings, shot them full of lead as they tried to escape, or hanged them as high as protesting Heaven. It was not a tale for babes, but his story of how he escaped the militia was perfect in its revelation of the essential Bill.

"When I see that show's all over I humps it over into de next State. First thing I meet is a sheriff and a bunch of militia. 'Say, where you going?' he says when they got me. I shammed stupid a minute. 'Boys, get a rope for this guy,' he says. 'Here, what you doing with that rope?' I ask. 'Sure we're going

to hang a striker.' 'Striker,' I said, stupid like, 'I ain't a striker, Sheriff. I was going dis moment into Colorado lookin' for scab work in the mines 'cos I hear they pays good money.' "

They had caught him sitting by a turn in the road and as they couldn't prove which way he was going and were in a hurry they let him go. There was a sly genius in this, and his wrinkled face was almost grotesquely good-humoured as he told the story. But the strike did Bill no good, for somehow ever since he was in the bad books of the police. Another time when he was "wanted" he stayed for a month in a room with drawn blinds at a saloon in Dallas, Texas, with a patrol-man on duty outside all this time.

Here Bill, the supreme individualist, for the first and only time joined his fortunes to another man's. There came to the saloon a wandering Irishman from Canada, with whom Bill founded a brief companionship based rather on mutual admiration than those warmer human qualities which make up the most of men's friendships. Shrewdness, independence and intense meanness were what each detected and admired in the other. Bill said this Irishman was no less than a miracle in his practice of the economic life (and how often is this so with those nations afflicted with a generous temperament). He did not smoke, nor drink, and by what Bill regarded as a master-stroke he satisfied his not infrequent need for love at half a dollar a time. By subtle flattery he obtained for this miserable sum the affections of some rejected, elderly wanton, though Bill, be it said to his credit, was still human enough to want his glass of whisky, and the flame of love burned more fiercely in him than to allow of his so wretchedly satisfying it. However, in his eyes his friend was exalted by these economies, and Bill, who

mistrusted all the world (not without reason), felt he could share with him, so together they went off to Canada with the brave intention of starting a saloon in British Columbia.

Yet all was naught, for they quarrelled and parted as other more ordinary lovers have done. Bill's little eyes shone as he told of this quarrel and the pipe came out from his cracked lips to emphasise each point by a stab at the wall. For a little while I could not tell what terrible fervour was working in him to denounce that sober Irishman, but slowly and piece by piece the cause came out, and so extraordinary was it, so mightily stuffed with the eccentricities of his queer mind, I could for a while hardly believe my ears. For these two men quarrelled almost to the death upon the subject of perpetual motion.

One great virtue was Bill's, he was a worker who never spared himself. Neither food nor drink ever passed his lips while his job was unfinished, whatever it was, and when it was done it was well done, in a spirit of sombre enthusiasm. One great hatred he had, nevertheless, for those who did not know the pain of labour as he had known it, the aching bone, the agony of stretched muscle, and one wild dream he cherished —to abolish labour for ever.

That dark mind conceived from somewhere in its turgid depths a machine harnessed to the principle of perpetual motion. What man had sought through the ages Bill was convinced he had found. He only wanted money, so little money, to build his machine and then mankind would be free for ever from body-wracking toil and would acknowledge him for its saviour—Bill, the despised and repulsed. He could not keep his idea to himself, but imparted it to his companion, suggesting they should join forces to

produce the machine instead of setting up the saloon. The canny Irishman would have none of this, told him straightly he was mad, and so they parted in bitter anger. Bill drank away his savings in a month.

Soon after this came the Russian Revolution, the news of it running through the Pacific coast like a call to the damned from the hosts of heaven. Freedom for the workers of the world! It was like rich wine in Bill's head, a kind of Dionysian fervour, for surely this must mean at last the only true freedom, and he too would be welcomed by the liberated millions as a saviour when he brought them his machine. For 5000 dollars he would save the world, for it would cost no more to build, while over there in Russia they were taking all from the rich for the people. He set to work to save again and two years later sailed for Japan and home.

From the day he set foot in Japan nightmare rumours of blood and lust beset his ears and fired his imagination. Siberia was a wild chaos where all enormities were permitted and great fortunes daily made and lost by daring scoundrels. The Japanese were full of the extermination they were to work on the Bolsheviks to gain bases for the greater extermination to be worked on America. When he crossed to the mainland and reached Harbin he found it full of the wreck of Kolchak's army, a maddened crowd of Russians rolling in every day with the loot of Siberia—rolling-stock from the railway, factory machines, specie, all the ruin of a great country. Partisan bands daily crossed the frontier to wreck trains, massacre their enemies, plunder and burn. He joined himself to one of these for a short time. But the life was too dangerous, prisoners were shot out of hand, and the 5000 dollars were scarcely worth a violent and brutish death. He deserted at the first chance and caught a train to Irkutsk.

They told him there that at Omsk he stood a chance of finding work under the new Government then forming, if he joined the Communists. So after another three weeks of stormy travelling he came to Omsk, and the evening of the same day a military train brought Trotski to the town to organise the Revolutionary Committee which was to restore order in Siberia. Bill did not relish the military display attending this momentous arrival, and though he was among the crowd at the station his feelings were already rather cold towards the actual workers of the Revolution he had come so far to see. Was it jealousy? Or disappointment? Or injured vanity? I do not know, but certainly at Omsk Bill's feelings towards the Revolution underwent a definite change for the first time.

An unfortunate incident may have been the cause of this. It seems that this extraordinary man was actually the possessor of domestic feelings of no common strength. Somewhere in the south of Russia, in his native village, if such a place exists, or at least the place his parents lived in before emigrating to Rumania, he had a sister still living. He had never seen her since he was nineteen, had not written to her, and had really no particular reason to believe she still existed. Yet he had brought her two great boxes of clothes from America in face of the strangest adventures and greatest difficulties. In Omsk one of these was rifled, to his great mortification, and one day shortly afterwards as he was returning home he saw a man slink away from his room in a suspicious way. In an agony of rage for his precious boxes, which in a way must have symbolised for him the only stable thing he knew on earth, he fired at the retreating figure and killed him.

There was unhappily no evidence to show the man

was really a felon and for a while Bill was in jeopardy of his own life. But the prisons were so full of Whites that there was no room for him, and since he was also a returned emigrant with technical skill he was sent on to Moscow with a caution to be more inquiring before he fired again. They would not have him in the Communist Party, but apparently found him some useful work to do before he was sent to the Mission at the beginning of the famine. His sister, though inquiries were made, he never heard of again, but the remaining box of clothes stayed with him for all that.

Five days Bill stayed with me in Kamishli Bash, and then at last our wagons came. But they would not let me travel with the horses, for every day my fever had been worse, so instead they took me the same night and put me in the Moscow express, and three days later I was safe in hospital, where for a fortnight I stayed. At the end of three weeks I was back again, but much had happened in that time. My late English companion from Aralskoe Moré had turned up for a few days, left an English girl there in charge, one brought up in Russia, it is true, and then disappeared again. An American had arrived on the same errand as ourselves, and these two, Sam the American and Florence the Anglo-Russian, became my close friends. Meanwhile, unfortunately, Bill had had sole control of the English horse-buying. He had not been idle, for I found two hundred horses upon the steppe, nor yet had he been scrupulously honest.

Indeed we were soon in trouble on all sides. Steklov tried to back out of his agreement with us, the people whose house we used tried to extort a monstrous rent, the railway authorities demanded bribes before they furnished wagons, the Izpolkom accused us of buying without permits and Sam discovered attempts

had been made to substitute bad horses for his good ones on the steppe. Two of the horses Bill had bought died of old age, many others proved unsatisfactory in various ways, and rumours came to us from all sides that he had been taking bribes from the Kirghiz.

Certainly the desire for riches had gone to his head. He could talk of nothing else but schemes for making money, and the company of Yaganov and other Cossacks excited him even more, for they were trading and growing rich before his eyes. This was the heyday of N.E.P., the New Economic Policy, and all Russia was like America in the early 'forties. Men were in a fever to grow rich, to win back what the Revolution had taken, and so fast was money made that foreign observers began to think Russia was to develop into a great modern industrial State. One could not escape from the atmosphere of fierce unscrupulous energy, of profiteers in misfortune, vultures on the battlefield of revolution. Wild improbable things happened daily. A man who was a starving beggar in Tashkent, becoming possessed of a bag of apples, might turn each one into a fruit of gold within a month.

The method was simple, for it was to take from a land of plenty into a land of dearth and reap fifty-fold on the least thing sold. The man with his bag of apples travelled in a cattle-truck to the first bazaar in Russia, sold them there, bought fish with the money from the Ural River, turned his fish into money again a little farther north, and so on till he came back to Tashkent in a first-class sleeping-car. A little luck, or a little capital, and anyone in a few months might be rich.

There was something grandly creative about this struggle for wealth, bringing out all the strength and cunning in a man, giving birth to wildest dreams, such a phase as the Industrial Revolution, cruel, base

and beastly, yet beyond all doubt productive and life-giving too. It was a kind of drunkenness that took the nation after its years of sorrow and repression, bringing strange things to pass—men who murdered each other for a few worthless roubles to start trading with; men who thought they could fulfil all their dreams of travel and beauty, for whom the world opened suddenly like a luxurious flower; men who saw themselves able to buy drink and mistresses again, and men like Yaganov who wished for wealth solely for the joy of gaining it, the effort of conquering, the delight of victory. It was a kind of mad passion, a great voluptuousness, which few escaped in the first year of N.E.P.

Few officials then who might not be bribed, few Communists who resisted the temptation to private trade. Yet it died as suddenly as it came to birth in the echoes of a few volleys fired at the startled bodies of those who had too flagrantly transgressed. Those Westerners who had hailed a new Yankee empire shook their heads in the print of their news-rags, sadder but little wiser, while the young men who had watched it all a little mournfully, a little cynically, demanded and obtained a place in the ruling party.

With us Yaganov, intent on restoring his great fisheries, dreaming of seeing his steamers on the Aral Sea, was the chief sinner, but others, big swaggering Cossacks with fair moustachios, were coining money by selling horses and stock to the Volga peasants who crowded the bazaars on the Syr Daria. Bill greedily drank in all their braggart talk of wealth and at every meal he poured it out to us. He would be now for buying a few sacks of grain in Kamishli Bash and selling them in Russia, or perhaps a horse or two, or a camel, or some tobacco from the islands. His plan changed

from day to day, but always the intention remained to obsess him, somehow to get money, to trade, to turn it over, to increase it, to become rich.

Bill's thoughts also, he told us, were turning to a little autumn love, for he still had that splendid box of women's clothes to bestow. The widow who owned the big wooden house where Sam lodged with his party had caught his eye, not because of her comely person, but because she had a fine house and two cows. Bill announced to us his intention of marrying her and setting up as a trader in Kamishli Bash, though what the widow thought of the proposal he did not say, nor did he know. I tried to persuade him against it, saying it would never do for him to live in the same village with Yaganov, whom he hated ("That fat feller," he called him contemptuously). He answered surlily that he would have no dealings with him. "But what of the two cows, Bill?" I asked. "Since Yaganov has the only bull in the village?" But he did not reply to this, for love is blind to the strongest obstacles.

Alas! for all these high plans, the widow was the innocent cause of his downfall. Twin demons, pride and alcohol, goaded him into madness from which there was no recovery. The widow gave a party to which were invited Bill, Yaganov, several Cossacks and one or two men from our employ or Sam's. A great plof of mutton and rice was made, with raisins in; the Cossacks brought plentiful samagondka, that home-made spirit which has replaced forbidden vodka and burns the throat like fire. They drank like Cossacks and heroes, but Bill, who had a townsman's head, was so drunk after only six glasses that he made outrageous proposals to the widow their hostess. The others restrained him and she left lest worse should follow.

He drank two more glasses to steady himself, with the startling effect that he became at once raging mad ("plumb crazy," as he put it himself when he had recovered).

He jumped to his feet and before all that respectable company charged Yaganov with having taken a great bribe from Ursala, the Kirghiz, the very bribe he had in fact taken himself a few days previously. The Cossack was sober enough to take no notice, though what he had drunk would have made four ordinary men helpless. After a breathless pause Bill repeated the accusation, accused him of robbing us in all ways, of pocketing the bazaar tax and many like enormities. In his drunken mind these crimes (and they were all his own) preyed heavily upon him, and since they must out he flung them at Yaganov, whom he hated. Some of his mud he knew must stick, for the Cossack's hands were none too clean.

The party broke up in dismay as Bill rushed at his enemy, getting in a blow on the bridge of his nose. To his everlasting credit Fedor Ignaty'ich made no retaliation; but simply held him till the others recovered enough to throw him out. A fool of a Cossack in Sam's employ, Yermolov, a half-fond loon, got a grand black eye and let go of him very suddenly. There was no holding Bill after that, and he went off into the village crying vengeance on the world. He met with the feldsher,* an Austrian prisoner with a fair moustache, and a weak, sulky face, reproached the wretch with robbing us, bloodied his nose and blackened his eyes and then made off for the station. Fortunately the station-master, a decent man in his way, suffered little, and Bill in exhaustion wandered back home and fell asleep in the kitchen.

* Unqualified medical worker.

One after the other the battered victims shook themselves, got up and tottered in to complain to me. Out of regard for our feelings, they explained, they had refrained from taking vengeance on Bill, or from handing him to the militia. But such a scandal! They must protest. With joy in my heart I listened to their woes, pretending a sympathy I did not feel. Only Fedor Ignaty'ich retained some show of dignity, but then he was comparatively sober. We pacified them all and I promised Bill should leave by the next train, which was the next night.

Florence and I hardly expected Bill to dinner that night, but he came in just as we were sitting down, his violence somewhat cooled, but still as drunk as might be. A cut lip and a bruised nose made the sickly pallor of his drunken Kalmuck face excessively repulsive. He gracefully retired while we washed up, according to his custom, but soon returned to pour out to us his views on life in Kamishli Bash.

It was a great revelation we got from those cracked and broken lips as we pieced together his drunken maunderings, sifting dream from reality and interpreting as best we might the mixture of foul Yankee slang and Russian, for he wandered haphazard from one to the other. But his theme was ever the same, riches, riches, the desire for wealth that had oppressed him for years, but more particularly during these last four months. For weeks he had been reckoning the chance of getting away with our money, now deciding the theft would be easy, now reckoning all the pains and difficulties.

He never directly accused himself, but wandered on in this way, " Say I did take dat money from Ursala, well, even if I did I might have gotten all your —— money and cleared off. But I didn't take any bribe

from Ursala—and if any —— says I did I'll ——." All very interesting and edifying for us who listened to him and soothed his rage. Then he would go on with the vengeance he was preparing on all those who had slighted or doubted him. He didn't care what we did, he was going to Petrograd, where he knew how to get rich and in a month he would be on his way back, then let them all look out. There was no man like Bill, great Bill who could despise the paltry world (for had he not been all round it?), and in a burst of condescending confidence he said he would show us the secret of his great machine that was to harness the principle of perpetual motion and save the world. He juggled on the table with knives, forks, cigarettes and odd things that came to hand, his mind stumbling darkly after the mechanical complications of the great wheel, for such it appeared was to be the form of this wonder.

Then his curious blood-lust turned to his old enemies the Communists, and he described to us a rising said to be preparing for the first week in December, when all the Communists were to be killed, men and women. "Kill the Communists," he muttered, "Russia never be right unless we kill all the —— Communists. Russia never be right unless we kill everybody. Kill everybody, I say, we gotta kill everybody." Perhaps he was right.

Eventually he went to bed and we saw him no more till noon of the next day, when I told him to be ready to catch the North express that night. He accepted his fate without a murmur, only saying he "felt pretty cheap and wouldn't mind going." Night came and we got him to the train with all his belongings. It was a dark moonless night and only through the chinks of the shrouded windows of the train did a few

rare beams of light fall on to the steel track where we stood. The engine was taking in water, and through the dark came the faint hiss of escaping steam and the brief words of the men tending her. Bill was not sober yet and his speech was fat with confidence and resurgent pride. He stood on the steps of the car like a gnome king and gave us a last wild sketch of his plans for hewing through the future. Two men, his travelling companions in the coupé, came to the window in the corridor to talk with us. They too were returned emigrants from the States, but Communists, high officials in the Tashkent co-operatives, and slightly drunk also. "America," cried Bill, with the lust of a brigand, "America," answered Sam with the defiance of a patriot, and "America," called the two big shaven-polled Communists with the exultation of conquerors.

"A fine country, a dam' fine country, eh?" asked the tallest Communist. "Yes," said Bill, "plenty money over there. Guess we'll be having another revolution soon," he added reflectively. "In America," said the big Communist, "that's all it needs, a revolution." "In Russia," grumbled Bill, remembering his wrongs. "We gotta get rid of all these Communists, then I guess we can make our own country." The big man laughed, not taking him seriously. "America," he said again, and there was the patter of water falling on the platform as they lifted the tube from the engine, a shriek from the exhaust and the long train moved off into the darkness of the steppe, taking Bill where? To America? God knows best.

THE NEW WORLD AND THE OLD

VII I HAVE said that during an interval of three weeks I was away from Kamishli Bash throwing off my fever in hospital in Russia, a journey of some interest, for on it I made the acquaintance of three Communists, and on my return spent three days at Orenburg, where Europe meets Asia. I got into the north-bound train very late at night, too tired and ill to notice the companions in my sleeping berth, who made a few jests at my expense as I got me to bed, for an Englishman is an object of mirth to all Russians nowadays. Religious hypocrisy and hectoring pomposity are now firmly fixed in their minds as our chief national characteristics, much to the annoyance of those among us who think they are neither hypocrites, nor bullies, nor pompous.

In the morning, seeing I was ill, they more than made up for their merriment at my expense by kindness in inviting me to share their breakfast and restoring me with a good draught of Tashkent wine. Two of them were Russians, just under thirty, not remarkable at all, though one of them, a short, broad man with a close-clipped brown moustache and lazy face, could not quite get over his suspicion of me as representing the loathed interventionists, or that fat bogey International Capital. Their leader, however, was the youngest of them, a Jew of only one and twenty, wearing a semi-military uniform of khaki and on his breast resplendent in scarlet and silver the Communist's V.C.—the Order

of the Red Flag. Small and lithe, clean-shaven, with a head of curly black hair, dark quick eyes and an eagle nose, delicately made, he was all vivacity and energy. Jests flowed from him as swift as speed, and looking at him you would say his clay was quicksilver and his blood was fire.

They were delighted like children to know that Russian literature was read so much, and wanted to hear which author was most widely appreciated. I hazarded Tolstoi, or Chekhov, and they were much disappointed.

"They mean nothing to us to-day," said the young Jew. "It is hard to read Tolstoi patiently, still harder to read Chekhov."

"Which of your classics are still real for you?" I asked.

"Many of them—Pushkin, Gogol, but above all Dostoievski. We understand him and he would have understood us. He is the greatest literary force in revolutionary Russia to-day."

"There is surely an irony in that—the fervid champion of Orthodoxy and Autocracy?"

"You cannot blame him for not anticipating the Bolsheviks," interrupted the man with the brown moustache. "But he did anticipate their spirit. His knowledge of the Russian soul was marvellous, and we are the most Russian rulers of Russia since Ivan Grosni."

The third man came in. "In every village we have spread cheap reprints of his works. He is to-day the most widely-read Russian writer."

"That is true," I agreed. "From my little experience of the villages it is ten to one that if a peasant offers you a cigarette it is rolled in half a page of 'The Idiot,' or 'The Brothers Karamazov'!"

They laughed. "For all that," went on the young Jew, "the Bolsheviks are in fact the most real incarnation of Russia. We too are only a new Autocracy, a new Orthodoxy, nearer to the people's heart than the old. Dostoievski was a Christian, but Nietzsche, who hated Christ, was inspired by him. So are we, who are also anti-Christian!"

"I doubt if any Russian born was ever a Christian in the Western sense at all," I said.

The man with the brown moustache smiled. "You are beginning to understand us."

"Listen," commanded the Jew. "Dostoievski taught that man is will and overcoming, that life is a striving beyond good and evil. He said in 'The Possessed,' 'There shall come a new, happy and proud man. That man to whom it will be the same whether he lives or does not live, he will be the new man.'"

"I do not understand that," I confessed. "I care very much whether I live or do not live. But I admit that many Russians seem to me absolutely indifferent to life. Yet they live well."

In a sudden burst of confidence the Jew leant over and placed a hand on my knee. "Listen," he said. "You are frank, and I too will be frank. We Bolsheviks have all the vices of the vilest characters in his works, but we have the nobility of the finest also, and it is never the merely vile whom he condemns, but only the false. There was only one sin to Dostoievski, indifference, and one virtue, an ardent heart. He saw the empty fool gibber beneath the mask of the intellectual and the liberal. Those were the only people he hated with the terrible fury of a pure soul for what is filthy and false."

I listened with respect to what this young man said, for he had seen much and done much. At seventeen

he was fighting for his revolution on the Volga. He had seen terrible things on the Caspian, fought in Persia and Trans-Oxiana against the British and the White Russians, against the Emir of Bokhara, against Enver Pasha himself. It was he who set my mind at rest on the subject of war against England and told me of Enver's gallant death. It was good to learn the English had had no reverse at Chanak and strange to hear that Northcliffe was dead, and Arthur Griffiths, and that Michael Collins had fallen in an ambush.

We were fast friends when they set me down at my destination, and I shall always remember them with gratitude and respect, placing them high among those many striking people a wanderer meets on his travels, to be intimate with for a short day or two before they vanish for ever on their particular errand in the swarming world. Small consolation to be able to fix them for a moment on their mysterious journey, and that moment an insignificant one. Their past, their future, one can never know, nor even guess at the rich or wild days in store.

After my stay in hospital I returned to Kamishli Bash with a Polish lad we called Frank, who was to be our chief train convoyer. Frank was born in Brest Litovsk and emigrated to America while still a boy, working there on farms and in automobile factories until to him also came the restlessness born of unknown promise which the Revolution carried to the great Slav populations in America.

He was a simple, almost stupid lad, and a poor mechanic for all his experience in Ford's works. Somewhat short and stocky in build, his broad face was heavy and clouded by a fall of black hair across his low brow, while his eyes were shy like an animal's, now bright with fear or sudden excitement, now dull

with apathy. He would rear about like a scared horse did anything unforeseen happen, shouting and swearing in foolish incoherence, much in the way of all his people. Yet he had a childish poetry which redeemed his dulness and a solid honesty which excused his nervousness.

There is nothing like the slow train journeys over the interminable steppe for making acquaintance with one's companions, and I soon got to know Frank. I think I never met anyone with a more honestly muddled head than his. Bill had hailed the Revolution because he thought it was to make him rich and free mankind from labour; Frank had hailed it with no less enthusiasm because he thought it would make men good.

He left America, the Empire of sentimental Mammon, believing that the Revolution had really brought equality, not merely equality of possessions, but also a spiritual equality in which the poor and foolish, the insulted and injured, would no more be half-despised, half-hated as in the old world. Frank was a natural Christian, understanding nothing of politics, that elaborate machinery which rules men's lives by economic necessity and the stern realities of human baseness. He looked at all government from the point of view of the poor in spirit, and if it did not so seem good, he wished to have none of it. An impossibly disconcerting view this, for no governor can be a Christian.

Of course he had been terribly disillusioned on his return and sometimes he sighed for the comfortable life he had left in the States. He had had money in the bank, a young Polish girl to court and a substantial dowry behind the romance. Then suddenly he left all this for the pursuit of an ideal, for the elusive

smoke of the great fire kindled on the steppe, and he had found only poverty, hunger and disillusionment.

"Why did you leave America?" I asked.

He gave a melancholy head-shake and "Guess I was crazy," he answered.

"Don't you want to go back, Frank?"

"No, not now."

It was hard to find why, but something still persisted, some spark that kindled in him from that great fire, and though the cloudy smoke had rolled away he felt still that there were people here in Russia who felt with him that despite the rebirth of greed called N.E.P. which seemed now all that was left, something pure subsisted and a Phœnix would yet rise out of those smouldering ashes of his dream. So debating we came to Orenburg and there to an involuntary halt, for our train went no farther, refusing the nomad adventure of crossing the Asian steppe. We had only twenty minutes in which to reclaim our mass of luggage, have it registered again, and get it on to the Tashkent train. But there were few porters, and none who would listen to our pleas for assistance; they thought, no doubt, that Frank and I did not seem rich enough to be worth attention. There was no other train till the Sunday, and we had to face the prospect of two nights in Orenburg. We found an American in the booking-hall, and he told us of rooms in a private house, driving us there himself in a great automobile.

We were welcomed by a little old lady in black with a bird-like face and a sprightly manner. She explained she was the widow of a General killed in the Civil War and that she was now living here with her daughter and daughter-in-law.

They had two rooms and a kitchen. The living-room walls were covered with great Ikons at each

corner, gaudy, ugly things of tarnished silver plate and imitation jewels, while on one side a picture in the antique style showed the surrender of Kazan by the Tatar chieftains to the conquering Boyars of Ivan Grosni. The table was covered with American cloth, China knick-knacks, and dusty albums spread everywhere, and in the window stood most monumentally a fine silver samovar covered with stamped medals, souvenirs of the great exhibitions of a dead civilisation, triumphant amid them a large medal stamped with the head of Alexander III.

Soon the daughter came in, a pretty girl of seventeen, delicately fair, yet not fragile, with all the warm soft curves of the women of Poland. How Frank warmed to the family and they to him when this common nationality was discovered! Her name was Tonia and she had the friendly, kittenish manners of a young animal, while in her eyes (cornflower blue, with deceptive innocence) was a pleasing coquetry. Sonia, the daughter-in-law, came in last, wearing a nun-like Red Cross uniform, heavy, slow-moving, speaking little, but homely and pleasant. I think she felt not altogether at home here, for she was Russian.

In the evening, over glass after glass of weak tea, we talked. The old lady was very proud of her family and told us much of Tonia's virtue and wit. "Imagine, she has been to the gymnasium, and learned Latin and French there too!" I looked at Tonia, who appeared in no way embarrassed by her mother's praise. "I know Amo, amas, amat," she said, laughing at me.

Were they so very innocent, those eyes? Was the maternal praise so disinterested? I began to wonder. Then out came the albums, like cemeteries, for they contained only the effigies of the dead. There were

pictures of the old lady in old-fashioned frocks arm-in-arm with a handsome young artillery officer.

"Ach, I was young then," she sighed, lifting her wrinkled old face from the album. "Indeed I am only forty-one now," this with a kind of pride and a vain little glance of defiance at us. I felt like answering, "No, you are not, you are dead and buried, rotting in your grave, like everything in that book." "My husband was a General, and fought against the Germans. He was killed in the Civil War two years ago. Here is my eldest son, a General too, the youngest in our army."

She showed me a series of photographs of him, as a baby, as a cadet, as a subaltern, a young captain in field dress and lastly as a General of Division at twenty-seven, with the Legion of Honour, the Cross of St. George, the Anne and the Vladimir upon his breast. He was a fine handsome boy, who had disappeared for ever somewhere in Siberia during the wreck of Kolchak's army. In one picture he was with his younger brother, a cavalry officer of whom they spoke little, not saying how he died, for he was dead too, perhaps in some way of which they were ashamed, fighting with the Red Army against the Poles, their own people. Those books were full of the dead, officers, officials, in fine uniforms, at picnics in the forest with their wives and sisters, at the Front, in barracks—young and old, and all dead, and their world dead too. "I am only forty-one," chirruped the old lady again, and again the only answer to that statement, incredible like all the world she conjured up for us in her albums, was, "No, you are dead."

The next day the old lady took us marketing. From the end of our squalid unpaved street of wooden houses we passed along an avenue of dusty poplars to

a public garden. "Karl Liebknecht Garden," said the notice on the gate, while inside we saw the leaves still as green as when in summer the young folk parade to listen to the band, or to slip into some pale moon-lit nook to whisper to their companion that they

> "Have one pearl, by whose light
> All things I see;
> And in the heart of earth and night
> Find heaven and thee."

Frank said he would like to take Sonia for a walk there.

Then only a few steps away we knew we were in the town where West ends and East begins, where you step straight from Europe into Asia. For opposite stood the great serai of the Bashkirs, with its slender pointed minaret, the many-coloured mosaics and magnificent dome of the mosque.

Madame chirruped on, basket on arm, shawl over her little grey head. How wonderful to be English, to be rich (unjustified assumption !), to have fine friends, fine feathers, to live where still there was a church in which priests intoned high nonsense of a Sunday to old maids and old rascals, where men were rich and men were poor and life moved as God ordained. So it once had been with her, she explained. A Catholic, a General's wife, once it was so and so, but now it was changed, changed.

Suddenly, as if to show how changed, appeared the battered ruin of the Cadet School of the Orenburg Cossacks. The Junkers must have fought sternly there. Only a part of the barracks and the stables was still intact and on the great parade-ground troops in blue and red were drilling smartly, while about the barrack square were lounging recruits just called to the colours, not yet in uniform. Was it an army of conquest or only an army of occupation ?

Then at last we had passed through the town and came to the market on the steppe. Here in the streets between the wooden booths jostled the nomad peoples of Asia, side by side with Cossacks and Russian peasants. Sparse-bearded, high-cheeked Kirghiz rode through the press with lofty indifference, or leaned to chaffer with some shrill-voiced storekeeper. Once or twice a groaning dromedary rolled through the crowd, a nomad with wild skin hat perched high on top. Bashkirs and Tatars, Gipsies and Cossacks, jostled in the crowd, and all the horsemen of the great plains seemed come together there. Here indeed was a place where two civilisations flowed into one another, the fluid mass of horsemen carrying the messages of both from the Volga to the Great Wall of China and back again.

In the evening we fell to talking again, and Frank by now was quite enraptured by the youthful charms of Tonia. The old lady started to praise her daughter's voice. Would we not come to the Catholic chapel in the morning to hear her sing? We promised to do so.

So on Sunday morning we all set out soon after the great bronze bells of the Orthodox cathedral began their melancholy booming. There seems to be a characteristic note in the bells of each of the Christian Communions, for the Orthodox summons is deep and loud, with a sad, monotonous note in the striking of its bells, a harsh, Asistic sound to remind one that this is a soil which has seen strange faiths of Pagan, Buddhist, Manichæan and Nestorian, and that something of all these has gone to the founding of the metal.

Beautiful and civilised are the bells of the Roman church, to which we were going. I had last heard Roman bells coming down from the hills above Rome

on a December evening when the last rose of sunset was still tinging the Western heights. Suddenly borne down on the wind came such a soft music of bells from church and convent that it seemed to have sung unbroken from the very childhood of the world.

The harsh, fanatic boom of the Orthodox bells drowned the Roman hymn, and then I thought with regret of the merry lilt of English bells. Their song is a pleasant, homely one, comforting the faithful with the knowledge that our Church is one of those dear domestic treasures which make our English life so comfortable and kindly. "Come all to church, good people, good people come and pray." But not the bad people; so that you know your prayers will do no one any harm, if they do no one very much good.

In this town where all faiths meet, and all peoples converse, in the early morning we had heard also the voice of the Mullah calling publicly to prayer. Some came to the mosques, others in the tents beyond on the steppe spread their little carpets, and went through the purifications and the monotonous formal reciting of the Moslem prayers. This was quite another religious beauty, that of an open avowal of faith beneath the clear sky of heaven.

In the Catholic chapel, save for its bell, there was none of the grave mystery, the calm, untroubled continuity from Pagan antiquity which is the splendour and grace of the Roman Church in Europe. Instead the walls were covered with gaudy inscriptions in Polish, and the old familiar images were replaced by tawdry Ikons.

All here was Polish—inscriptions, hymnals, Bibles and congregation. Three soldiers came in, two or three very old men, and a merchant, but all the rest

were women. Our hostess lit the candles and Tonia prayed with youthful grace and innocence before the altar of the Virgin, asking, no doubt, for strength to subdue the turbulence of love, the prickings of young flesh. Frank watched her fascinated, confessing to all the world that

> "Gentle love deeds, as blossoms on a bough,
> From Love's awakened root, do bud out now."

But of priest or choir meanwhile no sign. Frank continued to watch Tonia, the folk prayed on in silence, I fell asleep. Suddenly a general movement roused me, everyone was standing up at a signal from our old lady, and Sonia and Tonia began to lead the congregation in a hymn. They led them in fact, for the soldiers were no singers and the cracked voices of the elders quite failed to catch them up. At last it ceased, as suddenly as it had begun, and after two hours we were out again in the bright sun and clear, frosty air, wondering what was the explanation of this strange performance. In answer to our questions they told us that the priest had gone home to Poland, and that though they had written again and again to implore another none had come.

In the afternoon we said good-bye. Our cunning little hostess would take no money for our lodging, but asked us to leave something for the poor. With a sigh I gave her twice anything she dared have asked for lodging us, certain that these three women were the only poor in her mind. On the table in the sitting-room was a little vase of heliotrope, and as we went out Tonia took two flowers and blushingly pinned them in my shirt. They matched her eyes and I would have kissed these instead of her hand, only Frank was standing miserably by. Poor boy, he was to be much

deceived. They wanted an English or American husband for Tonia, someone to take her away to the old world made for women of her kind. Frank visited them often after this, Tonia made love to him, he was encouraged and petted, but only because they hoped he might one day bring another Englishman or American. I have heard that since our visit one of these three women meets every train to see if there is not some foreigner to whom they can offer hospitality —and a very pretty demure little baggage for a wife.

But it was good to be back in the train again, moving once more across the great steppe, back to turbulent life in Kamishli Bash. There we should be with our Kirghiz friends and enemies, Yaganov the sturdy Cossack, mysterious Steklov perhaps, and sly old Bill. I knew that when I got back there would be new faces, much to do, a whole life of new effort and sensation. Yet those days in Orenburg were doubly interesting, for their little glance at the three pathetic relics of a strange world just destroyed, for the moving picture of life in a city where Europe ends and Asia begins.

VIII After Bill left there still remained behind the consequences of his roguery, more than two hundred weakling horses on the steppe, and one day it fell to our lot to load these and about a hundred American horses into a trainload of wagons. At five o'clock, in the grey before dawn, a grey which never faded that day, an omen if we could have guessed it of the disaster awaiting us, three of us stumbled over the sand to the dark line of the station. We were all ready for the loading, hay stacked by the wharf, Russian and Kirghiz provodniks waiting for the journey, poles, ropes, nails, buckets, axes and lanterns all prepared. Under the direction of Ursala, tall and grim in a linen kalat of blue and white check, we worked in a thin drizzle loading the sharp-cutting reeds into the hay wagons. Then, since we had no engine, only one short wharf and a single siding, we had to shift all the wagons by force of hand, uncoupling them by fours and moving them, with loud shouting and clanking, into position.

We had been working for perhaps two hours when a black figure galloped unsteadily across the steppe towards us. It was Yaganov, drunk. He was marvellously drunk and rolling in the saddle, but he did not fall—so drunk that in the grey, uncertain light the whole world seemed drunk and rolling with him in a Dionysian madness. Yet the world as it noisily

worked remained, like him, splendid and dignified, never losing its universal and essential force, or sprawling aimlessly this way and that, in the manner of the tipsy young.

Never shall I forget that day. We were at work on the wagons an hour after they had arrived, moving them by hand, cleaning them out, repairing the floors, fitting them with the poles to which the horses were to be tied, four a side. Not till the afternoon were we ready for the horses, and over us all the time was the dominating figure of Fedor Ignaty'ich on his shaggy pony, roaring out abuse and encouragement unceasingly. Above our motley workers he towered, as we all sweated, hauled and shoved, nor ever once did he cease joking, cursing, directing, interfering, and somehow succeeded, as no one else could have done, in getting that crowd of ne'er-do-wells of two nations to work as they had never done before in their lives. As the day wore on he dismounted and rolled in to help, forcing our scum to the task.

Then we had to set to work in the corrals among the restless herd, lassooing them with the long sixteen-foot pole with a wide fixed noose at the end which the nomads use. We tied them together in bunches of four, not without difficulty. For sometimes a wild pony with a fling of his heels dashed from those who would bind him, and then, if the pole were not near, a Kirghiz leaped at the flying beast, caught his mane and brought him to a stop, sometimes by the force of his rush bringing down man and horse together in a whirl of dust and hoofs. At last, soon after the Mullah's sunset wail, we had loaded them all, and hot with the fight, our nostrils pricked with the smell of sweating, terrified horses and littered hay, we made our way home to dinner. It was the first time during

ILYA ANDRÉY'ICH.

the day Fedor Ignaty'ich had tasted food, but he showed no sign of fatigue.

It was the Polish Frank's work to take the train into Russia, and that night we gave him money, his papers and food for the long journey. Excited and bothered, he went up to the wagons to await the engine, aching in every limb but unable to sleep. The engine did not come that night, nor all the next day, and the interval he spent in getting his crew to shake down to their work. There were forty of them, half of them Russian, half Kirghiz, who took on the work for the sake of a free passage into Russia and an outfit of clothes after the journey. He chose his second in command, Fedka, a pock-marked, moon-faced lad who wore a sailor collar over his blouse, the only one of them he knew and would trust. One of the provodniks was a Turkish boy of fourteen called Muhammed. His parents had been massacred during the war at Bitlis on Lake Van, the boy had been picked up by a Russian officer, brought to Turkestan, lost his protector in the revolution and drifted to Kamishli Bash. He drank, prostituted himself for sheer wantonness, but kept his wagon clean and was steady in his work. He was the only other Frank knew anything of.

The second night the engine came to take them out into the vast and silent steppe. When at length they were started, the long convoy of wagons rattling eerily through that huge dark silence, Frank lay down in the hay on the floor of his wagon, four horses tied to a pole on each side of him, and tried to sleep. But sleep would not come. When the sliding doors were closed the heat from the eight beasts and two men (for Fedka was with him) was unbearable, and if only one of the sliding doors was opened an icy blast came in

from outside. Yet that was not his only trouble, for he had brought horses often before and knew that by snuggling well into the rushes and wrapping himself in his heavy shuba he could stand the cold. It was different, however, when he thought of the men in every one of those wagons, among the sweating, stirring horses. Then he was frightened. Men scared him, their dark thoughts, their sudden anger, and he thought of the forest outside his home in Poland, which he had not seen since he was a child. Men were like that, dark, impenetrable, with horrible things lurking in their depths. He had a feeling that something was to happen on this journey. For comfort he turned to Fedka, and they talked for a long time.

In the morning they came to Saksaulsk, where the engine was to be changed. Nothing but a station, an engine-shed, and a few nomad tents. The station-master would not give them another engine, made excuses, became insolent and finally put Frank into one of those terrible rages when the world seemed to fade into a red whirl, with the face of the offender insolent in the midst. He turned to Fedka, to one or two of his men standing by and denounced the station-master to them. He was an official, a bourgeois, an intellectual, the poor folk could never be happy till such as he were exterminated all over Russia. He went on with his tirade till he was exhausted, till no more oaths came to his lips, till he felt only tired, unhappy.

Nothing could be got from the station-master, who wanted a bribe, so they went back to their horses, watered and fed them, cleaned out the wagons on to the track to spite their enemy and prepared to wait with the patience of their race. Late in the afternoon a ragged Kirghiz came to Frank and explained with

great difficulty that one of the horses in his wagon was very ill. He ran round with Fedka and they found the poor beast on the floor, kicking and rolling in agony, its neighbour horses stamping away in wild fright. They fetched two more men and with difficulty cut the halter and dragged the poor creature out into the centre of the wagon, in danger all the time from the hoofs of its terrified companions.

They did not know what ailed it, but it died before dark and hardly had they dragged the body out than news came that another horse had fallen in the next wagon. Frank felt as though he had killed them. The Englishmen would be sure to think it was his fault, for did they not secretly consider all Russians fools and thieves?—all Russian workmen, that is, not the clever, educated people, of course. In terror he sent off a telegram to Kamishli Bash, but all he could think of to put in was "Two horses fallen, Frank."

The next night the station-master, afraid lest he be held responsible for the deaths, gave the train an engine and they set off on the next stage. By the time they reached Chelkar two more horses had died of the mysterious disease, and their bodies had been flung out to feed the vultures. Each night became a nightmare. When the train stopped, some scared provodnik would be sure to come screaming along the line, the only sound beside the panting of the engine in all the empty desert, saying that the horses in his truck had broken loose. Then Frank and Fedka would seize an axe and a lantern and run down the dark line of wagons. Frank climbed in to hold the startled horses, for as soon as the lantern cut through the blackness they set to plunging madly, till it seemed the wooden box would be kicked to pieces.

He darted into the kicking mass, swearing wildly,

screaming as madly as the frightened beasts as he drove them back into their places. Nothing was to be seen but the whites of their eyes till the red glow of the lamp, shown cautiously, lighted their straining shoulders and tangled limbs, Frank and the Kirghiz provodnik struggling in their midst.

At Chelkar came another heavy blow. It was here we had always replenished our hay supply, since it was impossible to carry enough for the ten days' journey on the train. But this time there was not a wagon-load in the place, so Frank left his horses in Fedka's charge and went forward on the engine of a passing train to Emba, the next division station, to arrange for the hay to be brought down to the station there to meet them. Some evil fate seemed to be laughing at him, however, for he got the hay, had it ready for loading, had even got some of it on board, when the whim of an official decided that an engine should be sent to drag them along another stage without delay. It was the first time they had not been kept waiting for an engine, and now they did not want it! But they had to go, there might not be another engine free for days.

Again he rode forward in the cab of an express, this time to Ak Tiubinsk, determined to be ready at all costs. More horses had died, seven in all, and to add starvation to this mysterious disease would mean disaster too terrible to contemplate. He bought his hay at Ak Tiubinsk and found it took nearly all his money, for the exchange had fallen so in the few days since he had left Kamishli Bash, where we had no means of following its vagaries, that fully a quarter of its value was gone. He explained the danger to the authorities, and the commander of the troops offered his help to transport the hay over the four

miles of steppe between town and station. Again the fates laughed silently and made him helpless. The day before all available transport had been sent out of the town to haul in wood for the winter! Yet by superhuman efforts they got two truck-loads to the station and loaded them on to the train. Then forward again, with Orenburg the only hope, though so far no horse had gone short. But money, he had no money left!

You must understand that Frank was a shy, rather stupid person, who would rather walk across a fiery lake than brave a man in authority, such was his superstitious dread and hate of these people. Yet he had brought this train of death through so far successfully and was doggedly determined they should reach their destination, if he died himself. At Ak Tiubinsk they had had to get permission to shoot two more horses, nine in all now, and no money to buy hay in Orenburg! He was almost distracted, with the worst blow of all yet to come, and luckily he was not to foresee this grisly event of the journey, or he might well have gone mad.

Instead he proved himself more than ever worthy of his trust. At Orenburg he assembled his motley crew, not quite the same which had started out, for there had been desertions, especially among the Kirghiz, with consequent replacements. He made them bring all their possessions, their purchases on the journey, and marched them to the bazaar. Here he sold the strangest collection of boots, shubas, dried fish, rugs from Tashkent and oddments of clothing, collected the money and with contributions levied from their personal funds he was able to buy enough hay to finish the journey. They all gave willingly enough, being promised a big reward at

the end of their troubles. At Orenburg two more horses died, and Frank was able to visit the General's daughter with whom we had formerly stayed and snatch a few fresh kisses from her lips before proceeding. Lucky, too, that he could not foresee how she also was soon to betray him!

They left Orenburg at night, and in the morning Muhammed came running to him, his pleasant brown face pale with terror and blubbering incoherently. Fedka, the moon-faced, got hold of him and shook him into silence, and then, after a moment, the boy was able to tell them that in the next wagon to his own the provodnik was lying murdered. Sick with horror they hurried on, and there in the hay, between the calm horses, lay a man in a welter of blood, his head battered in with an axe. One of the horses was gone.

They called the station Cheka and paraded the crew. Not one of them could, or would, give any information, only Muhammed blubbering there was anything but mute and stolid. The Cheka questioned him, and at last he told a story. The murdered man had picked up a companion at Orenburg, a big peasant, and the two had invited Muhammed in to them, promising him drink. Soon after midnight, at a wayside halt, he had left them and heard no more. At some sleepy station, in the dead of night, with only the silent rolling steppe of the Cossacks as a witness, the peasant, mad with drink and debauchery, had murdered the provodnik with the axe, battering him horribly, and had escaped with the horse, to sell it for a few paltry roubles in some distant village. He had chosen his place well—those bare rolling downs, with their lawless memories of Pugachov, which had witnessed unmoved all imaginable enormities.

When the blood-red November moon rose that

night, the last of the journey, Frank lay under his shuba sick and shivering with revolt. The day before he had kissed a girl with red lips and eyes of cornflower blue, in the night a man had been put brutally to death by his companion in a filthy orgy, while all along their trail of over a thousand versts they had left the bodies of dumb, agonised brutes, stricken by some unknown and fatal disease as they were being carried into slavery away from their native steppe. He turned to Fedka, moon-faced, pock-marked Fedka, and cursed him for no reason. They quarrelled, came to blows, so that the horses in fright began to plunge. In sudden remorse they stopped, and Fedka kissed him, on his cheeks stubbly with ten days' beard, and they lay down to sleep in their evil-smelling bed.

As he slept he began to dream uneasily that he was back in his little native town, where his father had been the watchman. It was winter, the wide steppe with its dark patches of forest covered with a monotonous carpet of silent snow, the rivers frozen over, and from the top of the watch-tower where his father struck a bronze bell every half-hour only the green cupolas of distant churches marked where the scattered villages still fortressed the warm life of man. His father, muffled to the eyes in sheepskins, was gazing into the night, a Russian white night with the sparkle of countless stars reflected on the crystals of the snow, with every branch and twig frozen in a still glitter, the lovely witness of such a vast remote splendour as recalled only the infinite silent plains of eternity itself.

Then a bright flame crackled into the air beneath, and Frank saw his father beat the alarm bell for the fire-engine. At a headlong pace he saw the outriders come down the street, each one holding in his hand

a flaming cresset, then the sledges bearing the apparatus pulled madly over the uneven white road by teams of horses harnessed three abreast, the glow of the fire in their startled eyes, and then more galloping horsemen whose waving torches glowed luridly on their brass helmets and keen axe-heads. Like blood on the axe-heads! and he moaned in his sleep.

Far above, his father watched them fight the fire with axe and crowbar, pulling down the flaming building, the one red angry place in all that immense white silence. Frank wanted to scream to the rest of the world beyond the plain to come and help, and it seemed he did, but no one came, no one from America, from England, for the plain was so huge and they had their own affairs to think of.

He ran over the plain to the west, to America, calling them to come and help, but no one took any notice of him. He was back again where sky-signs were wavering across the fronts of buildings that sheered darkly into an electric night. Expensive-looking men and women poured out of the theatres and noisy restaurants into soft-cushioned automobiles that glided away through the brilliant streets. Over the wilderness of roofs threaded a thick maze of wires feeding with news the clattering presses producing the morning's desert of paper for the proud democracies. He saw men writing books about the complicated adulteries then preparing in a thousand luxurious beds; women flaunted the painted challenge of their sex upon the pavements; and it all seemed a phantasmagoria of cubes and colours, of violent lights and angular beauties, with a hymn to civilisation coming in triumphant discords from factories, from jazz halls, from telephone bells and droning wireless.

He cried when they would not look at him, and a

policeman cuffed him. Then he came back again, running in fear from it all, over the endless plain till he was back beneath the rime-encrusted watch-tower. His father watched the fire die down in a heavy cloud of smoke and fitful showers of sparks, and, turning, leaned over the parapet and spat into space.

When he woke, the train was stopped in a siding, and getting out on to the track he made out the dim shapes of big warehouses and knew he was home again. In the morning he reported to the head of the Mission, a well-meaning, over-worked and sorely-tried man. "I'm glad you're back, Frank. Hope you had a good journey. How many horses have you brought to trouble us with this time?" That night he sat next to Bill at dinner, for the old scoundrel was still working in the Mission, though his glory was somewhat diminished, so that he was reduced to the bullying of servant-girls and the more timid of the English relief workers. Bitter with jealousy, he turned to Frank and said:

"Say, Frank, what you steal that horse for off the train?"

Again the world resolved into that whirl of red, and in the centre this time the ugly, crinkled face of Old Bill. Frank seized the nearest weapon, a fork, and stabbed blindly at his enemy. There was a scream, a shuffle of chairs and they held him while Bill was taken cursing away, dabbing at the blood coming from a wound above his collar. The authorities did not approve of Frank's violence, and since he was not considered a very efficient worker they sent him back immediately to Kamishli Bash to convoy more horses, though he asked for a rest and hoped to be relieved of the work altogether. But that would have meant the sending of an "efficient" man, and the Relief

Workers each had their favourite chauffeurs and interpreters, whom it would have been so difficult to spare. Since Frank had all his life obeyed that superior order of beings which is invested with the mystic authority of position and education, since he feared them and could not understand them, he came and did not complain any more than one of the horses in his wagons against the odd freaks of fate.

A RUSSIAN PATRIOT

IX To replace Bill there came to Kamishli Bash in Frank's company Ilya Andrey'ich, a lad of nineteen, the grandson of one of Russia's most famous authors. He was to be our Russian horse expert, for in spite of his years he knew much about horses, having worked in a Government stud since the Revolution, while years ago his father had possessed one of the most famous stables in Russia. Love of animals was so deep a part of Ilyusha's nature that at times he seemed himself to be only a splendid animal, a fine-limbed sensitive stallion, or even (and what true Russian is not?) a lithe and wily wolf. In height he exceeded six feet, was well-built in proportion, wrestled with much strength and skill and rode like one who is born in the saddle. The powerful jaw, vivacious eyes, broad low brow, were all his famous grandfather's. So was his stormy sensual nature, his love of hunting and wild life, his deep natural pessimism. The grandfather had a tremendous will and intellectual power which conquered and crushed the natural Russian in him. The grandson was weaker, the sport of the fate which had cursed his family for generations, making them wild and wilful, yet loved by all and pitied by a few. Three of his name had been famous in literature and the first of the family to receive a title had been a murderer at the command of Peter the Great.

We became fast friends, riding together, talking together till all hours, living and working together in

that clear air and bright sun till we were no more civilised than the Kirghiz nomads about us. That was true of us all, of Sam, the American Quaker, Florence, the Anglo-Russian, but above all of Ilyusha. He and Fedor Ignaty'ich, the turbulent Cossack, were made to love each other and they as it were set the high pitch of our life, rich natures both, as wide and wild as their native steppe.

Ilyusha was one of those to whom romance comes naturally. He had married a year before, riding thirty versts through a night of storm to his bride's village, and then back again to his mother's house to tell her of his act, horse and rider mired to the eyes and exhausted, but kept going by some secret fire of life. If he did a thing it was that way. He had lived for a year in Samarkand with an uncle scarcely less extraordinary than himself, and now he had left his wife and child in Tula, 2000 versts away, to join us on this empty steppe. Why? We did not know, for some time even could scarce believe he was married.

At night, when the table was cleared and candles were lit, he would take up our guitar and sing us gipsy songs in a strong and beautiful tenor. "The night is beautiful. The moon caresses the garden. Fling a slight cloak around your shoulders; hide your little dark head in the delicate black lace; open gently the wicket gate in the garden, and come, oh, my beloved, I await thee!" Or maybe it was this one:

"I love thee like the sun, the stars, the trills of the nightingale, as no man will ever love thee. I love thee like strength, glory, liberty, love itself; I love thee as man can love once only in his life."

He sang with much passion a song whose refrain was "Once more, and once more, and once again,

KONAT, AK BALA AND THEIR WIVES.

and many times again," so that the commonplace words took on a great beauty of vivid life and listening to him you said, "This boy is a great lover," and knew it was true. He was a great lover as others are poets, or kings, or prophets.

Soon after he came a chance visitor from Tashkent brought us hashish and at Ilyusha's suggestion he and I and the visitor smoked a little in cigarettes of mahorka rolled in newspaper. There is a divinity in hashish, though it be an evil one, for never has my heart been lighter, my head clearer, my joy in life more splendid than on that night.

The sect of the Assassins, smokers of hashish, terror of the world, may well have felt themselves to be staggering drunkenly to God, on light wings of wonder, over an abyss of dismal terror that is the vile world. God, they claimed, is a pure Absolute, and well they might with the power of the drug lifting them joyfully to white oblivion. He is unknowable, inaccessible to thought, they said. And who would know, or wish to think, when all things are clear in a dance of delight, that changes to a whirl of madness, that becomes all One in ecstasy?

The absolute engenders Universal Reason, that is in the early stages of the drug, when this Alexandrian Logos appears, beautiful, enchanting. From Universal Reason springs the Soul of the World, warm and palpitating with the secret voluptuousness of life. That is when the drug is in the Aphrodisiac stage. The Soul of Life organises Matter in Time and Space after those first rare puffs when the heart is strong and conquering. The human soul, feeding on the drug, seeks thus by divine knowledge to pass through the chain till in the consummation of centuries it is merged in the Universal Reason, while inaccessible

above remains the high and dreadful Absolute, to reach which would require the very destruction of eternity.

We smoked no more than would allow us to organise Matter in Time and Space, sleeping most soundly for it afterwards. Not far along that dangerous path for the most divine adventures would I pass, but Ilyusha, whom through the whiffs of smoke I saw as the strange mad figure of Hassan Sabah, the Old Man of the Mountain, urged me to go farther. I rose to denounce him:

"You are lost in the terrible dream that leads to absorption in the Soul of All," I cried. "You seek to be merged in the Universal Reason, to glimpse that pure and frightful Absolute."

But he only laughed, having a Cossack head, that no wine or drug will turn, and said I was drunk. And what of it? Life is only a drunken dream, or rather a series of dreams that our reason lights and controls, stringing them together like lovely Chinese lanterns hung in the dark alleys of time. Some of us must believe in their truth, even to the last extremity of giving our lives to convince ourselves of this. Others are content to half-believe, loving them, however, because they are strange or beautiful.

Lazary Gregor'ich had many dreams, but in 1914 bullets began to fly from all sides and most of his lanterns were extinguished suddenly and sharply. He had dreamed of travel in Europe with his brother. He had dreamed of peace and fraternity. In 1918 he still believed in fraternity and was one of the Socialist Revolutionaries who proclaimed a Republic at Askabad under the protection of British bayonets. Then the protection was withdrawn, the promises were broken, he lost everything but his life and saw his companions

butchered. Yet he was good to me, an Englishman. He had no illusions left, or a few only, for he still sang, and he still found pleasure in talking gravely of life and wisdom with the Mullahs and Khodjas in the Sart villages around Tashkent. He had perhaps only changed his Western dreams for Eastern ones.

He still sang to us the Sart love songs he had learned in the shadowy villages, at night, when the sunset prayers are said and the two-stringed guitars are brought out from their corners in the cool mud rooms.

"On Saturday, I met her, graceful as a cypress; I became gloomy and sad for her.
On Sunday, loosing my reason, I swooned away, seeing her face shining like the moon.
On Monday, I unveiled my heart's secret to her whose eyes are like the narcissus, whose cheeks are like roses, whose eyebrows are a bow.
On Tuesday, like a hunter, I took the key of the fields, but I became myself the victim of my timid beauty.
On Wednesday, my love walked out upon the grass, the nightingale beheld her face and sang his bitter complaint.
On Thursday, I said to my dear: 'Ah! hear my counsel, hide thy secret from the good and from the wicked in this world.'
On Friday, at last, Nesimi beheld all her beauty, and drank of happiness till he was sated upon her ruby lips."

Once when I was riding out with him alone in the late afternoon we met our herd of horses coming in from the pasture, herdsmen galloping round the flanks, the whole mass thundering stormily over the hard plain. Lazary Gregor'ich hailed them:

"Why do you ride home so early?"

"Brigands, comrade. Four armed men came towards us from behind the Serpent hill. We ride home to the village for safety."

"Which way did you see them last?"

"To the north-east, on the slope of the hill."

had done so from childhood, despite his title. Simple people loved him and old Fedor Ignaty'ich, as great a Russian as himself, worshipped him. He had never been a soldier, but all things connected with the army he understood and talked of with pleasure, believing that in its army the spirit of a nation is enshrined. One day there came a report down the line that no one was to go to the station to meet an on-coming troop-train, as the men were out of hand and plundering. The station-markets at Aralskoe Moré and Sapak had suffered, but nobody from Kamishli Bash went out with bread, fish or melons to meet the train.

When it came in a crowd of men in ragged khaki leaped down on to the platform. No officers were visible, the brown skin showed through rents in their uniforms, many were barefoot, and all seemed to be without greatcoats, though the cold autumn nights were already here. Disappointed at finding no food, they contented themselves with taking the station-master's stock of sleepers and some coal, to burn for fuel in their stoves. They could not be blamed, only the wretched officials who let their soldiers go naked and hungry and then cry out on betrayal when they fail in war.

Ilyusha was bitter. "Not so in the old army. Ah, then we had good soldiers, the best in the world. It was beautiful to see them once, and now, what a disgrace! What will people think of Russia?"

"Don't worry about that," I said. "In the end soldiers are judged by how they fight. The troops of the French Revolution when they won victories in Holland had to stand to their arms outside a captured town while straw was requisitioned from the burghers so that they might kilt themselves decently before entering. Napoleon led a band of hungry brigands

into Italy and afterwards conquered Europe with them."

"But we have no Napoleon."

"Well, to come to more recent times, even the respectable British Army plunders when it is cold. I was in an Australian battalion and they would give us no fires in billets in December, so we burned the furniture. We also kept the public houses open by force after hours."

He laughed at this, for the Anglo-Saxons are considered models of respectable behaviour in Russia, where they do not know of Yorkshire or the Dominions. "All the same," he added, "I would prefer discipline and smartness. Soldiers should be like athletes, trained for their work, moving beautifully, with balance and order. They are the athletes of honour."

For all that the Red Army is a more efficient force than the Army which broke up in the War; its soldiers are keener, freer and of higher spirit. Sam and I once travelled for four days on the end of a troop-train, four-wheeled cattle-trucks fitted with stoves, in them the soldiers and their women comfortably settled with their mattresses and belongings (they were coming home from service in Turkestan). Two trucks were full of fat-tailed sheep, the men's rations, and each day fleeces were hung up to dry on the electric lighting wires which ran over the roofs of the trucks. We marked the progress of our journey by counting the fresh fleeces hung up every morning, while the numbers of the living dwindled each day.

The men were well-clothed, saluted smartly and behaved much as all soldiers, that is, rudely and gaily. They were less kempt and clean than our own troops, but bigger, finer men, fair, loose-limbed young peasants. They had no parades or roll-calls during their long

journey, and I could not help thinking that an English regiment at the first long morning halt would have paraded for P.T. to keep the men fit in their cramped quarters. Yet they compared very favourably with the Polish troops I had seen and well led would undoubtedly make little of them.

XONE night Fedor Ignaty'ich came in to tell us we must prepare to change our ground for buying the horses. "The situation has changed," he said. "The Kirghiz are bringing no more horses to Kamishli Bash, for the season is late and they are driving them across the Syr to the pastures farther south, where no snow will cover the growth on the steppe."

"Must we go then to Jussali, or to others of the bazaars in the south?" Ilyusha asked. "Perhaps even to Perovsk?"

"Listen," the Cossack answered. "I have relatives in Jussali, Old Believers, stern folk, and I will go to-morrow to visit them and spy out the ground. You may not come with me there, for they would look upon you as heathen, but I will seek a good lodging for you and send word in two days' time if you are to follow."

He went the next night, but four days passed with no word from him, so Ilyusha and I, with the consent of Sam and Florence, decided to go down to join him. We left on the first south-bound passenger train, happy to be once more on the move across the steppe, going south up the Jaxartes with the wintering nomads. The scene from the train was familiar by now, yet it had not yet lost any of its fascination, nor ever will for me. The blue lakes with their rushes and wild fowl, the yellow river running swiftly

between its low banks, the vast expanse of brown steppe across which the many-coloured herds of frightened horses galloped away at our approach, we felt now to be our home and we loved it with the passion of the nomad for whom it is the source of all poetry and all life.

We watched the flying hoofs fade into a cloud of dust, and Ilyusha turned to me with a smile:

"Two things only make me stop and look in life, a beautiful horse and a beautiful woman."

"And about neither of them can you keep your head. Isn't that so?" I asked.

"It's true enough. I cannot be held back from a horse or a woman. But the worst is that they come to me. We are mutually attracted."

"Tell me truly, Ilyusha, you are not happy with your wife?"

"No, she is seven years older than I. She nursed me when I had typhus. You know how it is when one is convalescent, all your desire for life comes surging back, you cannot restrain your passions and your need is ten times as urgent as when you are healthy. Well, she encouraged me and we were forced to marry. It has ruined my life and I often wish I had died of typhus instead."

"Be cheerful,

> 'The grave's a fine and private place,
> But none, I think, do there embrace.'"

He laughed. "Ay, that's the rub. Yet you cannot imagine the horror of being married to a woman you hate, with a child you cannot be indifferent to, and being at the same time very young and desirous of love."

"You are in love now?" A useless question.

Was he not always in love with all the force of his being, one woman succeeding another?

"Yes. She is the wife of our neighbour in Tula. She had come to spend a few days with us and I drove her back. The road was good, the troika flying over it magnificently and we drove without speaking for some miles, intent on our speed, on the galloping of the horses. Then suddenly we both looked at one another and knew. Yet we had never spoken a word of love before. I did not drive her home that day. But don't listen to me, I am a dark soul, a barbarian Russian."

Dark, yes, though not black, nor melancholy, for he might grieve bitterly, but he never wailed. Given cause for joy and no one was more riotously happy than Ilyusha, and I have never known a better companion in times of stress. He was one of those rare people who know their work most absolutely, are never at a loss in a crisis and will sing a catch if the world is crashing down about their ears. He was cursed like all his family with a blight of violence and unreason, he could be bitter with hatred, mild with love, mad with remorse and lusty with unrestrained life. For all his introspection and wildness he was a man of action. That is, one you could rely on to strike hard in the right place at the right time, without hesitation or afterthought. I have a feeling, for instance, that had he been with me in place of Lazary Gregor'ich the day the bandits were reported they might not have got away unharmed.

He was of those in whom one recognises at once something dæmonic that sets them apart from men, an energy of soul which drives them through life to some terrible or magnificent end. For a long time I wondered what this different thing was in him,

for it was not a thirst for glory, or power, or beauty, or God, or any of the things that come first to mind. About this time, I think, I discovered the solution—he was a great lover, a hero of love. They are rare enough in history or legend, the Cleopatras, the Aspasias, the Don Juans.

Late in the afternoon we arrived at Jussali, where we expected to find Yaganov to meet us among the variegated crowd on the station. But the most part were Kirghiz, and we saw no Russians at all, save the railway officials. So I stood by our saddles and packs while Ilyusha went off to inquire. The railwaymen, like all Russian officials, went to great pains to avoid answering a question, and they at once became unusually busy. The Kirghiz shook their heads at Ilyusha's Russian, not understanding his questions, till at last, inspired, he seized an impassive Kazak standing near to us and asked many times with great energy, "Is Pietka here? is Pietka here?" for Pietka is Yaganov's name with the nomads. At last the Kazak understood and broke into voluble Kirghiz till others of his countrymen came up, attracted by the magic word "Pietka," and in broken Russian told us our friend was there indeed, on a freight train waiting on the north-bound line for the express to be cleared. Here was fame indeed, for a man to be known by all these barbarians nearly two hundred miles from his own home! They helped us courteously to carry our things across, happy to aid their Pietka's friends, and just as darkness was beginning to shadow the fantastic shapes of the station we came to his teplushka on the end of the freight train.

It was dark inside, so that we saw only dim forms squatted on the floor or lying on the two plank beds. One of them, short, enormous, rose to greet us,

someone lit a candle and the vague light flickered on Fedor Ignaty'ich, happiness on his bearded face at seeing us two again and kindly words of welcome on his lips. With him was a dark, cute little Russian, shabbily dressed, Genin from the Turksoyus at Aralskoe Moré, and our two chief herdsmen, Konat, pink-turbaned, ascetic-looking and loosely-built, a mediæval Templar, and Ak Bala, smiling, courteous and wearing the virtues of his race in all his broad person.

We were settled in the seats of honour, Fedor Ignaty'ich insisting on my taking that huge pillow so inseparable from his travels. The provodnik brought in a lamp to make us a better light than the guttering candle, a poor enough affair, but some sort of light did come from it to play hide-and-seek with the shadows inside that wooden box, shadows that fell on the strong manly faces of my companions, steppe people all, nomads, Cossacks and the horse-breeder from Tula, for such was Ilyusha's profession. The provodnik, a sickly little fellow in a soldier's blouse, came in too and squatted on the floor next to Konat and Ak Bala, while Yaganov explained how high prices had forced him to leave Jussali.

The train started at last and we swayed and rattled on the end of the long convoy of wagons, talking through the endless night. Of course, in Russian way, they started on politics, and Fedor Ignaty'ich attacked me because, though a bourgeois, I was not an enemy of the Government. Ilyusha, half-interpreter, half-ally of the Cossack, joined in also, Genin and Ak Bala interjected from time to time, and Konat, understanding no word but too lordly-mannered to sleep in our presence, lay motionless on the floor, his fine pale face expressionless under the pink turban.

The Cossack had reason to rail against the Government, while Genin, himself a Communist, so hated Steklov, his chief, that he agreed with all he said against this mutual enemy of us all. For if ever the talk turned on Communism it was upon Steklov it always fastened in the end. That very day, they told us, he had been re-elected President of the Aralskoe Moré Soviet. Genin and Yaganov loathed him and were fascinated by him.

"That man," Yaganov said, "can speak like an angel when he is drunk. I have stood by and wept to listen to him. It is for this they have made him President. Such is Communism, speaking like the heavenly voices when in drunkenness, robbing and wrecking when it is sober."

Ilyusha agreed. "But N.E.P.* is the worst crime. They have made us suffer unspeakably all these years, saying it was for Communism, and in the end they give us N.E.P., the triumph of beastly greed."

Fedor Ignaty'ich told of a young Communist at Aralskoe Moré who had been driven from the Party because he opposed N.E.P.

"At Aralskoe Moré we had a solemn ceremony over the graves of the soldiers who died for the Revolution. Steklov spoke and he spoke well, but he did not move us, for he did not speak with the voice of the dead. Then came this boy, who had lost an arm in the fighting, and he was like one of God's own prophets. He proclaimed what none of them had dared to say, that the young soldiers died for a better Russia, because they believed in humanity, for Communism, and not for N.E.P. When he finished we were all in tears, workers and bourgeois, Steklov himself. Yet a week later they put him in

* Pronounced as Nep: The New Economic Policy.

prison because he made them uncomfortable. It is our hearts that are wrong. There has only been one Communist in all the world and that one was Christ."

His voice would grow hoarse, like grumbling surf, when he spoke thus, the brown eyes would gleam under the sunburned brow and the strong arms make great gestures to drive home his truths. I did not suggest, or think, such a thing, but he feared lest his vehemence might make him suspected of greed or self-interest.

"I would not care because they have taken my business, if only it were well-managed. But you know how it is, they are all scoundrels, and this very week they have tried and imprisoned the directors of Turkrib, which is what they call my business now. To-day there are no boats, no nets, no curing-sheds. Not so had it been if I had them still."

It was true, I think, that his greatest grief was in the mismanagement of his business. As for wealth, he did not care for it, but drank it away, threw it away with both hands, spent it on his children, gained it for their sakes only and because he must fight and outwit his fellows. In this game of money-making he could feel a king among them.

He told us then of his life in the Revolution, under the Terror. In 1918 he was living on the Island Nikolai 1st, and when he saw his enemies everywhere gaining power around him resolved to escape till the coming of a better day. He sold as much as he dared of his stock, killed the rest save for a few cattle and sheep, buried all the proceeds together with a great store of clothes and began to prepare a large half-decked boat for a voyage. Seventy versts away in the Aral Sea was the deserted island of Barsa Kilmas, whose Kirghiz name means "Go and return not." It was a place of ill-fame with all the natives, the

only settlement which had ever been known there having disappeared from all human knowledge. Here he resolved to take his family and herds and live till life should be safe again among civilised men.

They sailed away in the night, a few cattle and sheep, their arms and clothing, his wife, their four children and a little Kirghiz boy. If any man saw the dim sail disappear in the gathering dark, if he descried the short and sturdy form of Fedor Ignaty'ich at the tiller, what did he make of it, I wonder? Did he guess that it was the last of the old patriarchal families flying for refuge before the bursting storm?

Landing, they made their home in a cave, hidden from the sea, with a natural chimney, and there for a year and a half they lived sheltered from the primitive fury of the Revolution. It was a lovely island, with fruit trees, fresh-water springs, fine grazing turf, a fruitful soil for crops and plenty of game. Fedor Ignaty'ich provided for them all, and I know from his young son that they were happier on that deserted island than ever since or before.

Yet the rough life brought its troubles and dangers. Once he was trying to catch a wild horse in the native way, that is, by bodily flinging himself at the neck, seizing the mane and bringing the beast to the ground. He received a kick that broke his leg across. His Kirghiz boy was with him, and if he could set the compound fracture they might struggle back to the cave. It had to be done, so he sat with his back against a tree, the sweat running in agony down his brow, never wincing or moving for fear he frightened the lad, while the limb was pulled into position. He limps to this day in consequence.

Another time his little girl was ill with diphtheria, choking to death. He opened her throat with a

razor, drew out the poison and roughly stitched up the wound. It was the only course to take if she were not to die, and he was one of those men who will take a desperate course if it is the only one open with the same calm assurance that others use to pull on their boots. He believed so enormously in life, this great Cossack.

The child lived, and it is typical of him that after they returned to civilisation he hardly deigned to notice her, save for effect when visitors were present. She often saw him drunk, among drunken friends whom her elder brother, a quiet, handsome lad of fifteen, put to bed with great dispatch and skill, yet she worshipped him as kings were once worshipped, with a devotion half-mystical, half-personal. So did her mother, her sister and two brothers. In all his life Fedor Ignaty'ich had never raised his hand against wife or children, and the wonder of that only those who know his kind can appreciate. Yet he did not think it wrong to ignore them, being half an Oriental, and they felt no bitterness for it, though they knew his faults well enough.

He brought them all safe back from the island (they always called it "the island," never by its own unlucky name), but not without further adventure. He was sought for by his enemies, and one day two of them landed with the sworn intention of killing him. But his was the advantage, for he knew the ground, shot straighter and quicker, so that for them in bitter earnest the Island was Barsa Kilmas, "Go and return not."

At the end of this year and a half Yaganov crossed to the mainland and brought back twelve Kirghiz families whom he settled there, perhaps with some idea of one day being able to develop the island with

their help. According to his own account as he gave it us in that rattling shadowy teplushka, they all lived in a state of primitive Communism, with no money and in harmonious happiness, himself their patriarchal ruler. I believe him, for young Seriozha, his eldest child, later told me the same, and he was too young and beautifully honest to lie about such things. In the end the Yaganovs had to leave and the Soviet at Aralskoe Moré sent out that same young, one-armed idealist who was to make the people weep for shame over the graves of the dead soldiers. He educated them, brought the colony into a state of flourishing happiness, so that the island so grimly named might have been a blessed Arcadia, but that nothing lovely may endure without wantonness soiling it. The new policy, N.E.P., came and the island produced no dividends, so the young soldier was recalled and another sent in his place who introduced drunkenness, starvation and disease to the Kirghiz families and in exchange sent out a few miserable roubles of produce to the mainland. On his return the soldier was arrested and imprisoned by Steklov because he protested too publicly against the "reforms" of the new policy as practised in Aralskoe Moré.

All this Yaganov told us as we rolled through the night towards Kamishli Bash. Sitting on the plank bed opposite to me, the two Kirghiz lying on the floor at his feet, he seemed more than ever a hero of patriarchal times, and this impression was heightened because wherever that man sat he had the knack of appearing to be on a throne.

I thought of a conversation we had once had with Kuchi Bai, the Ak Sakal of Kamishli Bash. We had been trying to drive a bargain for hay with the wily

old Kirghiz, a splendid old fellow with the manner of a dissolute nobleman of the eighteenth century. At last he had consented to sell at our price under persuasion from Yaganov. "I am not doing this for you very willingly, but only because Pietka wishes it. You know with us he is 'Bog I Tsar,' 'God and the Tsar.'" Yaganov had laughed and said, "True enough, but Lenin is Tsar now and I will never share my throne, so I am God alone."

We got back to Kamishli Bash in the grey of dawn, and as a result of that visit to Jussali arranged that our Kirghiz, Ursala, Ak Bala and Konat, should buy horses there from their countrymen and then drive them across country to us. Most of the horses bought in this way were beautiful animals, of whom Ilyusha was justly proud, but once they were the cause of what might have been a serious quarrel with the local Kirghiz. Up to now we had bought far above the number of horses allowed by our permits, but the Kirghiz Izpolkom had closed their eyes to this, as the more we bought the greater the bazaar tax they collected to supplement their meagre salaries.

Yet they might not rest content. One of them, a kinsman of Ak Bala's, had sold us many horses and now put in among a herd a few old screws whom it would be profitable to him to get rid of before they died off in the winter frosts. Ilyusha would have none of them, and when all the usual nomad wiles had failed Ak Bala burst out on him in a violent storm of anger. When a Kirghiz becomes angry it is exactly the madness of Ajax, and many a time they have run amok among the herds, killing wildly. So it was with Ak Bala. The broad Turkish face was convulsed with rage, he spoke at a terrible pace in unintelligible Kirghiz, made as if he would come to

blows and presented to us a frightful picture of violent unreason. Yaganov, who hated "unpleasantness" or a "skandal," was completely upset, but Ilyusha stood unmoved till tired of the storm, then he curtly bade Ak Bala take away his horses, good and bad, saying he would no more of him till his reason had returned. There came in the kinsman from the Izpolkom, threatening us all with arrest, for which, in truth, he had reason enough, but still Ilyusha would not yield an inch, announcing that we had the highest authorisation from Moscow for all our acts, and that if one of his Kirghiz so much as lifted a finger against us he would have cause to regret it all his life. Frightened by this bold resistance, the man went away and we heard no more of his violent threats. Ak Bala as suddenly as he had become mad returned to reason again, apologised for his extravagance and was willingly forgiven. He was an old friend we would not be happy to lose.

That same night, perhaps because his pugnacity had been aroused, Ilyusha was in trouble again. Visiting the station to arrange for the sending of wagons, he was accosted by a drunken Cossack, a tall, swaggering fellow, blue-eyed and ruddy-cheeked, with fair moustachios, from whom we had sometimes bought horses.

"Ho, you bourgeois," he called, adding some filthy adjectives, "why do you come here to rob us, with your Americans?"

Ilyusha did not reply, so the man went on, "We are going to sweep you from the land, do you hear, you midden? (svorloch)."

Ilyusha turned at the last epithet, which no Russian lightly bears. "So you are a Communist, Cossack?" he asked.

"Nay, but was once. I've left the Party now. But we are all friends against your like, you bitch's brat (sukunsin)."

Ilyusha struck him full on his mouth and he fell back among his companions, a cursing, bloody maniac. It was a winning blow, a magnificent blow for a boy of nineteen.

"You left the Party when N.E.P. came and it was no longer profitable to remain a Communist, I suppose," Ilyusha said as the man pulled himself up. There was a roar of delight at this, for, in fact, he had hit on the very reason. Private trading was forbidden to Communists on the severest pains, so when free trade started again those who would be rich left the Party for safety.

The coward, for such he was for all his swagger, let out some further filthy swearing and said he would report this remark to the Cheka and have Ilyusha in prison for an aristocrat and a mocker of the ruling party. With that he went cursing away, and we heard no more of him or his threats. Tell the Cheka he certainly did, so Yaganov said, but they would have none of him. In any case, Ilyusha was always one to say right out what he thought and he was not afraid of man or party. He had been in the Cheka prison at Moscow for what he called "a little disagreement with a Commissar," but what that was he never said. No doubt over some woman. The next day we borrowed some rusty fowling-pieces from Fedor Ignaty'ich, made up a few cartridges from old black powder and bits of metal, and prepared to try our luck at duck-shooting on the lake.

There was a camp of Kirghiz fishermen by the lake, half-naked, splendidly built young fellows who, with the brutal independence of their race, refused to let

us have a boat, save for an exorbitant sum. We cursed them roundly, but they were unmoved, so we walked away to pick up what lucky shots we could from the shore. Our home-made cartridges frequently misfired, but though our bag was next to nothing, we yet got sport from the joy of stalking in that quickening air and from the occasional chance of a shot at a flock of wild geese flying overhead in a pattern of sheer loveliness.

By this time the blue waters of the lake had a thin film of ice about the edge, which melted away towards noon and re-formed in the sharp night frosts. We had no dogs, so when we made a hit too far out to wade for it we had to strip and swim out to retrieve the prey. It was then in this atmosphere of sun and light and quick air that I felt for the first time the dark cruelty of life. As the water bit cold on my naked limbs and I swam towards the bird, still perhaps faintly struggling with death upon the reddening waters, when I gripped the yet warm body in my hand and its blood stained my bare arm, a kind of savage joy at the death I had so cleanly dealt this lovely feathered thing struggled with remorse for the warm beauty as wantonly destroyed. The ducks we needed for our diminished larder, but it is a cruel necessity which justifies the slaughter of such loveliness.

There was an irony, too, in our shooting parties, for Ilyusha, who was the keenest of us three, who danced and whooped for joy like a wild Indian whenever a hit was made, was a vegetarian from birth whose stomach could hold neither fish nor flesh. Conscience had not made him so, he would explain, but education at his mother's hands, for she was a strict Tolstoian. His own instinct was to hunt and kill. A bitter paradox, that the vegetarian should

rejoice to kill, and the flesh-eater feel a kind of voluptuous remorse!

The greatest moment of those days was after the sun had sunk magnificently behind the western ridges. Then every shot reverberated across the still dark surface of the lake like the booming of some vast cannon, till it struck the distant cliffs and the echoes were beaten back into the invisible distance. With the cold water up to my knees I waited on some mud spit till I could get my sights on to the birds swimming darkly from one clump to another of whispering reeds. Their harsh calling as they moved through the black clusters was the only sound to break the immense silence, unless it were some homing flight of pied rooks passing high overhead.

In this way we passed our days with Ilyusha and Fedor Ignaty'ich, Russians to the very marrow of their vigorous bones, and the nights went by as quickly in singing old songs and telling old tales, for both came easily in that land of legend, where every fathom of the soil holds a hero's dust. Except for the Cossack we were all young and the romance of the place and the half-wild life bound us fast together. We felt that we too belonged to the steppe, to its roaming peoples, and that the blood of its conquerors was running swiftly in our veins.

There came a day when Ak Bala came to say good-bye. He was dressed in a velvet kalat, a peaked foxskin hat tied on his head, and round his broad waist a magnificent silver belt. We exchanged presents, he shook hands, smiled in his sparse black beard, mounted and rode away. His legs were tucked up in short stirrups in the manner of his people, one hand held the rein, the other swung rhythmically by his side, holding the heavy whip, and horse and man

moved away in the bright morning as though one creature. Ilyusha cried out in admiration, "It is the greatest picture in the world," but Ak Bala, not hearing or not understanding, rode on unmoved, over the endless desert, back to his tents in the north.

Romance had ridden out of our lives, the romance that is race-memory, the inherited recollection of "old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago." It causes an exquisite pain and sadness because it recalls an already fulfilled experience, therefore one impossible of re-attainment, something very rich and vivid in the mind, which nevertheless cannot be lived again. And all this is suffused with the beauty of life lived, of effort sustained, however painful once, however long ago. We also had once been nomads.

A day or two later it was our turn to depart, and after saying good-bye we plunged into the steppe again, shaking behind an oil train in our teplushka. Fedor Ignaty'ich, his eyes full of tears, stood by till the end, and his last words were, "Come back again." But, "aimez ce que jamais on ne verra deux fois."

PART II

" Happy those who are born in a frontier fort !
From year to year they grow,
Knowing never a word from any printed book.
They chase the flying beasts, striving with limber cunning against them.
Mounted on their barbarian steeds, grown fat in the autumn, they fly over the whitening plain.
They go, riding so swiftly their fleet shadows can hardly follow them.
They flick the snow with their metal whips, to the clicking of their leaping scabbards.
The sage will never attain the happiness of the brave nomad.
When, each evening, the curtain of the alcove falls to above his white head, he asks himself : ' What is the use of all my effort ? ' "

(From a French version of the poem by Li Po.)

THE STORY OF THE KAZAKS

XI HAVE given much space to the picturesque Cossack rascality among whom we lived, for they were closest to us and it was only through their intermediary that we could come into touch with the real and ancient people of the steppe, the Kirghiz Kazaks, who had ridden their horses and pastured their flocks there centuries before the Cossacks of Russia emerged from savagery. Yet we spent some time in inquiring after the life and ways of the nomads, gathering much from Ak Bala, Konat and Ursala, our herdsmen, and finding out many things curious and beautiful. Dealing with them day after day, some-

times in fair play, sometimes in foul, gazing out over that huge plain, stretching interminably before the eye, over which they moved in families with their camels, horses and flocks, from pasture to pasture, they became for us all the visible world and their way of life was our way of life.

Whence do these wandering Kazaks come? It is hard to unravel their history from songs and legends, and the very nature of their nomad life has perforce prevented the making of more certain records. It is known that the great steppe of Central Asia from the Urals to the Wall of China had always in the recorded memory of man been inhabited by tribes of wandering horsemen living upon sheep and the milk of mares, dwelling in round tents of felt stretched over a wooden frame. So Herodotus describes the Massagetæ who lived on the upper Syr. Cyrus the Persian invaded their country, though the warlike Queen of the barbarians had warned him to do so at his peril, for she would make him drink his fill of Persian blood. She made good her boast, so Herodotus says (but certainly untruthfully), for she defeated the great King and stuffed his bodiless head into a skinful of Persian gore. It is just such a grim jest as would appeal to the rough humour of the Kirghiz to-day.

But the Kirghiz, though they pasture over the same country, are certainly no descendants of this warrior race. There are two Kirghiz peoples, one of whom, the Kara Kirghiz (Black Kirghiz), alone has a right to the name and can claim a long and splendid history, being indeed one of the oldest peoples in Asia. They came from Western Mongolia in the eighth and ninth centuries, from beyond the Altai mountains, the sacred home of the Turko-Mongol nations, and wandered west and south till, after many

centuries, they settled in the Pamirs, along the Thian Shan and the lower slopes of the Hindu Kush. There they remain to this day, a strong and mettlesome people, noted for their unruly life and factious cruelty.

The Kirghiz Kazaks have no connection with them and no right at all to the name Kirghiz. Nor do they themselves use it, but speak of their nation as Kazaks only, and so they are known by all the peoples of Asia. Ethnographically, despite their own legends, they would seem to be not a nation, but fragments of all the tribes of Central Asia who have risen to power from time to time. Their very legends of origin, so diverse, prove this, for where they can be traced at all it is to legends of miraculous birth common to all Turanian peoples.

The word Kazak explains all in itself, for it has simply the significance of "wandering horseman," much in the sense of the "chevalier errant" of the Middle Ages. The Kazaks were formed by wandering adventurers from many Turanian nations, nameless men with only a horse and a sword. Such as these went "Kazak" as the poor nobleman of romance took to the road for his living, or the injured Corsican to the maquis, and in time they were welded into the Kirghiz hordes we know to-day. The names of many of their tribes, those of peoples who once ruled vast Empires, seem to prove this explanation most absolutely. How else can we explain the existence among them of tribal names such as Naiman, Kipchak, Kirei, Kankly and Kungrad? Must it not be that wandering fragments of these defeated nations preserved the old names when they joined forces with the Kazaks?

There are three Hordes, the Little Horde, the Great Horde and the Middle Horde; the first divides

into three chief races, the second into four, the last also into four, while each race again is sub-divided into many smaller tribes. The Little Horde, largest in numbers of the three, covers the country from the mouth of the Volga to the Aral Sea on its Western shores, going as far north as Orenburg and the fringes of Turgai. The Middle Horde has the Turgai Steppe and lower Syr Daria, and the Great Horde is to be found in the Altai, in the Semirechensk (Seven Rivers) province, and on the upper reaches of the Syr. At the beginning of the last century Sultan Boukei formed a fourth Horde, the Interior Horde, who pitch their tents between the estuaries of the Volga and the Ural. Between them the four Hordes reckon some three million souls, and their country is larger than Western Europe.

Each tribe or clan, for they are but great patriarchal families, has its private mark called the Tamga, to which great reverence is shown. The Tamga is used for a seal to sign important documents and its validity was recognised by the late Russian Government. There are separate Tamgas for the aristocratic families descended from the old Sultans, and also for the Khodjas, the caste of saintly warriors who are the councillors of the nation. Most of their Khans claim descent from Chengiz or Timur, and it is likely enough that the claims are well-founded, for they were ruled for many generations by the Lords of Kipchak and the Golden Horde, the children of Djoudji the bastard, eldest son of Chengiz Khan.

It is probable that to-day the Kirghiz Kazaks and the Turkomans are the only races remaining who preserve the national character of the Turanian and Mongol peoples on the level it reached during the epoch when they produced great conquerors as

splendid as Alexander or Napoleon, men who changed for ever the face of the civilised world. They still have the strong racial feeling, founded on clan and family sentiment, which drove the Inflexible Emperor to unite all the Turko-Mongols under the discipline of their racial Yassak, from the Pacific to the Hungarian plain. The Yassak, their half-military, half-racial code, has disappeared for ever, destroyed by one of the noblest of the Turks, Tamerlane the Great. But among the Kirghiz at least the old tradition persists, and the Islamic law, the Sheriat, has taken no deep root.

We have seen that their origins are lost in obscurity, but we may assume that the first Hordes were formed at a very early date, perhaps during the upheavals that followed the Arab Conquest of Turkestan in the eighth century. Certainly the Kazaks were a nation before the Mongol invasion, but it was only after the great onslaught of Chengiz Khan, when the great Empires of the Kara-Khitai and Khorasm (Khiva) were broken up, that flying remnants from many great tribes gave them something of the strength and organisation they possess to-day. They were not converted to Islam till the fifteenth century, after the death of Tamerlane, and till 1534 their very existence was unknown to the Russians, though all this time they had steadily increased their power and influence over the steppe. In 1573 those great merchant-princes the Strogonovs urged Ivan Grosni, the Terrible, to send envoys to the Blue Sea (Aral), to open up trading negotiations with their Khans. Twenty years later the Kazaks still held only the centre of their present lands.

But they soon began to spread on all sides—to Siberia to stem the advance of the Russian Cossacks, to the

town of Turkestan, which holds the shrine of their great saint, Hazret-i-Yassavi, where they ruled as Khans in the seventeenth century, and even to the great cities of Tashkent and Khiva. Yet all the time the movement started by Ivan Grosni was growing, and the Russians were pressing into Asia. The frontier fortress of Orenburg was built, and finally in 1740 their great Khan Abul Khair made his submission to Catherine the Great. When the unhappy Kalmucks were flying from Russia in 1771 it was the Kirghiz who were the Russians' chief allies in the dreadful pursuit of the escaping nation. Hazlitt has written of this Odyssey of a nation from the Volga to the Great Wall of China, behind which, decimated by their foes, they finally sought refuge, as so many barbarian tribes had done before them.

The effect of the Russian Revolution on this race of horsemen and shepherds has been disturbing in the depth of passion it has roused and the longing it has stimulated. But to understand this it is necessary to look at the Revolution in Central Asia as a whole. Ever since the Russo-Japanese War Asiatics have been awaking to the glories of the past, to the humiliation of the present, to the immensity of the future. Their war cry may be summed up in the motto of the Indian nationalists, "Swa-raj is our birthright." Indian, Iranian, Turanian and Arab have all alike started great movements of national regeneration, political and spiritual. The foolish West, ignorant in the shadows of mob democracy, impotent because of the awful act of its own self-destruction, could only stand by bleating that light was dark till in turn a Chinese doctor and a Turkish general impetuously burst open the gateways of the sun.

Before 1914 there had been efforts at a Turanian

revival in Turkestan. The reformers were of two parties, the Sheriatists, fanatical reactionaries of Ferghana and Bokhara, who wished for a nationalist religious revolution back to the pure law of Islam, and the young progressives who looked rather to salvation through co-operation with the West. In 1914 the latter were in the ascendancy and had a leader in the person of the Grand Vizier of Khiva, a man of noble and enlightened character, in his death at least an Eastern Jean Jaurés, for he was murdered by the orders of the Khan on the eve of the war, his reforms destroyed and his supporters driven into exile.

The war made a great difference. To Germany and Enver Pasha belong such credit as there is for the creation of a Pan-Turanian movement, destined by them to defeat England in the East. As anyone might have foreseen, the Pan-Turanians were not long satisfied to become the tools of German Imperialism, and we owe to them instead the new Central Asia and Kemalist Turkey.

In 1916, the Kirghiz come prominently into the picture. Ever since their native steppe was annexed to Russia they had suffered the encroachments of the Cossacks on their fertile lands, while they themselves were driven farther and farther into the inhospitable deserts. The war had given them some hope that their just complaints might be redressed and their lands restored. On the contrary, they were increased to breaking-point in 1916, when the Imperial Government decided to recruit the nomads into labour battalions, thus breaking a century of wise policy and promises. Exasperated, they rose in revolt, heralding at once the Russian Revolution and the Asiatic national movements which were to follow.

In the province of Semirechensk the war became one of mutual extermination, so that even the Conservative Press of Russia was driven to protests against the atrocities of the Cossacks. They were still fighting these hereditary enemies in 1917, though a third of the Great Horde, men, women and children, had by this time perished, when the February Revolution came and was hailed as a deliverance.

After the Bolshevik success in October, nominal freedom came to all the Turkish peoples in the Empire, and Tatar, Bashkir, Kirghiz and Uzbeg Republics were declared. But real freedom was not yet, and the new Turkestan Soviet Republic proved as great a curse to the nomads as the old Empire had been. Caught between the White army of Cossacks in Orenburg and the Red Communists in Tashkent, their communications with civilisation were cut, their herds seized by the contending armies and their grain supplies destroyed. Famine rode quickly through the hordes, and a million had died of hunger before Moscow, wiser than the so-called native Government in Tashkent, intervened with a strong hand to save the survivors from extermination.

Now they are the spoiled children of the New Russia, completely their own masters, possessing again their ancient lands from Orenburg, their capital, to Semipalatinsk, from Lake Balkash to the Aral Sea and the eastern shore of the Caspian. They have an infant Press, a militia, their own judges on the Revolutionary Tribunals, in short, the skeleton of a strong and enduring social organisation. Side by side with the sister Republics of the Uzbegs and the Turkomans, these Turkish peoples are remaking Central Asia for themselves, in co-operation with, and not against, the civilisation of Europe, so fulfilling

WANDERING SHEPHERDS, TRAVELLING GREAT DISTANCES OVER THE PLAINS FROM PASTURE TO PASTURE.

the dream of Alexander that East and West should work together in equal brotherhood. The Sheriat party, though not yet destroyed, has nevertheless been badly beaten, losing its last throw with the death of Enver, and its survivors are driven into exile in the mountains. The people of the steppe, as so often before in history, are on the march again.

Their round black tents, horses and herds were once the terror of the world, but now the nomad Kazak only knows the life of the wandering shepherd, riding great distances over the vast plains from pasture to pasture, leading a rough and not unkindly life, glad to lay his bones at last upon some bare hill-top, secure beneath the low mud wall erected by his kinsmen, whence his spirit at rest gazes over the brown landscape where day after day the sun sets gloriously upon the tent-fires of his people. The spirit of great adventure splendidly fulfilled still lingers there, and in this new awakening who can foretell what their future may not be?

XII THE KAZAK CHARACTER

Bodily strength born of the air of the great plains and of temperate living is the greatest gift of the Kirghiz people. Their men are of medium height, broad-shouldered and clean-limbed, in middle age with a tendency to a well-rounded belly that never becomes so gross as to bereave them of strength or dignity (such a one was Ak Bala, our chief herd). Their hair is black, cropped close or shaved, and their beard often so sparse that even a grown man boasts no more than a dozen scant hairs on lip or chin. No hair grows on their cheeks, and their yellow-brown skins are smooth and fine.

Till the age of puberty boys and girls live naked on the steppe, burned by the sun and tanned by the wind, growing strong as young animals in the way of nature. After this maids don a white shift and the lads a pair of trousers till they are almost of man's age, that is, about sixteen. So a lad's body becomes beautifully bronzed, but a girl's skin, sooner shut off from sun and wind, grows fairer, and it is possible to see women as dainty white as Chinese coolie girls. All have the high cheek-bones and broad faces of their people, and their narrow brown eyes become shot with blood owing to their herding life in the desert.

Between fourteen and twenty the women are not ill-looking, and I have seen many whom perhaps some mixture of Russian blood had made very comely. But their fine skins and free carriage make both men

and women beautiful as heroes compared with the sickly inhabitants of our Western cities. Travellers have mocked the Kirghiz women for their broad, flat faces, comparing them with our own sharp-featured, slender women, and declaring them outright to be as ill-favoured as the witches of the fairy tales.

Those whom a pretty face whitened with evil-scented powder will compensate for flat breasts, pinched waists, drooping buttocks and spindle legs are no doubt right in their strictures. But if you love a comely body, full round breasts, strong short thighs moulded for love and children, a firm, straight figure that moves with the supple beauty of a wild creature, then you must think the Kirghiz women beautiful. There can be even less doubt about the men, broad-chested, the muscles rippling beneath the bronzed skins like sunlight on steel, not tall enough for perfect beauty and their legs a little bowed with constant use of the horse, but having also that proud bearing of the nomad which is the gift of the steppe to her children.

So, hardened to sun and wind, living their lives out of doors, dieting on kummis and delighting in manly exercises, they are almost free from disease. Only those horseless men whom necessity drives to the towns quickly fall a prey to the many ailments of the East, more especially to those which are a consequence of the vicious luxury of the Sarts, as the town-dwellers are called.

They are frank, hospitable and courteous to strangers, with the natural manners of an ancient people, intelligent too within the sphere of their own life, but easily lost and stupefied if taken out of it. Most of them are illiterate, with the simple

man's fear of, and superstitious reverence for the written character. Stubborn to obstinacy, when once their simple minds have grasped an idea it will yield to no force on earth.

Yet in their buying and selling they are subtle and wily, with no conception of honesty in dealing. They do not, as we do, veil their roguery with pious forms and grand words, but frankly admit that all chaffering is only a war of wits between buyer and seller. The ruses they employed to force us to take in bad horses among the good were as amusing as they were exasperating. It was a serious matter for them to be rid of their weak cattle before going into winter quarters, since they otherwise would certainly lose the greater part before the spring flowering of the steppe.

While Bill was there the simple Eastern way of bribery sufficed, but afterwards they exercised their cunning wits in all ways, coming, when all else had failed, even to threats of violence, as I have related. Their favourite trick was to put on fine saddle-cloths and saddle over the unsound beast and drive him among the herd, hoping we should not go to the trouble of making them lift off this gear. When that failed, they handed the horse over to some other dealer to put in among his herd, expecting we should fail to recognise it, or that in the examination of so many animals one or more might slip in during the confusion. In this way rejected horses returned to us six or seven times in the herds of different dealers, and they are wily enough to put a few days' interval between each appearance. Let the horse be short in the forelegs, and they will sell him standing on a rise, and so on with all the hundred tricks of horse dealers the world over. Nor were they even abashed to be

AMONG THE TOWN-DWELLING SARTS. AN OPEN-AIR BARBER.

exposed in their roguery, treating it all as a part in their game of life and laughing merrily over our good-humoured abuse.

They love laughter above all things and a good jest will often make them close a bad bargain. They are easily amused, and when one morning I began to chaffer brokenly in their own Kirghiz tongue it caused such laughter that I won my price. But they never let the same jest work twice! It was for this that Yaganov was so invaluable to us, for he knew their speech from the cradle and was master in it of that form of genial insult which is the way of the bargaining merchant. True, he was a little ribald, and many a time said a thing forgetfully in Russian which our host's wife overheard and smilingly rebuked. This witty war of horse-buying brought a merry sprightliness to our yard on the mornings when horses were driven in through the great wooden gates.

It is commonly said of the Kirghiz, as of all Turanian peoples, that they are naturally cruel. Certainly they are often indifferent to the sufferings of man or beast, as their hard desert life forces them to be, but they are less actively cruel than our civilised peoples herded together in their beastly towns. No doubt this legend of cruelty (you may see to what ridiculous lengths it will go in Ossendowski's amazing book, "Men, Beasts and Gods") is a legend of the whirlwind Mongol conquests, when whole cities were immolated and civilisation was wasted. Yet with justice it has been noted that this destructive rage spared all that the Mongols recognised as finer than their own culture, and barbarian treatment was only meted out to barbarian faiths or decadent societies. Life may well seem different from a Yurt upon the steppe from what it appears to be from the windows of a Hampstead

drawing-room, where it is alternately the fashion to swoon in humanitarian ecstasy or to be titillated by faint sadistic curiosity.

There is a difference between the slaughter of a Chengiz Khan or a Tamerlane and the gas and machine-gun holocausts of to-day. The former might on occasion massacre the men of a captured city, but the women and children were usually spared for slavery. To-day we bomb them all indiscriminately, and are considering now how best we may poison them with gas or disease bacilli. Chengiz and Timur were men with a noble conception of the world, who remade it to that conception at times when mankind was sick, and they have left their mark on our lives for ever. They are the equals of Alexander or Napoleon, and the pulse of life beats more strongly for their having lived. In the minds that conceived their campaigns and won their victories we can worship the beauty of great achievement. The Kirghiz themselves live in their families without blows struck or harsh words used and towards their women and children are kind and friendly. For all their polygamy, their family life is happy and tender enough to give a lesson to our divorce courts.

In common with all Muhammadan peoples, they do not have more than one or two wives as a rule, or three among those in a more considerable position, but Lazary Gregor'ich told us of Kirghiz with nine women, each one living in her own Yurt, and these Yurts sometimes fifty or sixty versts apart. The happy husband rode round to them in turn, spending a little time with each wife. They were all looked upon as legal wives, though four is the limit allowed by Muslim law, but in many ways the Kazaks have not felt the influence of Islam very deeply, and their pagan

traditions of pre-Muhammadan times still have a very strong hold upon them.

The first wife, called the baibicha, is held in the greatest honour, has the right to divorce her husband, and is served and respected by the younger women even when the husband has forsaken her bed. Marriage is only by purchase, a wife being a valuable commodity, and the bridal money sometimes reaching as much as a hundred horses for a girl of good family or great beauty. The Bolsheviks are trying to abolish this custom by law, and a recent decree is said to have made the purchase of a wife punishable by four years' imprisonment. With the best will in the world, one cannot see how such a law could now be enforced, and perhaps the open purchase of a wife is no more reprehensible than the elaborate seduction by dances, presents and visits to theatres employed in the West under the name of courtship.

The Kirghiz Kazaks are sadly superstitious. All their lives they go in dread of witches, fey spirits, warlocks and the like, for the affrighting of whom they possess a weird jumble of charms and spells. Such is their fear of evil spirits that mothers, in terror of their jealousy, commonly christen children with unlovely or unflattering names. They are called after feeble animals, or endowed with sorry qualities, in the hope that such terrified humility will be beneath the notice of the evil spirits. So Ak Bala, our chief herdsman, was "White Child," and Konat, so tall, silent and dignified, was "Feather," while Ursala had the significance of "Faster" or "Ascetic," and that grim man had the appearance of living up to his name, though the appearance was a false one, I am afraid, while Kushy Bai was "Bird." Others are luckier or nobler born, and their parents called

them Batyr, "hero," or Timur, after the great emperor.

All this, like the nine wives, is another relic of pagan Shamanism. So too their barbarous remedies for illness, their general superstitious dread of the unknown, their respect for stones, for high places and their feeling for the East rather than for the direction of Mecca. It is related by one traveller that when he asked a Kazak his religion, the nomad, puzzled, asked what he meant by the word. We ourselves once asked a drunken rogue how he could so ignore the commands of the Koran. "The Koran," he replied, highly amused; "have I the time to read the Koran?" Like most of his people, he could have read it all day for all the work he ever did, but outside the Sultan or Khodja castes they seem completely ignorant of their nominal faith. It is not by the Koran that those great Khans have lived whose names are still reverenced by all the dwellers in the black tents, from Orenburg to the Great Wall.

Of them Brother Ricold de Montecroix writes in his travels that "in their way of belief the Mongols differ from all the other peoples of the earth, for they boast not of having a law God-given, as is the lying way of other nations, but believe in God, and that very lightly and simply, by I know not what movement of Nature, which Nature reveals to them, believing that over all things in the world is a sovereign thing which is God." At the time of Kubilai Khan they were all Nestorians, the great Kubilai himself was a friend to Christianity, and that curious Eastern Church, so strangely attractive to Asiatics, might have kept its sway over them for ever had Rome shown half the vision and daring of these barbarian emperors and Nestorian priests. The Pope refused the offer of a

joint Crusade which would have blotted Islam from the world, and the Papal missionaries (including Brother Ricold) lulled the Mongol emperors into protesting slumbers by their dreary explanations of the wicked heresies of the Nestorians and Manichæans. To this day the Tamga of certain Kirghiz tribes is the cross, a relic of that half-forgotten past and a mute reproach to the overbearing stupidity of the Western Church. Nestorianism, Manichæism and Buddhism have all held a real sway over the hearts of Turkish nations, but Islam has never impressed itself on the nomads, and never will.

The Kirghiz Kazaks observe no religion save in their hearts, and you will rarely see one of them perform his ablutions and recite the formal prayers. Every day we heard the Mullah call to prayer from the crazy wooden minaret of the tiny mud mosque in Kamishli Bash, but few that we saw ever responded to that wailing, high-pitched voice so clearly heard across the thin, clear air of the steppe. This mute disregard of Islam is the more curious since Samarkand and Bokhara are centres of the purest Muslim faith and are reverenced throughout Islam for their learning and piety. In the town of Turkestan itself, on the Kirghiz steppe, is the lovely mosque of the Kirghiz saint Khodja Hazret-i-Yassavi, built to his memory by Tamerlane himself, and a holy place of pilgrimage to all Kazaks. Yet few of them ever make the Haj to Mecca, a town suspect to them for rotten corruption.

Unhappily, it is the custom among certain of the Sart Hajjis to return corrupted from the Holy Cities and prey upon the simplicity of the nomads. These pilgrims, who should be the best among men, are often the basest and most cunning, and expect on their return to make a scoundrel's livelihood as parasites

on the simpler faith of their co-religionists. Fortunately, few Sarts will leave their luxurious city life for the rude hardihood of the nomad way, and they make their money out of the Uzbegs and Tajiks of the towns.

In spite of this suspicion of piety as a mask for hypocrisy and their dislike of fanaticism, there is a class among the Kirghiz of good and honourable Muslim. These are the Khodjas, of whom has been mention before. In the hands of the Khodjas lies the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation, and their Tamga compels them to be men of learning, honour and high spirituality, the aristocrats of the nomad life. Many of them live in the district of Perovsk, not far south of Kamishli Bash, where are many tombs of Kirghiz saints. One morning as I walked through the bazaar a Khodja from Perovsk passed by me, a tall man of vigorous gait, with a more aquiline nose, brighter eyes and fuller beard than most of his countrymen. He wore a pale blue turban instead of the usual foxskin hat or embroidered skull-cap, and his clothes were of the finest linen. He walked with the bearing of a king, head poised nobly high, glancing at no one, the athletic body moving with a fine swing beneath his long Khalat. We once produced aristocrats like that in England, but now our patents of nobility often go to ignorance, rascality, and sordid wealth. And we complain that the East will no more be ruled by us!

Much of the difference between East and West lies in religion. While Europe was still Christian the two understood one another, but now we read our Gospels and do not live them, cannot live them, for society has so changed since the Sermon on the Mount that we are to-day other beings in another world. It is physically impossible now for our

nominal faith to mould our lives. In the East society has never changed, and men live to-day as they did at Mecca when Muhammad was driven from the city. To this day every Muslim born lives in the consciousness that one day he may feel called upon to sacrifice greatly for his faith, to give up family, possessions, even life itself. For that is what it means to make the Haj to Mecca, and when the day comes he does not hesitate, but whether he lives in Java, Bombay or Tashkent, he bids farewell to the world he knows and sets off into the difficult unknown.

Islam is a unity, Buddhism is a unity, but Christianity is no longer a unity, nor even a faith, but only the shadow of a once lovely dream. The West to-day is without a faith, without any common spirit uniting all its peoples, and that is why in modern times the fable has been started that East and West can never meet. But men are men the world over, with the same passions, the same desires, the same follies, the same high and heart-breaking illusions. East and West understood one another very well not so long ago, and they will do so again in the future.

The faith of the Kirghiz Kazaks, with all its limitations, is still the faith of Islam. It is not so strict, not fanatical, holding a belief in God—that is, in the essential nobility and dignity of life—above dogma or ritual, disfigured a little by the superstitions of a long pre-Islamic past, but still worthy of the spirit of man and a great people. Their Khodjas and Mullahs, free of this burden of superstition, bring into Islam a breath of that keen air of their native prairies which is so intolerant of weakness and sham, blowing the clouds from men's minds so that their outlook on life is broad as the horizon of the steppe, their minds and bodies as strong as its few tenacious trees.

THE NOMAD LIFE

XIII THE social basis of the nomad's life is their tent or Yurt. The Yurt is round in shape, like a beehive or a Buddhist stupa, from twenty to twenty-five feet in diameter and perhaps ten to twelve feet high. Unlike most other tents, it is fixed without poles, ropes or pegs and once up stands firm as a rock, nor can all the winter gales that blow across the waste upset it. It is built in a very short time, men and women working together as soon as the parts are unpacked from the kneeling camels. A frame of wooden trellis is fitted up in sections bound together with thongs of hide, and over this is fixed the roof of willow-rods. Over all are then hung thick felts, white when new, but growing black with time and wear, proof against the chilling winds and freezing showers of snow and rain that make the winter on the steppe. Inside the Yurt has its trellis covered with rush mats and there is a roof flap which may be opened according to the varying wind. The door is made by a heavy frame of wood and is closed by a movable piece of felt-covered trellis, so that when it is shut the tent is inviolable to the winter cold.

Their furniture is simple and the housewives are little bothered by its care. There are perhaps two carven beds of wood, of that shape so reminiscent of the Homeric couch which I have described, painted in barbaric patterns of blue and red, strewn with white

felts and the skins of trapped beasts. At the back of the tent stand boxes in like way carved and painted, where are stored the heirlooms of the family, their little hoard of treasure and the baibicha's private store of precious things. She carries the keys traditionally at her girdle, or, more curiously, at the end of one of her long plaits of black hair, while on the other plait hang ornaments of silver to balance them.

In front of this wall of boxes are the carpets where recline the wayfaring guests, but when there is no guest they are prudently stored away that their colours may remain bright and unfaded. The floor is generally covered with felt or with old worn carpets, still of some beauty but woven very long ago in Bokhara or Samarkand. Only the middle space is bare earth, and here is the cooking fire between two iron staples from which will hang the common pot. Once the tent is up and the furniture arranged it will be the first duty of the younger women to light this fire, while the baibicha prepares the meat for the evening meal. A few sticks of thorn or saxaul are spread and the flame is started, but wood is too scarce on the steppe to permit of the fuel being simply this sweet-smelling wood, so it is kept alight by argol, as they call the dried dung, which has a vile, pungent odour.

For clothes, the men wear a shirt of white linen, baggy trousers of linen or coarse brown camel-cloth tied with a cord round the middle, no socks, but long boots of soft leather, heel-less so that they thrust easily into their overshoes, which are religiously taken off on entering the Yurt. Over all they wear a kind of long-sleeved dressing-gown called a khalat, padded and made of stuff which varies with the riches of the wearer. A man of good family will wear a belt of

beautiful beaten silver, very old and often of great value.

The women are clothed in much the same way, the very poor, like their menfolk, in shirt and trousers, with the difference that they wear a short, sleeveless sarafan of velvet in place of a khalat. In general, their costume is a long white linen shift with wide open sleeves and a sarafan of velvet or camel-cloth. On their wrists they wear heavy silver ornaments, and strings of coins often hang from their plaited hair. Nursing mothers wear a shift slit at the breasts so that they can more easily feed their babies.

The headgear of both men and women is quite distinctive. That of the men the flapping hat of velvet and foxskin, the round hat of the same materials, or an embroidered skull-cap called a tiubitaka, which I have already described. The women at all seasons wear a head-dress of white linen wound turban-wise about the head, with a kind of hood falling behind sometimes as low as the waist, and a linen veil coming over both ears and beneath the chin, but leaving the face uncovered. Unmarried girls wear no veil, and their face and neck are free. Very clean and dainty they look in this dress as they sway barefoot over the desert to the water-pit, a long yoke carrying the iron buckets balanced upon one shoulder. The Kirghiz women are never fully veiled, unlike the Tatars or Bashkirs, and they seem to have preserved that sturdy independence of character which made the wives of the great Mongols among the most remarkable women in history.

The life of the family depends upon their flocks, for in the desert they may cultivate no crops, so that in the remoter parts they are often ignorant even of the existence of bread. Yaganov told us that he

once offered bread to a hungry Kirghiz boy whom he met in the wilderness and the lad after one bite at the strange stuff threw it away in disgust, thinking perhaps that the Christian wished to poison him, nor could he be prevailed on to eat more of it. Their chief flocks are the fat-tailed sheep, and from them nearly all the needs of their simple life are satisfied. The ewe gives them milk, from their pelts they get wool for shelter and clothing, the flesh is their staple food and the mutton-fat rendered down makes a villainous black tallow for winter light. They have also a few goats, whose flesh is considered a great delicacy, their horses and Bactrian dromedaries, but cattle are rarely found save in those settlements where there are a few Russian colonists.

The Kirghiz horse is small and sturdy, standing between twelve and fourteen hands, short-legged, with an ugly head, long tail and shaggy mane, and of a wiry strength incredible to those who know only the Arab and European breeds. Consider that from the end of July to the beginning of April the steppe is almost bare of pasture, that in the winter it is altogether bare and in addition swept by the polar gales, for from the Arctic tundras to the deserts of the Oxus there is neither hill nor forest to break the icy winds. Try then to imagine what kind of horse it is which may live in such conditions and yet be capable of doing seventy or eighty versts a day during the summer months, and that for as long as fourteen days on end, without once going lame. Yet such records are common among the Ural and Orenburg Cossacks in their wars against the Kirghiz in the first half of the last century.

These horses know only two ways of going: at a walk or a swift gallop. They have to be taught the

trot, though many have the swift ambling pace which the Russians call the "Inahod," and these are highly valued. Their milch mares are carefully chosen and much thought of, but are useless for other work, as their udders swell and grow sore. To realise the full beauty of the nomad horse and its rider look at the reproduction in the British Museum of the painting by Chao Meng Fou. It might be a portrait of Ak Bala, so little has the type changed from the thirteenth century, and in any case it is a brave picture of beauty by one of the greatest of all animal painters.

The Kazaks commonly reckon their wealth by the number of their horses, yet I think there were more sense in placing the highest value on their camels, for these lurching, grumbling, unhappy beasts are the most essential of all to the nomad life. Without them it is impossible to pack up the belongings of the household and move away when a pasture is exhausted, and it is only by continual migration in search of a scanty living for their flocks that the Kazaks exist at all, since the grudging steppe will yield no harvest. Their dromedaries are more splendid animals than the gawky Arab camel, and with the thick, silky coat of hair about the body, the long neck and the tufted thighs, it is impossible to deny them a certain comely beauty.

When woven, this hair provides the Kazak with a warm strong cloth, it makes him his ropes also, and the camel's milk, though sourer than a mare's, is a nourishing and refreshing draught after a day on the burning plains. A Bactrian camel fetches more on the bazaar than any but the finest horse, and there is now a great demand for them from the Russian peasants, a fatal demand for the camel, since the mouzhik has no tradition of camel care such as is

needed to keep even these hardy beasts alive on the bleak Volga steppes.

When a camel goes to drink it lifts its grave head to scan the horizon before bending the long neck down to the water. The nomads understand the patient sadness of its character, as they understand all the beasts among whom they live, and this is the story by which they explain that wide-searching glance of the camel before he drinks.

"Long ago, at a time when certain Genies took pleasure in living among men, there dwelt in the Mongol land a divine lama who had only come down to earth because he had a determined desire to destroy the human race. Quite alone he could never have brought his project to a successful conclusion; some aid he must have. So then he thought of creating a fearful monster, and from a block of granite he made the camel: but not the peaceful creature of to-day; no, a terrible camel with fine, well-sharpened horns, which at once fell to its task. Piercing the poor mortals with its horns, tearing them with its teeth, crushing them beneath its broad feet, it made great hecatombs of them. The nomads fell before it like ripe ears before the sickle. So wonderful a sight was it that the lama, all joyous, believed his task already finished.

"Good fortune it was that Providence was watching. Another Genie, more powerful and better intentioned, wishing to stop this slaughter, came and fought the monster, and overcoming it passed a rope through its nostrils.

"'Henceforth you will use your strength in the service of man,' he told him. 'You who wished to massacre them without mercy, you shall carry them, them and their burdens, to the end of time.'

"So it was done. . . . Then one day when the camel was peacefully browsing the grass on the prairie, the stag happened to pass, the stag who at this time had a head without horns.

"'Lend me your horns,' said gossip stag. 'There is a party to-day with the lion and the tiger, and I should like to do honour to such hosts by adorning myself worthily. Lend me those splendid horns; I will return them to you to-morrow when you come to drink at the river.'

"Without suspicion, the gentle camel gave what was asked of him. But he waited vainly for the return of the stag. Not on the next day, nor on any day following, did the treacherous beast appear again by the water's edge.

"And since then, each time the camel goes to drink, he first lifts up his head, questioning the horizon and searching with his eyes for the thief. . . . As for the latter, he is still running free, but he carries with him the evidence of his evil deed: by the will of the gods his horns must die once each year to show clearly that they remain for ever and in spite of all the camel's property." *

True the camel is still not quite purged of his evil beginnings, but civilisation nevertheless owes him a debt it will be hard to pay.

In the days before history, when culture was painfully growing up behind impassable barriers of mountain and desert that cut off from one another these few feeble shoots of beauty, it was the caravans of camels winding over the great steppes of Central Asia which brought one civilisation into contact with another, which prevented these first struggling

* From Commandant De Bouillane de Lacoste, "Au pays sacré des anciens Turcs et des Mongols."

flowers of the effort of man from dying unrealised through lack of nourishment.

The Kazak life is simple, and even dull perhaps, unless to one condemned as a slave to a machine, turning out the same parts on a lathe from coming to manhood to the day of death. To such a one it would seem the height of freedom, and certainly within its simple limits it is a life of action. The nomads move from one pasture to another in the broad routine of natural revolution from spring to winter, caring for their flocks and herds, bargaining in the rare towns for the necessities or luxuries their own life cannot provide them with, loving and producing children by the way, not brutishly, yet certainly with something of the same delight which they take in the multiplication of their animals, amusing themselves at the chase or with manly sports and in general content to be free and to love their open life.

They overeat at times, but rather because they have been forced to a long fast than because they are by nature greedy. Often a drink of kummis in the morning, or a handful of grapes and bread, if these are procurable, will suffice them for a day, while in general their only full meal is the evening mess of rice and mutton. They do not drink intoxicants, nor smoke, but have a kind of green paste or snuff, which they call tobacco, and this they chew or suck, rolling a little ball of it under the tongue. Its composition I do not know, though I have heard that lime enters into it, and once when I wished to try it for myself was warned not to, unless I wanted to burn my mouth.

They have few arts, a primitive music with which to accompany songs and dances on a two-stringed guitar, a great store of legend, heroic poetry and love lyrics, but no painting and little carving. Some of

their songs are not for the ears of babes or modest maidens, especially those epithalamiums wherein the rude herdsmen depict the lusty pleasures of love that are to delight some young couple. But their love poetry is not all so gross, and here, for a proof, is a song transcribed by Levshin :—

" Do you see this snow?
Whiter is the body of my beloved.
Do you see the blood flowing from this slaughtered lamb?
More rosy are the cheeks of my beloved.
Do you see the burned trunk of this tree?
Blacker is her hair.
Do you know with what they write, the mullahs of our Khan?
Their ink is not so dark as her eyebrows.
Do you see these flaming coals?
Her eyes shine with a light that is brighter still."

Marriages and funerals are the great events of their life. Then the members of the interested clans gather from a hundred miles around, and for all there are games and feasting. A young man may not marry a maid of his own clan, but must seek his bride in other tents. When he has found a girl to inflame his love, or to please his worldly instincts, the bridal money is paid and a date fixed for the ceremony. Then the youth with his family and friends rides over to the maid's aul and the mullah binds them together with little ceremony.

The barbarian marriage customs which once attended these ceremonies have now died out in all but the remotest corners of the steppe. But once, well within living memory, in fact, if many sought the bride in marriage she chose in this way from among the suitors. Mounted on the swiftest and fiercest of her father's stallions she rode off into the steppe, the eager youths

in hot pursuit. He who could first place hand on breast or waist was judged her winner, but to ward them off she struck out lustily with her devilish whip, so that many a bloody poll was seen before, perhaps with her connivance, some fortunate lad could win her. When in the ordinary way the wooer came to claim his wife, he had to fight his way into her Yurt through all her woman friends before he could embrace her.

In their love of a hard bargain and their too-evident delight in deceiving a foreigner, in their merry grossness and rough sensuality, but above all in their open life of hospitality, in their passion for animals and for all forms of manly sport, for hunting, hawking, wrestling, racing and horseback games, the Kirghiz remind me of my own Yorkshire countrymen. So swift and skilful are they in managing their ponies, they can hunt the desert hare from horseback, leaning from the saddle at full gallop and breaking the poor beast's back with one blow from their short, heavy whips. They hunt also on foot with dogs, but their greatest delight is the ancient one of hawking. Sometimes they use a falcon, but more often the Kazak rides with a small hooded eagle on his wrist to swoop on and kill the prey, whether it is hare, or fox, or antelope.

For racing at a wedding or funeral feast prizes of great value are given, sometimes as many as a hundred horses or camels being offered. They will give much more than they can afford out of consideration for the family honour, especially at a funeral meeting, for the richer the prize the more will the dead be held in esteem, and for this purpose the children and relatives readily despoil themselves. The courses are over enormous distances, often from thirty to fifty versts, for the chief quality of the Kirghiz horse

is its power to gallop over great distances, and it is to test this that the races are held.

As many as two score horsemen will start on the race, the squadron thundering into the distance at a tearing gallop, fading in a flash over the plain to a black dot in a whirl of dust, returning as quickly in a growing thunder of hoofs till the strained yellow faces of the riders are seen again, strung out now in files and bunches, wheeling madly to vanish once more, and so on till the course is completed, perhaps by only three or four tired horses who can burst their gallant hearts at the end of this wild ordeal. If the winner be still sound in wind and limb his owner may sell him for any sum he pleases to set, becoming rich for life at one stroke. Yet the sport is a brutal one and cannot, as they claim, improve their breed of horses, since even the victor in such a trial must suffer irreparable hurt, though that is not at first apparent.

But the greatest sport of the Turko-Mongol peoples is the Baiga, or horseback *mêlée* for the possession of a sheep's or goat's carcase. An Ak Sakal (elder) stands with a goat across his saddle-bow, while the young men range themselves some distance away over the steppe. When all is ready he cuts off the goat's head with a sabre and flings the trunk to the ground. At once the crowd of horsemen bears down upon it, fiercely yelling, raising a great cloud of dust and pulling up inside a yard if none of them succeeds in outpacing his fellows to the carcase. They struggle for possession till one man seizes it and breaks loose, hotly pursued and surrounded again by the others. In the end he fights clear with the larger part of the goat and brings it to the judge. They can pick up the heavy body at full gallop without pausing a second, and the *mêlée* which follows is a savage one. But

they are never unseated and accidents are unknown. It is a test of strength and skill in horsemanship, but not a game for "veray parfit gentil knightes."

They have a great love of wrestling, the arms in an overlapping lock round one another's bodies and gripping being forbidden. Between the bargaining for horses in our yard the young bucks would often hazard a throw. The broad shoulders strain and heave, the muscles under the brown skin stand out like steel whips, the short, sturdy legs press firmly on the ground and sweat rolls down the high cheek-bones of the shaven heads. It is rather a test of strength than of skill, but let one show the slightest faltering in his stand and in a flash his rival has him thrown.

So for months we knew and loved the people of the Kirghiz Kazaks. What will become of them and their steppe? Are they doomed to a sordid extinction like the Red Indians of America? Or does the future still hold for them some fate not altogether unworthy of their past? Once the steppe dominated the world, for the trade of the world passed over it, but land-ways yielded to sea-ways and new powers arose and conquered the old Empires. Yet to-day there are signs that the land is taking back its old dominion. Railways with turbine locomotives are revolutionising travel, the motor lorry penetrates where neither steam nor rail can go, even sending a regular service from Tashkent to Kashgar, and over all flies the aeroplane, a force whose wonders are still but dimly guessed at. Will the sea-powers have to yield before the old lords of the steppe? There is a new Russia to-day who dominates all Asia, full of life and young vigour. Will she repeat the conquests of the great Mongols and restore the peoples of the steppe to their ancient heritage? The Russian Revolution and the Asiatic

Renaissance have marched side by side from 1905 to 1925, and who can deny that the future is theirs to seize if they can find leaders great enough to point the way, if the rest of the world persists in dull hostility and misunderstanding?

A DREAM OF GREAT CONQUERORS

XIV When the buying of our thousand horses was completed and the time of our stay in Turkestan was drawing to its close, our herdsmen asked us to dinner with them in their hut, apologising for the rudeness of their hospitality. We gladly accepted, and on the appointed night, bending low to pass under the wooden portal, we went in to find our hosts waiting to receive us, grave and stately in the dim light of an oil-lamp. Rich carpets gleamed on the mud floor, their gear was hung orderly on the bare walls, and waiting for us to sit down first on the carpets, they too took their places when their guests were settled. Pietka was there to interpret for us, but conversation came slowly at first, for we were all a little embarrassed. Konat's wife, dignified and housewifely, served us with little cakes and tea, then came Pilmania, a Russian soup, then a plof of rice and mutton, and of everything we were expected to take three times, while our hosts, from politeness, refrained from eating at all.

Released at last from the tyranny of food, we stretched easily upon the bright Bokhara carpets. Konat, with the grave ascetic face, began to speak, Pietka interpreting. But I did not listen, for the fascination of his person was greater than any speech he might make. There was something very complex in this tall, loose-limbed man, whose face recalled the

early figures of the Renaissance, the subtle portraits of the Quattrocenta. Then suddenly Pietka asked:

"Konat would know, when you return to your own country, will you forget his people? Will they fade in your mind among all the wonders of the West?"

"Tell him," we answered, "that we shall never forget his people. There is something of the nomad in the soul of all men, and one day some of us at least will return and ride to far Altai to see the home of his race."

Konat's face brightened to hear of Altai and he quoted the Turki poem:

"On the white flank of white Altai
A golden flower springs up,
On the blue flank of blue Altai
A silver flower springs up."

We exchanged compliments with one another, saying how happily had this business of horse buying turned out for all of us, and promising mutual friendship. Then at last we went away, feeling we had said good-bye to the best of our youth. Remained in the morning only the need to say good-bye to the steppe itself.

Two of us climbed the Iron Hill, which dominates the steppe for fifty miles about. There we lay in silence, drinking in that scene which had been ours for so long, absorbing every feature, every shape of the land, so that in the years to come we should forget nothing, not a line or a colour. The blue water of glittering Lake Kamishli Bash, the ridges above Lake Raïm and the Jaxartes mouth, the lake below the Serpent Hill in the east, the violet-brown plain stretching interminably north and south, we drew all in, took in as well the bright sky, the colours

THE IRON HILL WHICH DOMINATES THE STEPPE FOR FIFTY VERSTS ABOUT.

of the day, the high-planing birds. Then we stumbled over the stony ground among the walled-in tombs and came down again to our white house in the valley.

The next day we were rattling north at the end of a long oil train in our crazy, shaking teplushka. The second night in the teplushka I fell asleep and dreamed that I was on the Iron Hill again. It was dark, the velvet sky was spangled with stars, but land and water stretched dimly away beneath, carrying mysterious roads into the unknown. Such a hush of mysterious silence hung along the Aral Sea, over Lake Raïm and Kamishli Bash, over the slow delta of the Jaxartes.

A man strode out from behind the mud walls of the tombs and stood near me, gazing into the blue infinity as though he must make it all his and then die in the approaching dawn. He made a most majestic figure in a long khalat, a curved sword at his side, and yet he was familiar. As he stood there greedily staring, I remembered a phrase of Renan's about the hills of Judæa. Looking down from them, he said, over the great plains, one feels the immensity of the world and the desire to conquer it. So, I thought, must this man be feeling, but I resolved to speak to him, for I was certain now that he was Konat. Approaching quietly I gave him "Aman," and "Aman," he answered me, untroubled, in a voice I knew.

"Konat," I ventured, and at the name he turned, and I saw that it was not Konat, but Timur Lenk, Tamerlane the Great, he who remade Asia to his own vision.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

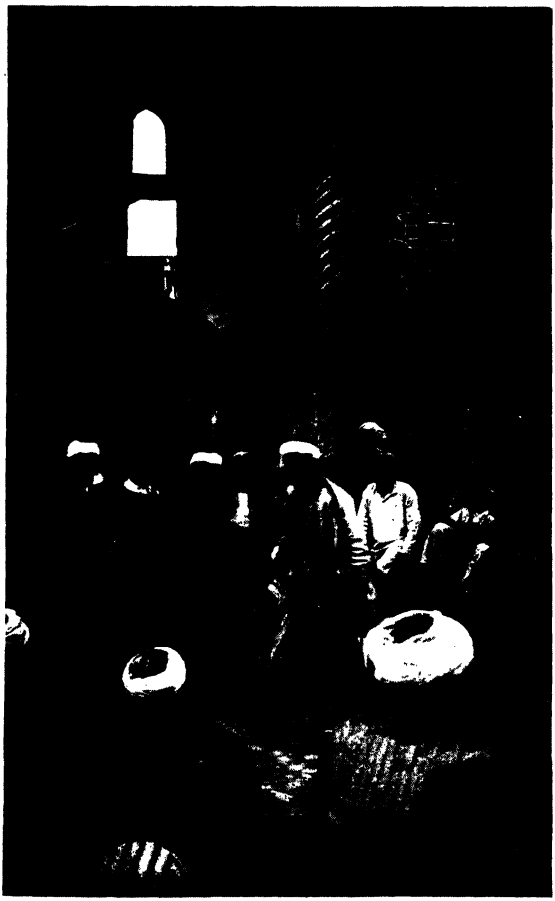
"I know that no more than you, Timur, but I think I must have fallen asleep here in the heat of the

afternoon. But you, what are you trying to drag from Infinity with your gaze?"

"The shape of a woman I have wronged."

"I too seek a woman I wronged," came from a deep voice near by, and turning I saw Ak Bala, short, strong and sturdy, but as he came up I knew he was not Ak Bala, but Temudjin, Chengiz Khan, Emperor of the World.

"I am seeking the shade of Bibi Hanim, my noble wife," went on Timur. "When I was away in the West, fighting the Sultan Bajadzet, conquering the men of Roum, Bibi Hanim, for love of me and my fame, commanded a mosque to be built. The arch of the entrance into the court was to be the tallest and loveliest in the world, as my fame was the greatest and her beauty the fairest. A young Arab architect, the most renowned in Asia, came especially to Samarkand to build this dream for her. The mosque rose slowly, but all men who watched its growing beauty wondered and were amazed, for it was something unearthly and exquisite, like the gates of Paradise. 'Verily this mosque is beautiful, verily this mosque is delicious,' they said, and added, 'It is for the fame of Timur Lenk, built by command of Bibi Hanim.' Some went away marvelling, but others said that no such divine beauty as this grew up to celebrate the bloody victories of Timur. The building grew so slowly that Bibi Hanim, the Queen of women, became afraid lest it be not finished against my return. Day after day she sent for the young architect to bid him hurry, but he only looked at her with burning eyes and said that Beauty will not grow at the command of even the greatest queen in the world. At last, in despair at his delay, she cried out, 'O fashioner of loveliness, what then *can* command Beauty to grow?'



A LEGEND OF TAMERLANE. A PROFESSIONAL STORY-TELLER AND HIS AUDIENCE.

'Only Love,' he answered, and my wife, the pearl of all women, understood then what she had secretly known in her heart for a long time. 'What is your price then, architect of madness, that this monument may be finished against the return of my husband?' for above all things she wished to greet me with this on my return, loving me beyond all else in the world. 'One kiss upon your cheek, Queen of women,' answered the architect. She granted him this, but the fire of that kiss burned a mark on the cheek of Bibi Hanim, and she fell from his hot embrace like a dead woman.

"The mosque was finished when I returned, and I, like the whole world, marvelled at its beauty, but I too knew in my heart at the first glance that this soaring loveliness was not inspired by the conquests of Timur. The mark on my beloved's cheek told my jealous heart the rest, and sword in hand I sought the young architect. He fled to the summit of his mosque, high over my town of Samarkand, face to face with the white mountain peaks. As I ran up with lifted sword he sprang into the air with a wild cry, of joy, or fear, or love, I do not know, for God, who knows all, snatched the falling body and changed it into a dove."

The shade of Chengiz spoke. "What did you then, O Timur? Did God's miracle quiet your turbulent heart?"

Timur shook his head. "I pulled down the frozen music of that arch and built it again, grander and taller, to fit the fame of Timur Lenk. When it was done the beauty of the mosque was dead, for I had destroyed the loveliest poem ever made to the glory of a woman. That is the wrong I did my noble wife."

Chengiz Khan sat down beside me and stretching out his hands to the night said, "I too have sinned

against Beauty, not so greatly as you, Timur, but yet it remains like a little thorn pricking my foot. I remade the world to my own fashion, as God bade me, and my work, like yours, endures, yet that one little thing can sting me yet."

"Speak and be comforted," said Timur.

"It was in the days when I conquered Khorasmia, beyond the hill there," and he pointed towards the long ridges above Raïm in the West. "My son Djoudji brought me among his captives as I lay in Samarkand the singing-girls of the Sultan. One of them, Bent Zendkidja, was of singular beauty, as even I remarked, who care little for the beauty of women, for the antelope speeding over the steppe had not more grace of body than she. By my side was Zin, the oculist of Samarkand, who had just cured my eyes of a painful disease, an ugly wretch crouched up behind his iron-rimmed spectacles like a perching owl. This lecherous old man asked me for Zendkidja for his own delight, and I out of gratitude granted his prayer. The singing-maid looked at him with the loathing he deserved and fled for refuge to the house of Nidham-el-Molk, the treacherous ex-Vizier of the old Sultan. Here she remained three or four days, regretting the Sultan, her late master, and his tall young sons, talking of his vanished glory with the Vizier who had betrayed him, and the pair of them drowning their sorrows in love and drunkenness. Zin could not get her away, so implored my aid. I gave him his singing-girl by force and rid the earth of the filthy blood of Nidham-el-Molk. So that I might keep my imperial word I linked in unholy bonds vile age and lovely youth. That is what pricks me like a thorn picked up from some bush upon the steppe; a little thing, but it rankles still."

When both had told their tales we sat all three a while looking out into the silence of night. Then I asked a question which was puzzling me sorely about the griefs of these two kings.

"This is all that troubles the peace of your departed souls? You have no sorrow for the peoples massacred, the bright cities destroyed, the carnage of your mighty wars? Two beautiful women wronged, that is all that works in you still, making your souls uneasy in the night?"

Chengiz Khan remained silent, but Timur answered me. "I regret only the wrong I have done against Beauty. For the slaughter and destruction you reproach me with I have no regret, nay, only joy, for I built a greater work with my sword than many with stone or paint or cunning words."

"But the dead, do not their shades reproach you? Is it just that a man should build his dreams out of men?"

Here Chengiz Khan rose with an impatient sign. "You speak like a fool. The work I did endures, and life flows the quicker for it. Who are these dead? If one or all had lived, would the great world have been the better or the wiser for it? Perhaps some among them were good or wise, but life is rich and there has been no lack of the good or wise since. I spared all men of arts and crafts. The rest the world could do without. Tell me now, if to-morrow a plague killed all in your land who were not among the artists or craftsmen, would they be missed?"

I answered that maybe no, for life is a little thing indeed and most men only wasters thereof.

"You are with me? Well, then, my work which I built up from their clay was the work of God. I gave peace to Asia, I gave strength to her trade and

commerce, I brought East into contact with West, and had there been those in the West saw as far as I, they had never parted again."

Timur spoke then. "I too did the work of God. The Champion of Islam, the Sword of the Faith, I made Islam supreme in Asia. All her beauty since is my child, for only those despise her who know her least. I ask you, friend, is not Islam a lovely thing? Did I not do well when I established her over Asia?"

I answered, "You did well, Timur, and the hand of God worked powerfully in you. You are two great conquerors; you stopped at nothing to fulfil your divine dreams, and now I salute you because you were victorious and yet have remembered Beauty, whom all men forget."

Timur laughed. "It was by remembering what all men forget that we became great conquerors, and a great conqueror is a great artist. But who is this?"

An iron stick rang on the pebbles and looking up I saw Fedor Ignaty'ich limp towards us leaning on an iron-tipped staff he sometimes used. Another was following him, a more sinister figure I had learned to distrust, and I felt for my revolver, fearing he might mean harm to old Yaganov, for I had recognised Steklov. Steklov held out his hand commandingly and cried, "Put up your revolver, I am not he you think." As he spoke he was indeed no longer Steklov, but the figure broadened, the Tatar face became more familiar and I knew that here was Vladimir Lenin. Yaganov too was altered, his clothes were strange, old Boyar's costume, and from my history books I remembered pictures of Ivan the Terrible.

Ivan sat heavily down and looked sharply at the

two Emperors, "Still here, old enemies? I was the first crowned Tsar in Russia and I took Kazan and Astrakhan from your children."

Chengiz smiled, while Timur Lenk salaamed and said, "It was after my day, first Tsar of Russia. Not so easily did I yield my cities. The Duke of Moscow knew me as a conqueror."

"My bastard Djoudji took your women for his bed," added Chengiz grimly. "Not so great then, White Tsar."

"We are quits to-day," said Ivan. "I roused the West against you. I made Russia a nation and I carried her frontiers into Asia. I brought the West farthest to the East since Alexander. To-day we hold you to the Wall of China."

Lenin stepped into the group, his Tatar face lit with fire. "We are one to-day. Russia is Russia no longer, but the work started by Ivan I have completed. East and West meet to-day in Moscow. The steppe is free to the Hindu Kush and the Great Wall, and the East is awake again. Not in vain have we four lived."

I turned to Lenin, in whose eyes still lurked that reminiscence of Steklov: "Vladimir Ily'ich, I took you for another, a man I hold a scoundrel and a thief. Such men have been your tools in this work of yours. Even if what you say is true, how can you stand beside these three great conquerors when murder and famine have blazed your trail? I understand them, for they had dreams of beauty and strength and made them true. But yours, what is it, this gospel of a German Jew?"

"It is the gospel of Life," he answered proudly. "Life is production, making and destroying; the process of Life, the process of production. Life is

love and drunkenness and creation, huge, vast, vigorous and various, like this steppe itself. To live we must conquer, struggle, rejoice and sorrow, but always seek, find and create. Sensuality, vice, they are the necessary materials of love, as sleep is necessary to life. They are also the materials of production, and I am not ashamed of them, because they are part of the glory of being, of changing shape and movement. Man and the machine make the product, man and woman the child. Work, like love, is a passion and a creation of life. I have struggled to free the forces of production, to give its glory back to work. That is my gospel, and that it comes from a German Jew is of no importance, since in the end it has come from God."

"What he has said is true," said Chengiz, and the other two nodded assent. "He has spoken like a man and a child of the steppe."

Timur turned to the east, where the grey of morning was appearing and one by one the stars were fading. "The dawn is near," he said, "and before I go I cry to the world that I love this steppe which flowers in spring, is burned up in summer and frozen in winter." "I too," said Ivan. "And I," said Chengiz. "I am its child," said Lenin.

The sun rose behind the Serpent Hill and I was alone. I walked back to Kamishli Bash and saw there Konat and Ak Bala riding out to the south-east, where our horses were pastured. On the station was Steklov, a portfolio of worn black leather under his arm. He smiled at me in his strange anonymous way and climbed into a waiting train. On the porch of our little white house stood Yaganov and with him a shaven priest of the new Church. "It is the name-day of our village," he cried as I came up. "A health to Saint

Michael," and he drained off a glass of white samagondka. The priest, who was also drunk, stood in the dawn on the step of the porch and called out,

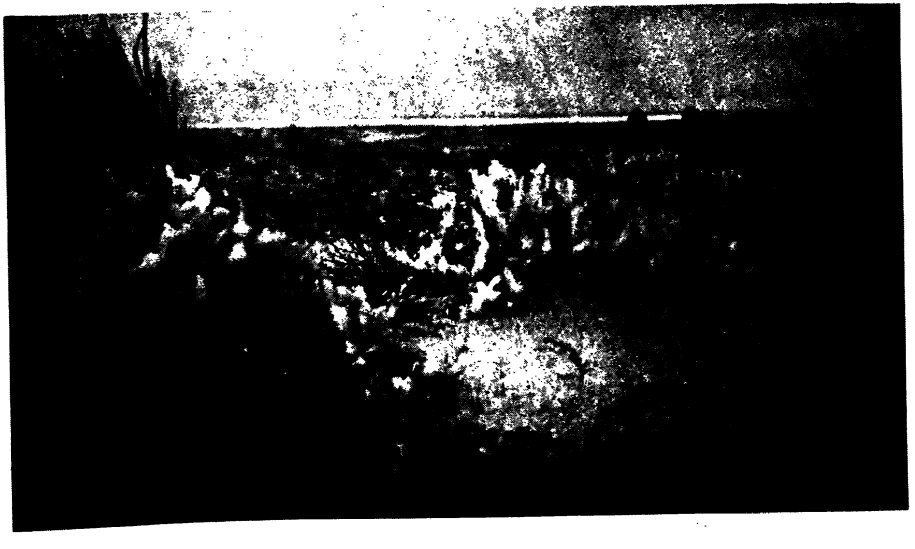
"I believe in the Sun and the Emperor Tamerlane. There is no God but God, and I am his prophet."

PART III

RESURRECTION

XV AFTER returning to Russia I spent a fortnight of comparative idleness at the Mission headquarters, and then went out to Andréevka, the oldest and most desolate of our outposts, some sixty versts along the road into the Uralsk government. With me went a lady journalist from England who wished to see what the very worst of the famine area looked like. A fortnight later a cinema party came out to us for the same reason. They neither of them saw the worst, for that was not at Andréevka itself, but in villages twenty and thirty versts farther to the east, villages where there was not food enough in the storehouses to last beyond the end of January, where only two horses were left alive with which to do the spring sowing, and of other live stock just as few, where life, as it were, rested on only the shakiest of foundations which it was our work to keep patched together till the next harvest. Andréevka rayon * was a large one, including, I think, eight volosts, each volost having as many as from three to five villages in it. In all this area there were four of us to watch over those tottering foundations, to see that each village was visited at least once a fortnight and that none went in want of the absolute necessities when help could possibly be given.

* See Note II.



FROZEN IN WINTER. THE STEPPE BY THE SHORE OF LAKE KAMISHLI BASH. ON THE RIGHT IS A KIRGHIZ TOMB.

It was a bare, grim area, where no trees grew save in occasional small copses by the river banks, a great tract of frozen, naked hills, flat steppe broken with sudden ravines, and occasional ice-bound rivers. Roads were few and many of them blocked for the winter, so that often great detours had to be made from village to village in our uncomfortable peasant sleighs. I think Andréevka itself was almost the most dismal of all these villages, with its long, straggling street, roofless mud isbas where only the big square stove, cold and covered with snow, reminded you that once a whole family had lived there. It was terribly significant that here in Andréevka only these single-roomed mud huts, the homes of the poorest peasants, were destroyed and empty as the result of the famine. The richer ones had all escaped with their lives, save where roaming brigands had relieved them of their surplus.

Outside the village on a little knoll was the cemetery, a collection of straggled wooden crosses grotesquely outlined on the bleak winter horizon. In a half-blizzard when only the crosses could be discerned against the leaden sky, through the whirling snow, the photographer set up his camera by the roadside to take a cinema picture of that place of death and cheated hope.

It was all a great contrast to the towns, where the famine was definitely over and where the children in the orphanages led the kind of life children should live, a life of play and gradual awakening to the wonder and beauty of the world. It was different in these remote villages. In the first place there were not half enough orphanages, and neither we nor the Government could afford more. It was always a question, when we visited the villages, of going over the melancholy lists of children with the local authorities and

deciding who were old enough to be turned out of the homes to take their chance (what a chance!) in the world that room might be made for those waiting to come in. But there were always more outside than there were vacancies for and it became harder rather than easier to turn out homeless boys and girls of fourteen or fifteen on to that hungry steppe. In the town homes every child had a bed to itself, and there were playrooms in each home, as well as interesting schools. Here in the country there were no playrooms and often the children shared beds or all slept on one great common board that ran round the room. Sheets were only available for sick children, and not always for them, while as for school, there were only a few of the older children to try to teach them. The education authorities in the Uyezd town were making brave efforts to send out a teacher to every village, but often we could give them no extra ration, and in any case they had no books, or pencils, or paper, not even the barest, most elementary apparatus. The villages were too impoverished by the famine to support their own education, and the Central Government could only afford as yet to spend money on restocking, on seed, on machinery, on the restoration of the agriculture which was the life of the countryside. So the children, grey-faced and mute, sat on their beds from day to day, unable to go out because only a few had boots and warm clothing, going to bed as soon as it was dark because there was no light, just waiting, waiting, for an end, for a deliverance that seemed never to come, waiting as only Russians can wait, with enduring patience, uncomplaining.

We were two women and two men, with two Russian interpreters, for our work of supervision. The Mission had been working here ever since 1916, and

as it was the first, so doubtless it will be the last of their outposts. No one could call the work pleasant, quite apart, that is, from the sheer discomfort of travelling for three or four days on end in open sleighs, over that bleakest of countrysides, for chiefly our trouble was we had to refuse what we knew to be necessities to men and women in the most terrible need. It is not cheerful to see a big bearded peasant break into tears before you because his horse has died and he will not be able to plough his land in the spring, because when life seemed within his grasp again fate struck it away from him and all his family. It is easy to say that in the spring there will be more horses, but our own scheme for buying horses in Khiva had fallen through owing to lack of money and we could not know if more would come in time. One could not explain to that heartbroken man (heartbroken is the right word here) that his life and his family's depended upon the charity of comfortable folk in England, men and women of the same Christian religion as himself, but whose faith and charity were subject to continual attacks by the mean-spirited everywhere. He could not be expected to understand that maybe a letter to the papers by some outraged peer, or a sermon by an indignant country parson, had condemned to death himself and all his family. We understood it, though, and it did not make life any easier for us to have this picture of our own countrymen always before us when listening to their desperate entreaties, watching their tears, tears of blood if that phrase has any meaning.

From village to village we went. Always we walked from our sleigh straight into the Izpolkom or the rooms of the famine committee. I had a certain list of inquiries to present in every village. First, how many

people had enough food to live through till the next harvest without relief, how many till the spring, how many till the end of January; next, how many in the village were sick with typhus or malaria and what medicines were needed; lastly, how was the distribution of rations being carried out and what stages had the work reached which was done in return; this work was mostly done by the women in the shape of spinning or weaving flax and wool to make clothes for the children in the homes. Perhaps two or three families could survive without help till the harvest; the great majority needed full relief at the end of January; as for medicines they were always short, especially quinine when every second person had malaria, but mercifully this winter cases of typhus were few. Then those who had complaints to make would come in to the crowded, steaming room. The famine committee were rich men and giving themselves extra rations; certain poor families received no rations at all, or insufficient; the horses were used for private purposes instead of in hauling wood for the poorer peasants; the feldsher from the volost village (every volost had a feldsher, that is, a partially trained but unqualified medical man) was not visiting the sick in the villages as he should, and so on. Sometimes the complaints were justified, and examination of the record of every ration given out which the committees were forced to keep (every peasant signed for his ration) would reveal that some in no great need were getting more than those in a desperate condition. Then there would be threats, expostulation and anger, and on the other side patent lies and dissimulation. In the end we would smooth things out, being careful to arrive unexpectedly at that village the next time food was distributed, and so preserve some rough

justice. Often enough, the committees stole the food and were discovered and arrested by the authorities, but the punishment was not severe, and when need was so great few were strong enough to resist temptation.

The next visit was to the children's home in the village, and that was always the hardest of all. Some of the children would have scabies or mumps and we would find them mixing freely with the rest. Then the superintendent would have to explain this. It was always the same explanation. "We have no room for isolation, comrade, anywhere in the village. In the last year we have lost so many houses and now the refugees have come back." "But you must; it is impossible for children to live like this. Fetch the president of the Izpolkom and I will make him find somewhere to put them." Soon that worthy would come; occasionally he was a Communist, but more often a non-party peasant. He would stand there smiling, very solid in his shuba and valinki, anxious to please, but wishing we would not cause so much trouble. "Can you find a room in which to isolate these children?" I would ask. "No, comrade. It's impossible. Before the New Economic Policy we might have taken one. But now we have to pay rent and the village can't afford it." "Well, but it must afford it. If no one will give one you must have a levy to pay for it." "What, comrade, when taxes are already so heavy half of us can't pay them at all! No, it's quite impossible. It's very sad, but we can't do anything." "We can't do anything," that was always the reply, sometimes honest enough, sometimes just meaning—"What's the use—why trouble us? As if life isn't a burden enough for us poor folk!" In the end we would overcome their stubbornness, and Walter, the interpreter, who was a good Commun-

ist from Moscow, would deliver a little lecture on the need to care for the children first of all things.

Once we came to a house where three children were sick with typhus. They were in a tiny room separated only by a thin partition of boards from the other children and every sound these made could be heard in the sick-room, though, God knows, they were quiet enough. The place was spotlessly clean, though too hot, and heavy with that damp, steamy smell of Russian interiors in winter. In their little room the three sick children lay on their straw mattresses, with no sheets, only a coarse blanket covering them. Two had passed the crisis and lay with wide-open staring eyes, very still and quiet. The other was moaning and restless, in a feverish sleep, the little grey face all wasted away. Two children followed us into their room and in an angry whisper I bade them be off. The superintendent apologised, "They are from the children's committee and think they can go anywhere." "Then tell them they can't," I answered roughly, but at the same time I did not feel other than rather pathetically proud that these forgotten infants had yet enough life in them to form committees to govern their little hopeless affairs, to look after their sick even. But the real heroine of this home was the small brown-eyed girl of thirteen who lived isolated from all the rest that she might nurse these three, for the teachers could not do it and also mix freely with the children, and their staff was not big enough to spare one away permanently. We could do little for them save send out from Andréevka the one of our two women workers there who was a trained nurse, with a supply of sheets and medicines.

The horses we had bought at that time were loaned out in squads to the different volosts to do common

work for all, and their upkeep was the responsibility of all the peasants. Afterwards, when money failed from England, we had to sell them at cost price to the peasants in order to buy more with the turnover. This was not so good a method, for it meant that the poor peasants who could not afford a horse, even on the instalment system, lost all benefit by them. At the same time, it relieved us of much work in checking work done, seeing the horses were properly looked after and paying supervisors who were generally quite incompetent (one of these was Kerensky's old coachman, and by common consent he was the biggest fool of all). I have no longer the figures with me, but I believe that before the famine there were 150,000 horses in the Uyezd and that in the summer of 1922 this number had fallen to 3,000. Samara Government gave large credits to the Co-operatives to buy fresh horses and camels and of course speculators did a great trade by driving animals over the frontiers of the Turkestan and Kirghiz republics. The Co-operatives naturally could not give away their purchases and great difficulty was found in fairly distributing fresh stock to the peasants. Of the thousand horses we had bought in Turkestan about 400 were for the Uyezd Izpolkom, who received grants from the Izpolkom at Samara on condition they turned the money over within a certain period. On the whole we could say there would be just a bare sufficiency of horses and camels for the spring sowing, which was something, though it was far from being enough, for 147,000 is a big deficiency to make up.

These then were the things our rounds were occupied with: feeding, medical attention, wool industries and horses. On the whole they were uneventful enough, even monotonous. In every village they would say,

"Go no farther to-day. Our people have seen eleven wolves just beyond." Or "Yesterday wolves killed one of our dogs. You will be in danger if you go on." But we never saw a wolf and we always went on. Once a figure slunk out of the gloom and frightened our horses. Walter fired twice at it with his revolver, but from the tracks we saw it was only a prowling fox. Occasionally we found the trail of a wolf in the snow, but they are not dangerous unless in packs. The thought that they might be near always made driving in the dark more exciting, even though we did not believe in them, and when we came at last into the dark village street we had a real sense of human companionship, of home and comfort, for which master wolf was responsible, for it certainly wasn't always warranted by the quarters in which we had to sleep, or by the cheer we found.

One journey from the village of Logachovka with Kyriel Gurianich I remember very well for its dreadful loneliness. Kyriel himself was a good enough companion, tall, picturesque, if you like, with his long military moustache and blue eyes. He was an old soldier, a battery sergeant-major from the artillery of the Guard, and he thought himself a great man in Andréevka. It must be conceded that he was both competent and useful, and, what is more, honest, but he had his disadvantages. He was certainly conceited, partly because of his trusted position with us, partly because his success in the army had made him look down on the stay-at-home villagers, and even more, I think, because he had had the best hay crop in the village, out of which he had made the greatest advantage. Kyriel suffered from having been always trusted, by his officers in the army, by us at home, and if he yet remained always trustworthy it was as much from pride

as from virtue. He was quite willing to tell me all about his regiment, which had been stationed in Warsaw, about their splendid drill, their fine uniforms, their guns and horses. "Ah, Rolf Karlovich," he would say, "it would have done you good to see the regiment march past. The band all on their white horses, the drivers each with his whip poised on his hip, the gunners upright on the limbers, each gun in line, the officers and sergeants riding in their places —it was good to be a soldier in those days. But now——" He could find no words to express his contempt for the army of to-day. "But," I would argue, "Budyenni and his cavalry, aren't they all right?" "Budyenni is a good cavalryman," he granted me, "but they can't compare with the old army. Don't believe all you hear, Rolf Karlovich. They can't compare with our boys." He had worked with the Mission ever since he had been invalided from the army in 1916, and only one other of our workers had ever been interested in his regiment—an English major who had spent his youth as military attaché at Petrograd. Kyriel loved this old officer, and showed me with pride a postcard from him sent from Lausanne. "He was an artillery-man too," he said, as though that settled everything about him.

At Logachovka when we got there in the evening the village committee could present no very satisfactory account of the use they had been making of their horses. We puzzled over their statistics for a while and then Kyriel looked up, evidently remembering our conversation on the way, and exclaimed, "For the love of God, Ralph Karlovich, look at all this." Then, pointing to a primitive picture of Marx on the wall of the hut, bearded and essentially unmilitary-looking, he added with all the scorn of which a misused

sergeant-major is capable, "That's the discipline of Karl Marx!" And that settled that.

Kyriel really was intelligent and capable beyond the average in these forsaken, backward villages. Yet he was so conscious of it, had such a way of nodding at you in the presence of the peasants as though to say, "Well, these ignorant fellows think so, but you and I are intelligent and know better," that I was really glad when the next day his infallibility received a severe shaking, though I confess I was frightened enough myself with the prospects opened up by that shaking. Logachovka is the most inaccessible of all the villages in the Andréevka rayon, and in winter there is only one road by which it can be approached over the high bare hills that cut it off from the rest of the world. This road runs along the edge of a precipitous ravine from the hilltop to the outskirts of the village and the heights are not pleasant to cross in bad weather. That morning a regular blizzard was blowing when we set off, so that we had to crawl along the edge of the ravine, almost blinded by the snow which the icy wind whirled in our faces. Luckily we passed it without a false step from the horses, but going down the hill we met the full force of the gale. A mask of ice was frozen over my face and we simply had to let the horses find their own way, for even when our eyelids were free from the ice and we could look out it was impossible to see farther than a yard in front. We had promised to be in Ephemovka that night for a spectacle, but I wished heartily we were free to go back to Andréevka, for it appeared more than doubtful if we should be able to make the long detour to Ephemovka (the regular road was closed for the winter). At the bottom of the hill the blizzard dropped and we passed a deserted village, very eerie

in the aftermath of the storm, after which we had to get out to haul the sleigh over a ravine which broke the road. At the next village there was not a soul in the streets from whom to inquire about our road, so we had to rouse up the miller. He was the first person we saw that day and he looked more like a gnome than a man. The weather had delayed us, so we had no time to stop and eat if we were to make Ephemovka that night, and the only alternative to Ephemovka, once we were on the road there, was a night on the open steppe. But the storm had made the road almost impassable and the horses crawled on mile after mile, often up to their chests in the drifting snow, with nothing to break the awful monotony of grey sky and endless white plain. Once Kyriel nudged me and pointed up, and I saw a small white eagle hovering above, the only lovely thing in all the frozen wilderness. Late in the afternoon we saw a black dot moving across country which soon resolved itself into a peasant standing upright on his tiny one-horse sleigh. When we had met and exchanged greetings Kyriel followed him with his eyes until he again was a black dot in the distance. "He is either very brave or a fool to go across country like that," he said. "In that direction, miles off the road, there are sure to be wolves and in the deep snow he could never escape. Besides, he runs the risk of being overtaken by the dark and losing his direction with no road to follow."

When he had gone we were alone again and the road grew no better. Often we had to get out and walk for a verst or two through the snow, encumbered by our heavy coats and sheepskins. The afternoon wore on and there was still no sign of Ephemovka. Kyriel, though he was supposed to know every road

in the rayon, had no idea how far away we were. Then darkness came and still no Ephemovka. Now it was serious, for we kept wandering off the road into the waste on either side. Never before had I known what it was to be really lonely, lost in an unearthly quiet on a ghostly wilderness of snow. It was as though the sun had died and we were the only people left in the world. After a while we were really lost, quite off the road and wandering in circles. Kyriel had no idea of which direction to take, he was as helpless as the most ignorant peasant, and though we took turns in leading the horses while the other circled in search of the road, we seemed to be no nearer. I made out we were in rough country, at the foot of some ridge, and I suggested to Kyriel one of us should climb it to look for a light. But he answered that it was useless, for on such a night we could see nothing. I had begun to wonder how best we might pass the night on the steppe, and to strain every ear for the howl of a wolf, when wonderfully we struck the road again. We must have been nearer than we thought, since a short ride brought us on to a firm well-used track and we were soon galloping hard towards the village. We rushed our tired horses over the frozen bed of the river as though wolves indeed were on our track, and drew up with a sigh of relief outside the house where we were to sleep. Best of all we were in time for the spectacle, which was an hour and a half late!

Mike, the other interpreter, with my three fellow-workers, were waiting for us, but at that time Walter had not yet joined the outpost. The spectacle was a great success, and we four English folk, one of us at least thoroughly tired, came back to bed about half-past eleven. We left Mike still enjoying himself at an improvised dance. He was getting on very well

with the priest's daughter, Alexandra Nikolaievna, a young Communist, like so many priests' daughters in Russian villages, who clearly had not long to live owing to consumption. Mike was warned he would have to be off with the two ladies at 4.30 the next morning, but he never came in to bed that night, though he was waiting outside at 4.30. He explained he had been dancing, but the truth was, he told me afterwards, he had spent the night on the stove with Alexandra Nikolaievna, in real Russian peasant fashion. "Well," he added, as if to justify himself, "a Russian poet, I've forgotten his name, unfortunately, says that Nature is cruel and heedless, so we must take from her whatever we can get. Why should I refuse what nature offers?" Why indeed? Michael Donelovitch, twenty-seven years old, who should have been as merry a little fellow as ever lived, had a permanent melancholy derived partly from typhus and partly from a cruel love disappointment in Canada. It was he who told me that for a long time he had not read Dostoievski because he thought he was "one of those bourgeois writers who aren't any good for working men like me." However, someone had persuaded him to try, and he now thought Dostoievski the greatest writer in the world.

Walter and I had once a good example of the awakening of the villages. At one of the volost villages the president of the Izpolkom, an old sailor in the navy, came round to tell us that in a hutor, or small settlement, in his volost there was a seam of slag which could be burned for fuel. They were anxious to work this and knew there was enough there to supply all the Andréevka district with fuel, thus solving one of our most difficult problems. If we would give rations they would work the coal, but they would need

extra food for such heavy labour. Walter, who had been a miner in Pennsylvania, was very excited at this, and we set off at once to drive to the hutor, where we were told there was an open face which could be worked without sinking shafts. The place was a steep and very lovely ravine, with hoar-covered trees and shrubs climbing up each side. Fat, good-natured, lazy Walter was transformed with excitement at the thought of being able to start a mining industry here, and it was quite difficult to prevent him from jumping down headlong in his excitement. With infinite labour we climbed to the bottom and then started to dig away the snow from the face, but it was unrewarded toil, for the examination of the face revealed that the first charge of dynamite would bring down the whole side of the ravine. It would have taken months of labour to prop everything up so that working could start successfully. Yet Walter was right when he said that the enterprise those villagers had shown in experimenting with the slag for fuel, the very fact even that they had thought of working it extensively for their common good, showed a new spirit in these villages. They were stirring at last in their age-long sleep.

The dullest, yet perhaps the saddest and most revealing, work which I did in the Andréevka outpost was to collate the statistics which the volosts sent in every month. Among these was information as to the births and deaths, and in every village the deaths exceeded the births by more than ten to one. Moreover, since most weakly old people were already dead, at least half the deaths were of babies and young people. If these figures continued it meant nothing else than that in a few years, appallingly few years, the whole population would have died out. Yet somehow we

all had faith that the disaster so obviously threatened would still be avoided. We felt enough faith in the immense zest for life of these people, in their great creative power, to be satisfied that somehow they would pull through eventually.

We had our reasons, strong reasons too, despite all the distress we saw everywhere, and it wasn't just a mystical faith in some peculiar property of the Russian peasant. In every village things were moving, life was stirring again, and a reconstruction, resurrection if you like, was beginning. In the first place, economy was restored. There was a real exchange between town and country, largely, of course, because the towns now for the first time had something to exchange, but also because transport was now quick and effective. Indeed by the end of 1922 the railways were working as well as in 1916, before the February Revolution. Taxes were terribly heavy on the impoverished peasants, as we heard everywhere, but at the same time much of what they paid was coming back in seed corn and help for the purchase of stock and machinery. In this respect the worst grievance went soon after Christmas with the abolition of taxes in kind and the substitution of a graduated money tax. There were few cows or good breeding stock to be seen and the only pigs I ever so much as heard of were two which Bill bought out of his Kamishli Bash gains. However, we were in the very poorest district of all, the one that had suffered most and longest, and in other places our workers had better news. One thing at least was certain, more grain had been sown this year than at any time since the Revolution, while the 1923 harvest has since proved our optimism about the crops to have been justified. Moreover, we knew that one good harvest would start things again, and by now

no doubt they have started. The Co-operatives in nearly every village are a great blessing to the peasants. Being first in the field, they are likely to beat in open competition the private speculator who flourishes so vigorously since the advent of the New Economic Policy. The peasants like the Co-operatives, are quite used to them, for they are by no means new, but only greatly increased in power and wealth since the Revolution, and on the whole there are few complaints about their management. In our area, one of the most backward in Russia, Mission tractors have got the peasants used to machinery, and when we go finally they will keep the tractors. The Government too is sparing no efforts to bring modern machines into the country, and in a few years the ravages of the famine should have almost disappeared. Another thing not reckoned with yet is electrification. If ever this succeeds—and it is more than a dream—then the state of the Russian peasant will indeed be that of a man who has taken a leap from darkness into light. Already I have seen a few, a very few, villages which boast electric light for every house, and that is something almost incredible, small step though it is. The peasant commonwealth is within sight of reality, a commonwealth where the peasants, producing individually with a minimum of co-operation in machinery, exchange through the co-operative societies with the Communist workers in the towns.

Politically there is also an advance. It is true that there are no absolutely free elections, that the higher one gets in the political structure the more arbitrary is the power. But he is a bold man who will make of that a complaint against the New Russia. Western democracy is neither desired by nor natural to the Russian people, and they are slowly forming their own

new system of government, adjusting it to the growing needs of the country and people. In the villages there is really a political awakening, and for the first time the peasants are actually receiving a political education. Every famine committee formed, every Soviet electing its executive committee is a sign of this. As we went from village to village we could not help but notice how every peasant, cigarette in mouth in defiance of the notice "Smoking forbidden!", felt it his right to come into the Izpolkom, or the Famine Committee, and put forward his point of view. If anything the fault lay in these Izpolkoms being too much village clubs and too little executive committees for governing village affairs. Communist propaganda was everywhere listened to and where it was understood discussed, if not always approved. Whatever one may think of the Communists one cannot deny that they do this for the peasant, they bring him in touch with an outside world whose existence he has never before even recognised, they make him feel he is important as a human being, that his work is important above all to the community as a whole, and that he has a definite place as a Russian inside Russia.

Socially the awakening is there also. Every village, however isolated, to-day has its People's House, or Narodni Dom. Of course these existed before, just as children's homes existed before, but only in a very few villages, and in our own Uyezd hardly at all. Every Sunday the people try to arrange something there, a lecture, a dance, a spectacle, and the effort is all their own, coming crudely and beautifully straight from the people's heart. How well I remember one such spectacle on New Year's day at Ephemovka!

This year New Year's Day fell on a Sunday, a very different New Year's Day for the Russian villages in

the famine area from that of the preceding year. In Russian the word for Sunday is Voskresenye, which means "Resurrection," and the superstitious peasants did not fail to make the most of comfort out of the coincidence. They had reason enough. January 1st, 1922, had dawned bleak and hopeless over a hunger-stricken steppe where bands of brigands roamed from village to village plundering and murdering, where madness was driving human beings to cannibalism, where starvation and disease claimed each day more victims than a battle in the war, where no children played in the streets and there were no marriages and no births. A year later they might fairly have claimed to have conquered death, though there were still hunger and distress, but at least children were playing in the frozen streets once more on their improvised toboggan runs, and nearly every night voices in the street singing to the accompaniment of guitars or concertinas told of marriage and festivity again.

Naturally we thought of such things as we were pulled swiftly over the bare hills in our sleigh to the village of Ephemovka. The New Year celebrations which we had been invited to attend there were symbolic and splendid in their way, the crown of achievement against the famine, the dawn of a new era of hope for the Russian village. Yet, however magnificent in abstract, the reality was rough and human enough, though that only heightened the splendour of these villages, that they should have dared so much when possessing so little. The entertainment was due to start at 7.30, but we were not fetched to the Narodni Dom from the peasant's house where we had put up till nearly nine. At Ephemovka the Narodni Dom was a big wooden hut with a rickety stage at one end, capable of holding perhaps two

hundred people, though that night there were at least three hundred packed in somehow, men, women and children, all in their sheepskins and felt boots, the kerosene lamps on the walls casting a dim glow on the men's bearded faces and the bright shawls that wrapped the women's heads. We were taken to the post of honour, the only bench that had a back to it, and had the pleasure of knowing that our feet disturbed the people in front whereas we were protected from those behind. Someone was making a speech when we came in, but his words seemed to beat in vain against that solid atmosphere, heavy with all the smells of Russia—mahorka tobacco, stale husks of sunflower seeds, cabbage soup and wet sheepskins.

We were near enough to recognise him. He was a boy of eighteen, the son of a former landowner, who had joined the Communists and was in charge of political propaganda for the volost. This boy always spoke to us in incomprehensible broken German, as though he could not tolerate the idea of foreigners being able to speak Russian. He was a good-natured, foolish youth whom everybody knew and liked, and we never felt any compunction in being rude enough to tell him to be off when he bored us. Not that he ever took any notice. He was in similar difficulties tonight, for manifestly everyone in that crowded room was impatient for the spectacle to begin, yet he stuck grimly on in face of all their interruptions and kindly jests, determined to explain the Revolution to the bitter end, rebuffing all their taunts with a dogged, rather self-conscious grin. From time to time the captain of the militia would rise in the front row, a stupid, clean-shaven peasant with a sword slung over his khaki tunic, rather uncomfortably conscious of his authority, and call out "Teesh, Tovarishchi, teesh!" (Peace, comrades, peace!) They knew him for a

brave and honest man, so they were quiet for a while. Then he and the president of the Izpolkom suppressed the speaker half-way through his exposition of the New Economic Policy and with the aid of a kerosene lamp examined the tickets of everyone in the room. The people behind us showed up their Co-operative Society checks, and their ruse succeeded, either because of the dim light or because the militia man did not read very easily. We heard their delighted chuckles for a long time.

Then at last the curtains were pulled back and the spectacle began. The scenery was made of flour-sacks and empty clothing-bales from the Mission Relief supplies and the furniture was knocked together from cocoa and biscuit boxes. We could still see in places the legends in English of the firms who supplied the goods originally, a pleasant meeting in this village seventy miles from the railway, in the heart of the steppe. There were three small plays presented, one of them really wonderful, which dealt with the tragedy of a worker's life in the towns before the Revolution. Another was a stupid social comedy and the last a very melodramatic picture of a worker's home in Moscow during the October Revolution. This was finished with the hero carried in dying by comrades of the Red Guard and exclaiming with his last breath, "Hail to the Social Revolution!" Unfortunately, one of the Red Guards was the young Communist who had made the speech. We had seen him through the back cloth desperately trying to fire off blanks from his rifle to represent the fighting, but now on the stage he could not keep his face, and at that last high-flown declaration his secret merriment got the better of him and he simply collapsed, rifle and all. His anticlimax spoiled the finish, but it fairly brought the house down.

In between the plays we had interludes of song and dance and funny stories (really funny) from the president of the Soviet, a merry rogue with a fair moustache and sly blue eyes, very popular with everyone. When it was all over he announced that the children must be sent to bed, but that all over eighteen would be welcome at the Izpolkom for a " feast " and dancing. The feast was cocoa and chunks of rye bread, but we enjoyed it better than supper at the Savoy, while the dancing certainly had more life in it than the languid crawling of our civilised ball-rooms. About two o'clock everyone went to bed except the actors and ourselves. We kept up the revels, dancing and kissing-games, till eight o'clock on January 2nd, and then went for breakfast to the house of one of the members of the Izpolkom. We were all hungry and ate the potatoes and pancakes with relish, while those who could not get to the table sang songs for the rest—the ballad of Stenza Rakin, Dubinochka, the Internationale and so on, a bizarre mixture of folk poetry and revolution.

When it was all over at last we harnessed the horses and drove back over the snowy hills again, the greetings of our friends still in our ears. Then the easy motion of the sleigh and the comfortable warmth of my sheepskin sent me into a doze, while blurred upon my mind remained crude pictures of the night's entertainment. The Russian peasant had survived his nightmare, his rough, kindly patience, his long indifference to suffering had conquered again, and yesterday in truth had been Voskresenye—Resurrection. I remembered the words of Dubinochka, how " the Englishman is wise and clever with his machines, but the mouzhik works and conquers with a song." *

* See Note III.

MOSCOW, THE HEART OF IT ALL

XVI I HAD used to think Rome the loveliest city in the world until I came to Moscow. But the beauty of Rome is the beauty of "a rose-red city, half as old as Time," all that is new in it is vulgar, whereas Moscow's beauty is not that of ruin or of romantic memory, but something living, breathing and ardent in every street and stone. The Kremlin has its rose-red antique loveliness, yet it is still the vital heart of Russia, the soul of the new country as it was the soul of the old, the monument of enduring Russianness. The wide streets and boulevards, the palaces and dignified grey stone buildings, the broad magnificence of the Theatre Square, these are no foreign growth thrust upon the dirt and picturesqueness of the working-class quarters, but rather grow naturally out of them, each an interdependent part of the lovely whole. The trams that rattle through the gateways of the Chinese Wall are no such anachronism as those that pass the desolate ruin of the Colosseum. The Chinese Wall is still a part of the Russian character, but the Colosseum has no part in the Rome of to-day. All the ruins of Rome are only lonely exiles that do not fit in, like the Gothic towers and churches of Paris. But the Cathedral of St. Basil, the shrine of the Iberian Virgin, the red walls, the exotic blue domes with their golden stars, the gold and silver of the other great churches, these are in no way strangers in the city. Moscow is a perfect

whole, the heart of it all, the capital of the great union of republics that covers half Europe and half Asia.

I had the address of one friend in Moscow when I arrived there in July, a Russian girl whom I had met in Oxford two and a half months before, so before I had been in the city an hour I went to look her up. As I walked along the Tverskaya to the *Pravda* offices where I knew she worked I could not help contrasting that odd meeting in Oxford so short a time ago. Brought up to look upon the Latin countries as my spiritual home, I had never regarded them as foreign, but the scene before me now was so utterly different, so new and strange that I could not help feeling like a traveller who has discovered some lost Atlantis. And I actually had a friend here, met in prosaic Oxford! It was just before the beginning of the Summer Term, and I had come up to work for my schools. I remember I was quite alone in the college, not even the rowing men having yet come up, and as I walked out into the High to buy my Sunday paper from the man who stands by the railings at the corner of Longwall, I walked right into the little group of Russians. They were guided by a friend who had been up at Balliol two years before, a Russian who works in the Soviet Mission in London, and they were all hatless and unmistakably foreign, two men and two women. My friend introduced his three companions as Russians from the Mission whom he was bringing to see a real bourgeois University! What an opportunity had fallen into my hands, to show the most English and loveliest of colleges to these strangers from another world. We turned back into the lodge, and, getting the keys from the porter, I took them up the Tower whence they saw all that

was most beautiful in England in the quiet of an Oxford Sunday out of term. It was a perfect spring morning, cold and sunny, with the fresh green of the trees ever so lightly mirrored in the waters of the Cher, while from some church in the town bells were ringing merrily. I turned to the youngest of them, a dark, brown-eyed girl, and said, seized as it were with an inspiration, "I will come to Moscow in the summer and you shall show me all Russia from the top of a tower." She smiled. "If you come to Moscow we will canonise you in one of the churches for what you have shown us to-day."

Later in the day they had tea in my rooms and they told me a little of their impressions. Of course, they had loved it, it was quiet, beautiful, all that you could wish, and so English. But (there is always a "but" with Russians) after all it was a bourgeois university, and did not belong to England, only to a privileged part of it. "We are trying to do better than that in Russia," they explained. I walked into the *Pravda* office still thinking of this encounter, wondering just how different it would be, what Comrade G—— would show me. The office was busy enough, with its lightly clothed men and women, and a man came up to ask my business, a Jew wearing a Russian blouse-tunic. I told him whom I wanted, and he hunted all through his lists of the staff, but, alas! no one of that name worked there. However, he suggested I might find her in the editorial offices, farther up the Tverskaya, theirs being only the business part of the paper. I thanked him and, deciding she would probably be at home now, went on to the old Hotel Metropole, Soviet House No. 2. The Metropole was queer enough, with its rather battered front and the red flag over the door. Inside

what had been the lounge there were now no carpets or furniture, and only ironical notices, such as "Hairdresser," "Cashier," "Restaurant," and so on, told that it had formerly been the largest hotel in Moscow. I went to the Bureau and asked for my friend's room. It was 551, on the top storey, and there were no lifts! However, I got there, only to meet with disappointment, for it was a mild-eyed and rather shabby young man in a linen smock who answered my call. As for the room itself, it was terribly untidy, and I could not believe that she lived in it. The young man announced he was her brother, and told me that, in fact, she was not living there then, but in Soviet House No. 1, as the Metropole was being renovated at the moment. He offered to ring her up, and in a moment I had the pleasure of hearing her surprised voice on the telephone. Still she appeared glad to find I had kept my promise, and was only too pleased to keep hers by "showing me Russia from a tower," or from anywhere else for that matter. I arranged to meet her the next morning, Saturday, in the *Pravda* office.

That night we did nothing save search unsuccessfully for one of the orchestras we had heard played in the open places on summer evenings. We did not find one, but in the Red Square we saw the graves of John Reed and other heroes of the Revolution. On Saturday morning I went early and alone to the *Pravda* office and without much difficulty found G—— in her little room. I felt quite triumphant as I shook hands with her, for I knew she had not quite believed me that morning in Oxford when I had said I was coming to Moscow. She told me about her work, which was editing the Workers' Page in *Pravda*, that is the page given over to letters and articles from

workers about life in their factories and workshops. She looked very cool in her white blouse and skirt, so did the other young women who came in from time to time to consult about something or other. I remember one especially, fair with small regular features and a look in her eyes that warned one she wasn't going to be trifled with by anyone, a kind of Russian and Communist Athena. Meanwhile G—— was making suggestions as to a programme for the day. I could look at pictures in the galleries, see the Kremlin, or go to the trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, which had then reached its concluding stages. I chose the last as the most interesting, for it was in a way the close of the Revolution itself, the final triumph of Revolutionary justice before everybody settled down again to prosaic everyday life. She asked me then to go to see the Foreign Editor, who would be glad to hear all about England, while she finished her work and got the tickets.

I found the Foreign Editor a kindly, spectacled old gentleman with dreamy eyes and a mild voice, not a very common type among the Communists, rather more like the idealist of tradition. He asked me what people in England thought about the trial of the S.R.'s. I replied, I think truthfully, that, apart from the readers of the *Daily Herald*, nobody knew anything about it, and that certainly nobody was very interested in it, save perhaps a few of the leaders and politicians in the I.L.P. and Labour Party. On the other hand, a lot of noisy people were making a great outcry against the arrest of Tikhon and the bishops. The old gentleman looked at me incredulously. "Is that really so?" "Absolutely." "But here it's just the other way round. Nobody is in the least interested in the fate of the bishops. Hardly

anyone came to their trial. This afternoon, though, you will find quite a crowd at the process against the S.R.'s." In a way I think he was right. In the towns at least there was not a great deal of sympathy for the arrested ecclesiastics; moreover, nobody thought them to be in very great danger. Of course, in the country the position was different, but the Foreign Editor, like all inhabitants of a capital, was rather prone to give the common opinion of the capital for that of all the country. "Tell me," he went on, the short-sighted eyes puzzling out my face, "what does the British Government do to rebels in Ireland and India?" "Shoot them or hang them," I replied. "Well, why do they make such a fuss then about our executing the S.R.'s, if they are found guilty, or the priests too for that matter?" "Of course, they have no case, but still you expect them to protest, don't you?" "Oh, yes, but then they must also expect us to protest when they carry out executions. If only everybody left us alone, I daresay they might find us quite willing to let them alone."

Of course, he was right, and in the end neither the priests nor the S.R.'s were shot, though how far that was due to foreign intervention it is impossible to say. (All this was before the arrest and execution of Budkiewicz, which was on quite different grounds from that of the other ecclesiastics.) He asked me about the political situation in England, whether I thought the elections were near and if Lloyd George would last much longer. He himself thought the Coalition would soon go, and after events proved him to have been correct in this, but I was not so optimistic, or so acute, for at that time I could see no particular reason for turning out the Coalition which had not been equally valid for at least a year. He

said everyone in Russia was looking forward with interest to a Labour Government in England, which even if it were a failure, as it probably would be, would yet prove to be a great advance in the political education of the English working-classes. Before I left he asked me to write him an article upon life in the famine area, but I am afraid I never kept the promise I gave.

After a hasty lunch I met G—— again and we walked to the hall where the great trial was being held. The afternoon session began at three o'clock and would last till five. Krylenko was making his concluding speech for the prosecution, and, though he had spoken all the previous day, did not expect to finish till late on Monday. On our way there my companion told me that the workers in Moscow had shown far more interest in a trial which had just concluded. A worker had written to *Pravda* to complain about the way in which his factory was managed and to request that the Workers' Inspection should investigate. The furious manager had burst into the worker's room and shot him, seriously wounding but not killing him. The most intense excitement was roused by the trial, and the court was packed with workmen every day. The manager was found guilty and sentenced to four years' forced labour, which in Russia often means no confinement in prison, but merely work without wages.

There was quite a crowd of people in the lobbies when we entered the building, the women bareheaded like G——, or wearing silk handkerchiefs round their heads, and the men in tunics or Russian blouses. In the outer lobby were a refreshment counter and a bookstall, so that no one might grow weary waiting, but there were not too many people there to prevent

our going straight in. We had to show our passes three times to the soldiers who stood with fixed bayonets at each door. Apparently anyone could have a ticket whose good behaviour could be vouched for by a responsible person. G——, of course, had Press tickets. At last we came to the sentries outside the court-room and waited there in the crush till it was time for the doors to open. I noticed a strikingly beautiful woman standing near me in curious clothes which might have come straight from a Directoire fashion print. She was dark, with nervous eyes and full red lips, and from her expression I think she must have been an actress. The woman was all electric storms, and I could not but wonder what brought her here, and what had been the tragedy of her life since the Revolution. A man in a linen tunic, with a student's stoop and an ugly, but kindly and intellectual, face pushed by me, nodding to G——. The actress, if actress she was, plucked him by the sleeve and nervously whispered some question to which he replied pleasantly, leaving her with a courteous nod, and apparently appeased, for she gave a little sigh, as of relief. She was one of those women who look as though they have never known how to smile and from whom you would receive a laugh with the utmost horror. G—— said, as the stranger pushed by the sentries into the hall, "That's Comrade Lunacharski. He is one of the prosecutors. It was his business to explain the historical growth of the S.R. party and their treason to Socialism." So that was the famous People's Commissar for Education! He looked a simple enough type and quite obviously was not one of those inaccessible Commissars (if there are any such) who go about surrounded by soldiers and in fear for their lives. I could not quite see an English

Cabinet Minister making his way into a public function thus. Such a one would certainly have insisted on using the private door reserved for him, even if the public one were more convenient, and would probably have been accompanied by an obsequious secretary and a policeman.

The doors opened at last and we went in, giving up half our passes at the door, the other half being necessary to let us out again. The hall was a lofty, magnificent place with marble colonnades down each side and splendid crystal candelabra suspended from the roof. Parties of soldiers with fixed bayonets stood among the pillars in the blue uniforms and broad red chevrons of the crack regiments. They were exotic in that classic hall, with their gnome-like cloth helmets and angular Slav faces, but not more out of place than the great red-covered daïs that filled all one end of the room. Chairs and a table were on the daïs, and three raised seats for the tribunal, while two sailors armed with revolvers stood at a door in the left-hand corner. A big red banner stretched across the wall bearing the hammer and sickle of the Republic and the slogan, "Workers of all countries, unite!" for neglecting which injunction the unhappy committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party were to-day on trial for their lives. My friend explained the arrangement of the court: on the right, facing us, were the places of the prosecutors, led by Krylenko, the Public Prosecutor, in the centre the seats of the three members of the Supreme Revolutionary Tribunal, on the left, in two groups, the seats of the prisoners and their defenders. One by one the various members of the court strolled in, till all the places on the right were filled. There were Clara Zetkin and Jacques Sadoul, representing the Inter-

nationale, Lunacharski and Krylenko, the official stenographers and one or two others. Most of them were in the easy workman's costume of blouse, breeches and high boots, except the women, of course, and Krylenko, a small, bearded man, very correctly dressed in a dark lounge suit, quite typical of an ordinary bourgeois professional man. Meanwhile the left was also filling up, and a big, rather noble-looking man, who sat down carelessly at his table and smiled at the others, was pointed out to me as Bukharin. He created quite a sensation by asking the president for leave to sit in his shirt-sleeves owing to the excessive heat! The permission was given and he somehow gave an air of tolerant good humour to the whole wearisome trial, though I believe he is himself one of the least tolerant of men, so much so that he has more than once made himself the butt for the witticisms of the irrepressible Karl Radek. Bukharin was defending the minority group of the S.R.'s, who it was not expected would be convicted.

There was a stir at the door which the sailors guarded and the prisoners walked in, followed by a dozen armed soldiers. They seated themselves in two groups, the majority, about a score, occupying the tables nearest the spectators and the minority group of four or five sitting a little apart behind. It was largely on the evidence of this group that the conviction of the rest was secured, and one of them was the brother of one of the two women among the prisoners in the majority group. Nearest to us at the edge of the daïs was Gotz, the chairman of the party, a clever-looking Jew with a small moustache and pince-nez, very alert and listening intently to every word Krylenko uttered, occasionally smiling

brightly, as though to say, "Well, that's a good point, comrade, but you know I've given you just as good as I'm getting!" The others were nearly all of a type, that type which is traditionally called to mind as the image of a Russian Revolutionary, dreamy, unpractical-looking men with long, fair moustaches, or more sinister faces of the Bakunin kind with great bushy beards. They were strikingly different from their accusers. Gotz, funnily enough, was the only man who might have been taken for a Communist. When I looked at them I thought I understood what had brought them here, and, except in a few cases, it was not conscious treachery, only muddle-headed incapacity in dealing with the reality of revolution about which their lives had been passed in dreaming. They looked healthy enough in the semi-peasant costume affected by their party, and surprisingly untired by the long trial.

There was another stir, the soldiers came to attention and the two sailors saluted. It was the court coming in, and we all stood up while the three men took their seats. There was no other ceremony, and the president, a fine-looking man with a short brown beard, dressed neatly in European clothes like his two colleagues, called upon Comrade Krylenko to continue his speech. Krylenko jumped up with all the eagerness of a dog released from its leash and in a moment a steady torrent of words was pouring from his mouth. He spoke well and fluently, with the long practice of the lawyer, his sentences short, ironic and precise, with few gestures, but those vital and significant, and no fine phrases. He had come now practically to the end of his review of each individual case and was preparing himself for a general denunciation of the Party's treachery by dealing with the chief

culprit, Gotz. He became more vehement, his gestures a little vindictive, his sarcasms more trenchant as he worked up the case against the impassive man a few yards away. It appeared that not only did Gotz admit all the charges against him, but had unashamedly declared his intention of repeating his actions if he got a chance! Gotz nodded his head in agreement, unperturbed, Krylenko let loose a particularly winged shaft of sarcasm that caused a smile all round, and the odd duel went on. I could not help thinking, while I watched the impassive behaviour of the prisoners as they sipped their glasses of water and wrote little notes to one another, that they knew perfectly well that whatever the verdict nothing very serious was going to happen to them.

A lady in the front row spoke to one of the Guards, who signed to Bukharin to come and hear her request. He crossed the daïs and bent to listen to her. It appeared she wished the president's permission to pass a note up to Gotz, which was quickly given and the note handed to him by Bukharin. He read it, smiled at the lady, and nodded. Evidently there was plenty of freedom for them in the court, despite all I had heard from Vandevelde and his like to the contrary. I think the real reason Vandevelde went away from Moscow after refusing to conduct the defence must have been that the lack of ceremony in the court was hurtful to the dignity of a Belgian Minister. Fancy being associated with a man like Bukharin, who went about such a solemn business in his shirt-sleeves, when you had been on almost equal terms with the monarchs and presidents of half Europe!

Yet it was solemn enough; there was real dignity in the proceedings, none of the vulgar rantings of a

Fouquier-Tinville or The Committee of Public Safety, and the obvious attempt to show the victorious Revolution arraigning the self-confessed traitors to their cause by no means failed of its effect, and this was rather because of the lack of impressive ceremonies than in spite of it. The magnificence of the marble hall itself was not too crushing a setting for the drama, and the very contrast hinted by the plain clothes and sober uniforms of the participants sufficiently suggested the great forces represented. The audience itself, so very quiet and interested, added to the effect. A few of these were workmen or soldiers, some just curious spectators like myself, others intellectuals or fascinated bourgeois, and a tragic little sprinkling were friends and relatives of the prisoners.

That, if you like, was the Revolution in full dress, the last time it was ever to appear so, with representatives of the Workers' International sitting with their victorious Russian comrades at the bringing to justice of the traitors to their cause. Theoretically at least the workers of all countries were united on that red-covered daïs, accusing through the mouth of Krylenko as Public Prosecutor the Laodiceans of their cause of liberation. Opposite to one another sat those who had desired the Revolution and those who had talked about it, and in a way it was much more than the process of one political party against another, for fixed for a moment on that theatrical platform in accusers and accused were seen the eternally opposed currents of hatred between the man of action and the mere dreamer, between the man for whom life is art and the man for whom art is life. Yet the tragedy was not too terrible, for those guilty innocents were a shade too pathetic for the parts they filled, while Bukharin in his shirt-sleeves showed too plainly

that he knew it was all a comedy, and only Krylenko, whose shrewish, ironic declamation was slowly coming to an end for the afternoon, appeared to be in deadly earnest, without relieving humour.

So we came out into the sun again, showing the return halves of our passes at each group of curious sentries, and walked back into the busy shopping streets. A motor passed with two or three people in the back seats, one of whom, a clean-shaven young man with an alert, humorous smile, vivacity in his slightest movement, raised his hand to his battered student cap when he saw G—— and called out something we could not hear. "That was Comrade Radek," she told me, and I looked with interest after the vanishing car. Shortly afterwards Sadoul passed us, walking away from the trial, looking a perfect Russian, as though in order to disprove the common theory of the lack of adaptability in the French people, and we exchanged a few words of greeting. Radek, Sadoul and Bukharin all lived in the Metropole, and G—— knew them well, especially Radek, who was then the editor of *Pravda*.

We went into various shops in order that I might buy a Russian shirt to replace my hot and heavy uniform. They were all clean and well-stocked, but there was hardly anyone in them and prices were very high. At last we came to a place with reasonable prices and I found what I wanted. The shopman, who was apparently the owner, welcomed me as though I were a ghost from the past. An Englishman—how wonderful! And how was London to-day? Once he had been the Russian agent for an English company in London—yes, the agent for all Russia, the Something Meat Company of London, he said. But what the name was I cannot remember, and why a fashion-

able tailor had been agent for a meat company I do not understand. Perhaps he had got the name wrong, for it was so long ago, in that vanished past which I recalled to him. He was pathetic, the old gentleman, with his politeness, his willingness to trust me because I was English (I was a little short of the money needed for the shirt) and his burden of mixed complaint and thanksgiving at the new *régime* of the last year. He complained because of the taxes and because, though he was free to run his business, no one could afford to buy from him except the wrong people, a few Jews and speculators, but all the same it was life again for him, who all his existence had known no other life but his business. G—— lent me the money I needed, and I paid him for the shirt and left him to his reawakened dreams of Old Moscow, of a time when English patrons, rich and splendid, had been common, and he was the sole and trusted agent for that English company which linked him to the world of his kind in London, Paris, New York.

It was half-past five, the Russian dinner-time, so we two made our way to a place my friend frequented where you could get a good dinner for two and a half million roubles—about 2*s*.—at that time. We went down one of those little side streets which in Russia they call a pereulok or alley, and which are sometimes quite good streets of residential flats, but oftener shabby mysterious places where the real life of the town flows secretly by. We went into one of the latter, a place of alternate tenements and one-storey brick or wooden houses, very quiet in the late summer afternoon with the sun's rays searching the rubbish that littered the cobbled street. It was a *cul-de-sac*, and we went to a forlorn-looking house at the end which appeared quite empty, but a knock at the door brought a wrinkled

old hag to look at us, who nodded when she saw G—— and pointed to the room behind her. It was a place of bare boards and wooden walls with a few trestle tables and rickety chairs, all the background filled up by a great brick stove, and flies busy everywhere. We took our places at one of the tables near the far wall and ordered cabbage soup, to be followed by cutlets. The old witch brought us chunks of rye bread in her skinny fingers and set out the knives, forks and spoons. One or two other people were eating, workmen and students, and occasionally someone came in bearing a roll of white bread to eat in place of the black stuff provided by the house.

"You are showing me Russia in an eating-house, not from the top of the promised tower," I told my friend, and indeed it was the Russia of Dostoievski's underworld which came silently in and out of that shabby room, where the old woman waited for her guests in a dark corner by the stove. We talked of G——'s work in Moscow and she told me how glad she had been to leave Europe and come home. After I had seen her in Oxford she had spent a month in Berlin before returning and had come back to Moscow with relief, "because here there is always something to do. Because we seem to live on a higher plane of energy than the rest of the world. When the time comes for you to leave Russia you will perhaps feel the change, the flatness of life in the West." She was busy translating a big English book on town-planning and garden cities and was immensely interested in the problem of bringing the worker into touch with the country. We talked of English and German efforts in this direction, she with real knowledge, I from a kind of blundering instinct. In an interval of the talk, while we waited for the tea when our dinner

was finished, I wondered at the youth of these new Russians. Hardly any of them are of more than early middle age, and for the most part between twenty-five and thirty-five, but then they need all the strength and confidence of youth to cope with the vast forces of creation released by the collapse of the old *régime*. We soon came outside again, and I bade her good-bye, for the next day at that time I was to be in the train on the way to the south.

MOSCOW, THE NEW LIFE

XVII VERY different was my return to Moscow in the depths of winter. All the stations on the line had been redecorated and painted, while the trains, brightly lit with electric light, ran to time and accomplished the long journey in nearly a full day less than six months ago. At Samara we found a magnificent buffet, full of tables with neat linen and plate, waiters in black coats hurrying round, and in one corner a fine bookstall with the most beautifully printed books and magazines. There were Christmas Calendars for sale with portraits of great Russian writers or Bolshevik leaders on them, and I think you could have bought a book there by any author of merit in the world. There were even fashion papers for sale, with all the latest models for men and women from Berlin and Vienna! Samara, with the paint peeling from the front of the station building, with its crowds of starving beggars and refugees, with its shabby eating-room, so filthy you hesitated to enter, had gone for ever. What we saw now was quite frankly better than anything I have seen anywhere in Europe, cleaner, brighter, more animated and architecturally far more beautiful. It was the same at Penza and at Riazan, so that when we reached Moscow on Christmas Day (Old Style) we were not surprised to find that we arrived at an absolutely new station.

The new Kazan Station was just completed, and the first thing to strike our eye on the platform was

a big advertisement for rubber tyres displayed by some "N.E.P. man" who announced his motto to be "Each for all and all for each!" Outside, the Izvostchiks were waiting to fight for our custom, the loudest-voiced and most persuasive and persistent set of rogues in Europe. They were very smart in their wide-skirted blue overcoats with silver buttons, and the neat blue-enamelled sleighs with their big and well-fed horses seemed a magnificent contrast to our provincial eyes to the minute shabbiness of the provinces. We drove a bargain with them for our long drive across the city and packed into two sleighs with all our baggage. As we drove briskly through the streets we became more and more amazed at the change. The trams were all repainted a brilliant scarlet and bore on their flanks in letters of gold "Red October Tramways"! Men and women in fine furs glanced disdainfully at our shabby working clothes as we passed, and my sensual eye remarked an occasional leg slimly stockinged in silk, braving the January cold, and faces, bright, flower-like faces, which were not innocent of paint and powder. To-day there seemed unusual excitement in the streets. We heard the music of bands in the distance and from time to time passed merry couples in carnival costume, that defied the cold, though they looked queerly out of place on the snow among all the heavily clothed passers-by. Then as we neared the Tverskaya we had to stop while some lorry-loads of cheering young men and women crossed the road in front, their trucks decorated with red banners and inscriptions. Then there was music nearer and more martial; flat wagons with tableaux on them, which we could not make out at that distance, passed by; the road on either side being kept by strings of young

athletes on skis, pulled along by noble shire horses. How young and vigorous they all looked in their fur caps, sweaters, breeches and puttees, their faces bright with exercise and the joy of carnival! We were still puzzled to know what it all meant, but afterwards we heard that what we had seen was the Anti-Religious demonstration which caused such a comical stir at the Christian hearths of our English elders. I recalled, too, that I had been told that the Komsomol, the organisation of the Young Communists, intended to celebrate a Pagan Christmas in opposition to the Christian festival. Long live Paganism! thought I as we crossed the Tverskaya and the happy band disappeared from view. Long live all that is alive and beautiful, whether it call itself Christian or Pagan.

That night we went to see our friend Kolya Petrov at the flat of his brother, which was quite near our own Mission house. They were occupying four rooms of what had once been a very large flat indeed, and for the first time in many months I sat down again in a civilised drawing-room where there were men and women in the drab evening clothes of Western convention, though we two Englishmen were, of course, in our working things, which were all we possessed, my companion in his blue-grey Mission uniform, I in khaki workman's blouse, breeches and top-boots. The room was quite small and overcrowded with very good furniture, for the Petrovs had somehow squeezed all their remaining possessions into the four rooms of the flat, and as they had once been millionaires their things were valuable and beautiful. Kolya's sister-in-law was a fat, good-natured girl who had formerly been a cabaret artist and whom his eldest brother had married much against their parents' wishes. She wore

a simple evening frock of black and her husband was in a sports suit of drab, while the youngest brother and Kolya wore dark lounge suits. The eldest brother was a poor-spirited character whom I did not much like, very different from his two brothers. He was the type of business man for whom formerly life had been filled by his wife, his work and sport, in his case the sport was motoring, and for whom nothing else had counted, politics, religion, art, any of the wider interests. Consequently when the revolution took away all but his wife he had been left hopelessly drifting, battered, worried, without any of the consolations which others had found in their religion or their art. He had come to no real harm and saved a lot from the wreck, being infinitely better off than any of his countrymen whom I had so far met, yet he grumbled continually against the Government, feared spies and denunciations all about him, and now when we met him that night was wailing against the afternoon's demonstration. He had not seen it, but his friends had given him the most extraordinary rumours, such, for example, as that the image of the Virgin had been publicly dishonoured, all quite untrue and of a kind only a mean mind could imagine. The youngest brother was like Kolya, impulsive, kindly, sentimental and thoroughly likeable, and I believe both he and Kolya felt just a little ashamed of the complaints of their brother and his wife before the evening had passed. Yet Kolya had told me once that he did not regret the Revolution, for what they had lost he never missed, and they had gained enormously in other ways because during all those terrible years their family had been knit together by suffering as they could never have been knit by their wealth.

Their cousin and his wife came in while we were

drinking tea and eating cakes, those inevitable accompaniments to a Russian evening, and Madame Petrova fetched in a neighbour to play to us on the beautiful grand piano which seemed to fill half the room. This was a quiet, sardonic, bearded gentleman with gold pince-nez who drank his tea and eventually departed unnoticed, for everybody talked so hard it was soon quite forgotten he had been invited in to play for us. Their cousin was a soldier, a young clean-shaven man in the blue uniform of the Cheka regiments, with broad red chevrons across the breast of his military blouse. He was a regimental commander, but nothing distinguished him from an ordinary soldier save four little red bars on his sleeve and the air which is inseparable from one wielding command. Kolya afterwards told me his history, which was very interesting and not unusual in the mad welter of the Revolution. He had been an officer in the old army and was the son of wealthy Moscow business people. At the beginning of the Revolution he had served with the Whites, but was wounded, and while recuperating in the country at the beginning of 1919 became converted to Communism. He joined the Party, fell in love with and married his wife, who was a peasant girl in the village where he lived, and was then given a command in the shock battalions of the Red Army. His wife, a mere wisp of a girl, with a fair, intelligent face, was a Communist also and apparently, from the family point of view of Kolya, a complete success. Certainly as she sat there that evening, hardly speaking, but taking in everything with her great ardent eyes, her pretty green dress colouring, in a sense, her presence with the beauty one instinctively felt her to be capable of achieving, she seemed different enough from these

good bourgeois, outside of and above them. But that was what Kolya meant when he said that in society one would never guess her peasant origin, which also, of course, was chiefly why she seemed a success to them. After the war her husband had worked with Dzerzhinsky in the Cheka and had later become one of the chiefs of the Young Communist Movement. He was a wonderful athlete, physically strong, as apparently only Russians can be, a fine boxer and a great skater and skier. Because of all these accomplishments they had made him People's Commissar for Sport, and his whole heart (which I should judge was a large one) was in this work.

He asked us to give him all the news about European Boxing, which to the best of our ability we did, though, much to his disappointment, we knew nothing of the defeat of Carpentier by Battling Siki, since that had happened after we came to Russia. I had to lament the decay of British boxing, but fortunately he could not shame me by producing evidence of better boxing in Russia, where the sport was only just beginning. He was very proud of the fact that professionalism in sport was impossible in Russia, and hoped great things from the young soldiers' and workers' sport groups. "Had we," he asked, "a Sport Ministry in England?" I replied I thought there was some department of the Board of Education which concerned itself with this, but there was no attempt to make sport or athleticism a part of the national life. The middle classes had control of amateur sport, and here and there a few "enlightened" employers formed associations among their work-people. But on the whole the mass of our nation preferred professionalism to action themselves, and playgrounds and opportunities were too scarce to allow the workers to develop themselves athletically.

At this he looked boyishly triumphant. "Look what we despised Russians are doing in this way! In England sport is the privilege of a class or a sop thrown by the more cunning capitalists to turn the thoughts of their workers from their real condition. But with us it is a vital weapon in the class war. We shall make the soldier of the Revolution the physical superior of the soldier of reaction." So he said, and who can deny the justice of it? The Russians have all the capabilities of a nation of athletes, and whatever the ultimate purpose of this new physical education it cannot but help in making them one of the noblest and most beautiful European nations. It would appear that Democracy has killed sport, except perhaps in our own Dominions, where natural forces have so far checked industrial forces, and only in Communist Russia, in Fascist Italy and in the dreams of Frenchmen like Drieu La Rochelle is it a living thing in national life, as it was once in England, in the country which was ours before the Industrial Revolution withered its heart.

After we left the Petrovs we did little of interest in Moscow, for it was holiday time and all shops were shut, so we were driven largely to the theatres for our amusement. I called to see G—— again before I left and found her back in her room in the Metropole, a very neat, pleasant little room this time, with warm rugs, a coloured bed-spread, and in the corner by the window a case full of Russian and English books. Kolya had gone to try to book seats in the Art Theatre, promising to call back for me in half-an-hour. G—— was surprised to see me, and told me she had left the *Pravda* now and was a student in Economics at the Socialist Academy, where she was preparing a thesis. She asked me a strange question, or it seemed strange then to me. "Have you been disappointed here?"

I answered, "No, why should I have been?" She did not reply directly: "I thought when you went in the summer perhaps you would be. It must have been terribly dull down there." "But it wasn't," I hastened to assure her. "I was never dull for a moment, and I would give anything not to be going away now, for this has been the greatest experience of my life." The telephone bell rang before she could answer. It was Kolya back again, as they had decided it would be impossible for them to get tickets at the Art Theatre. They were waiting below for me to come out to dinner with them, after which they proposed we should go to the Opera. I said I would be down in a few minutes and turned to say good-bye to G——.

We got tickets for the Opera from the Director, whom Kolya knew slightly, and then went to dinner in a restaurant a few streets away. This place became a cabaret from 11.30 till 2.30, so naturally at that early hour we were almost alone. Indeed only a fashionably dressed foreigner, a German probably, with his bejewelled and powdered mistress, was there beside ourselves. The room was beautifully decorated in red and black, a creation of the New Economic Policy, with a *maître d'hôtel* who scorned to speak Russian to Kolya when he could talk French with me. We must have looked very much out of place in our working clothes amid all that magnificence, but I must say I thoroughly enjoyed the feeling, especially as I felt the *maître d'hôtel* was hurt by our shabby appearance.

In the Great Theatre that evening was a ballet, "The Magic Mirror," abominably staged in a convention which even Covent Garden despises to-day, but divinely danced by Kandaurova and her beautiful

supporters. The music was mediocre, the setting was beneath contempt, but the dancing was loveliness come to splendid life, the pure rhythm of imaginative beauty. We were in the third row of the parterre, still in our unfashionable clothes, and in that audience of Jewish shop-walkers and respectable speculators must have appeared quite outrageous, though Kolya atoned somewhat for his two English friends, and little fault could be found with his dark lounge suit. I have never seen anything so horrible as that audience in the Great Theatre, for one and all seemed to shout aloud, "We have survived, we have climbed, we have arrived." One gaudy family of Jews, of all sizes in ugliness and vulgarity, had indeed arrived as far as the Tsar's box, and all around us were sleek young men in morning coats, stiff collars, expansive ties and expensive tie-pins. Kolya explained them by the fact that they alone would come to see such a ballet, and that decent people enough could be seen when the performance was worth while, but all the same these creatures left a bitterness in me which has not yet gone. They should not have been there, not so blatant, so assertive, so representative of all I had escaped for the first time in my life during these last six months, of all I was to see again as soon as I crossed the frontier. But what use to tell them they were an outrage when every voice in Russia was proclaiming it without effect? I thought of Kolya's cousin and his young soldiers, a thought which gave me much comfort, for I knew them to be the fine stuff which perhaps would one day clean the stable.

In Paris I was soon to see the Kamerny Theatre reveal to me what the theatre of the Revolution is really like. In the magnificent Théâtre des Champs Elysées, its half-empty state a terrible reproach to

French taste, I went with a band of enthusiasts to their last performance, the comic opera "Giroflée-Girofla." I had heard Tairov boldly proclaim to a half-mocking Paris that he and his theatre were "children of the Revolution," I had seen their Phèdre and Salome, but till that evening I did not realise how true this statement was. With me in the stalls was the dramatic critic of *Zveno*, the organ of the Paris *emigrés*, and his enthusiasm, quite the equal of mine, told me that they were children of Russia as much as of the Revolution. I can never forget that setting, rather like that of a gymnasium, over which these young men and women danced, sang, laughed, tumbled, climbed and jumped, true athletes of the theatre, young, strong, vital and beautiful. In their ridiculous cubist costumes each action, each motion, seemed vitalised and held for a moment triumphantly before the eye before it passed swiftly into another more incredible, more unexpected and more perfect. It was a new world that they opened for me, for everyone in the theatre, and we felt like the Romantics at the first night of "Hernani," only our enemies were away and had most fittingly left emptiness to represent themselves. How we cheered when the curtain fell, and by one impulse rushed up to the stage when it rose again! We had found the heroes of Modern Life, the people who had rediscovered the rhythm of the Greeks, who had learned to live beautifully.

In what we commonly call the world of the mind the Revolution has had some remarkable consequences. Leaving aside painting, of which I know nothing, the theatre has undoubtedly made progress, if only by finally determining, as a result of one weird experiment after another, what is feasible in theatre-craft, just

what people will accept, even people who have only the barest hold on life, as was the case with most people in Moscow during the first three years of the Revolution. In literature the result was quite different, for if a theatre is a permanent thing with its traditions fixed in one spot, not easily able to exile itself into the unknown, an author, on the other hand, is noticeably a floating quantity, able to pack himself off at the shortest notice to the other end of the world. Consequently the new Moscow is almost completely cleared of its old literary Gods; the Gods are in exile in Berlin, Belgrade, Rome, Prague or Paris, and, moreover, they have renounced their country in its new aspects. They have even made a moral obligation of the renunciation. A very great Russian critic whom I knew in Paris told me as much. "Understand," he said, "I have not left Russia because of physical discomforts, because of any fear for myself, but for moral reasons; because my conscience would not let me stay and appear to give my consent to the infamy around me." So they went off, all of them, to comfortable capitals where they could ease their conscience to their hearts' content by denouncing the infamy to sympathetic salons.

In Petrograd one or two are left, the poetess Anna Akmatova perhaps the best known, and in the Crimea a few still remain in rather desperate straits, dying in the convalescent homes or eking out some kind of a living to keep body and soul together. But Moscow is bare of the old giants. Andre Bielyi and Alexander Blok, with a flash of great intuition, recognised the Bolsheviks, yet it was only an intuition, for they did not understand them. Blok died, and Bielyi, convinced his first enthusiasm was all a mistake, sought refuge in exile and incomprehensible mysticism.

The rest, Bunin, Kuprin, Balmont, Merezhkovski, Gorki, are all fled, leaving the way clear for the torrent which they were convinced (perhaps not Gorki) would sweep everything away. But it did not; unaccountably, miraculously, the life of letters has survived, by the efforts of men like Zamyatin and the circle calling themselves the Brothers of Serapion; moreover, it has survived vigorous and original, appearing in new and interesting forms. Zamyatin all through the bare years brought young men to his rooms and by the sheer force of his genius and personality taught them to write, drilled the discipline of the matter into them somehow. Some of his pupils were workmen, others soldiers, others young bourgeois who had lost the opportunity of a literary education in the wholesale destruction. We may feel proud that Zamyatin himself, who during the war worked on an engineering mission from Russia in Newcastle, has been not a little influenced by English and American writers.

All kinds of groups worked together in that bitter time, sharing the little they possessed of a common fund in books, or in even more material firewood and food, that they might work out something new. The officers, as it were, at the first murmurs of mutiny and danger had deserted the ship, and they must somehow navigate her into port. Well, their navigation is of the rudest, they must make all their discoveries by experience, sail by dead reckoning, but in spite of all that they are bringing the ship home. Experience, incredible experience to us, is the mark of their work, a certain crudity or even cruelty, but it is still living, breathing, fresh and vigorous. All those groups of young men meeting at night in their Moscow apartments, often fresh from the wildest adventures in the most desolate places of their vast country, talking over

their difficulties and problems, reading their works, their criticisms, to one another, have really created something new. They have earned possession of the ship they are so bravely sailing, and when she has been docked and cleaned, her shattered gear repaired, they will take her into some strangely beautiful seas, bringing back rare cargoes from the new countries they visit.

Such is Moscow to-day, full of an unaccustomed activity, living hard and high, but with many strange unpleasant excretions. The N.E.P. man, vile though he is, is hardly an exclusively Russian product, for you may see him, this profiteer in misfortune, in all the capitals of the defeated countries, self-conscious, arrogant, semitic. Yet in Russia, above all in Moscow, he has less chance of survival than elsewhere and is more truly an unnatural growth. But his energy, his daring, his will to survive are something which all classes possess now, often to the confusion of incautious observers, for these too readily assume that Russia has been miraculously changed into a Slavic America. Action is certainly the keynote of the new Russia, but not a wild, undisciplined action, a mere mad scramble for wealth. It is rather action drilled to athleticism. They do to acquire, but the Revolution has taught its lesson, and the acquisition is not just for acquisition's sake, and each Russian doing hopes to create something enduring and worth while. If the leaders, those who set the rhythm of the movement, may seem at times to be encouraging what is often ugly, sometimes base even, to our dazzled eyes, let us try to believe it is because a new rhythm cannot be created without pain and suffering in the creation, without much waste of material and extravagance of action.

EPILOGUE. A JOURNEY TO THE FRONTIER

XVIII THE end came at last, a very fitting and beautiful end, though we could not know that when Kolya, rather solemn and sorrowful, bade us good-bye at the station. But I knew at least, almost immediately after the train started, that the end would be magnificent, and I knew it with absolute certainty. On the little table in our coupé, which was for two persons, were two or three dainty packages obviously belonging to a lady whom certain persons wished very particularly to have a pleasant journey, certain not very practical persons, judging from the appearance of the packages. My companion and I could not quite understand why they were placed there, for all the women were in separate coupés at each end of the wagon, and in any case there were only two beds in our coupé. We noticed the lady, young and more than beautiful, to whom they clearly belonged, wandering in the corridor, and occasionally, when she could get hold of him, remonstrating with the provodnik. Evidently some mistake had been made in allotting the places in the train, so they had put her with us. I asked her to come in and sit down, and she smiled gratefully as she accepted. We put her in the corner seat near the window, I sat in the middle and F—— in the corner by the door.

She apologised for troubling us, but there had been a stupid mistake. We assured her with sincerity that any trouble for her was more than a pleasure; it was

a positive delight. For she was one of those rare women who by their mere presence can immediately command the most absolute devotion from men. She sat there in her corner, rather frail and ill-looking, very quiet, her voice so soft that I often missed the end of her sentences, her eyes lit with a grave amusement at the situation we found ourselves in, and her whole self, though set in repose that was almost languid, alert with an interest in life and in people which instinctively one felt could never fade. I was not surprised when she told me soon after that she was never bored, and I guessed, though she did not say so much herself, that no circumstances, however unexpected, could ever dominate her, frail though she was. It was right that the loveliest woman whom I had yet seen in Russia, or anywhere else, for that matter, should come so beautifully as this, so unexpectedly at the end of these adventurous months.

F—— was too far away in his corner to talk with much success, also he had a difficulty in making himself understood which his native English shyness prevented him from trying to overcome at that distance, so I had her conversation more or less to myself. She was so Russian, so Muscovite even, that she had hardly ever left Moscow. She had been in the country in the Moscow province occasionally, and when she left school in 1914 had travelled in the Crimea and the Caucasus. But the war and Revolution had kept her at home, for which she was very far from sorry. Moscow was the world to her, and she was troubled to be leaving it, to be leaving Russia at all. "My friends made me come," she said. "They want me to go to Berlin for some months to get well again, for they all think I am ill."

"You have friends in Berlin?"

"My sister. I have not seen her since 1917, when she was only fifteen, a mere schoolgirl, and now she is married and has children."

"Then you don't know her husband, Varvara Alexandrovna?" (for that was her name).

"No. In 1917 she was in the Caucasus with her governess, and they fled together to Germany after the White troops were defeated there. We have none of us seen her since and know nothing about her husband; even his family is only known to us by name. What things we shall have to tell one another! All that we have gone through in Moscow during the Revolution (and that's something, I assure you), and she, too, will have everything to tell me. Why the world has changed in these few years, and I shall have a whole life to tell her. I expect I shall make her husband jealous, there will be so much to say."

Indeed it was quite incredible, such a situation. A thing of dreams from the days of the French Revolution. She told me a little of all that had happened in those years, of the struggles of her family, the frequent imprisonment of herself and her brother, her work in one of the Government offices, her friends, who were numerous, and all the weird phantasmagoria of the three bitter years. Even in these last two years when everything was improving they had still suffered and she and her brother had quite recently been imprisoned again (how evidently she adored that brother! She spoke of him as one might of a mediæval knight, an embodiment of gallant bearing and truth). She had been very frank with the Cheka Commission before which she appeared, and she had clearly impressed them, as she must impress everyone, with her own fundamental honesty. "You are a good and honest person," they had told her, and

she had been released, while for her sake they had also let her brother go. She told all this so simply and plainly that it was impossible to suspect her of conceit, or even of posturing. That was how it happened and that was how she told it. What her crimes had been I do not know, nor did I ask, but, knowing her, I can guess. She had never compromised during those mad years. She was a Christian and continued to go to church, no doubt helping priests in trouble who were probably not fit to tie up her shoe-strings. She was devoted to her friends, and had not ceased to call on them, to write to them or to help them even when she knew that they were suspected of treason to the Revolution, or when she was aware that they were actually working against it. For her a friend would always be a friend, whatever he did or did not do, and one's Faith always one's Faith, into whatever disrepute it might fall. Moreover, the fact that either friend or Faith was in trouble would no doubt only bring her the more readily to their side. All this I only surmise, and you must take it on trust, but I believe it is absolutely true. I certainly gathered that that was her own opinion of her brother, and I do not think I shall be very wrong in ascribing to her what she ascribed to this wonderful brother.

Of course, such a person in the madness of a Revolution was bound to suffer, to suffer more perhaps than the guilty on either side. Yet her very quietness so impressed itself on people that she had been saved, miraculously, I think, because in such times beauty and elegance, and she was both beautiful and elegant, are the first things to attract suspicion, even when they are unaccompanied by suspicious actions. Yet, looking at her, you quite understood why she was safe, for nobody could harm her. It would have been impos-

sible. She spoke a great deal of her friends, above all of her brother, when telling me of this time of turmoil, but she never once mentioned her husband (I had not said she was married), which is a mystery I do not pretend to fathom. She had been married seven years, and once when we were talking of Russian children she sighed very sadly because she herself had none. "If I had had a little son he might now have been six years old."

Her insight was amazing. We had hardly been talking twenty minutes, and that without once mentioning politics, when she asked me point-blank, "You are an idealist, are you not, who believes in action?" I told her she might count me an uncomfortable person in many ways but I could not but be astonished at her discovering this so quickly, for I am not a wild-eyed, long-haired, strangely spoken person, being a very ordinary-looking Englishman. Then, again, soon after she asked, "Your companion is not very sympathetic, isn't that so?" It was perfectly true. F—— and I were good enough friends, but I hardly think there was any important thing in life on which we were not absolutely opposed. Yet how in the conventionalities of our railway-carriage talk she discovered that, I cannot say, for neither word nor gesture could have told her. We two were both very English, yet in character two such opposite and unlike types as I think you could only find among English people.

She went out into the corridor shortly after this, and when she came back it was with a clear mind as to why she had been turned out of the place given her in the train and put with us two men. She smiled as she told us. "I thought there must be some very great person travelling on this train, since I was not

allowed to sleep in the same coupé with her. I have solved the mystery though. It is Madame X——." "Then who are the others at that end of the wagon?" "Krestinsky; with his wife and daughter and our courier to Berlin." "Madame X—— is alone then in her coupé?" "Yes, quite alone. Evidently she did not wish to be contaminated by a bourgeoise." F—— smiled triumphantly at me when he heard this, for it conformed to all his views upon the Bolsheviks. As for me, I looked very glum and felt not a little ashamed. However, Varvara Alexandrovna seemed to bear no malice for the great person's insolence, any more than she bore malice for other things she had suffered during the Revolution. She cheered me kindly, "I have some very good friends who are Communists. I myself don't believe them to be all like Madame X——." I thanked her for this, and added, to soothe myself, "I am sure X—— would disapprove of such conduct, and if you will excuse my saying so, a man can't be held responsible for what his wife does in his name. In any case Madame X——'s gain in privacy is also our gain in company." And at this we let it pass.

That evening was the first of five which we two were to spend sitting up in a railway carriage. Varvara Alexandrovna composed herself on the top bed, stretching with the grace of a kitten, though there was nothing kittenish in her character, while F—— and I fixed ourselves somehow in the two corners of the lower bed, our feet curled uncomfortably on the bags and trunks with which we filled the narrow floor-space. We said good-night and dozed off into a restless, broken sleep. As happens during such uncomfortable slumbers, my head was filled with visions, half-dream, half-recollection. Like the scenes

of a film pictures of the last six months flickered on to the screen of my mind. All over the vast plains of Asia, up the high mountains to the table-land of Tibet and beyond to the deserts of Mongolia, I could see the fires of the nomad camps again. There were the little round tents of felt, the oval-faced, high-cheeked Tatars moving about the affairs of their desert life. Caravans of shaggy Bactrian camels moved over the wastes, sheep-skinned natives riding with them on their sturdy ponies, and all had the slow beauty of their wandering life. Then we were leaving those dry plains. Ilyusha and I were standing on the platform of our little freight truck that shook and rattled at the end of the long train, watching the brown and broken steppes recede behind us. The air was like a peal of bells, clear, fine and joyous, and we two sang out of sheer lightness of heart, while our voices echoed and faded into the infinity behind us. We were singing "Crombimboly, Crombomboly," a foolish German student song. Then Ilyusha, the great lover, began in Russian to sing "La Donna è mobile," and when the last note died over the steppe it seemed that our companionship was fading with it, dissolving into echoes. I saw Fedor Ignaty'ich, the turbulent Cossack, limp away over the sand towards our white house in Kamishli Bash, moving heavily like an overloaded bee, dejection in his gait because he, too, was losing his friends. Then Christmas Day in the Uyezd town came into my vision, the whirling, changing reds and whites of the dance, men and women in national costume, the notes of Frank's concertina and the tinkle of a piano. Finally came Ole Bill as I had last seen him when we had met by chance in Moscow but three days before, just outside the British Mission. He was wearing a rabbit-skin cap with the

STANDING AT THE END OF THE LONG TRAIN, WATCHING THE BROWN AND BROKEN STEPPES RECEDE BEHIND US.

ear flaps down, and his wrinkled Kalmuck face was half lost to sight, but the little cunning eyes were there and the cracked lips from which stuck the everlasting pipe. An ugly vision, Bill, and I thanked Heaven he was not the last vision of Russia I was to have, for above us Varvara Alexandrovna was sleeping gently, only once or twice she turned and sighed—Akh, Gospodi, Bozha moi!" "Oh, my Lord, my God!"

When she awoke in the morning and we had got tea from the provodnik in our two great tin mugs I told her I guessed her dreams. She smiled back that that was not difficult, for all night she had dreamed of Moscow and her friends. These friends, so unpractical, had forgotten to provide her with anything from which to drink tea, so she shared with us in the two mugs. The morning passed away quickly, although the train was late, and we seemed very soon to arrive at Minsk. We three got down and went into the buffet to drink a glass of tea. While we waited for the waiter to bring this, she sauntered over to the bookstall and bought me a Russian translation of Tagore's "Gardener," for she had seen me reading a novel of his in the train. We sipped our tea, chatting about nothing, till the blast of a siren and the noise of a train moving roused us in alarm. It could only be our train, for there was no other in the station, so dashing down a note in payment we rushed out of the room. All the doors on the platform seemed to be locked, so we ran right through the building before we could get out. F—— went off at full speed, determined not to miss the train and all our baggage, but Varvara Alexandrovna could not run very fast, so I stayed behind with her. I had given it up as lost for us two when a man called out

bidding us not be alarmed, as they were only shunting. We laughed, intensely relieved, for we neither of us relished the idea of spending a few nights in Minsk, a filthy city full of Jews, while our papers were all gone into and we missed train after train at the frontier. Our young lady was also afraid that any hitch would mean her arrest and recall to Moscow, for she was still far from being popular with the authorities.

F—— we found safely ensconced in the coupé, and we were all three able to laugh at our scare. In a few minutes we were on the way to the frontier, but we knew that we should not catch the Polish train that night, for we were three hours late. Krestinsky telegraphed asking them to keep the train, but the Poles refused, and we had to face the prospect of passing the night on the Russian side of the frontier, thus wasting twenty-four hours of our journey home.

The next day we spent in talk, for the train did not move down to the Polish station till the afternoon. Varvara Alexandrovna was anxious to discover exactly my mind about her country, and I no less wished to hear her ideas upon its future.

"Do you think there is any chance of Russia's becoming a great bourgeois democracy like America?" I asked her. "Many English people seem to think that."

She laughed at the idea. "Of course not. Do you think so yourself? You have seen more of the country than most people, more even than I, who am a Russian; do you think that all those other races, Tatars, Bashkirs, Kirghiz and Uzbegs, will ever be Americanised, or even Westernised?"

"Naturally I don't. These clever people judge by Moscow and Petrograd, which are at the beginning of a great commercial revival, and imagine from what

they see of the business men and officials there that you are changing your whole character. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, and the diplomatic missions help them in this. I go often to dances at your British Mission, and there are few members of it who understand the new Russia, or want to understand it."

"I see; they have the diplomatic mentality of 1914."

"They have. Moreover, they think that those Russians, members of the old aristocracy, whom they ask to their dances, think as they do. But they are mistaken. A few very stupid people do so, no doubt, but not most of us. I like the gentlemen in your Mission, but they are not all very intelligent."

"What do you think of the future, then? You expect the Bolsheviks will stay?"

"Of course they will stay. They have done a great deal for Russia and no one would have back the interventionists. But the future is with the peasants, who are incalculable. The Bolsheviks are educating them, and once they are educated nothing can prevent their taking charge. As it is, it is really the peasants who eventually decide everything."

"We think we know your peasants. Englishmen have all kinds of strange sentimental ideas about them, but nobody yet knows them or what they will do when they have come to themselves. They have strength enough, physical and mental, to shake our Western ideas to pieces."

She assented. "Yes, somebody will get a shock one day. One other thing Westerners find impossible to realise is that the Bolsheviks are more than half a peasant party. That is partly the Bolsheviks' fault for pretending not to be, but in fact they are. All

their vigour, all their crudity, all their cruelty, all their idealism, are those of our peasants."

This judgment was so true that it seemed final, and we left the discussion of the future to talk of my own experiences. "Tell me," she wanted to know, "you yourself, coming from the West, have you not been horrified by what you have seen in Russia? Has it not seemed all incredible to you?"

I smiled. "Like all Russians, you want me now to abuse you and your country. Well, I am willing. You have a phrase, you say, 'We are a dark people,' and it is true. I came here very young and confident, full of illusions on everything in life, and I have lost them all in your darkness."

"Or changed them only?" she asked, a little maliciously.

"Perhaps. But I would rather think that in their place I have gained from you the courage to look on darkness without fear. I believe in you as a people, for all your evil; I believe in your Revolution, for all its corruption and cruelty."

"And why do you believe in all that?"

"For no sensible reasons at all. Because you have charmed me as a people, because as a nation you are so physically fit and beautiful; since, you know, all the old and infirm and spiritually weak died off in these bitter years. I believe in you because I like your sturdy, pleasant-mannered children, who are afraid of nothing, not even of men."

"And our madness? For we are mad, so foreigners say, though I suppose that is only another word for our darkness."

"It is only a kind of passionate living. You have a peculiar spiritual logic that leads you into strange

recklessness; but that only gives me a kind of comfort, a confidence that life is always right."

She laughed. "We Russians are awful fools. Don't try to understand us."

"All peoples are awful fools, and I can't understand any of them. But I do watch them."

We concluded our talk, for it was almost time for the train to start on the last few versts to the Polish station. "We are not very far apart," she said, going out into the corridor. "When we meet again I hope you will be more Christian." Soon the train began to move, and we watched through the window the melancholy snow-covered landscape. There was no frost here, and the boughs of the saplings were black and bare. In a few minutes we came to a crossing, where, just beyond in the snow, stood a Red soldier. He stood quietly in his long khaki overcoat that reached to his heels, his face gazing curiously from under the red star on his peaked helmet at the passing train. His rifle and bayonet showed him to be the frontier guard. Over the crossing a Polish sentry stood, and here a crowd of officials in smart blue uniforms resplendent in silver buttons boarded our train. The calm, watching figure of the sentry of the New Russia passed out of sight and amid, slush and melting snow we pulled into the Polish frontier station.

The customs here was much more formal than in Russia, and I had, moreover, the misfortune to lose by confiscation all my Russian newspapers. The train we got into when the examination finished had no sleeping accommodation, and seven of us were crammed into a stuffy little second-class carriage. There were we three, the two Polish couriers, a cabaret singer from Moscow who was going to take up an engagement

in Warsaw, and an English lady who had been fourteen years away from her own country, a pathetic little creature who spoke her native language with Russian idioms. The two Poles were kindly, good-natured old gentlemen, looking very proper in their French-cut clothes and very typical of their country. The cabaret singer was a darling. No other word could describe her. She was plump, with vivid red hair and a well-made complexion of the purest pink and white. When we were all settled in our places she proceeded to powder her nose and was naïvely surprised when Varvara Alexandrovna refused the loan of her powder-box. She looked dreadfully wicked, but was as simple as a child. She had never left Moscow before and was worried about her husband ("already the second!" she said laughingly) and her little boy, whose photograph she showed us. She and Varvara Alexandrovna at once plunged into talk about the boy and the lovely city both were so regretfully leaving behind.

The carriage was horribly stuffy, there was no corridor, but a lavatory which opened out behind added to our discomfort by its abominable smell. Hardly any of us slept much that night, I imagine, but before we composed ourselves Varvara Alexandrovna confessed she was hungry, and I fed her with a hunk of bread and a packet of Sunmaid raisins. "You can truly say now you have been feeding the starving," she told me. She had confessed she loved adventures, much though she appreciated comfort, but I imagine she never had so uncomfortable an adventure as that night journey to Warsaw. I dozed, and dreamed of the Volga as I had seen it last, at night. The train was crossing slowly above the great river now frozen into immobility, grey and half invisible

in the darkness. Then, like a hole in night itself, we looked down on to a place where the ice had not closed over, blacker than darkness, more evil-looking than death, bottomless. In the cold grey winter night it had looked like the surface of an immense and frightful witch's cauldron. That dream was broken by our train's coming to a stop in some big station, Brest-Litovsk perhaps, and the noise of two drunken soldiers quarrelling outside our door. One of the Polish couriers looked out and threatened the rascals with the picquet, at which they surlily staggered away. Then we went on again, waking at last to a pale daylight flowing over a snowless countryside. Varvara Alexandrovna's eyes filled with tears. "Look, there is no snow," she said. The cabaret singer was saddened also at this absolute evidence that they were no longer in their own country, but impossibly far away in a strange, unknowing land. Even the pathetic little Englishwoman looked graver than usual, while F—— and I exchanged unhappy glances. F——, like myself, grew sadder every hour we drew away from Russia. How was that to be explained? Here was a typical Englishman loathing with all his heart the Bolsheviks, willing to hear no good of them, but yet he felt he was leaving behind something strange and fine which he would miss in Europe. I cannot explain his feeling, any more than he could, but one day the world will have to find an explanation.

At noon we came to Warsaw and our party broke up. An old lady in black met Varvara Alexandrovna on the platform, but before we said good-bye she promised to be on the Berlin train that night if possible. We left her standing there, smiling gently at us in farewell, looking like a Luini Madonna done in Russian tones, if such a thing be possible, and sadly

we two got into our droshky to drive to the Mission House. At night we went down to the trans-continental express and found two seats in an empty first-class carriage, for we had been too late to book sleepers. I walked all along the train looking for my friend, but she was not there. Then I waited at the barriers, scanning every face that came through, but hers was not among them. A bell reminded me the train was starting, and I ran back up the platform after it. A fat Pole was hanging on to the steps of our wagon trying to smack a few last kisses on the painted lips of his wife. I shouted, but he did not budge, so I pulled him off by the coat-tails and climbed in. Her friends, I knew, must have kept her in Warsaw to rest, and we must face the return alone, without that last lovely witness of Russia to comfort us. Remorselessly the express sped on through the night, till there came a time when even the train attendants could not understand Russian, till, passing over Germany the next day, the wagon filled up with Jews, with English speculators with harsh North-country voices, with tourists, with all the waste and desolation of dying Europe. The same evening, at Essen, there was a murmur and commotion all through the train. An old Frenchwoman pointed through the window and asked me excitedly, " Et les Boches, est-ce qu'ils sont contents ? " I followed her gesture and saw on the platform a French sentry in horizon blue, a steel helmet on his head and over his shoulder a rifle with fixed bayonet. That day the French had occupied the Ruhr. We were home indeed !

NOTES

Note I (*p.* 36).—*The Sectants.*

The Sectants or Raskolniki are the Schismatics of the Orthodox Church and were formed by a revolt against the Westernising methods of Peter the Great. They have most adherents among the Cossack communities, especially those of the Ural, and represent the purest and oldest traditions of Russian life that have come down unchanged from the days of the struggle for life against the Mongol and Tatar hordes.

Apart from the Raskolniki, Russia abounds with countless other sects, chief among whom are the Molokanye, the Stundists, the Baptists and the Dukhobors. They are all remarkable for the simplicity of their lives and the extravagance of their opinions. These latter, mostly based upon literal readings of the Bible, might have passed unnoticed had they not chanced to believe in them. This misfortune has brought upon them all the wrath and persecuting genius of orthodox Christians. Since the Revolution they have been enabled to live quietly and peaceably, the Bolsheviks having nothing to gain by any interference with peoples hostile to the Orthodox Church.

Note II (*p.* 178).—*The Political Organisation of Russia.*

The Revolution has made no change in Russian territorial divisions, which are still: the Government of Province, the Uyezd or County and the Volost or district. An Uyezd, for administrative convenience, is sometimes divided into Rayons of several Volosts. The great political change has, of course, been the introduction of the Soviet System of government by council. Soviets themselves are elected, not to carry on the government, but from time to time to elect from their own body a Political Executive Committee (Izpolkom) to carry on these functions. A conference of village Soviets elects the Volost Izpolkom, the Volost Izpolkoms in conference send delegates to the Uyezd Izpolkom and the Uyezd

elects to the Government. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets, composed of delegates from the Uyezds and Governments, meets annually to elect the central administrative body, the Vsik (All-Russian Executive Committee), from which the Council of Commissars is formed. There is now a Second Chamber formed of delegates in equal numbers from each one of the national republics in the Union. This sketch is very rough and imperfect, but will serve to give some idea of the administrative unity created by the new Constitution. With the village as Unit there is now a perfectly simple connection from the lowest to the highest governmental body.

Note III (*p.* 199).—*The Political Resurrection of the Village.*

It has struck me that people might think from this chapter that I intended them to believe that before the Revolution there was no political life or freedom in the Russian village. This, of course, is not the case. The peasants had complete self-government within the Commune and a certain amount of influence in the work of the Zemstvos (the Organ of Local Government created by Alexander II.). But from the Bureaucracy and the Governing Class they were cut off as by a Chinese Wall. The two knew absolutely nothing of one another, and the peasants' own administration in the Commune was uncertain, narrow, ignorant and limited. So completely were they cut off from outside influences that this comparative freedom, far from cultivating in them a political sense, rather deepened their dependence and ignorance.

The new unified Soviet system has broken down the Chinese Wall, and the Village is now the base of the whole political pyramid of the Soviet system. The political revolution thus caused is tremendous, almost unrealisable by Western peoples. It is, of course, closely bound up with the peasants' conquest of the land and their free exchange with the Towns through the medium of the Co-operatives.