# THE REAL SIBERIA




Mr. Foster Fraser.

# The Real Siberia

together with an Account of
a Dash through Manchuria

*by*

John Foster Fraser

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To

Henry John Palmer, Esquire

Editor of the "Yorkshire Post"

and

President of the Institute of Journalists

*at whose invitation*

*I travelled across Siberia*

*I dedicate this volume*

*the record of my wanderings.*

# Foreword

This volume lays claim to give nothing more than personal impressions of a journey made across Siberia and through Manchuria in the autumn of 1901.

I went to Siberia on a mission of curiosity, with the average Britisher's prejudice against things Russian, and with my eyes wide open to see things I might criticise and even condemn.

If, however, I found little to bless in the great land beyond the Urals, I also found very little to curse. Through generations there has grown up in the public mind the idea that Siberia is a land of snow and exiles. There is much that is thrilling in stories of innocent prisoners, weary and starving, being driven through blinding storms with the whips of brute officials to urge them on. Yet the public, I am afraid, rather like that sort of thing, and a succession of writers have ministered to their appetite for sensation. So only one phase of Siberian life—a slight and a passing phase—has been depicted.

Nurtured largely on such books, I went to Siberia half expecting to feed on horrors, and with the intention of writing one more volume to show how cruel the Russian is. Of course I saw much to condemn. But I saw something else. I saw that the popular idea about Siberia is altogether wrong. I saw a land capable of immense agricultural possibilities, great stretches of prairie waiting for the plough, huge forests, magnificent waterways and big towns, with fine stores, with great hotels, with electric light gleaming everywhere; in a word, instead of a gaunt, lone land, inhabited only by convicts, I saw a country that reminded me from the first day to the last of Canada, and the best parts of western America.

I look upon Siberia as the ultimate great food-producing region of the earth. The building of the mighty Trans-Siberian Railway has attracted the attention of traders. Americans and Germans are already in the country opening up commerce. Britishers, however, lag behind.

The title of this book is "The Real Siberia," because I endeavour to show that the Siberia of convicts and prisons is passing away, and the Siberia of the

reaping machine, the gold drill, the timber yard, the booming, flourishing new town, is awakening into life.

Some of my conclusions may be wrong. But I looked about and kept my ears open. I am too small a man to pose either as a friend or enemy to Russia. I am simply a man who went out to see, and I have written about what I saw. Whatever be the faults of this book, it is, at least, an honest record.

JOHN FOSTER FRASER.

*The Authors' Club, Whitehall Court, London, S.W.*
*April 1902.*

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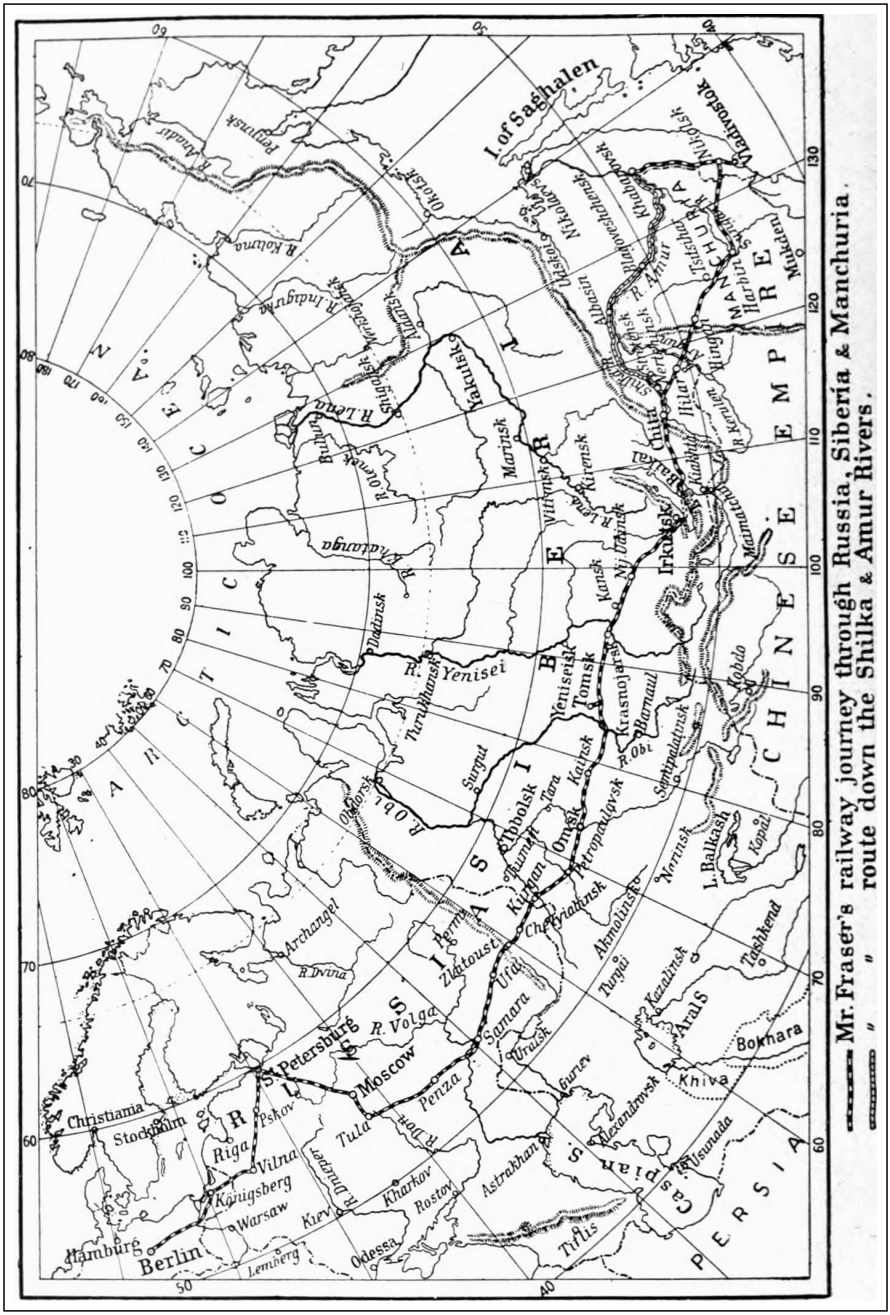
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Ostrov Novaya Sibir
Ostrov Koteln

## Chapter I

# The Start from Moscow

The bell in the big stuccoed and whitewashed Moscow station gave a clang. Thereupon brawny and black-whiskered men took off their caps, put their arms about each other's necks, and gave a brother's kiss upon the lips.

There was uproar. The train for Siberia was starting. A bunch of officers, well-set young Russians, in neat white linen jackets with gold straps on the shoulders, crowded a window and laughed good-byes to friends.

From the windows of the next car were the uncouth faces of peasants, their hair tangled and matted, their red shirts open at the throat. They were stolid and brutal. They were the moudjiks emigrating to the mysterious, evil-omened Siberia. On the platform stood their wives—dumpy, unattractive women, in short skirts, and with gaudy handkerchiefs about their heads. They did not understand the language of farewell. With eyes tear-red and with quivering lips they looked upon the hulking hairy men with the sleepy animal faces. But they said nothing.

Three mechanics, drink laden, came reeling along, bumping everyone with their kits. Their eyes were glazed, and they grinned slobberingly and lurched like coal barges beating up against a gale.

The bell clanged twice. Everybody must get aboard now. Once more the brother's kiss. From the car window the young fellows got long and ardent hand grips. They were in the blush of life, and off to Siberia with laughter in their hearts.

Standing a little back was an ordinary soldier, a fair-haired lad, slim and beardless. He was at attention, his heels clapped, his arms taut by his side. He was more than head and shoulders taller than the wizened little woman, her tanned old face all seared with care, who was clutching at him, and kissing him on the tunic and dulling its whiteness with mother's tears. And she was praying a mother's prayer.

Clang, clang, clang! Three times, and all aboard now.

There was a shrill whistle. The cars creaked and moved. Everybody, in the train and on the platform, made the sign of the cross. The perilous unknown was ahead of them.

Some husky shouts of farewell were thrown from the windows, and there was some dimness of eyes. Even a scampering foreigner felt the solemnity of the occasion. But in a few seconds we were in the sunshine of a blazing afternoon, and the train was lumbering on its way to Siberia. It was Thursday afternoon, August 22nd, 1901.

This was not the famous Siberian Express about which so much has been written and which starts twice a week from Moscow, "the fairest jewel in the crown of the Czars," for the far-off city of Irkutsk in Central Siberia, a continent away indeed, 3,371 miles, and which is reached in exactly eight days) The Russians are an enthusiastic and credulous people, and in all the world they think there is nothing so magnificent as this Siberian Express. They come in their hundreds to the Moscow station every Tuesday and Saturday night, the grandees in their furs and their pearls, the red-shirted, matted-haired moudjiks, and the shaven-chinned, American felt-hatted commercial men who have the spice of the West in their veins, and they all stand and gaze at the people Siberia-bound as most of us will look at the first traveller to Mars. Siberia is a long way off. Has anybody ever returned from Siberia? Hearts grow big and words choke. Tears stain many cheeks. Yet laughter and merriment rings over sorrow.

Remembering this is slothful Russia and not slapdash, bang-about America, it is a luxurious train, is the Siberian Express, with its electric lights, restaurant, library, observation car, bath rooms, ladies' boudoir, piano, and all that is considered "up-to-date "in travelling. Europe is now looking towards

Siberia as half a century ago it looked towards Western America—it is the wheatfield of the world; it has the finest grazing to be found in the two hemispheres; no horses are like the Siberian horses; its butter is shouldering "best Danish" from the market; great areas yield coal and iron; its hills ooze gold. There is a Siberian "boom."

The rich speculators, engineers, Government officials, Germans searching for trade, to build a bridge or to open a store, all travel by this train. It is invariably crowded. You have to sleep four in a coupé, two on the seats and two on the improvised bunks above. To be sure of a place you must book weeks ahead.

I had no desire to travel like this. I am a vagabond fond of taking things slowly. So what did it matter if I took eight or eighteen or twenty-eight days to reach Irkutsk? I had no mining concession. It was the last thing in my mind to open a store. Mine was but a mission of curiosity. I wanted to see Russia; I wanted to see the poor, crushed, depraved Russian peasants; above all I wanted to see Siberia. So I did what no wise foreigner had ever been known to do before. I travelled by the ordinary daily train that jogs along slowly, stopping at the wayside stations, picking up moudjiks, putting moudjiks down. It 'took very much longer, but there was a charm about that. Besides, it was much cheaper and it required only a very small bribe pressed into the hand of the black-whiskered, astrakan-capped conductor to get a carriage to myself. I spoke four words of Russian, and I carried all my belongings in a couple of bags.

Off to Siberia!

There is something uncanny in the phrase. The very word Siberia is one to make the blood run chill. It smells of fetters in the snow. You hear the thud of the knout on the shoulders of sickened men. For generations, to whisper Siberia in the ear of a Russian has been to make the cheek blanch. No one ever went there but in chains. The haggard men that ever came back told tales that made listeners breathe hard.

We have all supped of Siberian horrors. We shudder, cry out for their ending, but have a gruesome satisfaction in reading about them.

Yet Siberia, the land of criminals and exiles, is pushed into the dusk when we think of Siberia with its millions of miles of corn-growing land, minerals waiting to be won, great tracks of country to be populated.

Siberia is the Canada of the eastern world.

For a fortnight before mounting this train I bustled about St. Petersburg and Moscow seeing Government officials, seeking advice and information and assistance. And after each interview I had with Ministers of the Czar my mind reverted to a lady I saw on the frontier when at Wirballen I entered Russia from Germany. I recognised her as a fellow-countrywoman: tall, angular, wearing spectacles, a woman of uncertain age. There was only one thing on earth she could be—a governess. Governess was writ large all over her. I could read her story plain enough. There was poor pay and hard work at home, and now, after years of struggle, she was going to Russia to be English governess to some wealthy man's children. I am afraid I have the ordinary man's ungenerosity towards the tribe of governesses, and I thought as I looked upon her plainness that she was a weedy specimen of English womankind.

At St. Petersburg I met officials. Everyone spoke English. It was not mere courtesy that led them to speak appreciatively of things English. That kind of talk is easily to be seen through. But their liking was honest and deep-seated. They measured things by English standards.

More than once I remarked, "It seems strange that you, a Russian, should take such an interest in English life and methods." The answer was invariably the same: "I daresay it does; but you must remember that my nursery governess was an Englishwoman."

That impressed me. It was not long before I learned that the kindly regard for English folk you find among the upper classes of Russia is to be traced direct to the influence exercised in the nursery by spare-figured English governesses.

And in my heart I have apologised to the lady I saw at Wirballen.

A man I had two talks with was Prince Hilkoff, Minister of Ways of Communication, the chief of the railway administration, also of the post roads, rivers, and canals. When I was first received I found in the ante-room, await-

ing audience, uniformed officials with rows of orders upon their breasts—a gorgeous, eye-aching display of picturesque garb. I half anticipated to find his Excellency in dazzling dress; but I was greeted by an elderly gentleman in a navy blue lounge suit, and with the easiest of manners. There was nothing Russian or official about him. He looked American, with his long, strong, bronzed face and little tuft of beard that the Americans call a goatee. He spoke English like an American.

"Yes," he said, "I studied engineering at Birkenhead and afterwards in America. It was when I was a deal younger than I am now. It was at the time of the liberation of the serfs, and my family and I didn't see that disputed point exactly in the same light. So I packed up and went abroad to shift for myself. It was a little rough, but I guess I got over that. I came back to Russia just when Russia was beginning to be interested in railways. I got a small position—oh! a very small position in the administration."

"And since then?" I urged.

"Oh, since then," he replied, "I've just worked. I'm just a working man, you know—a sort of blacksmith. But I never worry. What is the good of worrying? When my work is done, I like to shut it right away. Then I play tennis with my children, or I hunt or fish. That's a great thing I like about English business men. When their work is finished it is really finished, and they get out of doors for exercise. Now, an American can't play golf without thinking about business. The Americans are a fine go-ahead people, the most go-ahead in the world, but if they would just think there was something else besides business, why I guess they'd get some real value out of life."

He was very proud of this great Trans-Siberian line, was Prince Hilkoff.

Now the train had stirred to speed, and with a thump-clang, thump-clang thundered over the metals. Everyone was at the window, with body half hanging out to catch the last gleam of sunlight on the cupolas of the gilt and bedizened Greek churches in wonderful Moscow, the great city of the plain, ancient capital of Muscovy, now blend of garish Tartar and drab European.

St. Petersburg is too modern, too cosmopolitan to please eyes fond of the picturesque. The buildings are usually imitations of something else, and the marble, not infrequently, is painted plaster. There is a T-square arrangement

of thoroughfares which is useful, but not pretty. There are the palaces to be seen. But palaces are the same the world over—the same endless galleries, with the same giant vases and gilt bedsteads and slippery floors. Palaces must be uncomfortable to live in. You cannot put your feet on the chairs, and you would probably be decapitated if you dropped cigar ash on the floor.

Moscow is far better. Here you get the clash of east and west. It is a city with distinction and individuality. It is crowded with churches, and the bells, beaten with wooden hammers, boom the day long. The style of the churches is Byzantine, with spiral flowers in flaming reds and greens and yellows. There is the Kremlin, amazingly attractive and strange, with old-time grotesqueness.

As I strolled round the Kremlin, I seemed to slip back to the fantastic architecture in story book pictures, when I believed fairy tales. Had a fair lady appeared with a candle-snuffer hat twice as high as herself and tilted back, and trailing yards of muslin, I would have accepted it all as perfectly natural.

But dovetailing into and wrapping about the Tartar city is the strictly modern. There are horse tramcars in the town, and in the suburbs are whizzing electric cars that shriek as they tear along. There are charming gardens where, beneath the trees and in the candlelight, you may have dinner. You lounge and dawdle and puff your cigarette and imagine you are in the Champs Lyseesées. You understand the slow tread of civilisation, however, when the orchestra plays "There will be a hot time in the old town tonight"—a belated air, but reminiscent of home.

You get the English papers in Moscow about a week late. Should there be anything interesting about Russia, which, of course, you particularly want to read, you will find the column smeared out with the toughest of blacking. I have friends who confess to making periodic attempts to wash that blacking. They are never successful. The cartoon in Punch is frequently obliterated by a black smudge. A lady I know received a London illustrated paper. A half-page picture was blotted. Her innate feminine curiosity was aroused. She did her best to obliterate the obliteration. She failed. She was happily acquainted with an Englishman in diplomatic service who received his newspapers uncensored. She hastened to look at his paper. Her inquisitiveness was

thereupon instantly appeased. The picture was an advertisement of the Czar receiving, with open hands and undoubted satisfaction, a box of much boomed pills manufactured in the neighbourhood of St. Helens, Lancashire!

All through that first hot afternoon the train went grudgingly along, as though it were loath to move Siberia-wards. It was made up of corridor carriages, first class painted blue, second class yellow, third class green.

There must be fifty little towns within fifty miles of Moscow. The train stopped at every one of them, sometimes for only five minutes, more often for twenty, and once for an hour and a half.

Everybody tumbled out on the platform, a motley throng. The men wore the conventional pancake-topped and peaked caps, and without exception top-boots, very soft about the ankle, so the leather clung in creases. The difference in the garb between the better class and poorer class Russian is in the matter of shirt. The better class Russian favour a shirt of soft tone, a puce, a grey, and now and then a white, and he tucks it away like a decorous European. The poorer Russian has a shirt of such glaring redness that, be it as dirty as it might, its flaming hue is never lost. He wears it hanging outside his trousers as though it were an embryo kilt.

As evening closes in and the train trundles over a prairie I see the meagre harvest has been garnered. There are no hedges, hardly a tree. It is possible to see all round, as though to the edge of the world, and that is not more than two miles away. The roads are ribbony tracks across the waste. Far off are awkward V-shaped carts, each making a huge wake of dust. A greyness hangs over the earth. Like the white sails of a ship looming out of a sea haze, a white object pierces the gloom. Nearer you see it is the cupola of the village church, always a massive, imposing building, whitewashed. The village is like a hem of rubbish thrown about.

There is the sadness of the sea on a plain that has no break in the horizon. As night closes a cold wind soughs.

The railway line stretches endlessly behind; it stretches endlessly in front. The train is like a fly trailing across a hemisphere.

Every verst there is a rude cabin made of logs, painted yellow. In each cabin is a peasant, and sometimes a wife and daughter. As the train comes along

a little green flag must be shown to prove the line is clear. Each cabin is within sight of the next, a verst ahead, and the one behind. And these little green flags stretch from Moscow to the Pacific coast. It is usually the mother or the daughter who shows the flag. They are stunt women in scant clothing and bare feet. Only occasionally is the little banner unfurled. Generally it is wrapped round the stick and tied, and is held out just for form's sake. They are old and worn, many of the banners, and, like some umbrellas, look well while folded, but would show a tattered face if unfurled. When darkness comes it is a green lamp that is displayed.

The train creaks and groans and growls. On the engine front are three great lights, as if it would search a path through the wilderness. So we crawl into the night on our way to Siberia.

## Chapter II

# Over the Ural Mountains

That first night, with a single blinking candle for illumination, I lay on an improvised bed I made myself, listening to the regular jog-thud, jog-thud, of the carriages over the metals. Twice the conductor—a stout, black-bearded, mayoral gentleman in military kind of frockcoat, with a white and purple tassel on the shoulder—came with a couple of supernumeraries, thinner men, to open and shut the doors for him, and inspected my ticket. There must be an odour of large tips about the foreigner. Anyway, he received my ticket with a bow, examined it carefully as though it were the first thing of its kind he had ever seen, and then handed it back to me with another bow.

I was glad when the weary dawn arrived. I was gladder still when the train pulled up at a station, and I joined in the dash and the scramble towards the buffet, where scalding tea was to be had and mincemeat stuffed dumplings, satisfying, and most indigestible, to be bought for a trifle.

How the Russian eats! He has no fixed mealtime, but takes food when he is hungry, which is often. He has about six square meals a day. He has at least a dozen lunches, a little bit of salt fish or some caviare, a piece of bread and cheese, an onion and some red cabbage, a sardine and a slice of tomato, all washed down with many nips of fiery vodki. He never passes a station without a glass of tea—marvellous tea, with a thin slice of lemon floating in it. I got a fondness for Russian tea, and foreswore bemilked decoctions for ever.

Russians have a sufficient dash of the East in them to be careless about time. Whether they arrive at their destination to-morrow or next week is a matter of indifference. But the inner man must be attended to. So at every station there is a buffet, sometimes small, sometimes large, but always good, clean, and painted white. There are one, two, or three long tables, with clean cloths, with serviettes covering slices of white and Russian rye bread; plants are on the table, and are circled by rows of wine bottles, with the price written on the label. On a side table are hot dishes, half fowls, beef steaks, meat pies, basins of soup. There are plenty of waiters dressed as are waiters in Piccadilly hotels. Everything is bright and neat. And this is at wayside stations with not a house within sight; with, indeed, nothing but heaving dreary prairie around. It is the same all along the line. There is a difference in the size of the buffets, but never in excellence. I am enthusiastic about these Russian refreshment-rooms. And if ever the Muscovite thanks the Great White Czar for anything he should thank him for the food on the railways. Foreigners grumble about the slowness of the Russian trains. They are not particularly slow. The time is spent at the railway stations while the passengers eat. And while Russians have appetites in proportion to the size of their country those waits are not likely to be shortened.

Dragging the train on which I travelled were two engines, black and greasy, and with huge funnel-shaped chimneys. They consumed an enormous quantity of wood. But there was no scarcity, for at every station there are stacks of wood sawn into convenient chunks.

At one end of the train was the post-waggon, with two brass horns ornamenting its outer panels, and a green painted letter-box, bearing a picture of a sealed letter hanging outside. In other lands the mail is sent by the fastest trains. In Russia it is sent by the approximately slow.

All the other cars were for passengers—one car painted blue for first-class passengers, two painted yellow for second-class, and seven painted green for third-class passengers.

So the majority were third-class, a higgledy-pig-gledy community of decent-looking artisans and their wives and hordes of children wandering East to settle, and a fair sprinkling of harum-scarum young fellows, always

smoking cigarettes and diving into every buffet and shouting for pevo (beer), and making mock attempts to pitch one another out of the window.

The mass, however, of my fellow travellers were the moudjiks, shaggy men with big sheep-skin hats that gave them a ferocious air, wearing rough-spun cloaks and often with sacking tied around their feet instead of boots. The women were fat and plain, though the colours of their dresses were often startling in brilliancy Gaudy orange was popular.

The lavatory accommodation, even in a first-class car, was limited, and as it was for the joint use of both sexes it was a cause of frequent embarrassments.

Ablutions had to be performed singly, and for two hours each morning there was a little crowd of unwashed and semi-dressed men and women standing about the corridor, all smoking cigarettes, women as well as men, and each eyeing their neighbour with side glances of distrust lest there was some underhand move to get possession of the lavatory first.

Among the provoking things of life is the way Russian hotels and lavatories on Russian trains supply you with water to cleanse yourself. There is no tap to turn on the water, but there is a button, which, on pressing with your hand, releases a trickle. The moment you cease pressing the button the supply is cut off. When you are actually pressing the water trails along your elbow and soaks your shirt sleeves, or douses your clothes and boots. The only refuge is selfishness.

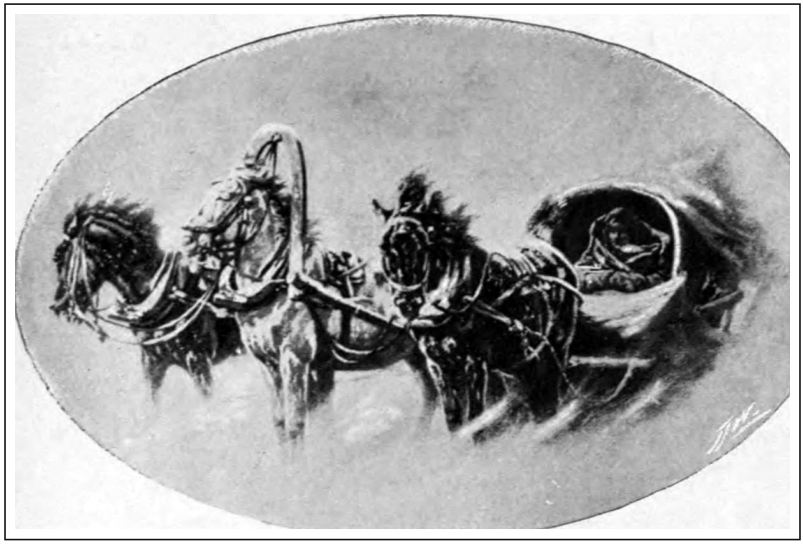
So I plugged the basin outlet with a cork and held the button up with a lead pencil till the basin was full. Then I washed. Thus the water supply soon gave out, and I picked up several expletives in Russian from my fellows. And after all, perhaps, they didn't mind. Before the end of my journey I came to have a liking for the Russians. But in the course of my vagabond life I have been in over thirty different countries and I've never met a people who get along so well on a minimum amount of water for washing purposes as do the Russians.

All the third-class cars were grimy. The woodwork was painted drab inside, but there was not a vestige of. cushion.

I spent hours among these emigrants and found them interesting. They were horribly dirty, and as they liked to have the windows closed, despite the temperature, the cars reeked with odour. They carried all their worldly possessions with them, some foul sleeping rugs and some bundles of more foul clothing, which was spread out on the hard seats to make them a little less hard. Bread, tea, and melons was the chief food. There were great chunks of sour black bread, and at every halt kettles were seized, and a rush made to the platform, where the local peasant women had steaming samovars, and sold a kettleful of boiling water for a half-penny and a water melon as big as your head for a penny.

Besides bread-eating, and scattering half of it on the floor, and munching melons and making a mess with the rind, and splashing the water about when tea-making, there was the constant smoking of cigarettes. A peasant might not be able to afford a hunk of bread, but he had a supply of cigarettes. They are tiny, unsatisfying things, half cardboard tube, provide three modest puffs, and are then to be thrown away. You could smoke a hundred a day and deserve no lecture on being a slave to tobacco.

The emigrants were happy—there was no doubt about that. Though the faces of the men were heavy and animal, guile was not strong about them. The cars rang with their coarse laughter.



The Popular Idea about Travel in Siberia.



The Real Way to Traverse Siberia.

Late one night I visited them. At the end of each car was a candle flickering feebly. The place was all gaunt shadow. The men lay back loungingly, like weary labourers caught with sleep in the midst of toil. On the seat beside the man, huddled up, with her face hid in her arms, was the wife. Lying on the floor, with a bundle of rags as pillow, were the children. I had to step over a grey-whiskered old man, who was curled up in the gangway—a feeble, tottering creature to emigrate. Close to the door was an old woman, her face hanging forward and hidden, and her long, bare, skinny arms drooping over her knees. It was all very pathetic in that dim, uncertain candle flare. There was no sound but the snore of deep-sleeping men and the slow rumble of the moving train.

I stood looking upon the woeful picture and thinking. Then a child cried, and its mother turned testily and slapped it.

The second day out from Moscow it became dull and cold, and a bleak wind scoured the plain. There was little but a sandy wilderness. The gale sounded round the crawling train with eerie moan. It picked up the sand and engulfed us in a brown gritty cloud. Everything in the carriage became thick with dust. It was to be tasted in the mouth and felt achingly in the eyes. To gaze from the windows was to look into a scudding fog that curved thick from the earth and thinned skywards. The train lumbered creakingly.

Suddenly there was a lull. Hither we were running out of the sandstorm or it had spent itself. The rain came in great drops, pat, pat, pat, for a long time. Then swish came the deluge, and the carriages rattled with the tattoo of the downpour. When it had passed the air was sweet to breathe. The sun shone clear over the refreshed land. I set about with an old towel to thrash some of the grime from my belongings.

We traversed the Volga in the early afternoon. We went at a crawl over the great square network of a bridge perched high on stone pillars, whilst all devout Russians on the train stood by the windows ardently crossing themselves. It is a wide muddy river, flowing sluggishly, and draining a stretch of country twice as large as Great Britain.

There were two steamers surging a way up, and great islands of rafts were floating down on the tide. When the train halted it was easy to hear the

quaint, rhythmic oar-beating songs of the Volga boatmen. They had brought their rafts from the north, beyond Nijni Novgorod, the city of the great Fair, and it would be months yet before they reached their journey's end, down in the wild country of Astrakan, on the Caspian Sea.

Towards sundown we grunted into the bustling town of Samara, and here we had an hour and half-haif to wait. The platform was all excitement and uproar. Samara is on the Volga, and a flock of folk from the north and south had come by the waterway to catch the Siberian train.

There were officials to take up posts in the far interior. There were a lot of slothful Tartars, sallow-skinned, slit-eyed, wisp-bearded, who had slouched their way from Mongolia and were now slouching back. There were fine-set Cossacks, carrying themselves proudly, their white sheep-skin hats perched jauntily, a double row of silver cartridge cases across their plum-coloured coats, that fall from the waist like a quilted petticoat, and each wore long riding boots of the softest red morocco. Above all were more peasants, unkempt and ragged, bent beneath bundles, driven hither and thither like sheep, mostly apathetic, crowding into the already overcrowded waggons, and camping on any spare patch of floor.

Again we went snorting across the steppes. Now and then we ran through clumps of darkened pine, Forest fires have been raging during the summer, and hundreds of villages were laid waste. The refugees had hastened to the railway line, expecting there they would receive assistance. For twelve miles at one place there was a string of camps.

It was evening as we passed, and the glow of the camp fires on the lanky peasants, as they stood and shouted while the train puffed by, made a striking scene.

Next morning, as we rolled towards the Urals, the country became undulating and passing pretty. There was plenty of woodland and herbage, and many a time it was easy to imagine a stretch of English scenery on a large scale.

Now and then we scudded by a village. You can't imagine how ugly a village may be till you have seen 'one in Russia. They are all the same. The houses are of unpainted wood, all one storey, and usually built awry. They are

in disrepair. There is always. a yard, but it is ankle-deep in muck, and the pigs have free entrance to the house. The fencing is half broken away. There is usually one street, a hundred yards wide, but it is kept in no order. It is axle-deep in dust in summer, and in winter it is axle-deep in mire.

One thing I noticed the first day out of Moscow, and I kept noticing it right across Siberia till Vladivostock on the Pacific coast was reached—how seldom any of the stations are near towns. You constantly see a town seven or eight miles off, but not once in six times does the line run near. If you ask a Russian the reason he will laugh. Then he will tell you. When the line was planned the engineers made millions of roubles by blackmailing the towns on the route! "You give us so much money and the line will run quite close to you; don't, and we will take the line as far away as we can." The Russian official, it is said, grows rich not on his salary, but on bribery. Many an official does not deny it. It is as well understood as that he must wear uniform. If you start preaching morality among public men he answers: "You foreigners do the same, but you are not so open about it as we are."

There is very little cutting or bank building to make the line level. Where the country undulates the line undulates also. For miles it is a series of billowy mounds.

The train was heavy, and where there was any incline the two engines grunted like broken-winded horses as at a snail's pace of about three miles an hour it reached the top. Then, to change the simile, it was like a cyclist who spied a long declining sweep before him. Steam was shut off, and with a burr and a roar the train "coasted" at a dashing, reckless forty miles an hour. When it reached the dip the engines started grinding and panting, trying to keep up speed to help on the next rise. The endeavour was only partially successful. We were soon down to a panting crawl again.

For an hour and a half we halted at Ufa, the most prettily situated town since leaving Moscow. It is built on the side of a nicely wooded hill, and neat villas look down from the heights. It was Sunday evening, August 25th, and, as the passing of the Siberian train is one of the excitements, the station was crowded with townsfolk. If you will look at a map, Ufa, just to the west of the Urals, looks a long way from civilisation. Yet the better class folk sauntering

about this Sunday evening were very little differently dressed from what you may see in any provincial English town any Sunday evening.

But, oh! the number of officials. You never turn without elbowing an official. Half the population of Russia seems made up of officials engaged in governing the other half. Everybody in lower rank salutes everybody in higher rank, and the salute must be returned. Equals ignore one another. I would hesitate to make a wild guess how many times a Russian gendarme raises his hand to the salute in the course of a day. It must run into the far hundreds, and get very wearisome. If a superior speaks to him he keeps his hand at the salute all the time.

As soon as we left Ufa we started climbing into the Ural Mountains. Every Russian I had met broke into adjectives when informed I proposed to cross the Urals. They were beautiful, lovely, picturesque, magnificent, grand! The Russian, however, is no authority on scenery. He, of course, judges by contrast, and naturally when you have spent years on a desert you regard a hillock with some trees as charming. The scenery in the Urals is beautiful because you have travelled days on a featureless plain. The hills are humped and broken, and the train curves over their shoulders among masses of trees with leaves splashed with the rich tints of autumn. Also there were places where for miles the line hugged grey rocks. It was a peaceful Sunday evening with a crimson and saffron sunset as we curved upwards,

It was all welcome to the eye, and reminded me of parts of Derbyshire. I stood out on the gangway smoking my pipe, and tried to realise I was thousands of miles from England.

But what a part these Urals have played in the story of mankind! For thousands of miles they run north and south, a wall dividing Europe and Asia. You have only to look into faces of men who come from a race born east of the Urals and then into the faces of men born west of them to understand how divided is the human family.

In the far-off times the Tartar hordes swept from their heights carrying slaughter into Europe. Right through Central Europe you get a glimpse of a Mongol eye, you are brought into contact with a trait of Eastern character, and you see the heritage of the Khans.

We had Tartars on this train, but they were slither-"heeled and fawning, and tramped the corridors wanting to sell sponges and slippers and gew-gaws. And the race they conquered centuries ago had now turned the-tide, and had driven this iron wedge of a railroad due east to the waters of the Pacific. The Tartar cringes to the Russian.

We were on the Urals' top at midnight. Asia did not greet us kindly. A fierce hurricane struck the invading train. I lay awake for hours listening to the Valkyrie shrieks of the storm and the bullet pelts of the driven rain against the carriages. In the tearful morning, with black clouds trailing the earth, we rumbled down to Chelyabinsk. Beyond lay Siberia!

## Chapter III

# Through a Great Lone Land

I saw Chelyabinsk under difficulties. We were all turned out of the train —which was an excellent thing to do, for the cars were in need of a wash and brush up—and there was a wait of five hours before another train was got ready in which we could proceed to Central Siberia.

It was raining in torrents. Everybody had an enormous excess of baggage, and as there is no left-luggage office at Chelyabinsk everything was carried or dragged or thrown into the buffet—all except the belongings of the emigrants, who camped on the platform, sitting on bundles and spreading their evilodoured sheepskin coats to act as waterproofs.

I have joined in a scramble for food at an English railway station, but that was the decorum of a court reception compared with the fight at Chelyabinsk. Though there was so long to wait, we were all in as much hurry as if the train started within ten minutes.

I would have fared badly had I not made the acquaintance of a pleasant, stout and elderly baroness, who was on her way to visit her married son living at Ekaterinburg, on the eastern slopes of the Urals. I had seen her for half a day standing in the corridor smoking cigarettes. The car corridor has no extra width, and when I tried to pass the lady we jammed. It was awkward, and I grunted.

"Ah, you are an Englishman," she exclaimed. Then with a wrench we tore ourselves asunder; I raised my hat and she bowed, and we exchanged cards.

We became capital friends. I presented her with some English novels I had in my bag, and she presented me with a tin teapot. It is usual for everyone to make their own tea on Russian trains. She also gave me tea and sugar. Thereupon I proceeded to make the floor of my carriage in a mess with crunched sugar, and my papers became disreputably marked with tea stains. Amateur housekeeping in a railway carriage has its drawbacks.

My thanks were as profuse as I could make them, and I asked the baroness how I could relieve my obligations. "Give me a box of your English wax matches," she said; and I gave her the only box I had. An hour later she sent me fifty of her cigarettes.

She told me she loved the English. She wore an English cloth cap and carried a stick, and was much like an English country gentlewoman.

When she found the buffet crowded at Chelyabinsk she took it as a personal insult, called the manager, and spoke to him vigorously. So we got a special table, and though we had been informed there wasn't another chair in the place two must have been speedily manufactured, for they were forthcoming instantly. I saw her to her train for Ekaterinburg, and we parted with expressions of mutual esteem.

Then I explored Chelyabinsk.

Conceive a field in which a cattle show has been held for a week, and it has been raining all the week. That will give you some idea of Chelyabinsk. The buildings were sheds, and the roadways mire,

And yet it is a place that has been muttered in tears for centuries. All convicts and exiles for Siberia were marched over the Urals to Chelyabinsk. It was the dividing station, one gang going to the arid north, and another gang going to the mines in the far east; others condemned to labour on the waterways—all expelled from Russia, with the piled-up horrors of Siberia before them.

Siberia, however, is to be no longer the dumping ground for criminals. Siberia indeed intends to become respectable this century. It is crying out in protest, as Australia cried out to England years ago. The Czar and his Imperial Council have the matter in consideration, and before my hair grows grey the terrors of Siberia will be topics limited only to the pages of novels.

All State-aided immigrants coming to Siberia enter this land by the gate of Chelyabinsk. Their papers have to be examined, and they themselves have to be drafted into groups to be taken off, in charge of an official, to the land allotted to them. All this occupies time. And time is no value in Siberia. So the wait is for a week, ten days, two weeks, even six weeks. Spring is when the great incursion takes place. I was told that early that year (1901) as many as a dozen trains a day came over the Urals laden with emigrants, and that in May there were as many as 10,000 peasants living in the sheds erected for them and feeding at the State kitchens till they could be sent to the interior.

Comparatively speaking, the emigrants in the autumn are few. I talked to one group. There was an old man and an old woman, a youngish woman, and three children, the eldest not more than four years. They were sitting in the drenching rain, the elders munching black bread and onions, and the two children that could toddle dancing in a muddy puddle as happy as could be. I asked the old man if he hadn't got too far on in life to come to Siberia to face its fierce winters. He said he and his wife were going to live with their son, who had come to Siberia in the spring with a little money. The Government had given him land. Now he had a home ready, and he had sent for his wife and children and his mother and father.

Again it was a fight, like an excursion crowd, climbing into the train bound for the interior of Siberia. There were more folks than there was room for. I believe I was the only first-class passenger, but the wily second-class passengers, who understood the art of travelling, made no haste, allowed all the second-class places to be filled up, and then insisted, as they are entitled to do under Russian railway regulations, on travelling first. They stormed my particular stronghold, but as foreigners are supposed to ooze roubles, a six-foot-four conductor cleared them out and locked me in.

We were all in our places a full hour before the train started. I kicked my toes to keep myself warm. It was a bedraggled leaden day, and my window looked upon the goods yard, where stood rows of waggons. It was like a delay on a branch line in a colliery district.

At last came the clang of the bell, twice: "Get ready," three times: "Off you go," and the engine, with three preparatory shrieks, lumbered off with us

across two thousand miles of land so flat that there wasn't a rise the whole distance that would serve as a tee-ing ground at golf.

The country was featureless. Here and there were clumps of silver-limbed larch which broke the monotony. But we ran for hours at a time with little else taller than grass blades between us and tho horizon.

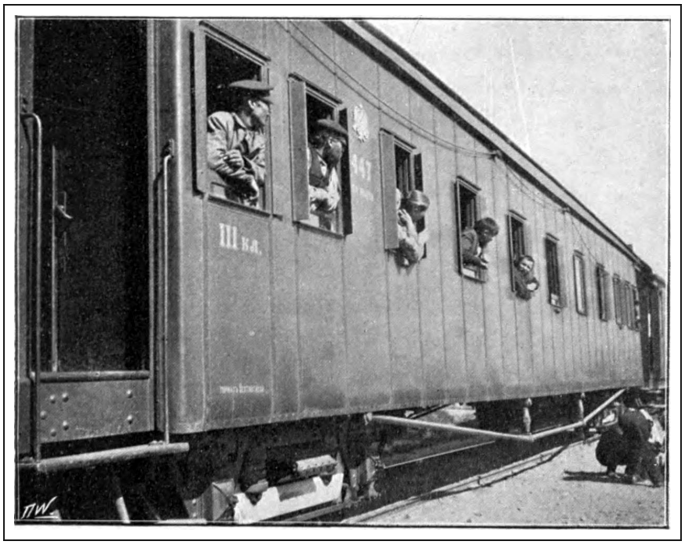
If you have been on a steamer in a dead calm, and seen nothing but a plain to the edge of the world, and heard nothing but the thump-thump of the engines, you will understand exactly how traversing Western Siberia impresses one: nothing but sun-scorched grass and deep grunting of the engine surging through the wilderness. There is one stretch of line without a yard of curve for eighty miles.

The line is raised about a foot above the level of the land, and there is no fence to protect it. I could see from the digging on either side, to obtain this slight bank, that the soil was black and rich. What the British corn-grower will say when Siberia is populated and given up to the production of cheap wheat he himself best knows.

It is a wonderful grazing country. Of that there is no doubt. I saw herds of horses and cows. One young Siberian, whipping up cattle, challenged our train to a race. That he won, amid the plaudits of us all, does not prove so much the swiftness of his horses as the slowness of our train. Fifteen miles an hour was its top speed.



Whenever the Train Halted there was an Opportunity for a Promenade.




Third Class Passengers.

Very seldom was a house to be seen except the guard huts stationed every verst. All the men in charge were good-conduct convicts. The stations were at long intervals, perhaps every twenty miles. There was, of course, the station building, neat and yellow painted. There was the inevitable water tower. In the background were one or two official-looking, yellow-hued, one-storey houses. That was all.

No, not all. For, as it is the proper thing for everybody to carry their own tea and sugar, there was on every platform a great cauldron of a samovar, where rich and poor alike could help themselves to hot water. Also, on one side was a long covered stall, where the local peasantry—where they came from I've no idea—sold cooked fowls, hot or cold, as you liked, for a shilling, very hot dumplings, with hashed meat and seasoning inside, for twopence-halfpenny, huge loaves of new made bread, bottles of beer, pats of excellent butter, pails of milk, apples and grapes, and fifty other things. Passengers loaded themselves with provender at the stall, and ate picnic fashion in the carriages until the next station was reached. There it all began over again.

Wasn't a journey through this great lone land dreary? Of course it was. The eye began to ache with the monotony of the horizon line, and peasants ceased to be picturesque because every group at every station was exactly like the other groups.

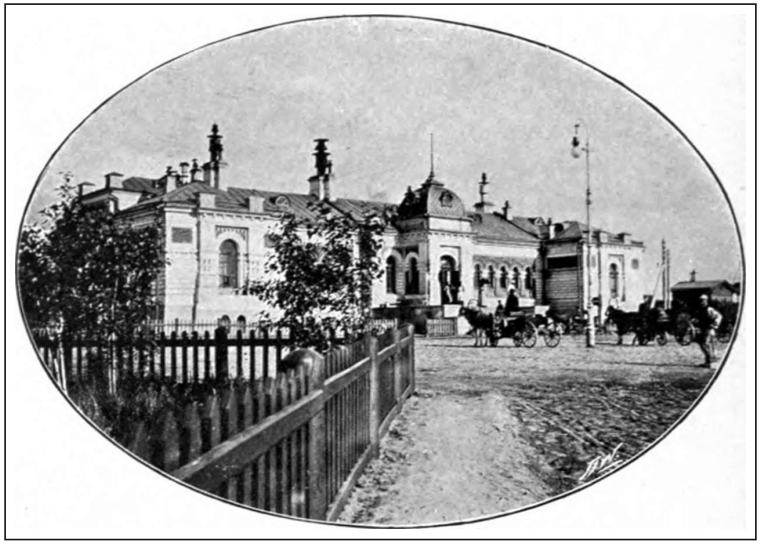
Yet, as the days passed and we went rolling on and on across a sea of prairie, with nothing before but two threads of steel stretching over the edge of the world, and nothing behind but two threads of steel stretching back to eternity, a glimmer of consciousness how big Siberia is, and what this thread of railway means to Russia, crept into the mind.

I got tired reading my novels. So I went and sat in the gangway and under the spell of the wide waste—so that the train, while crunching and grunting along, always seemed to be in the very middle of it—my thoughts strayed vagrant through all I had read about this mysterious land of Siberia. And there sprung up the name of Yermak. Yermak was a kind of Alfred the Great, with a difference. In the beginning he, like many other empire-founders, was a freebooter. He was a pirate on the Volga. He seized boats and their contents, and cut the throats of the crews. It was, therefore, but natural he and

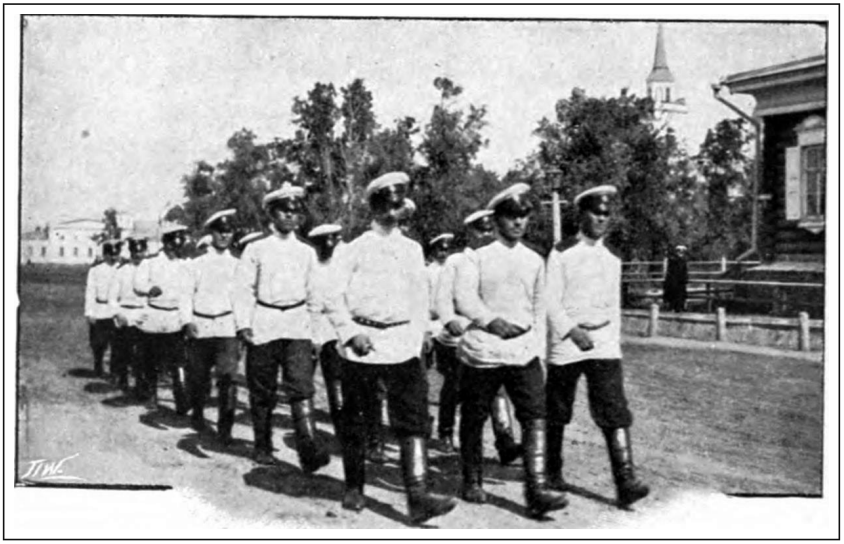
his companions were chased by the troops of Ivan the Terrible to the Urals. Yermak, however, was befriended by a great merchant, who knew there were wonderful sables to be got on the far side of the hills. It was on New Year's Day, 1581, that Yermak and his Cossacks set off. For years they fought and raided and traded. All his men were killed in time, and Yermak himself was drowned in the Irtish while trying to escape an old Tartar enemy. But he had captured Siberia for Russia. Ivan, who had despatched soldiers to hang him, sent, before the end came, the Imperial pardon, the title of prince, and a robe that had rested on his own shoulders. There was a dash and daring in Yermak's character that appeals to the imagination. He is the national hero, and his banner hangs in the cathedral of Tomsk.

So, as we rolled across the prairie in corridor cars and caught sight, now and then, of the old foot road—nothing but a rutted track, hardly ever used since the coming of the train—I let my fancy play on the times of long ago, when adventurous traders came here after the precious sable, fought with the tribes, died in the snow, ate one another from brute hunger, and then I thought how many a weary procession of convicts had trudged across the steppes, taking two years to accomplish a journey the Siberian express will now do in a fortnight. I confess the railway, a twin thread of steel spreading over the continent, began to fascinate me as nothing had done for a long time.

Here is a land, one and a-half times as large as Europe—forty times, indeed, as big as the United Kingdom—that has lain dormant through the ages, but is at last being tickled into life, as it were, by the railway, as a giant might be aroused from slumber by a wisp. Until ten years ago, when the building of the line began, there were more people in London alone than in all Siberia) Even now there are only ten millions of inhabitants, one person to every two square miles, and out of every hundred persons ninety-tbree are men. Half the people to-day are convicts or the descendants of convicts.



Omsk Station.



Cadets at Omsk.

Looked at from the rear window of the tail car, the railway does not signify much. And yet never since the Great Wall of China was built has there been such a thing accomplished by the hand of man. It is 5,449 miles long, and cost 85 millions of pounds.

The first sod of the line was turned in 1891 by the present Czar when Grand Duke Nicholas. In nine years 3,375 miles were laid, including thirty miles of bridges, several of enormous height and length. The Great Canadian Pacific line, under far more favourable circumstances, took ten years to build 2,290 miles. By dividing the work into sections the Trans-Siberian line, year in and year out, was built at the rate of about a mile a day. The mind begins to be confused when it tries to grasp what this means.

Then the traffic. The main object Russia had in making the line was military, so that in time of war she might have a quick way of throwing her hundreds of thousands of troops into China or into her great port of Vladivostock on the Pacific. Immigration, commerce, and the development of Siberia came as an after-thought. In 1895, when the line was opened only as far as Central Siberia, the number of passengers was just over two hundred thousand. In 1900 there were a million and a half passengers—Seven times as many.

But the solitude of this great lone land laid hold on one. It is an ocean of parched grass land, silent, awesome. And yet surely some day it will flourish, and be bountiful to the earth!

## Chapter IV

# In a Siberian Town

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It was on the night of Wednesday, August 28th—after I had watched the sun set like a huge crimson balloon behind the line to the far rear of us—that the conductor came and informed me we would be at Omsk within the hour.

I intended to halt there for a day. So I threw my belongings together—not forgetting to tie my clattering metal teapot, the gift of the baroness, to the handle of my kit-bag—and then looked out the window. We were going at a dead crawl. But far ahead I could see the moon-like glow of many electric lights. We rumbled across a huge girder bridge, 700 yards long, spanning the Irtish—the mast gleams of many boats at anchor, and the red and green lights of a steamer churning the water to a quay side, showing far below—and we ran into a big, brilliantly lighted station, crowded with people and with the grey and red of military uniform everywhere.

Before the train came to a standstill a hungry pack of blue-bloused, white-aproned porters mounted the train and literally fought with one another for the privilege of carrying passengers' baggage, and receiving the consequent tip. My two bags were enough for two ordinary porters. But my gentleman wouldn't hear of another porter helping, and barked savagely at anyone who offered assistance.

There were other folk getting on at Omsk; plenty of people going east, and throngs who had come to meet or see friends off. There was a well-lit dining-

room, and conventional waiters were scurrying with hot plates, soups, and tea, and there was the pop of bottles everywhere.

And this in the heart of Siberia, I thought! I couldn't get myself to realise it. Apart from details I might have been landing at a civilised place like York. I approached the stationmaster and asked him in my fumbling Russian to recommend me to the best hotel in Omsk. He gave a snap of his fingers and instantly there appeared an hotel porter in dark blue coat edged with gold lace, and the name of an hotel on his cap in gold letters. He spoke German, which is the commercial language of Russia. In two minutes my baggage had been piled on a droshki, and with a whoop from the driver to his horse we set off.

I have before referred to the curious fact that hardly ever is a station close toa town. Omsk does not depart from the rule, and therefore Omsk station is three miles from Omsk itself. There was no regular roadway, but a stretch of ground some three hundred yards wide, bumpy and dusty, and with great pools of slush.

The droshki I was in was a real droshki' The thing they call a droshki in Petersburg is a sort of abortive Victoria. The genuine article has a humpedup seat with no back, so that every bump you are jolted in a way to make your bones rattle, and you are in constant imminent peril of being pitched into the adjoining pool.

At one violent lurch off went a bag of mine into the mud. I tried to be indignant, but the driver, as he went back, only laughed and exclaimed, "Nitchevo!"—a word which takes the Russian happily through life, and means "What does it matter; nothing matters; why worry

It was midnight, and pitch dark. The horse, though a sorry animal, could go well—perhaps because its stable was at Omsk; and we jolted on, far ahead of anyone else. We were tearing across a bleak and muddy plain. I addressed my driver, a hulking fellow, as "My little dove!" which is the proper thing to call your coachman in Russia when you want to please him, though he was as much like a dove as I am like a man-o'-war. He was delighted, and whacked the horse again.

Omsk looked as though it had gone to bed. It was like a big village, with the streets very wide and uneven, and most of the houses one-storey and

ramshackle. There were tipsy wooden posts at the corners, and on their summits were flickering little back-kitchen kind of oil lamps. Not a soul was to be seen.

Suddenly there was a clatter—clatter—clatter—clatter of a wooden rattle. I had not heard that sound since I was in Western China. Siberia is next-door neighbour to China. I knew what it was. It was the policeman on his rounds. In England we make our constables wear rubber-soled boots at night so they may move about stealthily and surprise thieves. In Siberia the police keep the rattles going, so the thieves have full warning when the guardian of the peace is approaching!

You can't convince a Siberian any more than you can a Chinese that the thing is stupid. "Ours is the best plan," says the Siberian, "for it gives householders confidence that the police are about."

So I reached the hotel, a big barn of a place, bare and cold. But I got quite a passable bedroom—though the springs of the bed were like those in a lodginghouse sofa—and after a wash I sought the restaurant. It was a big room, well lighted with giant lamps. On the centre table were two imitation palms. On the little side table were vases with little bonnet-shop flowers—an attempt to make the room cheerful. Then I sat down to a tired Britisher's supper of steak, chipped potatoes, and bottled beer. And I was in the wilderness of Siberia!

A few years ago Omsk was no more than a village, though the seat of Government of the steppe territories was there, with one or two big whitewashed official buildings. The rest, however, was a cluster of huts. It was a post station where horses were changed by travellers, and where gangs of chained criminals were divided and sent to various regions. But no manacled prisoners have been marched through its streets for four years now. There is a prison, but it is retained for local wrong-doers. Now and then a train, iron-built and all the windows heavily barred, grunts through Omsk station with the faces of brute murderers and political prisoners peering out. But that is seldom.

The town is not unlike a West American settlement. It is in a raw unfinished state, Huge handsome buildings are in course of erection, but round

about are rude log shanties. The finest structures are the churches and the breweries.

The Irtish River is alongside. I went aboard a passenger steamer which plies between Semipalatin, not far from the Chinese frontier, and Obdorsk, within the range of the Arctic Circle. There were excellent cabins, a long dining room, and a comfortably furnished sitting room. Such fine waterways are the Obi and the Irtish, the latter a tributary of the other, that every summer one or more steamers from London, which have come round by the North Cape and skirted the foot of Novaia Zemlia, drop their anchors at Omsk, bringing English wares and taking back wheat and skins.

The main street is broad. There are several large stores. The church of St. Nicholas is an imposing bulb-towered edifice of bedizened Byzantian architecture.

It was-a holy day when I was at Omsk—they have about 200 holy days a year in the Russian Empire, when no work can be done—and I went to see the church just as the congregation was dispersing. The ladies were more or less fashionably dressed in bright summer costumes and beflowered hats, and had gay parasols. Summer dresses and parasols in Siberia—there was something incongruous in the idea "

"That," I was told, as I stood watching, "is one of the evidences of civilisation coming to Omsk. Four years ago the women—like that old lady—never appeared in the streets in other than a plain dark-coloured dress and a black shawl tied about the head. But since the coming of the railway there has been a great influx of men wanting to start business and they have been followed by their wives and daughters."



The Church of St. Nicholas, Omsk.



The Ceremony of Blessing the Waters.

The old wooden theatre that did duty three years back is already sneered at, and the erection of a fine opera house is in progress.

"Yes," said the local resident showing me round, "theatrical companies come out to Omsk. They're not good, but they are willing to do anything. I have seen 'Hamlet' one night, and the next night the same company has given us the opera 'Faust.'"

There are 50,000 people in Omsk, and of these twelve or fifteen thousand are soldiers. Quite half the old population—the people who were here before the railway—are the descendants of convicts. A number of exiles, indeed, still live in Omsk. They are not generally known, except to the police. They are at liberty to engage in business as they please. The only restriction is that they must not leave Omsk. The town, I found, was rather proud that two celebrated Russian writers, Petropavlovski and Dostoyevski—the latter wrote "Memoirs from a Dead House," which even in translation makes your flesh creep—were exiled in Omsk, and the houses in which they lived are shown to the visitor. Dostoyevski was twice severely flogged, once for complaining of soup given him, and once for saving a fellow convict from drowning. The second thrashing was so severe that he was taken to the hospital as dead. When he reappeared, however, he was called Pokoinik (the deceased), and Pokoinik was his name until death really overtook him.

Omsk, you should bear in mind, is the very centre of 2,000 square miles of the finest pasture land in the world. I met two Americans in the town pushing the sale of American agricultural implements. One, the representative of the Deering Manufacturing Company, said to me, "Sir, I have been all over the United States, and this is my third summer visit to do business in Omsk. I tell you Siberia is going to be another America." He also told me that three years ago he sold only 40 reaping machines. That year, 1901, he sold 1,500, and next year he proposed to bring out 4,000. Deering's were doing a good trade because they are first in the field. The Government were buying their machines, and then selling them again to the emigrants, getting repayment by instalments. Altogether there are eight American agricultural implement manufacturers' representatives in *

Any English I inquired.

"Not one," he laughed back, and I saw the glow of Yankee satisfaction at getting what he afterwards called "the bulge on John Bull."

Besides Americans selling agricultural wares, chiefly mowers and reapers, there are fourteen firms in Omsk engaged in the newly-developed Siberian butter trade with England. The largest firm belongs to a Russian Jew; the other thirteen belong to Danes. It was a Dane in St. Petersburg who four years back accidentally saw Siberian butter. He was struck with its excellence. Three years ago 4,000 buckets, each containing about 36 lb., were shipped by way of Riga and Revel to England, and sold in the English market, I've a suspicion, as "the best Danish." Last summer (1901) 30,000 buckets a week were exported from Siberia to England.

I got into a talk with a Dane engaged in butter-buying.

"Yes," said he, "the way the butter business has sprung up is amazing. But what has been done is but a tiny scrap to what will be done in the future. You've seen the cows, what miserable looking things they are. But the pasturage is so good that there is seven per cent. of butter fat in the milk. There are only two steam dairies in all Siberia; all the other butter is made in primitive fashion by hand. The conditions are such that it is not so clean-flavoured as it should be. But it is splendid butter all the same. The output at present, with a thin population and defective methods, is small, and the competition among the rival firms to get it is American in its keenness. I travel six or seven hundred versts every week on either side of the railway line, buying butter from the peasants. It is brought in native carts all that way to the railway. But the peasant doesn't understand business. I'll make a contract for so much butter to be delivered to me in Omsk at a certain price—about eleven roubles (22s.) the pood (36 lb.) has been the price this summer; but when in Omsk the man may meet one of my competitors, and he has no hesitation, if offered a few kopecks (pence) more a pood, in selling it to my rival. When I remonstrate he simply said the other man offered more. He doesn't understand the morality of a bargain,"

"And about the morality of the other butter buyer I questioned.

"Well," the Dane answered, "competition is right up to the knife. This week five train loads of nothing but butter have left Omsk for Riga. You've

seen the trains may-be, painted white, with all the latest refrigerating appliances fitted up. The Russian Government is delighted at what is taking place. The authorities will do anything for us. They have just issued a pamphlet in Russian showing how the Siberian peasants can start profitable dairying with the necessary machinery for an outlay of 500 roubles (£50). The Russian peasant, however, is slow. But the Jews have come into the business, and many are already making fortunes by dairying. My firm started a big dairy about 400 versts south from here. The peasants would not believe a machine could separate the butter from the milk. They said the devil was in the machine. There's been a drought down there. Everybody believed it was because the Almighty was angry that they should allow these devil machines in the country. So they wrecked the place and smashed every separator we had. But it will be all right in a year or two, as soon as they get more civilised. They are beginning to see the advantage of machinery. The winter food for the cows has had to be cut by hand. Now these people are beginning to see that if the grass is cut by machines they can get far more hay, and keep four or five times as many cows, and then the separators make better milk; so some of them are on their way to becoming rich."

In the afternoon I drove out to the plain beyond Omsk and visited a Kirghiz camp. The Kirghiz are the Red Indians of the West Siberian steppes.

The Russians have conquered them, and pushed them upon the least fertile tracts of land to make room for immigrants. The race is decreasing in number, and will one of these days disappear from the face of the earth altogether.

They are not unlike the "Red Man of the Wild West" in feature, but are listless and drowsy. There is a strong strain of the Tartar in them, shown by the slit of the eye. They are nomads, driving flocks of sheep before them. Indeed, the sheep is their standard of value. A woman is only worth four sheep, but a cow is worth eight sheep, a horse is worth four cows, and they will give three horses for a gun.

I found them very agreeable, smiling folk. Their tents looked like huge cocoanut shells cut in half. They were framework covered with coarse felt. The men were clad in sheep-skins, but the women had bright-hued cotton wraps,

red and yellow print. They showed hospitality by offering me fermented mare's milk, which I lied about by saying it was delightful, though I was near to sickness with the vile stuff. It took a fortnight to get the taste out of my mouth.

We squatted on mats and smiled and nodded. When I suggested taking their photographs, which they understood, they were delighted. But there was a delay, for even feminine vanity extends to the Kirghiz, and we had to wait till the young women decked themselves in their gorgeous native costumes. One put on a huge red hat trimmed with foxskin. I was with the Kirghiz only some half-an-hour. As, however, I bade them farewell native fashion, by holding both hands in mine and shaking them, I could not help but feel sorry for these children of the Siberian plain, who have lost their heritage and are soon to be extinct. The touch of civilisation means death to them.

So back in a whirl of dust to Omsk, where, at the hotel, was as good a little dinner as any traveller need desire.

In the evening there was a fête in the public gardens, and to that I went with two Americans. Probably seven or eight thousand people gathered in the grounds, chiefly young fellows and young women. Apart from the military, there was hardly any difference in the dress from what you see in an English or American town. There was the usual laughter and flirting going on.

On a raised platform a band crashed waltzes, and everybody who could get on the platform danced. You may have witnessed the dancing at Belle Vue, Manchester, on an August Bank holiday. There you see a great mass of perspiring lads and lasses swinging each other by the hour. The Omsk scene was like that, but on a smaller scale. There was also an open-air theatre. It was impossible to get anywhere for the crush. But from the distance it looked rather a mournful performance—probably a Russian version of "East Lynne." I thought I recognised the death of little Willie.

Then, to wind up, there was a grand explosion of fireworks, whizzing rockets releasing blue and red stars, gorgeous designs, and the mob crying "O-o-oh!" for all the world like Londoners at the Crystal Palace. The final

piece showed the name of the Czar in coloured lights, with a crown above. Everybody cheered and hallooed, and the men waved their hats.

And this was in far Siberia, 2,805 versts east of Moscow!

## Chapter V

# Siberia as an Agricultural Country

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It was while at Omsk that I awoke to the fact that my previous idea about Siberia was marvellously wrong. It was, of course, the popular idea, which is more dramatic than the actual condition. Siberia, to that useful but ill-informed individual, "the man in the street," is a horrible stretch of frigid desert, dotted with gaunt prison houses, and the tracks over the steppes are marked with the bones of exiles who have died beneath the weight of chains, starvation, and the inhospitable treatment of savage Russian soldiers.

Britishers and Americans love to sup on horrors. An Armenian atrocity, the life of Captain Dreyfus on Devil's Island, the slow death of men chained to barrows in Siberian mines, all that is gruesome and cruel, thrills! It is the convict life of Siberia—so contrary to all that we enlightened ones of the West think right—that we have had depicted luridly in books of travel, magazine articles, and in melodrama.

It is not so much because travellers have written about what they have never seen, as the insatiable thirst of the public for sensation that has been ministered to. Prison horrors are more attractive than methods of cattle rearing, and so the tendency has been for writers to pick out the worst feature in Siberia, the convict system, weave together all the dreadful stories they can find, dwell on the horrible life in the snow, until the public, reading about

nothing but convicts and snow in Siberia, imagine that Siberia has nothing to show but convicts and snow.,

I had not, however, been long in Siberia before I realised that the desire on the part of writers to give the public something dramatic to read about had led them to exaggerate one feature of Siberian life and to practically neglect the real Siberia, full of interest but lacking sensation. So let me try to wipe from the public mind the fallacy that Siberia is a Gehenna-like region. -

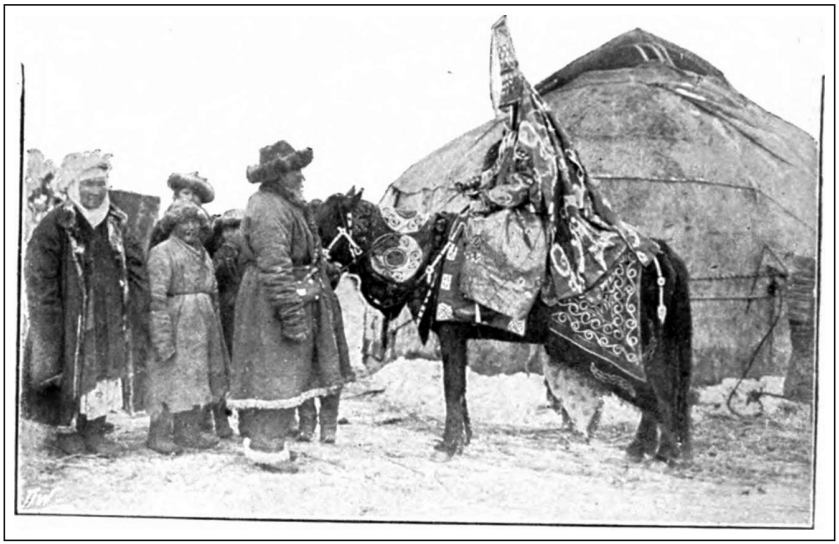
Away north, where the land borders the Arctic, there is no vegetation but moss and lichen. Beneath that, southwards, comes the great forest zone, a belt of dense woods two thousand miles wide, running east and west across Asia. But further south still is the agricultural region, through which I travelled and which the Russian authorities seem ardently anxious to develop. And it is in this region, between the Urals and Lake Baikal, that there are thousands of miles of country as flat as a billiard table, and thousands of miles of pleasantly undulating wooded land—not, I admit, a place to go to in search of picturesque scenery, but about as fair as I have seen, and ripe for agricultural projects.

There is hardly any spring in Siberia, the change from the long winter to the blazing summer being little more than the matter of a fortnight.

To talk of a Siberian winter is, I know, to make one shudder. Yet in all the towns I visited people said, "Why do you come here in the summer, when our roads are so dusty? It is in winter we have a good time. It is cold, 30 degrees of frost, but you don't feel it much, for it is so dry and the air so still. The sky is cloudless for a month ata time. Then the sledging—ah, it is when the sledging is in full swing you should see a Siberian town



Khirgis on the Steppes.



A Khirgis Bride.

What impressed me as soon as I crossed the Urals was that the human race—beyond a few migratory tribes—should not have flourished more in this land. Yet, now, since the opening of the railway, the Russian Government is almost going on its knees to induce European Russians, who on the southern sandy steppes find it so hard to make both ends meet, to emigrate to Siberia.

European Russia is thinly enough populated in all truth. But the parts good enough for cultivation are under peasant proprietorship, and a father's land is divided among the sons, so each generation has a smaller and smaller piece of ground to nurture. The -more venturesome have their eyes on Siberia, where they hope a less starvation life is to be got. As I said in a former chapter, there has been a steady flood of emigrants to this side the Urals. On some of the trains are fourth-class carriages, about as bare as a guard's van on an English goods train, and as much lacking in luxury. But the absence of cushions and lavatory accommodation does not, I fancy, trouble the newcomers. Most of them have a stolid content. They pay about a shilling fare per hundred miles In cases of need the Government will make an advance of £10 without interest.

A Russian who desires to emigrate here must get permission from the authorities. The permission is 'necessary, for land has to be allotted, and arrangements made for State officials to conduct the parties. For the first three years no immigrant is called upon to pay taxes. In Western Siberia a grant of some $2 English square miles is made to every man, and in some cases there is an additional grant of six miles of forest. In Central Siberia the extent of the grant is determined by the quality of the land.

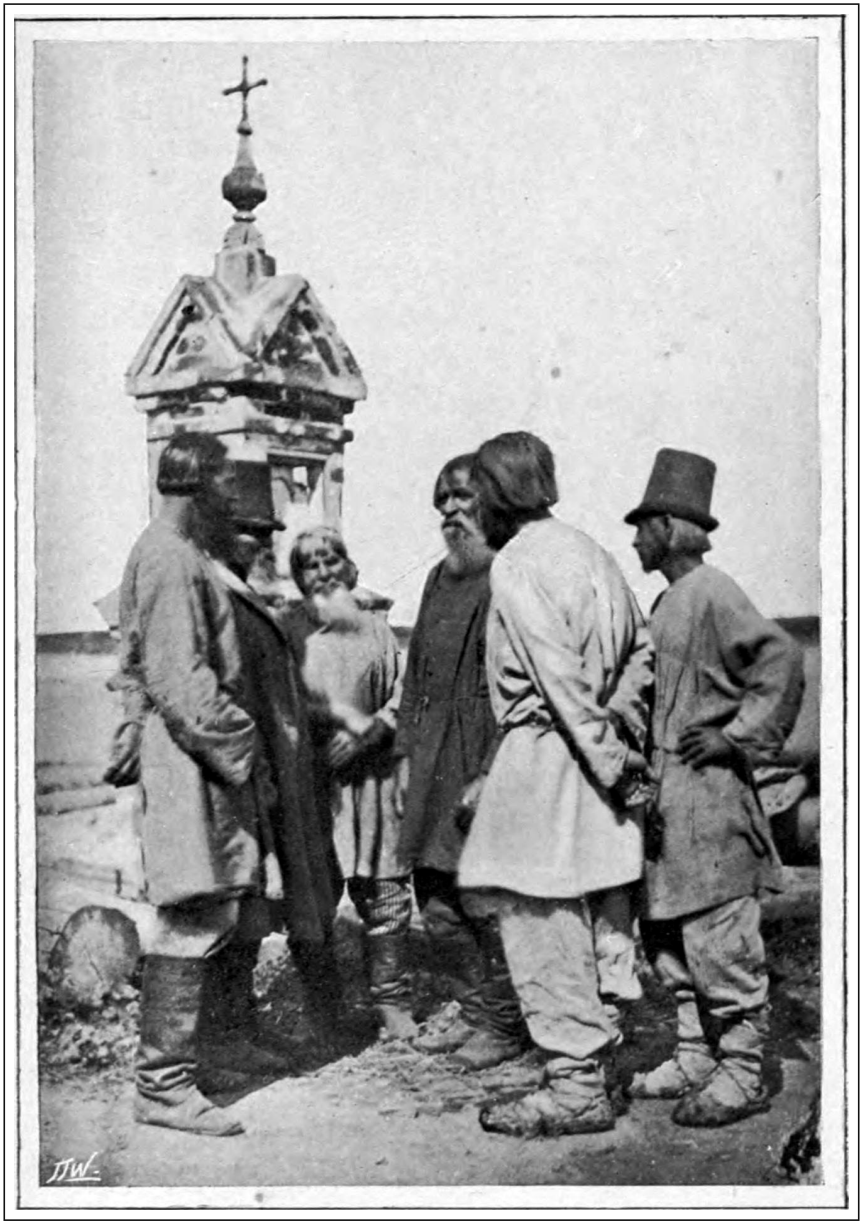
As the settlers are practically State tenants, sale and mortgage of land is forbidden. If an immigrant has a little money, and wants to purchase a particular strip, he can, however, do so on paltry terms. Near the large towns the cost for a square verst (a verst is about two-thirds of a mile) ranges from 10s, to 12s, whilst in other places good land can be bought for 6s. a verst. The buyer must deposit half the sum in the local treasury. This ensures the delivery of the land for three years' use or profit. Full proprietorship is obtained by the buyer spending, on plant and working, a sum not less than twice the

cost of allotment. From 1898 to last year 18,900,000 acres of State land in Western Siberia were transformed into immigration plots.

May is the month when the tide of immigration sets in. As Russian official red tape is quite as slow unwinding as elsewhere there are often huge crowds of emigrants at stations, thousands even, waiting for days till they can be conducted to their plots. Naturally enough there is misery among the ignorant immigrants who get dumped in a particular district, knowing little about the climate or the soil. So the Government have appointed Commissions of Inquiry, though neither the immigrant nor those already settled have any voice. Further, there has been organised among Russian philanthropists a relief committee which has representatives at thirty stations where immigrants chiefly stop, and these men give advice to the discouraged and sick.

I confess to being amazed by the inducements held out so that Siberia may be speedily peopled. Not only at every station is the big steaming samovar, so that hot water may be obtained for the constant occupation of tea drinking, but at every station also is a big chest of medical appliances, and there is always an official who must know how to render first aid to the injured. Food for children, sick persons, and indigent may be got free. Other immigrants buy their food at cost price. Then on arriving at their destination the immigrants receive seed from the Government for next to nothing. Tools are to be bought on easy terms.

Nowhere in the United States—and Siberia is frequently alluded to as the new America—have I seen such an expanse of magnificent agricultural land waiting for man and his plough. And yet there is small prospect for some generations, at least, that Siberia, through Russian farmers, will give of its teeming abundance to the rest of the world.



Village Cronies.

The fact is, the Russian is one of the worst farmers on the face of the earth. It is probably the strong strain of the Tartar in him that makes him indolent. He is certainly no born agriculturist. Catherine the Second recognised this a hundred years ago when she invited German colonists to settle in Southern Russia, hoping. their example would have effect on the Russians themselves. Five years ago I went through this colonised region. Compared with Siberia it was a wilderness. The German villages, however, were neat and clean. There was frugality among the people. The farms might yield little, but they were cared for, properly tilled, and all fenced. The Russian villages, however, were masses of filth and misery. The houses were dirty, and turned one's stomach; all the farm buildings were in a state of decrepitude, and if a fence broke it remained broken. The land was neglected and gave a wretched return. There was sloth everywhere.

It always struck me that the moudjik cared for nothing but animal satisfaction, enough food for the day and enough kopecks so that he might get drunk with vodki on the Sunday.

The Russian Government, with all its faults, and undoubtedly they are many, is acting benevolently to the Siberian settlers, buying American agricultural machinery, and re-selling on easy instalment terms. Yet everywhere I remarked how the immigrant lacks energy. First of all, he won't live on a farm three, five, or ten miles from anybody else. He insists on living in a village or town, though his farm may be thirty miles away. He tills a stretch of ground, and sows wheat, but he never thinks of reaping till it is dead ripe; then he cuts with a hand sickle, and half the foodstuff rots in the rains. When he has used up one piece of ground he moves to another. He doesn't understand manuring. He doesn't look forward to the next year, or the year after. Asa rule, he has no desire to get rich. That impetus, which has done so much to spur the American, is non-existent. To get through life with as little trouble as he can seems his only ambition.

The farmers, are, of course, all of the old serf class. They have behind them an ancestry little removed from slaves, with nothing to mark them from beasts of burden but their speech. From such a people a bright and intelligent

yeomanry is, of course, not to be expected. Every crowd of moudjiks I came across had the same sluggish, bullish, coarse expression.

The Government, as I have explained, is trying to educate the settlers into the advantages of modern appliances. But when all that is done Siberia will give but the scrapings of its wealth, for no Government and no machinery can alter the character of a race. And the great block to development for generations will be that the Russians have not the real qualities of agriculturists.

Every day as I travelled through this land and looked at its possibilities I found myself muttering, "Oh for a hundred families of my own North-country yeomen to settle here to show what can be done, and in half a generation go home with fortunes made."

Siberia is a good country for horses. They are sturdy workers, and as hardy as you can find. In Central Siberia there are eighty-five horses to every hundred of population. In the United States the proportion is twenty-two to the hundred, and in France seven to the hundred. The Siberian proportion, indeed, is only excelled by the Argentine Republic, where the rate is 112 horses to every hundred inhabitants. In the region of the Trans-Siberian Railway from Cheylabinsk to Irkutsk it is estimated there is something like three million horses. The average peasant horse is worth from 24s, to 30s. The horses used for the post,and which have enormous powers of speed and endurance, cost from £2 10s. to £3. The finest horses, which would fetch about £60 in England, ate to be got from £5 to £7.

Under the impetus of the butter industry it is likely enough the rearing of cattle will somewhat improve. At present beasts are small and lean, and bullocks are chiefly used for draught.

The vast tracks of natural pasture are ideal for sheep grazing. The fat-tailed Tartar sheep is the best. At present these sheep are reared for the fat on their tail. This fat grows all through the summer, and a yearling will give twenty pounds of tallow. In the winter months the tail gradually disappears. It is one of the provisions of nature. When no food is to be got because of the snow the animal gets sustenance by the gradual disappearance of the fat tail. When it is housed and fed in the winter months the tail remains. This fat-

tailed Tartar sheep is not, however, very good for wool. An inferior sheep is bred for this.

In a purely agricultural region comparison of heads of animals with numbers of population is interesting. The proportion of horned cattle varies from fifty per hundred inhabitants in West Siberia to seventy per hundred in East Siberia. As to sheep there are eighty-five to the hundred in the West, but in the East there are 135 sheep to every hundred of inhabitants. In the towns I have inquired the price of meat. Fairly good beef and mutton can be got for 2d. and 3d. a pound, and a good plump chicken can be brought for 8d.

It was the fine skins that the nomads brought over the Urals that first attracted Russian trade in Siberia. The most valuable is the sable. The tribes hunt for sable in winter. Mounted on snow-shoes they go into the forest and follow the trails. Sometimes a sable gets into a hole, and then the hunter must wait, maybe for days, before it will come out. But it is worth waiting for; the skin will bring him from 50s. to £9—a considerable sum to a nomad. The skin of the blue fox is also much prized. Some authorities say the blue fox is the same as the white Arctic fox—only the summers are so short in the Polar regions that the fox does not think it worth while altering his fur, whilst in the south he does not put on his white fur because the summers are long. Only the piece by the paws is worn by rich Russians, and the rest is exported. A cloak of these paws is worth £1,000. A black fox skin is worth £50, and a silver fox skin will fetch £25.

The whole country is full of bear, reindeer, wolf, elk, beaver, hare, and antelope. Ardent sportsmen, seeking for some fresh country to try their guns, might do worse than go to Siberia for a couple of months in early autumn. 'Besides animals, they will find plenty of game—geese, ducks, grouse. If the sportsmen get among the Kirghiz tribe they may see good hawking. These people have big, well-trained hawks that will strike foxes and even wolves.

All this—though possibly dull to the man who would like a series of thrilling convict stories—will, I hope, do one thing. It will indicate that Siberia is not the harsh frozen prison too generally imagined.

Now a word or two respecting the government of Siberia. It is divided into four oblasts, or provinces. At the head of each is a Governor-General, who

represents the Czar, and has supreme control over both civil and military affairs. There are various councils who advise the Governor-General, and each province is divided into districts with administrative institutions. Each town has a municipality, elected by householders. Each village is a small commune with an elected mayor and magistrates. The commune keeps a sharp look-out upon the doings of its members, for the community is made to suffer when the news of wrong-doing reaches the higher authorities. The chief person in all the village is the pisar, or mayor's secretary. He is the one person who must be able to read and write, for the members of the peasant Parliament are very likely devoid of these qualifications. Therefore the pisar is a sort of village Pooh-Bah. His salary is generally in kind.

Vile and stenching as are most of the villages, it is impossible to help admiring the substantial and clever way in which the houses are built of logs roughly hewn with an axe, dove-tailed at the corners, and with a layer of moss between each beam to avoid draughts. During six winter months the double windows are closely shut and puttied up, and in summer very little air can get into the house because the windows won't open.

There is no bedroom as we understand it. At night cushions are spread on the floor, and the whole family sleep in their clothes. In the morning they give their faces a rub with water, but use no soap. I don't recommend the peasant way of washing one's face. He fills his mouth with water, and gently squirts it from between his lips to his hands.

Naturally enough the pleasures of these agriculturists, far from what is considered civilisation, are few. Getting drunk is regarded as a very excellent thing, and often very vile is the liquor. In each village, however, is generally a young fellow who can play the accordion; and so in the evening there is often dancing. The women are not very attractive. They are stodgy and expressionless. Their one touch of vanity is to have a gaudy shawl tied about the head.

I went much among these peasants trying to get a glimpse of their lives. Though often the smell of the houses made me feel ill, I received nothing but courtesy. They are simple-minded people, very religious and very superstitious. And although there may not be a house in the village more dignified than we would use as a cowshed, there is always a big white church, with

towers of oriental, bulbous shape, painted blue or gilded. In the right hand corner of every room of every hut is a sacred picture called an icon. The peasant never finishes a crust of black bread without standing before the icon and crossing himself He may be on the way to the vodki shop, but when passing the church he takes off his hat and makes the sign of the cross) When he is drunk he is not quarrelsome. He is worse—for he becomes very affectionate, and wants to kiss you!

He won't start on a journey on Monday, and if he sets out on a Tuesday or any other day, and the first person he happens to meet is a priest, he will turn back. When there is lightning which frightens him he recalls the names of his bald-headed friends, and so stops it!

Only two steps above the savage is the peasant as I saw him in Siberia) He is uncouth, and his passions are primitive. He hulks about with his red shirt outside his trousers, and never does to-day what he can put off till to-morrow. But he has come to a fine country. Siberia is no longer an evil-omened word. It is capable of much more than freezing exiles to death. And it is with the object of making that fact plain I have written this chapter.

Dinner Time on a Farm.

## Chapter VI

# A Caravanserai for Orgies

❦

From Omsk to Tomsk is some six hundred miles, and the post train by which I journeyed took just under two days. The mail arrives at Omsk at half-past eleven at night, allows two hours for carousal in the buffet, and then at half-past one snorts on its eastward way.

I was assured, by all the saints to whom the Russians do reverence, there wasn't a spare carriage in the entire train. But bribery is the one thing that opens doors in Russia, and when I whispered to the conductor that I would provide him with the means of having many cups of tea—the Muscovite save-your-face style of intimating you are prepared to offer an insult in hard cash—he muttered "Cechas," and I knew all would be well. Also, I knew just as well as he did that he had one or two coupés unoccupied, but with locked doors, and that he would swear there was a sick lady inside, or two Jews, or a family of children with the small-pox, until tea-money was suggested.

"Cechas!" the conductor had said. Literally "cechas" means "within the hour"; idiomatically it means "at the earliest moment"; actually, as everybody who has travelled in Russia knows, it means now, to-morrow, next week, possibly not at all. If waiters at Russian hotels ever babble in their sleep they cry, "Cechas! cechas!" The last words of a Russian railway porter, when he must leave the pale glimpses of the moon and hie him to sublime or sulphurous realms, will be "Cechas!" It is a word that rings in your ears from the instant you set foot in the Empire of the Great White Czar till you leave it.

So I sat on the corner of my leather bag and smoked an English briar charged with English tobacco, and watched the bustling scene; looked in at the buffet, where everyone seemed to be feverishly guzzling; occasionally I walked to the far end of the platform, and gazed at the clear star-sprinkled sky, and recalled it was just about time for afternoon tea in far-away sunny England—though I couldn't tell it was sunny, but hoped it was so for the love of home.

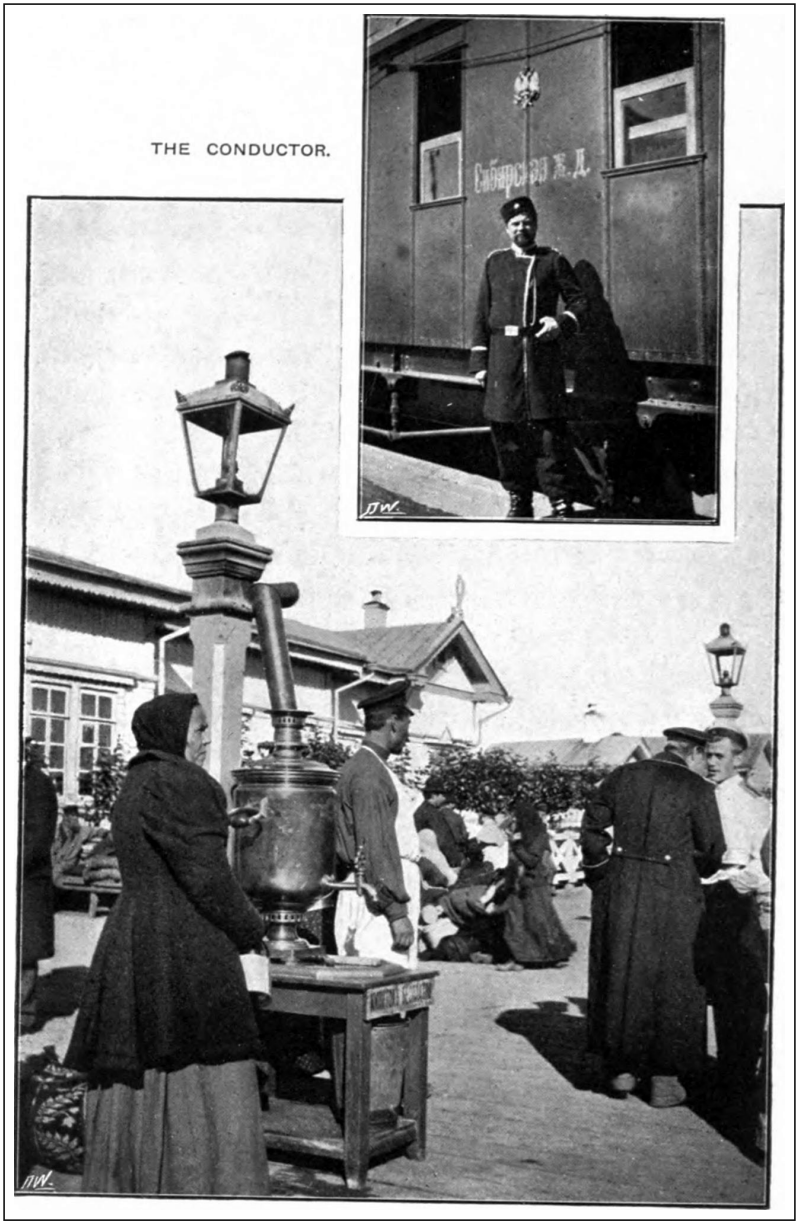
IT explored the first corridor section of the cars, hoping to find a compartment. I was growled at—probably sworn at, for my acquaintance with Slavonic anathema is happily that of a child—by drowsy Russians, or I found the doors locked. Then I went on the chase for my conductor, and finally ran him down in the third-class refreshment room, where he was drinking Samara ale, with a trade mark on the label of a red pyramid, which showed that the brewers at Samara, on the banks of the Volga, have some acquaintance with the mainstay of Burton, on the banks of the Trent. I remonstrated in halting Russian, and asked about that carriage.

"Cechas, cechas said he.

"Cechas be something," said I. He was probably wanting me to increase the insult. But I wasn't disposed.

Then I produced a little weapon I was carrying in my pocket. No, it was not a revolver. It was simply an open letter from Prince Hilkoff, the chief of the railway, informing all officials on the line that I was a journalist travelling through Siberia with the special permission of the Czar, and that I was to be given assistance and shown courtesy.

There is nothing that impresses a Russian so much as a big name and a big seal. I've an idea the more sealing wax used the more important is the document regarded.




There is a Samovar at Every Station.

"Cechas!" exclaimed my big, slothful, bribe-seeking conductor, and he cechased into the train, gave me a compartment, insisted on helping to put my baggage straight, and saluted me as though I were a decorated field-marshal, instead of a meek-eyed young man in a slouch hat, smoking a common briar-wood pipe, bought at the Stores for tenpence.

So I was comfortable—for a time. In the compartment on one side of me was a gentleman who snored. I saw him in the morning. He was very corpulent, but with weedy legs, no neck, and a face that was porcine. His snore was three-parts grunt. Every now and then it would seem something stuck somewhere. There was a momentary pause. Then came a gruff blast that, without exaggeration, shook the train. I could sleep through the rowdyism of the four card-playing, vodki-drinking young officers on the other side of me, but the snore of that fat Russian as we crawled eastwards through Siberia irritated. It was necessary to plug my ears and wrap my head in a rug before endeavouring to snatch sleep.

Morning brought drenching rain, and anything that might have been pleasing was soaked out of the landscape. The rain fell in torrents. The clouds trailed their skirts across the land. When they lifted we were beyond the plain, and in a gentle undulating region, with frequent lakes, some of them miles in length.

The stations at which we made such long halts were now drab painted, and with green roofs. There was generally a bedraggled gang of peasant women, waiting to sell milk and cooked fowls and eggs and bread.

It was a very chilly two days that I do not recall distinctly. When I was hungry I dived into the little buffets, and ate uninquiringly of the strange dishes provided. Then I dived back to my carriage, wrapped myself in coat and rug, and read and dozed the two days away. There was nothing exciting. The only thing to record was that on the second morning we were running through a forest of pine and larch.

If you look at a recent map of Siberia you may see the railway line marked in red. If the line runs through Tomsk it is inaccurate. If, however, a tiny little eighth-of-an-inch long branch line points northwards to Tomsk it is correct.

Tomsk, the capital of Siberia, is eighty-two versts from the junction station of Taiga, which means "in the woods."

And why doesn't the Great Trans-Siberian Railway run through the capital? It is an old story I was always hearing with regard to this line. It was laid in corruption.

"How much will you give us if we bring the line past Tomsk asked the surveyors and engineers who mapped the route.

"Nothing!" replied Tomsk. "We are the capital of Siberia, and you can't avoid coming here."

"Oh, can't we?" replied the route-finders. "If you don't produce so many thousand roubles there will be insurmountable engineering difficulties that will prevent us coming within a long way of Tomsk."

These engineering difficulties were discovered, and so the Trans-Siberian Railway sweeps along fifty miles to the south of Tomsk. And Tomsk, to put it baldly, is very sick. Its population is progressing, but as a snail progresses to a hare. Irkutsk, further east, is already ahead of it by ten thousand. So the glory of the capital is on the wane.

Of course, the Tomsk people became indignant—for Tomsk was a flourishing place, the very hub 01 Siberian trade long before railways were thought of A branch line has been constructed from Taiga. Taiga, therefore, which was little more than a signalling hut in the forest, has these last six years become a busy junction. I counted eleven tracks side by side in the goods yard. There were rows of red-painted freight vans waiting to go this way or that, and a huge engine-shed, with gangs of grimy mechanics attending the engines.

The first-class fare from Taiga to Tomsk is three roubles (about 6s.), 2 roubles 95 kopecks as a matter of fact, but there is a tax of 5 kopecks towards paying for "the war in China." Everything must have a Government stamp in Russia. You can't buy a theatre ticket without paying a tax. Still, three roubles is not so much for a fifty-mile journey first-class, especially as it takes four hours to cover the distance.

The clouds lifted in the moist eventide, making a divine sunset, as we ran through nicely wooded country that might have been a bit of homeland, if only there had been hedges and farmsteads.

Most of the passengers got off at what seemed a tiny wayside station.

"How far are we from Tomsk I asked.

"Tomsk Station

"Yes, Tomsk Station," I replied.

"About half-an-hour."

When we got to Tomsk it seemed as though I was the only passenger. I marvelled, but the next day discovered. Still the old story. Dispute between the railway builders and the town folk. The line might quite easily run to the centre of the town. It doesn't. After it gets within two miles of the place—the wayside station at which everybody got off save myself—the line makes a great half-moon bend round one side of the town, never getting nearer than the two miles, and pulls up two miles on the other side of Tomsk. That is one of the ways they do things in Siberia.

I had a jolting, bone-cracking, droshki ride through a vile sea of mud until the city was reached—another unpaved, miry, over-grown village, but with electric light everywhere.

The largest hotel is the "Europe." I went there. It had only been opened a fortnight, and it reeked with paint. The paint on the floor of my room came off like the tar on a freshly asphalted sidewalk. Everything was blue, red, and gold. At one end of the dining hall was a huge, up-to-date barrel organ, for all the world like the organs that accompany roundabouts at English fairs, only bigger. There were the harsh brass and rattling drums, clanging cymbals, and in front was a toy figure of a man with right arm jerking up and down, beating time wrong. At present this organ is the sensation of Tomsk. It makes such a row that one's appetite disappears.

But Tomsk is a rollicking wealthy city, and its evenings are given to dissipation. Between eleven at night and four in the morning that accursed organ roared airs, while high revelry held sway.

I hunted up the one Britisher in Tomsk, a Scot representing the American Trading Company, and we roamed the place together. I shall never complain again of dirty streets in England or America—after Tomsk. Two days' rain had made them canals of mud. We drove about—the filth was up to the axle-tree. Where there was any slope it was bumpy and hillocky, and it was necessary

to hold on tight or be pitched ignominiously out of the droshki. One finished a droshki ride sore all over.

The town is on low land, but within a mile is a pleasant rise until a high bank is reached overlooking the River Tom, scouring north till it joins the Obi—a most picturesque situation, the very place for villas. The wealthy of Tomsk, however, have small appreciation of the beautiful, and prefer the fetid town. It is here that the main road from the Far East to Moscow fords the river.

There is a gigantic ferry that took across in one load fourteen carts and horses and forty or fifty people. The boat was curious. At one end were three horses trotting round and round, turning a cogged shaft, which turned a pair of paddles, and these carried the ferry from side to side, while a man steered with a fish tail of an oar.

Last year the population of Tomsk was over 52,000, with 9,000 houses, 33 churches, and 25 schools. It is the educational centre of Siberia—indeed, it takes third place in the Russian Empire. In 1888 the Government contributed a million roubles to found a university, and the rich residents contributed another million. The University buildings are handsome, and about a thousand students are in attendance. The professors are mostly Germans, or of German extraction. Close by a technical college is being erected, where it is proposed to teach everything that will aid in the development of Siberia. A department has already been started for special instruction in geographical and scientific research. The public library given to the town by Count Strogoneff would do credit to an English town twice the size of Tomsk.

For three-quarters of a century now Tomsk has been close to valuable gold-fields. There is gold everywhere. It can be got out of the sand on the banks of the river Tom. The richest workings, however, are two or three days' journey away.

Siberian gold exploitation is not very popular just now in England. The reason is not the scarcity of gold, but the restrictions put by Russia upon it being worked by foreigners. I believe the Government—which is much in need of money—would make things easier, so that foreign capital might come in, if a percentage of the gold were given in return. But there is a strong

anti-foreign party in Russia constantly crying out against the country getting into the financial grip of outsiders. I heard, however, of two young fellows, a Scot and an American representing Glasgow and New York syndicates, who had for the last couple of years been putting down between thirty and forty thousand pounds' worth of quartz-crushing machinery.

The town is half full of millionaires and convicts-conviets. Most of the millionaires are themselves convict descended—uncouth, illiterate men, unable to write their own name, and absolutely ignorant of the outer world. They know no place but Tomsk, and they think there is no place like it. London and Paris are but vague names to them. If you begin talking to them about these cities they grunt, and regard you as a, liar.

Tomsk is a sort of granary for Siberia. There is a great market place, and here is brought tea from China—only 400 miles away—furs from the north, bullock and horse skins from all! the country around.

It is a quaint sight to see all the carts gathered in the market place, dirty, wheezy, hooded things, in the care of shaggy men in clattering top-boots, violent-hued shirts, and great sheepskin hats, haggling, quarrelling and bartering. Their hair is towsled and unkempt. The men, indeed, do hair-cutting for each other. They smooth it out straight over the forehead, as well as at the back of the neck. They clap on the head an earthenware bowl, that fits fairly tight, and then with shears clip away every bit of protruding hair.

At the street corners are vermin-covered deformities, willing to give you blessings in return for kopecks, or curses if you give nothing at all. Cringing, black-hooded women, carrying, like a plate, a velvet-hooded board on which is a cross, meet you everywhere—in the streets, in the shops, and even on the trains—inviting alms. They are licensed beggars on behalf of the local churches.

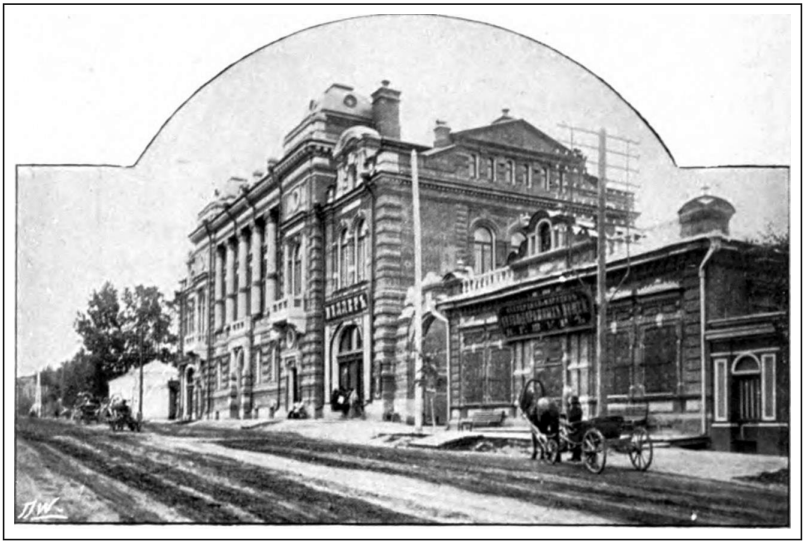
Churches are everywhere. The Cathedral is a giant place with white-washed walls and big blue bulbous domes. The inside is a blaze of gilded icons. The door leading to the "Holy of Holies" is of gold. The Russian Greek Church is fond of gilt bedizenment. The priests wear the most gorgeous vestments, and the moudjik gives his last kopeck to save his soul.

Some of the churches, however, struck me as pretty. They were low, with long shelving roofs, painted green, and very long tapering spires, also painted green.

On the shoulder of the hill adjoining the town is the Alexis Monastery, and in the grounds were walking long black-robed, long black-haired, and long black-whiskered priests—all rather dirty and greasy.

I went to see the small and crumbling old hut—protected by a special roof—where lived the old man, Theodore Kuzmilch, the bond-servant of God. Tomsk people, however, call the place "Alexandero House." The one dimly lighted room is made into a sort of chapel. There are sacred pictures on the wall, and lights ever burning before them.

Kuzmilch, it is said, had been exiled from Russia for vagrancy, and coming to Tomsk a merchant gave him this hut, and here he lived for eleven years as a hermit on bread and water, and never went out except to church or to do some kindly act. He died in 1864. There is a picture of him in the hut, a gaunt, hollow-cheeked, eagle-eyed old man with long white hair. Close by, however, is a painting of Czar Alexander I. when he first came to the throne, and also a picture of Alexander in middle life.



The Club-house at Tomsk.



The Theatre at Tomsk.

It is believed in Tomsk that this hermit, who now lies buried in the monastery grounds, was no Theodore Kuzmilch, but Alexander I. himself. Alexander abdicated the throne of Russia because all his plans for the good of his people had failed. He was tired and weary of his position. So while on a journey to the Crimea for the benefit of his health it was given out that he died at Taganrog. Public opinion declared that, with the consent of his successor, Nicholas I., another corpse was taken to St. Petersburg and buried in state. Alexander disappeared. Nothing was heard of him till he turned up as a wanderer in Tomsk. He was recognised but by one person, a merchant. The secret was well kept, and it was not till long after his death that it leaked out that old Theodore was the Czar. Such, at any rate, is the story told in Tomsk.

Like all cities to which wealth comes easily, Tomsk is licentious, extravagant, and life is not counted of much value.

I saw a dirty old man slithering in the mud. "The richest man in Tomsk, a rouble millionaire four times over," I was told.,

A couple of ladies, fashionably dressed, splashed by in a carriage drawn by a pair of horses. "One is the daughter of a convict, and the other is engaged to be married to a convict's son."

Another man trailed past. "That man is a prince; he belongs to an older family than the reigning house of Romanoff. He is nephew of the Governor of Moscow. He's a bad lot, and was the head of a gang of swindlers. He got hold of a rich Englishman anxious to settle in Moscow. In the Governor's absence he took the Englishman to the Governor's house, pretending it was his own, and sold it for 30,000 roubles. It was the Englishman who was sold. That is why the prince is exiled to Tomsk. He's a solicitor here."

Some dark-eyed, keen-featured women went past. "Jews!" said my companion. "Jews are the curse of Siberia, as they are of Russia. The Russians and Siberians are not good business men. The Jews are. The Government is hard on them, but the Jew here gets baptised a Christian, and so he can cheat, outwit, grow enormously rich. But he is a Jew at heart all the same. If you were a Russian and had business to do in Russia you would understand why the Jew is hated."

A group of intelligent young fellows strolled by Students—many of them ardent young men who read all the Western literature they can get hold of. In 1900 a lot of them had a procession through the streets, singing student songs out of sympathy with the Moscow and Petersburg students, who were rioting for reform. Next day two hundred of them were taken by the authorities out of the town. These lads of twenty had been exiled!

The Russian Government, I will say, is much traduced. But it does often show a childish fear. Fancy exiling those boys! Fancy exiling Glasgow students because they had a procession in the streets i

There being plenty of money in Tomsk, pleasure is the one pursuit. Not to be immoral is to be suspected of revolutionary ideas. Laxity of conduct is the best sign of good fellowship. Nowhere, I confess, did I see signs of refinement. The houses are glorified huts with red paint and plush. To squander money in drunken carousal, and to load his womenkind with pearls and sables, is the ambition of the average Tomsk man. There is a flavour of the Californian gold-digging days about Tomsk, but with the romance left out.

On the whole, I was not favourably impressed with the capital of Siberia. It is a caravanserai for orgies,

## Chapter VII

# Vagrant Notes by the Way

❦

From Tomsk, the present capital of Siberia, to Irkutsk, the future capital, and already called the Paris of Siberia, took three and a half days.

Had I been on the search for adventure I could not have sought, the wide world through, a more unromantic route. We had long hidden good-bye to the prairies, and now ran through a region of forest and heaving countryside, with many rivers to cross, and sighted at last, like a grey-purple cloud humped on the horizon, the gaunt, snow-creviced mountains that wall China.

I have heard this railway journey across Siberia dubbed uninteresting. Maybe it is; but, being of simple tastes, I ceased to find it so.

The weather was as it should be. There was a nip of frost in the early mornings, so that breath puffed hoary. The middle of the day was sunshiny, the sky as blue as Irish eyes, and never a woof of cloud to be seen. There was the fragrance of pine in the air. Then the fall of evening was so still, so impressive; the west ribbed with fire and topped with palest green, the dome of heaven deep azure, and the east, coming up like a shroud, recalling other days in far Western America.

When I got back from Tomsk to Taiga the junction on the main line, I had a wait of four hours before the post train from Moscow went on.

The stretch of platform in front of the grey-walled, green-roofed station buildings was full of emigrants. They had their bundles thrown into heaps, and they squatted on the ground and used the bundles as back-rests, Maybe

my eyes were getting used to the sight of hulking men in red shirts and heavy, long-legged boots and rough sheepskin caps, but these did not look quite so brutal as those I saw at Moscow. They lay about, and slept in ungraceful attitudes. Their wives, with the patience of cows on their plain faces, sat in groups talking quietly and chewing sunflower seeds and spitting out the shells, or fetching hot water from the ever-bubbling public samovar to make tea. In and about them moved a wiry, kindly-faced man, selling cheap copies of the Scriptures.

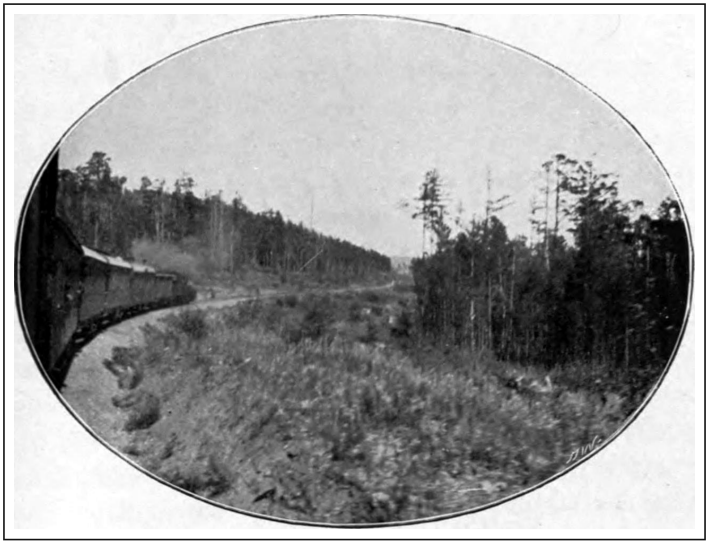
The children, and there were hundreds of them, were bare-footed, ragged-breeked little savages, supremely happy.

Half-a-dozen boys made themselves into an imaginary train by hitching with one hand to each other's shirt-tail, the other hand playing the part of imaginary wheel, and so went shou-shouing up and down the platform.

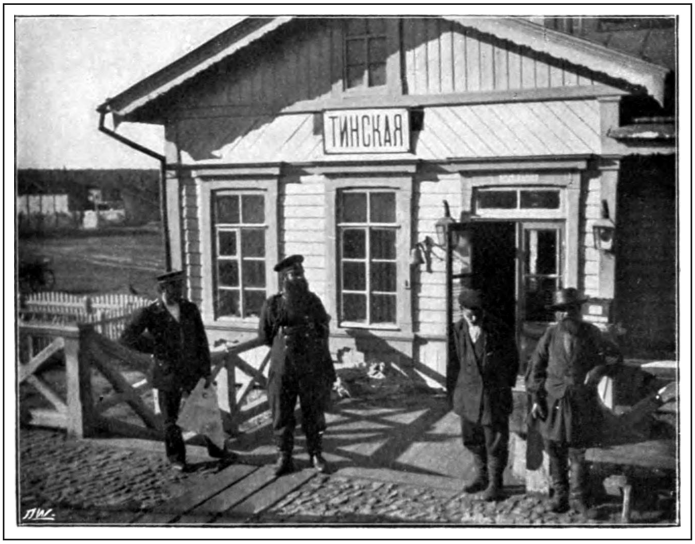
There were two lads I particularly noticed. At every station where we halted they jumped out and filled their pockets with stones. The intervals between the stations were occupied with pelting the telegraph poles from the carriage window. The animal called Boy is the same in all climes.

There were many Tartars, ungainly-limbed, sallow-cheeked, beady-eyed Mongols, in astrakhan hats and padded, quilted frock-coats and short trousers and flip-flapping slippers. They sat on their beds, and looked at each other slothfully and blinkingly.

Then there were the ordinary middle-class Russians, who might have been stodgy Teutons for all the distinction there was in costume.



Through the Taiga.




A Wayside Station.

Colour was given by the men in uniform, the white jackets and the blue trousers and gold decorations and clanging spurs. Every man in Government employ, be he soldier or ticket-collector, wears uniform, and half the men above the peasant class seemed to be officials of some kind.

It was at Taiga I became conscious of the fact I was being watched. I felt the knowledge of the fact creep in somewhere at the back of my neck. I turned hurriedly and caught the departing side-glance of a short, inquisitive-eyed and tufty-bearded gentleman. I knew he was watching me. Maybe he belonged to that mysterious body, the Russian Secret Police. Maybe he thought I was a Soho-Nihilist—though I hope there was nothing suggestive of Soho in my attire, save my old knockabout slouch hat.

I took a stroll to the far end of the platform. He followed and pretended not to be looking when I turned, but when I again passed him I could feel his gaze, like a Rontgen-ray, go into the side of my head.

When the Moscow-Irkutsk post train arrived I hunted out a carriage and prepared to make myself comfortable for four nights. Suddenly the door was jerked open, and as suddenly jerked shut again. It was my little spy. I heard whispering in the next compartment, and when I went into the corridor my spy—I got to regard him as my own particular property after three days—and the conductor came and stared.

Whenever I left my carriage he left his. I couldn't go into the buffet and have a cup of soup without my spy sitting opposite me. If I wandered for ten minutes into the woods to take a photograph, or climbed a bank to get a snapshot of the train, he was near.

Truly, as a spy, he played the game badly. It was all too patent. If I could have really acted suspiciously I would have done so, just to fool him to the top of his bent. All I could think of was to look at embankments, simulating wisdom, as though calculating how much dynamite it would need to blow them into the air, or walk along the line and inspect the rails, as though I had some deep design in mind. But I maintained an air of sublime ignorance that he was on the earth.

It was the evening before we reached Irkutsk, and the train was halting for half-an-hour, when, all at once, there was a row next door. I sprang into the corridor to see.

There were the railway officials ignominiously throwing my spy and his belongings out. The inquisitive little fellow had never seen a foreigner before, and he was travelling first-class with a second-class ticket. He was very petulant at this indignity of ejection. He fretted and fumed. But "out you go and get into a back carriage," was the attitude of the officials. As he picked up his bedding and kettle he looked at me. I could not resist the temptation to give him two broad, slow British winks and then laugh. It was the only revenge I had.

A railway journey such as this I was embarked upon was much like a voyage aboard ship. The passengers struck up acquaintance, and a kind of family feeling prevailed. Like the rest, I jumped from the train in the fresh of the early morning—and how crisp and blood-tingling is the welcome of the young day in Siberia—and ran with my little kettle to the big bubbling samovar that somebody had got ready, and joined the good-natured struggle for hot water.

It was the same each morning. Most of us were sleepy-eyed and uncombed. There were peasant women with baskets, in which were great slabs of that morning's bread, brown and spongy and a little sour, which I fancied. For a penny got hunk. The first-class and second-class folk, being more "swagger" than the third-class and fourth-class people—the first and second men wear their shirts tucked in their trousers, and the third and fourth wear theirs outside—often bought fransoozki kleb, which, you understand, means French bread. But for this twopence must be paid. From another old peasant woman I got a pat of butter, cool and delicious, for twopence, and for fourpence I secured a plate of blackberries.

Then back to my carriage, where I have tea and sugar—my packet of tea burst one night and got mixed up with pyjamas, cigars, and shaving tackle—and I squat on the floor and make the most delicious tea in the world.

There is something constitutionally wrong with a man who doesn't like Russian tea—rather weak, with a little lump of sugar and a little slice of lem-

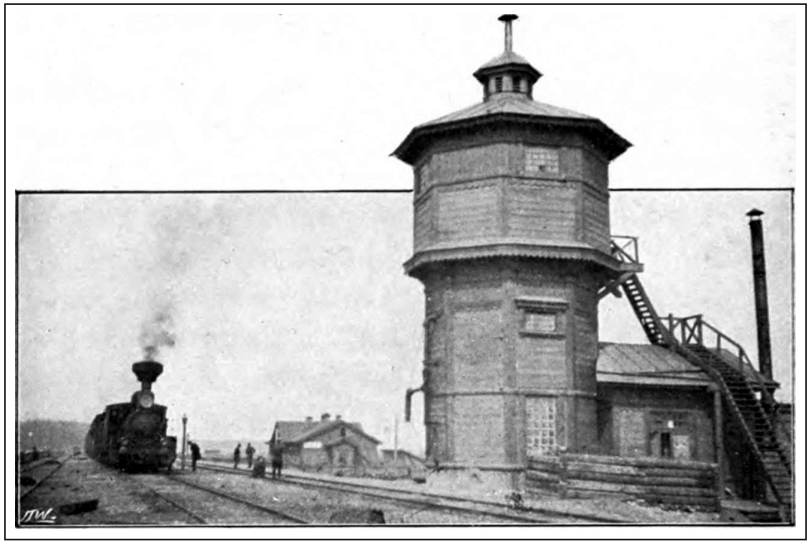
on, and no milk, and drunk from a tumbler. I—who for several days had no spoon, and not knowing the Russian for "spoon" found a paper-knife an excellent substitute—could write an epic on Russian -tea-drinking.

Then with the window wide open, while the train rolls slowly through the forest, the engine bellowing with long hollow echoes like a steamer crawling its way up the Mersey in a fog, I drink glasses of tea, many of them, until I must be "visibly swelling'," and munch my new bread and new butter, and eat my berries with the dew still upon them. Then a pipe, and a long look upon the never-ending regiments of trees, tall, slim, silver-barked.

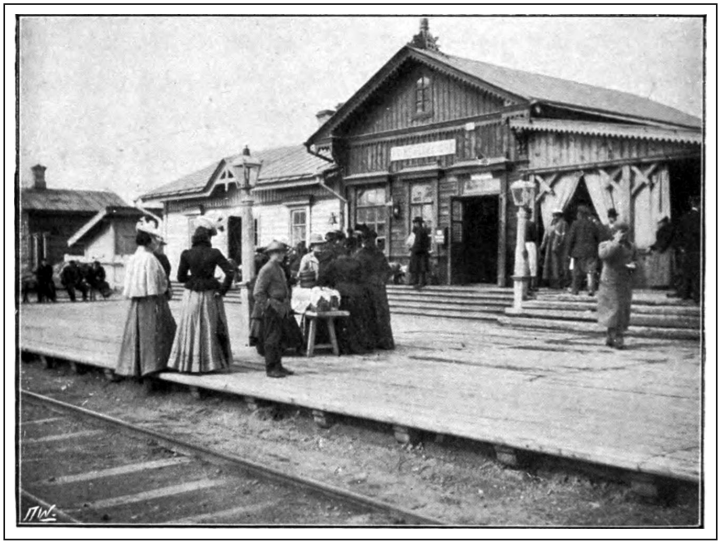
For fifty yards or so each side the line was a clearing, and the trunks of the slain stuck up like black knuckles in miles, miles, miles of gorgeous undergrowth. It was as though there was a carpet of virginia creeper as blood-red as the wine of Capri, but with a clear yellow dash now and then, like Moselle, to bring out the brilliance, and with the drab velvety dust of the line between.

Later on we were among pines, nothing but pines, the ground sprinkled with sunlight, but the distances dark as caverns. Here, in the clearing, a fresh crop of firs was springing up, with young limbs as green as a shallow sea. I thought of the millions and millions of Christmas trees they would make.

The fact of being in Siberia often slipped away from my mind. When you go from London to Bournemouth the run through the New Forest does not make you think of Siberia. Yet we kept going all day, all night, several days and nights, through just such a country. It was the continuity of it, the seeming endlessness of it, that brought one with a jerk to realise something of its length.



There is a Huge Water-tower at Every Station.



A Typical Siberian Station.

Though this Trans-Siberian track is a wonder of the world, all built within ten years, the idea of some such a way has filtered through the minds of men for a generation or more. It is interesting that it was an English engineer, with the unkind name of Dull, who, away back in the fifties, thought of a horse railway from Nijni-Novgorod to some port on the Pacific. As there were some four million horses in Siberia, the idea was not a bad one. The Russian Government approved of the plan, and invited estimates of cost. But not a single estimate was sent in, and so Dull's scheme passed to the limbo of might-have-been. Then with the growth of railways in Europe came other Siberian plans, to throw a railway over the Ural mountains to the mining regions. After years of rejection and re-consideration such a line was made. Then other lines were made, chiefly to get into touch with the trading centres in Siberia on the banks of the rivers. And no country in the world has such navigable rivers as Siberia. Look at a fair-sized map, and you will see there is a cobweb of them—the Obi, the Yenisei, the Lena, the Amur, with a hundred tributaries. But like a vision—as we sometimes think it will be possible some day to go to America by airship—kept floating before the brains of engineers the idea of one continuous line from Moscow to the Pacific. Then one morning came the order from the Czar of All the Russias, "Let it be done."

And it was done. And I was now riding over it in as comfortable a carriage as I want anywhere.

The train was certainly slow, so slow and easy that it was possible to shave even when at its topmost express speed of fifteen miles an hour.

The cuttings were few and the banks few. The route of least resistance was followed, and if there were any hump of ground in the way the line went round it rather than through. The result was that the track, for the most part, was just a foot of earth shovelled up from either side. The sleepers or ties were thrown on this, and the rails clamped.

There could not be much speed on a way like this. Now and then the coaches side-rolled in an uncomfortable manner, showing there had been unevenness in the metal-laying. But this was occasionally. As a rule the train was steady, and it was possible to sleep the night through without a single awakening.

Already it has been discovered that the track has not been sufficiently ballasted, and that the rails are altogether too light for the traffic, which is becoming heavy. So, now, for long stretches, the line is being freshly ballasted and relaid. I saw thousands of workmen, broad built, but not tall, with dark, heavily bearded countenances, men of sturdiness. They are all rough-clad. They are hundreds of miles from any town. They are confined to this little open streak, slicing like a knife through the pines.

'They stood aside, and rubbing with hairy arms the sweat from their brow, gave a good-natured nod to anybody with head pushed out of the window. They had temporary huts, and yet hardly huts, for they were often nothing more than a slanting roof made of sleepers, beneath which they could crawl and sleep.

I often looked out in the dawn and saw them taking their first meal of tea and brown bread. I never saw them take anything else at any other meal. They lived on tea and brown bread, and didn't look weaklings. Once, or, at the outside, twice a week they had beef at a meal. Their wages were 10½d. a day.

It was always a striking scene as darkness came, and when the engine fires threw long shafts of light up to the sky and among the black foliage, to pass a camp of these men by the forest side, their kettles boiling over a heap of crackling twigs, and they themselves lounging on the ground, dead-tired men, and the fire-light playing on their dark Slavonic countenances.

All along the line, for thousands of miles, are good-conduct convicts, who spend their lives in little huts, always a verst apart, and signal with green flags that the road is clear. Many of them looked far above the railway labourers in intelligence. But on the faces of them all was an abiding sadness born of the loneliness of the life they lead, with never the shadow of hope for the future.

At night it is a green lamp that is used. Many an hour towards midnight I stood on the gangway between the carriages and ticked off the green lights as we spun along. Away down the black avenue would appear a tiny green speck. As the carriages rumbled over the metals it would get bigger. Just distinguishable in the darkness was the figure of a man holding the lamp high

up. He and his light would be lost the instant it was passed. But when all the train had gone by he turned and showed the light the other way. I instinctively turned and looked ahead again. And yonder in the distance was another tiny green speck.

Just in itself there is nothing much in such a simple signal. It is, however, when you think there are thousands of these men, and that a signal started to-day at Moscow runs for eleven days until it is broken on the banks of Lake Baikal, beyond Irkutsk, that the twinkling green lights get a peculiar interest.

There is one thing to be said for the Trans-Siberian Railway—that hardly ever does a train arrive behind time. Indeed, I have known the train run into a station twenty minutes before time, and as a rule it is five minutes in advance.

At first you find the time-table a Chinese problem. It took me a whole morning to grasp it. First you find your watch doesn't tally with the obvious time of day, and when you look at the station clock that clock is unmistakably hours behind. You see the train is down to arrive at a particular place at a particular time, say half-past seven; but you know it is actually mid-day. There is confusion, which is due to the line running continuously towards the sun.

To keep things in order, however, the railway authorities ignore the sun, and keep Petersburg time. So in Eastern Siberia, when the sun is setting, the station clock will indicate lunch time. Therefore, first of all, the time-table shows Petersburg time. But as every station is about ten miles from the town it is supposed to serve, intending passengers cannot be expected to make a special trip to find railway time. Accordingly, on the time-table is printed in red the local time as well. You personally want local sun time, and, when you have mastered the time-table so far, you set your watch in the morning by the red figures. But when you glance at your watch towards evening you find something wrong, that your watch is quite ten minutes behind local time. You marvel, think your watch has got out of repair, and what a nuisance this is in a country like Siberia Suddenly, however, you condemn yourself as a dunderheaded idiot for not understanding before that local time is continuously changing.

It is endless worry trying to keep pace. I didn't try. Each morning I just put my watch ten minutes ahead of the local time, and was content with its being correct, there or thereabouts, for the rest of the day.

As the clanging of the station bell gave plenty of warning when the train proposed to go on, the halts were not to be ignored. It was possible to have a pleasant walk. Half the train-load turned out, and, while elders just sauntered about, the younger ones pushed among the undergrowth or dived into the forest, and came back with berries or tangles of bright red creeper. There was a young fellow and his wife travelling in the same corridor car as myself. They were very young, and he was going east to make his fortune. Always when the train stopped they set off hand-in-hand to the woods, and came running back, panting, at the last clang of the bell. But the girl had a bunch of pretty wild flowers. Their carriage must have been a perfect bower.

A fine bridge spans the Yenisei River near Krasnayarsk, a town beyond the great forest and lying in a plain encircled with hills—really a pretty place. A cathedral of swelling proportions gives dignity to it. It cost £70,000, and was presented by a fortunate gold-finder. The same gold-finder gave Krasnayarsk beautiful public gardens, considered the finest in Siberia, though that does not mean much. There is also a museum presented by a rich merchant.

Indeed, in all the great towns of Siberia the men who have amassed wealth —many of them sons of convicts, absolutely ignorant of the outer world, often leading a vicious life—vie with one another in beautifying their native place. The favourite thing is to build a church,

## Chapter VIII

# The Paris of Siberia

❦

The great lumbering train, travel-smeared with eight days' run from Cheylabinsk, made a last wayside stop.

That the greatest city of Siberia was at hand was shown in the altered appearance of the passengers as they sprang from the cars and hastened to the buffet for tea, coffee, and fresh rolls. Men who had worn the same flannel shirt for a week came forth in white front and collar and bright tie. Razors had been busy, for many a ten days' scrub of whisker was gone. Women whom I had seen with light shawl thrown over head and shoulders fluttered in the glory of tailor-made jackets and radiant hats.

The only folk who still wore the same clothes, the bright shirts and patched baggy trousers and cumbrous big boots, and who hadn't shaved or washed or combed, were the peasants.

At the wayside station were other passengers waiting. They were boys and girls from ten to sixteen, the lads in grey, with a black belt round the waist and a peaked cap, and on their backs cowhide bags containing school-books —smart lads going into Irkutsk to the Gymnasium. The girls were dressed exactly the same as you find schoolgirls of the same age in Leeds or Manchester or Edinburgh. They carried their school-bags neatly strapped and behaved demurely, as young misses should, though their brothers were noisy youngsters, crowding into the same carriage and yelling and behaving exactly

as their Anglichani cousins five thousand miles away behave when they go from their suburb to school in the big town.

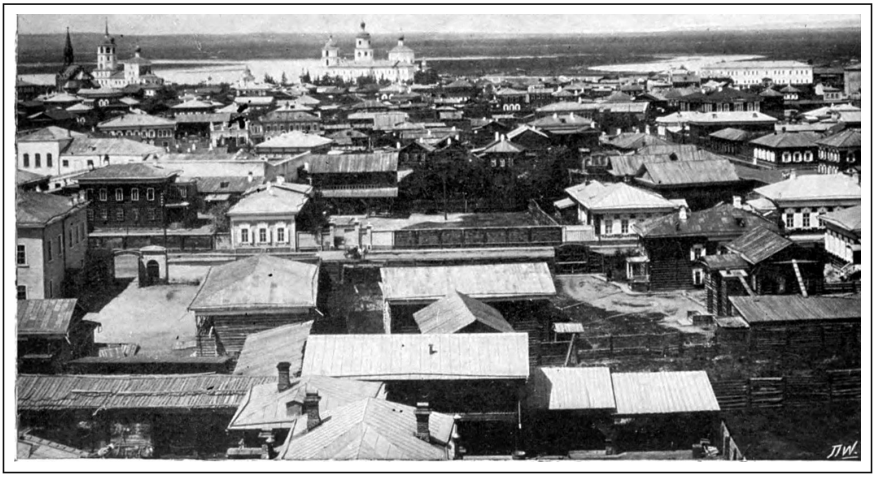
It was a raw, grey morning, that Thursday, September 5th, as the train crawled upon the wooden bridge spanning the dead blue Irkut river, broad, sullen, and strong, sweeping to the mighty Yenisei, and emptying thousands of miles away within the Arctic circle. Over the low-hanging fog peered the dome of a cathedral, and great buildings loomed. There was the whistling and shrieking of engines. As we waited on the bridge for the signal to go on I thought of the stop on Grosvenor Bridge, over the Thames, before the south country trains rumble into Victoria Station.

Slowly we went on. There was a road crossing, with a mass of carts and people waiting till the train had passed. The axles creaked through a goods yard. Then, before we quite realised it, we were in Irkutsk Station. Porters boarded the train like banditti, and fought with one another to carry baggage. The corridors were blocked, and people got angry, and there was swearing and indignation, and—well, the scene was not at all peculiarly Siberian. It might have been any European station.

When my belongings were packed on a droshki, away I was carried, humpity-bumpity, over the vile, uneven road. I felt I and the droshki were playing a game of cup and ball. I was caught every time.

There was a tributary of the Irkut to be crossed, the Angara, by a jolting, uneven bridge of boats. We banged across it. And so we were in Irkutsk, four thousand miles east of Moscow, further east, indeed, than Mandalay: a thriving, jostling, gay city—"the Paris of Siberia" you call it when you want to please.

It is not a description I would apply myself. Irkutsk is more like a restless, bustling Western American town near the region of gold diggings. There is one street two miles long, and all the others are at right angles.



The City of Irkutsk.

It is a white and green town. Most of the buildings are stucco-faced, whitewashed, with sheet-iron roofs painted green. The effect is one of cleanness and coolness.

The weather during my stay of nearly a week was exquisite. All day long the sky was of Italian blueness. There was not a cloud anywhere. The middle of the day was torrid, and to walk along the sunny side of the street was 10 do so blinkingly.

The nights were nipped with frost. In warmest summer the earth, six feet beneath the surface, is frozen. The altitude of the place is some thirteen hundred feet. The air is dry, and I was told there isn't a single case of consumption among the sixty-five thousand inhabitants.

In the old days all the caravans of Chinese tea, after a long, slow march across the bleak Gobi desert, came to Irkutsk. The caravans now are but shadows of what they were. Prosaic steamships and more prosaic railways have done much to send tea another way. Still, there are thousands of tons brought into Irkutsk, caked like black brick, for there are old-fashioned Russians who declare that tea loses its flavour if it gets within breath of sea air. They must have tea that has crossed the Gobi on camel back, and been hauled into Irkutsk on sledges in winter. They are willing to pay for it. Modern business methods have, however, travelled to the Far East. I remember, a year or two back, when at Hankow, on the Yang-tze river, the centre of the Chinese tea trade, a Russian merchant laughingly telling me he sent all his tea by sea, round by Hong Kong, Singapore, Ceylon, the Suez Canal, and the Bosphorus, to Odessa; that it was sold at Moscow as "overland tea," and that not a single tea drinker was the wiser. Still, in Irkutsk there are men who have become millionaires in roubles six times over out of the tea trade.

There are more men, however, who have become millionaires out of gold. Irkutsk is in the middle of the gold district, stretching far down the banks of the Lena, far into the mountains of Trans-Baikal, and also among the fastnesses bordering Mongolia, only a hundred miles away. The law is being modified, but till recently all the gold from mines in East Siberia had to pass through the Government Laboratory at Irkutsk. Only about half of it did.

Even then six hundred million roubles worth of gold passed through in the last thirty years—that is 1,173,456 pounds avoirdupois of gold.

There are stacks of yellow ingots at the Irkutsk Laboratory that would make the mouths of Bank of England directors water. Two old men guard it at night. A force of Cossacks formerly guarded the gold. But one evening they marched off with the lot. Thereupon the mind of the Russian authorities went to work. Their reasoning was thus: "It is dangerous to have a body of stalwart fellows on guard, for they might up and away with the gold any hour. It would be much better to have two old men who couldn't carry a bar between them." The possibility of these two being hit on the head some night with a mallet was lost sight of.

The other half of the gold has been squandered in riotous living. If you are a miner, and have stolen gold, you must dispose of it somehow. In side streets are greasy, blue-bloused Chinamen, ostensibly dealers in tea. Though never a cake of tea enters their stores, they grow rich. Their enemies say they buy the. stolen gold.

How to get gold out of Russian territory without discovery requires cuteness. But the ways of the Chinaman have become poetically proverbial. Even Chinamen die. And a dead Chinaman must sleep his long sleep in his native land. So his good brother Chinamen in Irkutsk embalm him, and put him in a box, and burn candles over him, and send him away to rest with his fathers.

Peeping through a keyhole at an embalming operation not long ago, the Irkutsk police saw gold dust blown through a tube up the nostrils into the empty skull. So they discovered why the Chinese were so anxious to give the soul of their dead brother peace by burial at home. His head was to serve as carrier of gold till he reached the Flowery Land, and then the dust was to be extracted.

The Irkutsk people and Siberians generally have, I found, "a guide conceit" of themselves. They say they are Russians with all the latest improvements.

I talked through an interpreter with a good many of them that week, from his Excellency the Governor-General and mine-owners worth a million sterling to the hall porter at my hotel and the droshki driver who took me about.

They each and all had a gleam of satisfaction in the eye when they asked, "Don't you think Irkutsk is one of the finest cities you have ever seen

It is getting ahead in public buildings. The Greek Cathedral is an imposing building of heavy-domed architecture. There is a resplendent Opera House that cost £32,000. There is a museum of all things Siberian from the days of the mammoth to the latest device in gold-washing, in charge of an intelligent young Russian. There is a school of art, a public library, and, besides the gymnasium for the better class boys and a high school for the better class girls, there are thirty-two other schools, and all sorts of philanthropic institutions, including an orphan home.

The town is under the control of a municipality, elected every four years. It consists of sixty members, and the mayor is chosen from their number. The rates imposed are slight. Still I have seen some shrugging of the shoulders as to what becomes of all the money.

There are houses which for outward appearance rival some in Park Lane. The restaurant where I lunched and dined each day was Parisian, save that, there was one of those huge hurdy-gurdy organs playing archaic music-hall tunes. Fancy "A Bicycle Made for Two" being played in Eastern Siberia!

The shops are fine. You can buy anything in them—even English patent medicines. There are drapery stores that seem like a bit of Regent Street. The hairdresser's shop near my hotel was as well fitted up as any such establishment on the Boulevard des Italiens. The electric light blazed everywhere.



Afternoon Scene in Irkutsk.



The Hotel Dekko at Irkutsk.

And yet with all these there is a rawness about Irkutsk that made me exclaim a hundred times, "It is just like a mushroom city in Western America."

The roads were no better than tracks, either all dust or all mire. The pavement was a side walk of boards, some of which were missing. A grand new building had as neighbour a rough wooden shanty. All the sanitary arrangements were insanitary. Everything costs about three times as much as it does in London.

There is a small fortune awaiting the man who will build a good hotel. There are several hotels, but, while they are all dear, they are all dirty. I have met several Europeans here—Europeans as distinct from Russians—and after mutual agreement that the popular idea in England and America about Siberia is all wrong, the conversation has invariably turned to the domestic habits of the Russian people—which are not cleanly—then to the filthy state of the Irkutsk hotels, and finally—not a polite topic perhaps—to the size, behaviour, and intelligence of the Siberian bug.

There was a long-shanked American gold-digger—who wore a frock-coat, flannel shirt, brown felt hat, while cigars stuck out of one waistcoat pocket and the business end of a tooth-brush stuck out of the other—who betwixt oaths and the ejection of tobacco juice declared he has no pity, but with his six-shooter plugs them through the heart at sight. Then a mild Britisher described how the previous night, as an inspection of the walls of his room was not satisfactory, he pulled his bed into the middle of the room and encircled it with insect powder. He saw the enemy approach, but that barrier was not to be got over. Then they held a consultation, crawled to the wall, crawled up it, crawled along the ceiling till just above the bed, and then dropped! You see, even the stories in Siberia get a Transatlantic flavour.

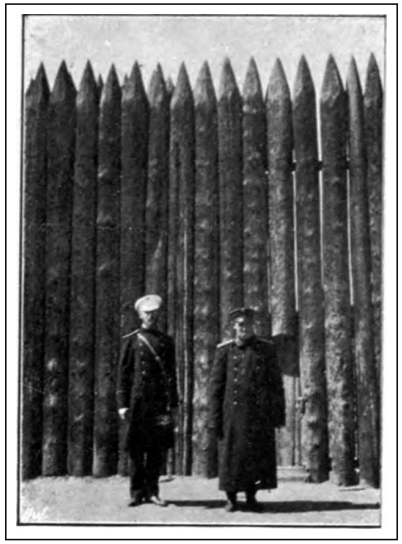
Between five and seven in the evening—when the heat of the day is softening, and the chill of night has not set in—all Irkutsk, fashionable Irkutsk, all who are somebody or who think so, Government officials, officers, their wives and daughters, the wives and daughters of the millionaires, Tom, Dick, and Harry, Betsy, Jane, and Mary, are to be seen on the main boulevard called the Bolshoiskaia.

Cyclists go whizzing past; a man comes tearing by in a light-built American gig with his body bent, his arms outstretched, just showing the paces of his horse; a neat carriage drawn by three black, long-maned horses, the two outside animals running sideways—quite the "swagger" thing in Russia—rolls along. The two gorgeously-clad ladies, its occupants, receive the sweeping bows of the young officers. Several ladies and gentlemen taking horse exercise advance at a trot, and it is noticed the ladies are sitting astride the saddle. I cannot say it struck me as a "horrid exhibition." The dress was of dark blue with a sort of short petticoat. Indeed, to my pagan mind, it appeared rather becoming.

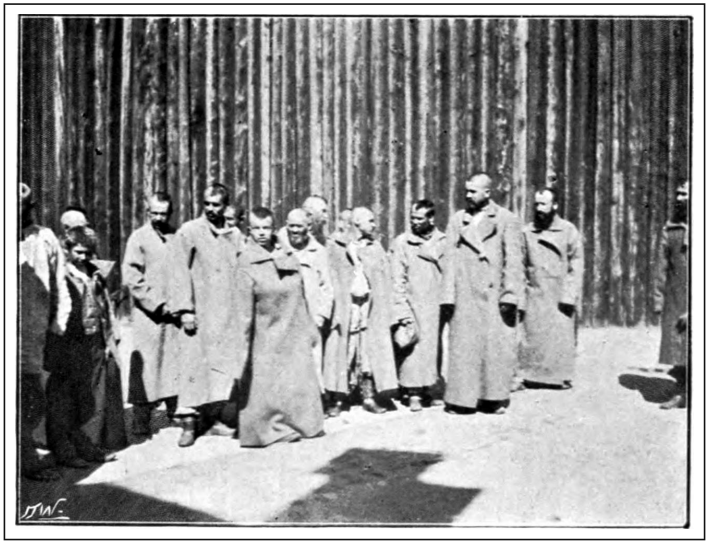
If of the towns I know I sought one that Irkutsk is really suggestive of, I would select San Francisco. Physically they are unlike. But the social atmosphere is the same. There is the same free-and-easy, happy-go-lucky, easy-come, easy-go, devil-may-care style of living.

All the business is one of dealing, importing European goods, re-selling to far-away towns in Siberia, working mines, buying skins, and exporting to Europe. The smash-ahead commercial people here are Russians from the Baltic provinces, really Germans. They are all energy. The Russian himself—with that ineradicable strain of the Tartar in him—is more dilatory. The impulsive Britisher or American, hustling about, is to him something of a madman—clever, but still mad.

Money-making in Irkutsk has been so easy for several generations that the new whirl that has come into the town with the Trans-Siberian Railway has startled even the millionaires. They are sturdy old men, most of them, with character written deep on their strong faces. For all the new-fangled Western ideas that have swept into the town they have a little contempt. Several of the wealthiest still keep to their rude peasant clothes.



The Chiefs of Irkutsk Prison.



A Group of Convicts with Heads Half-shaven.

But Irkutsk is beginning to put on airs, and even a grimy millionaire in red shirt and dirty top-boots will not be tolerated in the fashionable restaurants. A police order was issued recently that anyone not wearing a white shirt and collar could be refused admittance. Also there are notices stuck up requesting the guests not to get drunk, but to remember they belong to a civilised country!

Some of these millionaires—one named Khaminoff, who came to Irkutsk half a century ago as a carter, died recently, and left eleven million roubles made out of tea, skins, and gold—have travelled in Europe. They have seen London, Paris, and Vienna. "Ah!" said one of them to me, "I was glad to get home. After all, there is no place like Siberia!"

The intellectual people of the town are the political exiles. They have suffered for their opinions by being banished to Siberia. But for the fact, however, that they cannot return to Russia, they lead exactly the same life as any other resident. Most of them are clerks in offices, and some hold exceedingly good appointments. Five years ago an English girl, who went out to Irkutsk as governess to a wealthy family, married a political exile. She submitted to the conditions of her husband's life. She can now never leave the country.

Apart from the political exiles, the town is besmirched with the criminal class, the really degraded. You have to see the men in prison to understand even a little of the brute nature of many of these people.

There are great prisons around Irkutsk. To these for generations men have been sent from Russia to expiate murder and unmentionable horrors. At the end of their imprisonment they have been released. But the Russian authorities have not taken them back to Russia. They left them free to do as they liked—preferring they should stay in Siberia. The men made for the big towns, chiefly Irkutsk, because it is the gold centre. Accordingly a great part of the population consists of such men and the children of such men. No wonder, therefore, there is, on an average, one murder a week in the town. There are drunken quarrels, and then a hit over the head with a spade. Life is held cheap, and murders are committed in order to steal a few shillings. Robberies with violence are common. Burglary is prevalent. Yet there are hardly any police in the town. Everybody is supposed to look out for himself. It is

dangerous to leave the main street after dark without a revolver. The timid householder opens his window and fires a shot before going to bed, just to inform prowlers there are firearms in the house.

You can drive along the Bolshoiskaia at eleven o'clock at night and not see a soul. But if you go into the big restaurants you find them crowded, and they remain so until three and four in the morning.

There is a noted restaurant that I visited. The place was full of men and women, eating and drinking and smoking. There was a platform, where a troupe of girls from Warsaw sang lewd songs, and then came and drank champagne with the audience. It was a replica of a San Francisco sink.

And yet all this was four thousand miles east of Moscow. When I got to my room I looked at my map, put my finger on Irkutsk, and tried to realise I was in Siberia. Facts somehow did not seem to fit in with a life's conception of the land.

## Chapter IX

# In Irkutsk Prison

Well I remember as a boy being thrilled—more than any Red Indian story ever thrilled—by Mr. George Kennan's lurid descriptions of prison life in Siberia. These descriptions thrilled others besides a schoolboy. The world shivered at the enormities perpetrated in the snow-driven land beyond the Urals.

"Only Russia could be so cruel; a civilised country would shrink from such barbarities," said the horror-stricken.

And since those days there simmered in my mind a curious craving to see this gaunt land of Siberia, and let my own eyes gaze on the starved wretches sent to living death.

In St. Petersburg, in Moscow, all along the Trans-Siberian line, I came across Britishers who had no love for the Russian, who sneered at his dilatoriness, swore at his bribe-seeking proclivities, showed disgust at his personal habits. Yet, when I mentioned Mr. Kennan's brilliant and startling story of his wanderings, I was always met with an "Ach!" anda shrug of the shoulders.

Well, in spite of hearing this—and occasionally something stronger—from every Britisher in the country, I kept an open mind. If opportunity came, I would have a look at a prison myself.

So during a talk with his Excellency the Governor-General of the Irkutsk province, I asked if he had any objection to my seeing the Irkutsk prison?

"Not at all, but I think the Alexandrovski prison, seventy versts from here, would be better."

I had thought of Alexandrovski, the largest prison in the country, but considered seeing that was out of the question. I accepted the Governor-General's suggestion, and said I would go there on my return journey through Siberia Very well! Could I now go to the local gaol? Certainly! When? Any time! To-morrow? Yes! After breakfast? Any time convenienténtto yourself!

So the next morning, accompanied by an interpreter, I drove out to the Irkutsk prison.

It was not the gloomy, sullen-stoned, slit-windowed, iron-barred structure such as are our prisons at home. The front showed a two-storied, white-washed building. The sides and backs were walled with pine-tree logs, tightly set together, and all sharply pointed at the top. Sentry-boxes were stationed at every thirty yards, and Russian soldiers in white blouses and white caps paraded up and down, carbine on shoulder.

I was met by the Governor, a short, kindly-looking man, who kept his hands in his pockets except when lighting another cigarette, and by the Inspector of Prisons, a tall, fair-whiskered man in white and gold uniform.

After the preliminary introductions the inner wooden door, not iron-studded, was thrown open, and then there was a rather slim, ramshackle iron gate to go through. We were now in the exercise yard—a nice open space, planted with smallish pines and with plenty of seats about.

A crowd of several hundred men, coarse-featured, and mostly bearded, all in loose white linen clothes, were scurrying to their dormitories on the shouted order of the Governor. A jangling sound struck my ear. I noticed many of the men wore chains fastened about the legs.

The convicts gave a backward glance at their visitors.

"Where are they going?" I inquired.

"Back to their cells. They have four hours' recreation a day, two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon. I thought you would like to see them in their cells."

"Do you restrict them in talking

"Oh, no, they just do as they like, except that they must not sing. We have 700 men here, and some very good singers. These are in the chapel choir, and have a dormitory to themselves and practise frequently."

We took a promenade of the entire building, with two armed attendants in our wake. The corridors were whitewashed, with sanded floors. The doors were of heavy wood with iron gratings.

The keys were turned and the bolts pulled. So we passed into a low-roofed but well-lighted room, with fifty or sixty men standing in a rough line..

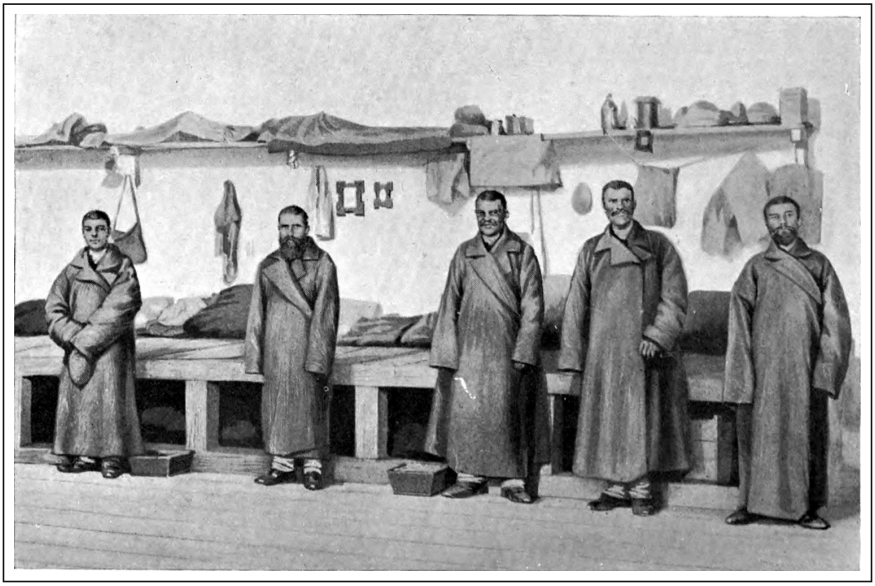
"Good-morning, men," said the Governor, and they replied, "Good-morning, sir."

The prisoners had the brutal features always seen in the criminal classes, the heavy jaw, the low forehead, the cunning eye. Most were thieves, but also there were accused men among them awaiting trial; and the mixture of both condemned and untried struck me as unfair to the latter.

I picked out men, and through my interpreter asked for what they were in prison. They answered readily. One young man said he was serving six months for stealing a coat—which wasn't true, for he had bought it from an unknown man. Thereat the other prisoners laughed.

"What do they do here I asked.

"What they like, except that they must keep their cells clean."



In Irkutsk Prison.

And clean they were. There was a place to wash in; one or two religious books were on the table; on the wall was a cheap oleograph of the Czar, and in a corner was an won or sacred picture.

What attracted me was the informal relationship between Governor and prisoners. The men talked without any restraint, made requests, and even jests.

We visited cell after cell, with the same kind of occupants, and each always neat and clean.

Noticing how insecurely guarded the whole place was, I asked if ever there was any insurrection?

"In my predecessor's time," said the Governor, "there was, because the food was bad. But I can't say the men were dissatisfied. Indeed, the prison is always filled up in our harsh and long winter with men charged with petty thefts. They want to get into prison to secure food and shelter."

Next I was shown hardened criminals—men in solitary confinement. They were brought out of their cells into the better light of the corridor so that I might photograph them.

There was one deep-chested, hirsute man, with clouded brow, who stood like a log with his chains hanging about him.

The next was a wiry little fellow, with short, pointed beard and very bright, beady eyes. He was the most notorious housebreaker in Siberia. He laughed and joked, and admitted with a certain pride his expertness. "I know it is wrong to housebreak," he said merrily, when I questioned him; "but, then, for working one gets so little money, and if people are not able to take care of their property they deserve to lose it."

We went to another yard, all noise. Here ironwork and carpentry—chiefly the making of bedsteads and doors and windows—were in full swing. Except that the men were all clad in a kind of white overall, very badly fitting—all prison clothes are made for men six feet high, and those who are not that length must accommodate themselves as best they can, and ludicrous do the short fellows look—there was nothing to distinguish it from an ordinary workyard. Here the men were of a more intelligent type, and looked conten-

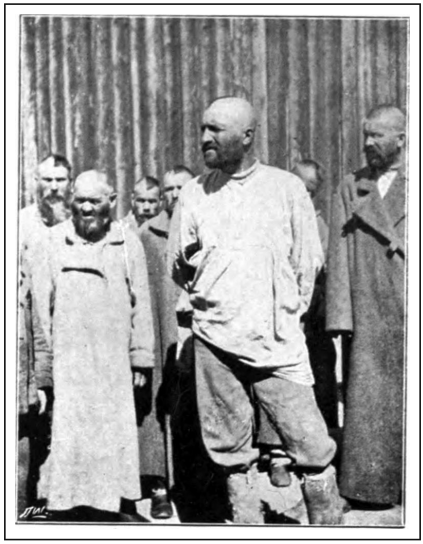
ted and industrious, though I dare say they were not so energetic when the Governor turned his back.

These men receive a small wage, which is placed to their account, and draw it on leaving the gaol—that is, if they have not spent it, for one of the odd things I came across was a prison shop where men who would like some delicacy beyond prison fare can get French bread, cheese, sausages, sardines, and other things, but neither drink nor tobacco. No money passes, but any money the prisoner has, or earns, or has sent to him by friends, is kept in an account book, and the men can feast to their hearts' content till funds are exhausted.

After that we went to the kitchen. Dinner was in preparation, birch, a thick vegetable soup, with about a quarter of a pound of meat floating in each plate—the ordinary Russian fare. A bowl of it was brought to me, with a wooden spoon, and I found it as good as I have had at Russian railway stations. Each prisoner gets some such dish as this every midday. Also he gets three pounds of bread, and tea to drink, morning and evening.

Next we visited the part of the prison where were the worst criminals sent from European Russia. They were on their way to work in the mines, and to spend their years in Saghalien, the prison island in the Far East, and which is the Russian Botany Bay.

Most of them were murderers. They looked it. One could have no pity for them. They were desperadoes. They all wore long grey felt cloaks, nearly touching the ground. They were all chained, and walked with a jangle-jangle at every step. But the most distinctive thing about them was that the right side of the head, half of it, was clean shaven. They came into the yard so I might photograph them. It required but quick action and they could have slain the six of us—the Governor, inspector, myself and interpreter, and two warders—and made good their escape.



A Group of Convicts.



Five Women who had Murdered their Husbands.

"Do these men ever escape?" I was fain to ask.

"Yes, sometimes. But our police system is such that they are nearly always captured.

"In the summer time a man can wander the country; but when winter comes he must make for a town. Then, unless he has murdered some travelling peasant in order to get his passport, he is sure to be re-arrested. The usual practice of convicts, when the police lay hold of them because they have no passport, is to be a mystery, refusing to give their names, to say where they come from, or indeed anything. These are hard cases to deal with, because while they can be suspected, as they have no passport, it is impossible to fully punish them because we have no evidence they are really escaped convicts. They make for a town a long way from their prison, so that recognition is nigh impossible."

We then left the main prison in order to visit that for women. We walked through a village of shanties to what looked the best house in the place. The Governor turned the handle of the gate, he went into the yard—a higgledy-piggledy place littered with old bricks and the rubbish of some house that had been demolished—and I saw some rather slatternly women sitting about, and some children playing with a kitten. "

"I'll send for the matron," said the Governor.

"Is this the prison?" I asked in some amazement.

"Yes, this is the only prison we have in Irkutsk for women."

It was just a large-sized ordinary house abutting on the street, but not a single soldier to see. I couldn't help laughing.

The matron was a large-boned, commanding woman, most suitable for the post, and was a little flustered at this unexpected visit.

Without ado we walked into a big lower room; There was not a pleasant atmosphere. It was a scorching hot day, and there were no windows open.

There were three long, slightly sloping shelves running along either wall. These did duty as beds. There were women sprawling about, half of them with children.

The scene reminded me of a visit I once made to a cheap lodging-house for women in the East-End of London. The place was far behind the men's pris-

on for cleanliness. The smell was indeed sickening. There seemed to be a lot of unnecessary old clothing lying about. The women, who were sitting in groups when we disturbed them, were unkempt, and most of the children would have been benefited by a wash. There were forty women and about twenty children.

"What are these women here for?" I asked.

"Everything from petty theft to murder."

"Show me some of your murderesses

The matron called on five or six women to stand on one side. There was nothing to distinguish them from the ordinary slothful peasant women. One, however, was taller and better looking. Her features were clear cut, and her hair dark. There was a sinister, angry gleam in her eyes, as though she resented our presence.

"That," said the matron, "is our recent comer. She is a Jewess, and she is here because she poisoned her husband."

The thing, however, that would not get out of my mind was the absurdity of the place as a prison, so far as we understand prisons.

"Really," I demanded, "do you mean to say these women-don't go away

"Well," I was told, "one went away in the spring. The usual roll call was made in the evening, and she did not answer. We were surprised at her going, but we were more surprised three days later when she came back. She explained that she wanted to see her lover, and as men are not allowed on Sunday, which is the visitors' day, she just went off, and after seeing him came back again."

I returned to Irkutsk town with thoughts about a Siberian prison very different from those I had when I first set foot in Russia. It was the first prison I had come across. There was no hesitation about my visiting it, and I have set down all exactly as it impressed me.

The gruesome romance that has blossomed around the Russian exile system is, I am inclined to think, the outcome of the underground methods of police. Banishment has a tinge of the theatrical in it, and the procession that years ago set out for Moscow—soldiers first, then dangerous criminals in chains, then women, then other prisoners, then the pitiable spectacle of

wives and children following their husbands or fathers into exile, the sympathy shown by the sightseers in the streets, who gave the exiles money and forced clothing and food upon them—made a picture so dramatic that no wonder the hearts of the sympathetic were touched.

A two years' march to Saghalien—despite the fact that there was no marching in winter, and that in summer the distance was twenty miles a day, two days' walking and one day's rest—had something awful in it, especially as these exiles were dead to the world, and news of them hardly ever recrossed the Urals.

There are things in Russia which no man with Western training can admire. The government is autocratic. But it is not despotic. And I say that because, just as I resisted looking at things through rosy glasses, I also endeavoured to regard them with unprejudiced eye.

Before I left St. Petersburg it was my fortune to have a chat with a very distinguished Russian. What he said to me was this: "You British people don't understand us. You think because we have no representative institutions we must be averse to change. My dear sir, Russia has made tremendous strides this last half-century, and she would not have made them had there been popular government. When you talk of popular government you don't understand what that would mean in Russia. Do you know that only three per cent. of the population can read or write. The government is trying to change this, but it is hard when dealing with a people who for centuries have been serfs. I tell you that, for a country such as ours, which has been behind other lands so long, autocracy is the only thing that could have lifted it to its present place among the nations."

Now a word or two about the present prison so far as Siberia is concerned. Since the coming of the railway, with the consequent flood of respectable immigrants, there has been, as I have already remarked, a growing feeling against Asiatic Russia being any longer the dumping-ground of all wrongdoers. Though the long expected ukase putting an end to the exile system has not yet been issued by the Emperor, the banishment from Europe to the further side of the Urals is dwindling out of sight.

Still, as the system is not abolished, I give what I have learnt from independent authorities, and in no case from Russians.

The exiles may be divided into three groups: first, the political offenders, in a minority, and banished for strong insurrectionary or religious opinions; secondly, criminals, mostly forgers and thieves, who are sent to the big prisons in the interior; thirdly, murderers, who are sent to Saghalien, where, even when the sentence is finished, they must spend the remainder of their lives.

The political prisoners are given the best part of the country to live in, namely, in the west. Other prisoners are exiled nearer to the icy regions according to the gravity of their offence. The political prisoners may practise handicrafts, and, by special permission, medicine. A "political" is not identified with the criminal any more than a debtor is identified with a felon in England. Such offenders do not travel with other prisoners in a gang. A "political "may be on a train going into exile. But no one knows it besides himself and the member of the police travelling in the same carriage. "Politicals" get about £1 10s. a month from the Government, but this varies according to the district to which they are sent. Wives who accompany their husbands are allowed 386 lb. of bread a month, but must submit to the regulations of the étape. If all goes well with a "political" he gets permission to settle in some Siberian town with his family, but any allowance from the Government then ceases. He is just the same as any other resident, save that he can never leave Siberia. If he wishes to farm, tho Government will give him a plot of land and money to work it. But this money must be paid back by instalments.

Of the criminals, there are those dead to the outer world, who lose everything—wife, children, property, all—and those who retain wife and property, and can return to their town when the sentence is completed. If these second-grade convicts behave well they are allowed to live near a prison and work for their living, on condition that they give so much work daily to the Government.

The chains worn are five pounds weight for the legs and two for the wrists. A convict with a life sentence wears chains for eight years. If the punishment is twenty years' imprisonment, chains are worn for four years. The

use of the knout is absolutely abolished. A "plet" is, however, used, and is worse. It weighs eight pounds, with a lash of solid leather, tapering from the handle to three circular thongs the size of a finger. Capital punishment does not exist in Russia, but a flogging with the "plet" is equivalent to a death sentence. The skilful flogger will kill a man with six blows.

Women are never now set to work in the mines as the men are. They are never flogged. Indeed, what I saw in Irkutsk applies generally to female prisoners in Siberia.

England is not loved by the Russians, and there is not much affection in England for Russia. The Russian believes the Englishman is the cruellest creature on the earth; the Englishman is quite certain the Russian is.

And in this connection I recall a story I heard in St. Petersburg, and told by Verstchagin, the famous Russian painter of the horrors of war. A couple of years ago he showed those wonderful pictures of his in London. Englishmen took exception to his picture depicting how, in the Indian mutiny, rebels were shot at the cannon's mouth, because, said they, this was likely to give an entirely false idea of how Englishmen treated black men. Then they would turn to his picture of Russian soldiers stringing up Poles to trees in the snow during the Polish insurrections. "Ah," they said, "those inhuman Russians do that to men fighting for their country. That proves you have only to scratch a Russian to find the savage Tartar underneath." Later on Verstchagin showed his pictures at St. Petersburg. The Russians did not like the representation of hanging stray Poles on handy boughs. It gave an absolutely wrong idea. "But ah, that picture of British killing Sepoys by strapping them before a cannon—that just shows what inhuman brutes the English are to all races they want to master!"

## Chapter X

# Sunday in Siberia

❦

You find paradox in Irkutsk as elsewhere.

Being the wildest, the most wicked city in East Siberia, it is also the most saintly, devout, sabbatarian place within the realms of the Great White Czar.

Sunday is as strictly observed there as it is north of the Tweed. In all other towns there is trade on the Sunday. The Government, however, is the Lord's Day Observance Society in Irkutsk, and inflicts fine and imprisonment if you sell a pennyworth of anything. There are two cathedrals, one new and one old, also 25 Greek churches, two synagogues for the Jews, and other places for other people.

There is religious liberty in Siberia—Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Sunnites, and pagans live in peace—except that perversion from the State Greek Church is forbidden and punishable if done.

The tinsel Byzantine decorations of many churches you see in European Russia make the eye ache with their gilt gaudiness. But in Siberia the churches have mostly a quiet quaintness, a simplicity that is effective, nothing more than Doric walls whitewashed, a long, slightly sloping roof, green painted, and a needle of a spire, green painted also.

At sundown on the Saturday night—the air soft, fragrant, and full of pellucid blueness—all Irkutsk seemed to clang with bells calling the faithful to prayers. It was a mellow, vibrant sound, for the bells, many toned, were struck with wooden hammers,

With a friend I drove to the cathedral—a distance from the town, as everything is in Siberia. It, however, has not the Slavonic demure prettiness of the other churches. It is new. It is a huge domed structure, a sort of miniature St. Peter's, stucco-faced and drab-coloured. It stands on a sandy waste and has a cramped appearance.

A long, covered colonnade with steps leads up to the church, and on them squat wrinkle-faced, sore-eyed, and twisted-limbed old men stretching palsied arms for charity.

At the top of the steps as we push open the glass door, the thick aroma of incense fills the nostrils. Dusk has fallen, and a weird gloom, broken by a hundred taper lights, pervades the church. The cup of the dome is blue, sprinkled with golden stars. There are no pews or seats. A purple carpet covers the floor, and on it are kneeling men and women.

In front is a great screen of gold, and the candle lights catch cornices and make them glow like shafts from the sun. Possibly all this massed gold would be ostentatious in the light of day. But now, in the softness of the evening, ostentation fades away. Everywhere are pictures of saints, and before them stand heavy candelabra with a hundred sockets. It is for the devout to bring their tapers, fix them, and do reverence.

But something better than incense fills the air. It is the sound of men's voices. There is no organ; there are no stringed instruments. There is a choir of men, and their throats have deep richness. With the majesty of a Gregorian chant, they sing their Slavonic adoration, but tinged with pity, like the low melody of wind on the plains.

A door in the middle of the screen swings open. There are priests, long-haired and long-whiskered, in heavy canonical robes, silver-twined. One,a tall man, sallow-faced, lustre-eyed, his black beard that of a young man, his hair falling over his shoulders, comes forward swaying a censer. He stands on the step, and in a voice of sweetness and strength cries, "Gospodi pomilui Lord, have mercy!"

His face is like that of Christ—not an unusual type among Russian priests.

"Gospodi pomilui," responded the worshippers, kneeling and touching the ground with their foreheads.

Beyond the screen, within the Holy of Holies, where lights flicker on a cross, is an older priest, elevating his hands and praying.

Upon his prayer like a wave breaks the billow of sound from the choristers. And the people who have come to pray cry, "Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!" many times.

The light is dim. The tapers blink before the gold-encompassed saints. The cathedral is full of music and incense.

There are worshippers continually coming. They carry tapers, some only one, some many, and as they bow before the altar they make the sign of the cross. Far more than half those present are women.

Here comes a lady, dark-featured, well-dressed, with fashionable cape upon her shoulders, and on her head a bonnet that might have come from Regent Street. She goes to the picture of a saint, makes obeisance, and then she lights a taper from another taper. To make it grip she puts the end of her taper in the flame for a second, and presses it tight in the gilt socket. Then she goes to the picture, kisses the foot of the saint, and, kneeling, crosses herself, and prays with her forehead on the ground. She moves to another picture.

There is a peasant, heavily bearded, his sunburnt face rugged and furrowed. He wears a red shirt, velvet trousers, and big boots. He has no taper, but he stands taut, like a soldier, and he crosses himself and bows and cries, "Lord, have mercy."

The big voice of the singers soars over all, repeating the liturgy in Slavonic.

A gentleman in frock-coat, begloved, and carrying a cane, comes forward, takes his candle, bows, and goes away.

A couple of slim boys, in the dull grey uniform of the Gymnasium, hurry along. They stand, heel-clapped, and with dexterous wrist make the cross signs. They light their tapers. But the tapers won't stick upright in their sockets. They are well-behaved little fellows, but as the tapers will persist in toppling over, the boyish sense of humour asserts itself and they grin. At last they are fixed, and the lads stand watching the candles with a half-amused

glance, wondering if there are to be any more tricks. No; they hold. Then the boys swing round, make their bows, and hasten away.

Here comes tottering an old lady—a very old woman, short and bent, and with a black shaw round her head. From the rim of black shawl peers a worn face, the upper lip fallen in, the eyes sunken and dull, and yet with that beautiful resignation, shining through the countenance, you often see on the faces of old women whose thoughts are not of this world.

There is a picture of the Madonna and Child—the young Mother with eyes all love looking upon her new-born Son. Many, many tapers are before this icon, which glows with a special radiance.

To this the old woman comes with clasped and knotted hands. Her face is upturned, and the full gleam of the tapers falls upon it. There is a yearning in the sunken eyes. The dried, yellow lips quiver. The bones of the old woman ache, for she groans as she kneels. She lowers her face to the ground, and there she stays long, a dark, crouching figure of adoration before the picture.

When she looks up there are no tears; only, I think, there is a brighter light in the eyes than before.

She rises. With faltering steps she goes to the picture and reverently kisses the feet of the Child. Then she kisses the arm that holds Him.

The old woman finds peace and comfort to her soul. Maybe she sees the lifting of the curtain. It is not for one of another faith to say aught in disparagement. It is a pathetic sight. So I nudge my companion and we come away.

Night is closing in—night with a blue sky glittering with stars—and we walk back to town. On the way is a real old-fashioned Siberian church, white and green—three churches, it seems, with individual towers, but the first and second making a staircased passage way to the main building. We go in.

The service in the cathedral has much in it akin to the ceremony of Rome. But here it is wholly Slavonic.

Imagine this picture. A low, curved ceiling, like a cellar way, so you can touch the roof with your hand, painted with clouds and angels looking over them. The way is blocked with worshippers. Over their heads, through an atmosphere hazy and choking with incense, is a square apartment, stunted and cramped, but with the walls covered with gilt icons, and hundreds of candles

making the place shimmer with fire. Everybody is praying and crossing——moudjiks, ladies, soldiers, students, peasant women.

A procession of priests, preceded by the swinging incense burner and flanked by bearers of big candles, marches from the Holy of Holies. The priests are in stiff robes of gold and silver and purple, and their black hair tumbles about the collars.

A choir of treble-tongued boys is singing shrill.

A grey-haired priest carries before him a silverbacked volume—the Bible. He lays it on a small lectern in the middle of the congregation. There is a fresh burst of devotional song as the choir moves in front of all the gold, but like shadows, as the place is misty with incense. The elder of the priests kisses the volume and moves away. Then the congregation, in the bedizened strangest of low-roofed chapels, press forward and put their lips to the edges of the book. The Saturday evening service is over. It is quite dark when we come out. There is a lamp gleam in some huts not far away, and in the still night comes the barking of a dog far off.

All over Siberia priests of the Orthodox Greek Church are to be met—in the towns, on the prairie, in the trains. They wear long gowns, sometimes brown, but generally black, and they all have big, black, soft felt hats. Though there are to be seen faces intellectual and refined—facial likeness to the accepted idea of Christ is striven after—the majority look slothful, and every one without exception that I came across was greasy and dirty. Grease and the dirt are hidden away under the gorgeous vestments of high Church ceremonial, but they are repellently apparent when a priest sits opposite while you are having tea in a buffet.

There are two orders of these clergy, the white and the black, or the parochial and the monastic. If he marries, the priest must remain a simple priest. But if celibate, he may rise to be a bishop.

The best paid of the clergy in Siberia gets about £120 a year, whilst the poorer clergy often have to beg for their bread. They have much to do. There is always a service between four and five in the morning. There are two other services in the day. There must be service on the birth of a child and at the death of any one in the parish. All new buildings, schoolhouses, and bridges

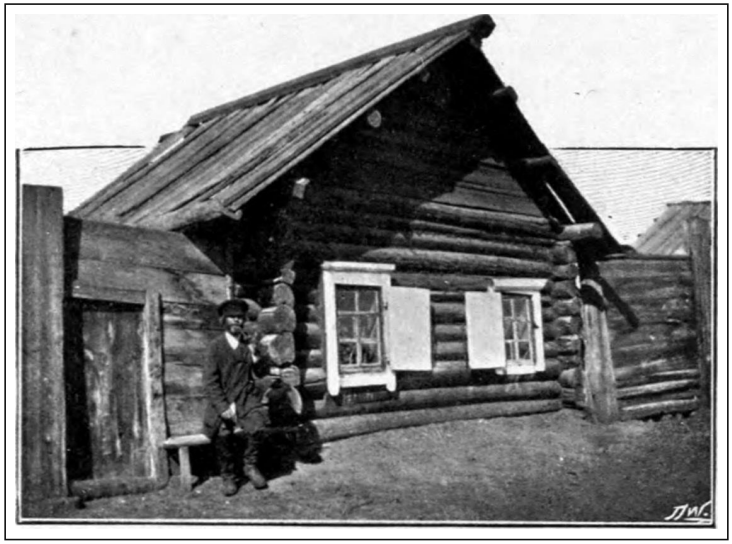
and boats must be blessed; children beginning a school term are blessed, and in time of pestilence or peril there must be a continuous prayer. All priests must fast 226 days in the year, and monastic priests are never to eat meat. A priest cannot indulge in theatre-going, drinking, card-playing, or dancing.

Churches are kept in repair by parochial committees. These personally visit and determine what tithe shall be paid by each house. All the vestments are provided at parish expense, and are often jewelled and very costly.

The method of administering communion is peculiar. Priests receive the bread and wine separately; the laity receive them mixed, and given with a spoon, whilst to the children only wine is given

I have mentioned religious liberty in Siberia. This does not exist in Russia proper. From there, sects objectionable to the Orthodox Church are driven beyond the Urals. But once in Siberia they can do much as they like. It is the same in politics. Politics are tabooed in Russia, but in Siberia more freedom is exercised.

Strange faiths appeal to the untutored mind. So among the Siberian peasantry flourish fantastic beliefs. There are many of them, and a narration of some of their tenets would raise a smile.



On the Road to the Monastery.



The Monastery of St. Innokente.

The principal body of dissenters really worth mentioning call themselves Raskolniks, or Old Believers. There are quite a hundred thousand of these in Siberia. They are the descendants of people who were exiled from Russia in the 18th century. Their chief peculiarity is their strict temperance and horror of innovation. They take neither tea nor coffee. They never smoke nor will allow anyone to smoke in or near their dwellings. The women have a disease called quarter brought on immediately by the smell of tobacco. They give short, frequent cries whilst suffering. The Raskolniks won't look at potatoes, and they won't eat or drink from any dish or cup used by another.

Yet, despite their oddities, the Raskolniks are much esteemed. They are always sober, and always industrious—two qualities that cannot be applied to Russians generally.

Sunday morning!

There is a special aroma about Sunday morning no other morning has. It isn't the cessation of labour in the grimy cities. I have breathed it in the far hills of Western China, and on the alkali blistered plains at the back of Nevada.

And this Sunday morning, September 8th, when I push open my window and stand on the balcony and hear the chiming bells in Irkutsk city, why, I might be in England. It is beautiful, genial, and the air is like crystal.

We are going toa famous monastery. We bargain with a droshki driver, who declares it is seven versts (five miles) away, but we find it is not more than four versts. The horse is fresh and away we rattle humpity-bumpity over the track of a road, raising clouds of dust.

A pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Innokente is a favourite Sunday outing with Irkutsk folk, and owners of private droshkies are hieing, like ourselves, along the wide road, which, if followed for a sufficient number of thousands of miles, would land us back in Moscow.

There is the racing, frothy Angara river to be crossed by a ferry. A hundred yards more up the river an anchor has been dropped. The ferry boat—which will carry a dozen horses and droshkies—is attached by a stout rope, and the force of the current playing on the rudder drives the boat from side to side of the stream, as broad as the Thames at Westminster.

The monastery stands on a heave of land beneath the shelter of a hill. It is long and gaunt, and shows pink in the warmth of the sun.

There are many pedestrians out, doing the pilgrimage on foot, and the peasants in their bright garbs—no half tones nor dirty greens, but honest red and green and yellow—look freshly picturesque. There is the Irkutsk young married man pushing the perambulator, while the wife is in the adjoining meadow picking flowers. Here and there are stalls where the dusty walker may buy bright pink kvass, an innocuous cool beverage made from crushed fruit.

Every now and then I have a chuckle. Maybe it is the loveliness of the day. More likely it is the reiterating thought: "This Siberia! It's not like Siberia at all. If I tell folk at home what it is really like they won't believe."

We run through a village with the quaintest, tiniest little log huts imaginable. There is a fine old fellow sitting outside the door reading a newspaper. I jump from the droshki to take a snapshot. He understands, and is delighted, but apologises that he is so deaf. "Never mind," I tell him in English, tapping the camera, "that won't interfere with making a good picture." He smiles, and raises his hat as though he knows.

The doorway to the monastery is packed with beggars, such a gathering of lame and blind with open sockets staring at you, and limbs festering with disease, I never saw.

There is an open space about the church, and in the cool of the trees Siberians are sitting. About the door is a jostling ebb and flow of humanity We—that is the Britisher I had rubbed up against yesterday and myself—gently elbow our way in.

What an uproar! There is none of the "dim religious light" that was so impressive last evening. It is cruel glaring daylight, and as the eye skips from the golden icons to the gilt screen and from the screen to the gilt candelabra, all aflame with tapers, and then to the ornate vestments of the priests, the description "tawdry" slips from the tongue.

The church is packed to suffocation. Everybody is standing and every woman seems to have brought at least one child, which is crying. And a fretful Siberian child has good lungs, and it kicks.

To the right of the doorway is a sallow priest wearing a purple skull-cap and doing a thriving trade in the sale of candles. On the left is a podgy man with a pair of scales having bickerings with the women folk, who are buying priest-blessed bread and trying to stuff their youngsters into quietness with it. From the noise, they must be accusing the man of giving short weight.

The day is stuffy, and the congregation perspire freely, and the fumes of incense irritate the throat.

I don't know whether the chattering of the women or the crying of the youngsters or the singing of the choir—a poor choir compared with Irkutsk cathedral—has first place in the sound. To be devout in such a throng is impossible. Nobody is devout, though there is kneeling and loud responses.

In the middle of the church, on a slightly raised throne, sits the bishop in gorgeous apparel, grey silk decorated with gold, and on his head a bulbous crown of gilt. The priests up by the altar walk to and fro chanting. He bows low with them, and the grease from the candles he is holding trickles on the carpet. He sweeps the candles to the right, to the left, behind, and the congregation bow the head to receive the blessing.

To the right centre is a bier canopied with crimson silk and festooned with artificial flowers, and flanked with giant candles all aflame. Here lies the apostle of Siberia, St. Innokente. He was a missionary who went out to China in the opening of the 18th century. The Celestials, however, declined the privilege. He founded this monastery not far from Irkutsk and died. And his body is as fresh as the hour the breath left it! That is what the priests say. So it is a very holy shrine.

The crush round the bier is tremendous. There is an old priest standing by the coffin, and he regulates the pressure of the worshippers who desire to give the homage of a kiss. There is a stream of people up the steps, old and young, and they lower their heads in reverence. There is a mother with her child, and she bends the head of the child so it may kiss also.

In time I get near enough to see, half expecting to find a corpse.

No! there is something in the shape of a human figure, but it is all shrouded. An ebony cross inlet with silver lies on the breast and it is this that is kissed.

Still the crowd presses forward. Still the children cry and the women talk. Still the fumes of incense rise. And more unbearable becomes the atmosphere.

"Let us leave," I pant.

How sweet is the open air, and how delicious to sit under the trees!

The dormitories of the monks run round the church. A monk is standing in a doorway, and we go up and introduce ourselves. He is courteous. He shows us the bare cells, and tells us there are eighty priests living there. He also shows us the bakery, and the workshops, for every priest in this monastery follows a handicraft. We take a walk under the trees, and he asks what nation we belong to. When we tell him we are Angleski, he inquires if the people in England are Christians? We say some of them are.

He tells us the story of St. Innokente and what a holy man he was. Then incautiously we remark that if the body is fresh it should be uncovered for the people to see. He tells us of the doubting of Thomas!

We drive back to Irkutsk, and the sultry afternoon is drowsed away in easy chairs. The ringing of the Sabbath bells never ends. In the evening we join the rest of Irkutsk in making the promenade up and down the Bolshoiskaia, the big street. Everybody is in their Sunday best.

But with sundown the Sabbath ends. The restaurants fill up; gaiety and mirth bursts forth, and Irkutsk is its wicked self once more.

## Chapter XI

# Trade and Some Trifles

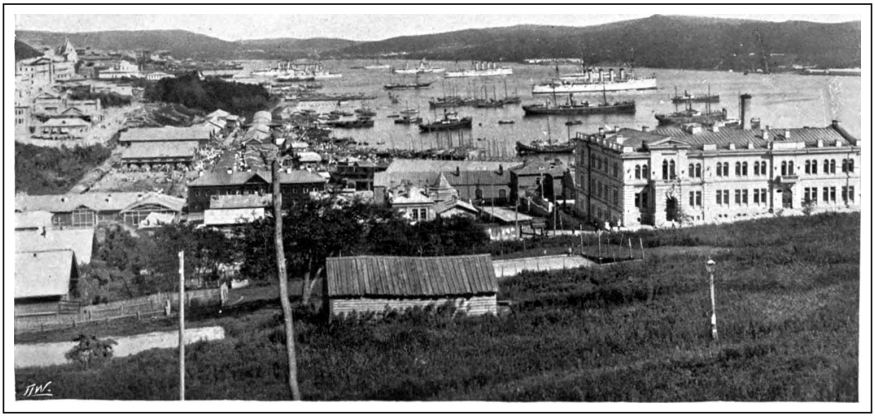
❦

The Russian, as you find him in Siberia, has many good qualities. Above all he is hospitable. This prompts him when giving you a glass of wine to spill it on the table-cloth. That indicates his liberality. To be careful and watch the pouring so that it comes within an eighth of an inch from the rim of the glass would mean stinginess, and such a thought is abhorrent.

But a commission needs to be sent the length and breadth of the Russian Empire to teach the people, officials as well as ordinary folk, what are the table manners of Western nations.

Said a man to me in a restaurant, "I knew at a glance you could not be a Russian, because you were using your knife and fork in a civilised way."

You know how a player of a kettledrum holds the sticks—that in the right hand in a sort of grip, and that in the left with the palm turned up and by the two first fingers. A Russian holds his knife and fork in the same way. He gets a piece of meat on the end of the fork, and with it sticking up in the air bites whilst stoking vegetables into his mouth with his knife. There are no mustard spoons, so he dives his knife into the mustard pot. Personally, I was regarded as an extraordinary being because I declined to use a serviette that evidently six other people had used.



Vladivostok.

It takes time for a Britisher to conform to the meal hours of the Russian. There are no bacon and eggs for breakfast. Indeed, there is no breakfast at all. You have a glass of tea, or two glasses of tea, with slices of lemon in it, and that serves till two, three, or five o'clock, when you have dinner.

Before dinner it is usual to have a sekuski. In case you should have no appetite, there is a side table laden with twenty dainties. You have a glass of vodki, and toss it down your throat at one swallow. If you are an old hand you have two, four, or six vodkies, which put you into the best of good humour, but unfit you for anything but gossip for the rest of the afternoon.

Then you pick up a fork lying about—never washed or wiped from one day's end to the other—stick it into a sardine, or a slice of onion, or a little bit of cheese, or some caviare, and you eat. You have just enough of these to provoke an appetite, and when it is provoked you sit down to dinner. In the afternoon or evening you will drink many glasses of tea, which is, I admit, an enjoyable occupation. Between ten o'clock and midnight you have supper, really another dinner, and about three o'clock in the morning you think of going to bed.

To do things in the proper way and be correct and Western is, of course, the ambition of Irkutsk. So there is quite a social code. The old millionaires, who for forty years found Irkutsk society—such as it was before the coming of the railway—quite satisfied with a red shirt and a pair of greased top boots, are now "out of it." A millionaire only becomes a gentleman when he tucks in his shirt and wears his trousers outside and not inside his boots. It is etiquette to put on a black coat between the hours of ten in the morning and noon. No matter how sultry the evening is, if you go for the usual promenade and not wear a black overcoat you proclaim you are unacquainted with the ways of good society.

As to wealth, there is but one standard in Irkutsk. A man is known by his furs, and his wife by her furs and pearls. Macaulay writes somewhere about Russian grandees coming to court dropping pearls and vermin. I would be sorry to say things are exactly like that. But certainly the Russian is as sparing with water as though it were holy oil from Jerusalem.

When railway travelling a Siberian lady decks herself in all her finery, light-coloured gowns and feathered hats, and loads of jewellery. The Englishwoman who travels in a plain tailor-made garment and a straw hat is thought something of a barbarian.

And yet it would be unfair if I attempted to 'convey the idea that Irkutsk is nothing but a wealthy, flauntingly dressed, criminal, and licentious city. There are the many schools, the philanthropic institutions, the museum, to prove Irkutsk has another side.

Though there is no manufacturing in the town save seven breweries, there is a thriving industry in house building, and there is a fortune for someone who starts a saw-mill. Most of the houses are of wood, and every bit of it is sawn and prepared by hand.

In Irkutsk and throughout Siberia generally are artels or associations of workmen. They make a contract to finish a certain amount of work in a given time for a given sum, and they share the proceeds equally. I constantly came across wandering artels, especially builders. These will get a peasant's cottage ready for occupation in four or five days. Indeed, labour throughout Siberia is generally done by these working communities, with no master between them and the persons who want a thing done. For instance, in many of the villages, as the Siberian can't understand agriculture, the peasants find it difficult to get sufficient sustenance out of their land. So a foreman is elected, a common workshop is built with common funds, and weaving, working in bone and leather, and other industries are carried on, and at intervals the foreman drives away to the nearest town, and sells the produce.

The relations between employers and employed are all settled by strict law. Wages must be in cash; there must be no Sunday labour in factories, and no arbitrary dismissal except for given offence. The hours for women and children are limited. Fines imposed are to be in accordance with the standard sanctioned by the Labour Inspection Department, and they must all be paid into a fund for sickness or accident. Most country factories, and all factories in towns employing a certain number of hands, must provide a school, library, hospital, and bathroom for free use. Strikes, as we understand them, are

rigorously prohibited. But when a dispute arises between an employer and his workpeople a magistrate acts as umpire, and his decision is final.

In Irkutsk, in Tomsk, and in Omsk, I endeavoured to get into touch with the commercial classes, and find out their ideas about the future of Siberia.

All the best men I came across were Russians from the Baltic Provinces, and therefore more German than Russian. The keenness of competition is already beginning to be felt, but it will be these men who will amass gigantic fortunes within the next quarter of a century. They admit the ordinary Russian will have to alter a good deal before he is a successful business man.

The Russian lacks energy. If a thing is to be done he cannot see what difference it makes if it is done to-morrow, or next week, or next month. He is improvident and extravagant. So he finds his property mortgaged to the Jews, and the foreigners, or Russians of foreign extraction, making most of the money.

On all sides I heard grumblings about the corruption of officials. There must be honest officials, but commercial men declare the officials are continually blocking the way, not only with dilatory red-tapeism, but by hindering everybody who will not give enough in bribes. Indeed, I was told that the bribing here, there, and everywhere, which cannot be avoided, is often such that very little margin of profit remains. The foreigners get disgusted with the oiling of palms that must be gone through at every turn. Here, indeed, a very pressing reform is needed, and the best reform should be the better remuneration of these officials. They are wretchedly paid.

The Great English-built Ice-breaker "Baikal."

The number of officials met with is simply amazing to the man from Western Europe. One is staggered at the thought of what must be the cost of this army of government employés, notwithstanding their poor pay. Every man in government service wears uniform, and as it takes at least four Russians to do in a post office what a girl of eighteen will do at home, some glimmering of an idea may be obtained of their number. In a small town through which pass four passenger trains a day, and, say, eight goods trains, you will find two, or maybe three, great buildings. They belong to the Railway Administration, and eighty or a hundred men will be employed. You wonder what on earth they can find to do.

Now and then I got into conversation with officials, and dropped more than a broad hint that they wasted time, and suggested that if they intend to do much with so wonderful and rich a land as Siberia they must wake up. Never once did I find them resent my attitude. They got along very well, they said, and they didn't see why they should race and tear about like Englishmen and Americans. There the Eastern nature peeped out. Hurry they don't understand.

One travelled Russian was quite candid. "It is no good," he said; "a Russian can't do a thing quickly. If he tries he only makes a mess."

Till the foreigner came along, the possibilities of Siberia only dimly entered the Russian's mind. It has, however, been drilled into him, and just now he is a little feverish. He doesn't know how to develop it himself, and he is somewhat dog-in-the-mangerish about the outsider..

The government, on the other hand, is spilling money freely—spilling it in the sense of getting no return—hoping to make Western Siberia a mighty grain-producing land.

I suppose no country on the globe has such waterways as Siberia. Three rivers, the Obi, the Yenisei, and the Lena, can be navigable from their estuaries for thousands of miles. About a hundred steamers, chiefly belonging to Mr. Sibiriakoff, known as "the gold baron," because of his wealth, ply on the Lena.

Trade, however, on the Lena has its drawbacks, because it is more or less frozen for nine months in the year. The Obi is more favourably situated, as it

flows into the Arctic Ocean further south, and passes through a comparatively populous district. There are 150 steamers on it belonging to various companies; it and its tributaries have regular navigation for 10,000 miles. There is the Angara river here at Irkutsk, carrying with a rush the waters of Lake Baikal down to the Yenisei river and to the Arctic. Vessels can get through to Baikal now. But it is not easy, though it could be made so by a little engineering. Then you would get a waterway for 4,000 miles. I feel like apologising for giving this school-geography-book information were I not aware of the misconception there is at home about Siberia.

The Trans-Siberian Railway is in contact with all these rivers at many navigable points, and where it is not, branch lines are hurriedly being constructed. Therefore everything is to hand to make Siberia prosperous, so far as the government can provide. But, alas, there is one thing requisite and not to be found—energy!

Of course, there is at present a volume of trade. It could not be avoided. But it is a mere scratching in the region of possibilities I have already described the Omsk butter trade, one of the most remarkable of suddenly-sprung-up industries. But it was a Dane who saw what might be done with Siberian butter. The government, as I have said are buying quantities of American machinery for the agricultural districts, but what is required is a body of expert foreign farmers to go about giving sound practical instruction in wheat raising. Before many years, if that were done, and the flood of immigration continues, Siberian wheat would be beating the wheat of the United States and Canada out of the world's market. The government is fostering the beet sugar trade. It is in full swing, and I was told that in 1900 ten times as much beet sugar was produced as in any previous year.

One or two efforts in the way of large timber exportation: have failed chiefly owing to mismanagement, added to the fact that the wood was carried in a green condition. There is a two-thousand-mile belt of forest running right across Siberia. Timber should therefore become one of the chief items of Russian export. Interior China is almost bereft of forest vegetation, and at present gets immense quantities of seasoned timber from California, Here, then, is a market at Siberia's very door.

An interesting sight in Irkutsk is the piled-up cases of Chinese tea, all tightly and well wrapped in cowhide, ready to be sent to corners of the empire. But, as I explained in a former chapter, although Irkutsk is the distributing centre of tea, and through tea and gold gained its commercial eminence, tea now plays a comparatively small part in the trade of the city, because for years most of the tea for Russian consumption is sent direct from Chinese ports to Odessa. Again, with the proposed line from Irkutsk across the Gobi desert to Pekin—a line not so much in the air only as we Britishers would like—tea will be sent to the great cities of Russia, and there will be no need of the services of Irkutsk as a distributing agency. However, at present all tea brought to Russia by overland route comes to Irkutsk and it is estimated that some forty to sixty million pounds' weight reach there every year. Indeed, in the busy season—in winter, when the transit is quick and cheap because of sledges—as many as six thousand boxes of tea are often delivered daily.

There is coal to any abundance all over Western and Central Siberia. That I saw did not strike me as good. It is nevertheless used by the engines over long sections of the Siberian railway. Until, however, some finer seam is struck, Siberia has at present little chance of a successful market for her coal. As to using it herself, that is not at all likely when there is so much wood to be had simply for the fetching.

Now, I went to Siberia on a mission of curiosity, and with no other enthusiasm than that of the man fond of travelling and seeing new lands. But he would be blind indeed who could pass through this country and not appreciate what could be done with it if—well, if England had it.

But here I have a regret. Siberia is open to British trade. And yet between Chelyabinsk and Vladivostock Britain takes the place of a very bad third. Germany comes first and America second. I saw German and American wares constantly. The only article of British manufacture that stood ahead was sauce. I saw advertisements of British agricultural machinery, but I never saw a machine. I met dozens of Germans engaged in commerce. I only met two Britishers so engaged. One of these represented an American firm, and the other a French firm. Whenever I noticed a warehouse for machinery or agricultural implements I went in. Generally American, but sometimes German.

When I asked if there was any English they said no, but produced, thinking I would like to read them, elaborately illustrated catalogues from engineering firms. Usually they were in the English language. They were only waste-paper. But in every hotel, in every restaurant, I saw the familiar bottles of familiar English sauces. That my country should purvey to Siberia little else than sauce—I felt like smashing the bottles 1

## Chapter XII

# Across the Great Lake Baikal

What travellers Siberians are! On the morning I left Irkutsk for Trans-Baikalia I found the station crowded with people, as though a plague had stricken the city, and everybody was making mad haste to escape. In such a sparse population as Siberia has, you might imagine that often the trains would be comparatively empty. On the contrary, they are always full, packed with officials, wives, children, merchants, and chiefly the peasant class.

I had thought that when Irkutsk was reached the flight eastwards would cease. Not a bit. And the trains going west, back to Europe, were just as full.

"Where are these peasants making for?" I asked, seeing so many one day in a train bound for Moscow.

"Those are the immigrant wasters going back to their old sordid life in Southern Russia. They came here two, three, or more years ago on free tickets, and got land from the government. But they have grown homesick; they declare they can't live in Siberia, and so they are returning. That is one of the colonisation problems; so many poor folks come out here who know nothing about the agricultural conditions, and so there is hardship and misery."

As in all unsettled lands, there is a great mass of the discontented in Siberia, people who believe that a fortune is to be made in every other place than where they happen to be. And as the travelling is ridiculously cheap—about a shilling a hundred miles third-class—there is a constant human surge up and down the Trans-Siberian line.

The uproar and confusion of departure is deafening and bewildering. There is usually only one platform, and sometimes two or three trains standing parallel. If your train happens to be the second or third you must clamber through the carriages of the first and drop into a sort of passage between two trains, where, although there will be no starting for another hour, people are rushing with gesticulatory madness, hunting up lost relatives, or searching for missing pieces of baggage.

Every Russian is an old woman in the matter of baggage. A kit bag, or a bag of any sort, in which they can carry all their belongings, they have not. On an average everyone has eleven pieces of baggage. First there is a bulging bundle, that can only be tugged and punched and squeezed through the doorways. That consists of a couple of pillows, some rugs, and some sheets. Then there is a sort of satchel, with a lot of trappings about it, and a swollen neck suggestive of goitre. There will be three wooden boxes of various sizes, also paper bundles and hand-bags, always a kettle, a badly wrapped up loaf of bread, and, if the struggle is very great, you may find a man rubbing a cooked fowl across your shoulder.

Everybody takes everything into the carriage with him, and by necessity everybody is a nuisance to everybody else. Then the squabbling! At times you are certain there will be a free fight.

It is the endeavour of everybody to travel in a better class than they have paid for. The third-class load up the second-class carriages, the second-class passengers take possession of the first-class carriages, and when a legitimate first-class passenger comes along there are terrible rows, and life threatenings in the clearing of everybody out.

Military officers are entitled to travel in a class higher than they pay for. But now and then a highhanded warrior spark will have a third-class ticket and travel first. There was a Cossack officer who mounted the train at Irkutsk for the little station of Baranchiki on Lake Baikal side. When the usual rumpus commenced, and the officials came along to straighten matters, he was requested to travel second. No, he wouldn't! Why? It was his pleasure!! But why not obey the regulations? Regulations! Phew! It was his pleasure to

break them! Would he make room? No, it was his pleasure to travel first. And travel first he did.

At last away we rolled, once more eastward bent. For forty miles, until Lake Baikal was reached, the line hugged the bank of the river Angara, blue, clear, and rapid, acting as an escape for the mighty inland lake, and dropping 400 feet between Baikal and the Paris of Siberia."—

Plains and forests were left behind. The river was bordered by a beautiful mountainous country, rather like the Hudson as you see the hills from the cars on a journey between New York and Albany. The weather was exquisite, so genial, so bracing, that I broke into snatches of song.

In early afternoon we rumbled into the lake-side station of Baranchiki. In the rich glow of late summer there was the great inland sea to admire. But there was no time just then to admire scenery. It would not have required much strength of imagination to think I was at Folkestone. Porters seized the baggage, and, losing pieces of it, scampered along the pier, where lay a steamer belching black smoke. A string of grimy men were pitching coal from a truck down to the engines, and another steamer laden with horses was snorting its way seawards.

The pestering thought that the chief thing of British manufacture I had found in Siberia was sauce, vanished as I saw the big steamer was the Angara, built by Armstrong, Whitworth and Co., Newcastle. Here, at least, England was holding her own!

I looked for the great Baikal that is supposed to scorn ice packs and does carry three trains across the lake. But she was not to be seen, though there was the special jetty which gripped her when trains were run on board, and a hundred yards away was a black monster of a floating dock, where she can be housed when repairs are necessary.



Lake Baikal in Summer.



Running a Train on Board the "Baikal."

It is certainly an advantage being a stranger in Russia. Foreigner spells "good tips" to servants, and so the cabin steward on the Angara gave me a good cabin, saw my luggage safe, and handed me the key.

Lunch? Certainly! There was a nice little buffet on board, and a hobbling old waiter, who had all the habits of his tribe, though he was four thousand miles east of the nearest European city, brought me cutlets and peas and bottled ale.

I saw somebody glance sideways at me through the window, somebody with a ruddy, clean-shaven face and a little cloth cap. So I went out.

"By the cut of your jib you're a Britisher," I said.

"Yes, Isaac Handy, of Sunderland. Glad to see you."

Here was an honest-tongued north-countryman who had come here with others to put the Baikal together after she had been sent out in pieces from Newcastle. Also he superintended the building of the Angara on which we now stood; he was giving an eye to the building of the floating dock, also keeping watch on the steamer Ftoroy, specially built for the rapids on the Angara river. It was his duty to be about and be useful if anything went amiss with the engines which the Russians could not understand. He was one of the modest army of Britishers one drops across in odd corners of the world.

We went on the main deck and chatted with the captain, who had been in the Baltic trade, and spoke English well.

It was a delicious afternoon, and the forty-six miles across Lake Baikal were like a holiday cruise. There were two ladies aboard—of whom more anon—most industriously snapshotting their fellow passengers. Other folks had out maps and binoculars, and down on the lower deck huddled the peasantry among their bundles, a little afraid, some of them, for they had never seen so much water before.

The Angara was striking from Baranchiki to Misovaya, in Trans-Baikalia, where another train would meet us. Some day the railway line will be carried round the southern end of the lake, some two hundred miles, but the track will have practically to be blasted out of the face of the solid rock. The line is necessary, for the icebreakers of Armstrong, Whit worth and Co, cannot always break the Baikal ice in mid-winter.

There was no suggestion of winter, however, that balmy September afternoon as I took my ease lounging about the deck of the Angara, admiring the picturesque lake scenery and the entourment of high black mountains.

A wonderful stretch of water is this Lake Baikal. It is probably the deepest fresh-water sea in the world. It has been plumbed to a depth of 4,500 feet. It is 420 miles long, and has a breadth of from ten to sixty miles. There is plenty of good fish, and about 2,000 seals are killed annually. The timber on the hillsides is cedar, and in the sheltered valleys grow apples and cherries, strawberries, raspberries, and whortleberries.

As the vessel slowly churned her way across, Mr. Handy told me about the lake. He pointed out a huge boulder lying in the mouth of the Angara which the natives regard with awe, because they believe that were it removed all the water would run out of the Baikal. Certainly the water tears into the river at a terrific speed. This is not to be wondered at, as the Baikal is nearly 1,600 feet above sea level.

Presently there came steaming down the lake a huge four-funnelled vessel, white painted, by no means pretty, and rather like a barn that had slipped afloat. That was the Baikal, one of the most wonderful vessels in the world, coming back from Misovaya, and carrying two goods trains fully laden. If necessary she could carry three trains and eight hundred passengers, but at present the Baikal is used for merchandise and the Angara for passengers.

The Baikal passed sufficiently near for me to appreciate her great size, and as the fore gates were open I caught a glimpse of red-painted goods waggons. The ship is of over 4,000 tons, close on 300 feet long, and has nearly 60 feet beam. She has three triple expansion engines of 1,250 horse-power, two amidships and one in the bow. This power is required in the ice-breaking. She will break through ice 86 inches thick, and her bow is made with a curve, so that when the ice is thicker she can be backed and then go full steam at the ice, partly climb on it with her impetus, and then crush it with her weight. This means that the Baikal sometimes takes a week to cross the lake.

The Baikal is sometimes frozen from December till April. But although the ice puts a hindrance in the way of ships, the lake is busier than in the summer. I have before mentioned that winter is the great time for cheap transit in

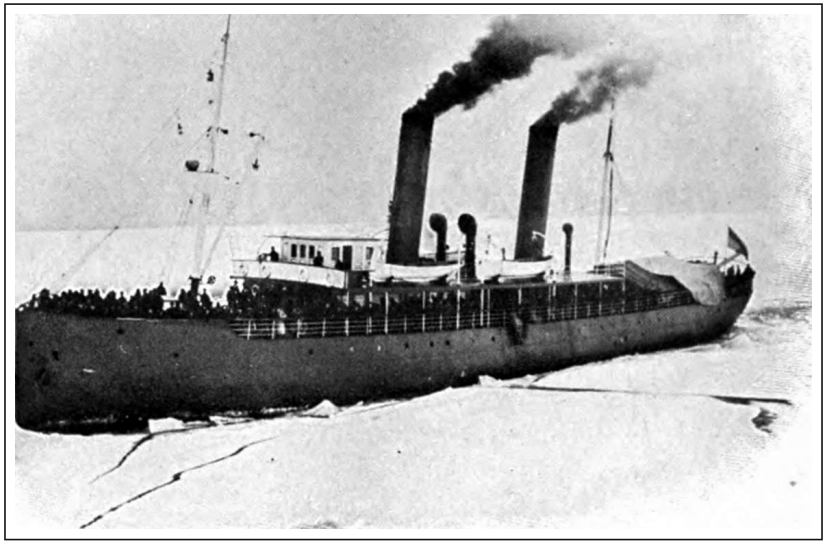
Siberia, because sledge travelling is easy and quick. So a road is made across the lake; the track is marked by pine trees stuck in the ice; a man holds a contract for keeping the way in repair for the post, and if there is a nasty crack he must board it until it heals by freezing; and all day long there is a constant procession of sledges coming from Trans-Baikalia, Mongolia, and Manchuria, and making for Irkutsk.

When the sun in ruddy haze had dropped behind the mountains, a clumsy breeze came scudding across the waters. So we went below to drink tea. Mr. Handy brought out a collection of photographs, his own work, and while we talked about the superstitions of the people in this little-known corner of Asia, I was turning over snapshot views of Lambton Castle and Redcar and keels on the Humber.

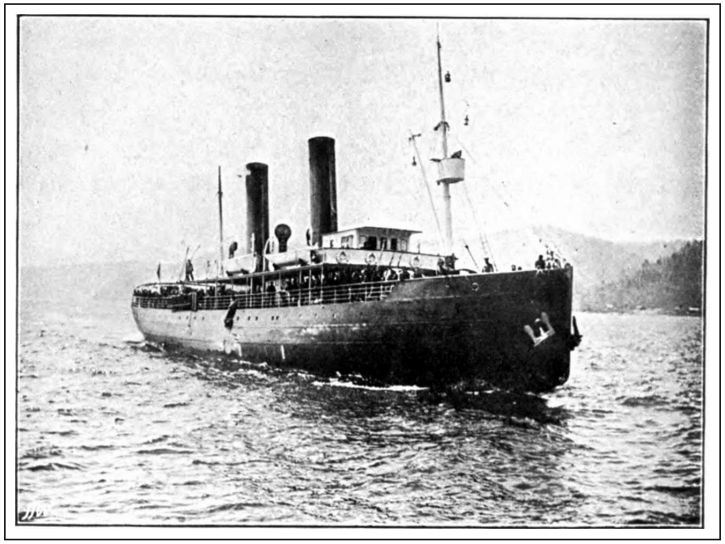
Up on deck again we found billows of cloud tumbling from the mountains, racing over the dark waters of the lake, shrouding the world, so that we steamed through smoking mist, till a wailing wind crept down from the north-west and drove back the clouds, and filled the rigging of the ship with Valkyrie cries. Then in the darkness I heard tales of the furious storms that often ribbon the lake into tattered foam.

They say hereabouts that it is only on the Baikal in the autumn that a man learns to pray from his heart.

Twinkling red and green lights appeared on tho right, and soon we were splashing alongside a little jetty flooded with electric light and a long train waiting.



The "Angara" in Winter.



The "Angara" on Lake Baikal.

So I found myself in Trans-Baikalia, the far eastern part of Siberia. But the train didn't go on for four hours. However, I sought my carriage and made my bed, and smoked my pipe, and read my novel till drowsiness came.

And when I awoke it was broad daylight, and at a long, heavy, plodding pace, the train was rolling through a stretch of wild Scotland. That is what it looked like. There were the bleak hills and the clouds clinging to them, the sullen crags, and the fierce rivulets; then great hollows with sedge-bordered lochs. Mist floated to mist, and hills waved to hills, and a cold gauntness was on the land.

I rubbed up acquaintance with my neighbour, a stout Teutonic-looking Russian from Nicolaievsk, at the mouth of the Amur. He spoke English about as well as I spoke Russian, but also stuttered. It took him twenty minutes to wish me good morning.

A mutual desire to snapshot some of the Baikal tribesmen brought the two ladies whom I had noticed on the boat and myself together. One was a Russian lady who spoke French, and the other was a French lady who spoke English and Russian. They were Moscow residents, and were taking a little round trip across Siberia, then intending to visit Japan, China, India, Egypt, Turkey, and get back to Russia at Odessa by Christmas. They were proud of their adventurous voyage, and enjoyed the curiosity of the other passengers as to what they were doing.

The Russian doesn't understand the occupation of "sight-seeing." He can understand being sent to Siberia, or going to Siberia to earn money, but to visit it just to look at it suggests to him you must be a bit of a fool. At last, on the second evening, the ladies told me all the train knew why they had come to Siberia. Neither was in the first flush of youth, and as there were ninety-three men to every seven women in Siberia their object was to find husbands! They were intensely amused.

The distance from Misovaya to Streitinsk is 605 miles, and it took the train three days to cover the distance. The line had just been opened, and as the metals were just spiked to the sleepers, and the sleepers just laid on a light bank of soil, speed was out of the question.

Everything indicated haste. There were no platforms at the station-houses, and the station-houses were all in course of erection. Whenever possible, the line kept to the bank of a river, and where there was no river, but only mountains, it took great horse-shoe curves to avoid cuttings and tunnels.

We climbed right over the Yabloni Mountains, one engine snorting in front and another puffing and pushing behind, until we got to an altitude of 3,412 feet. Then, with long sweeps, we swung down to the edge of the Ingoda river. After that, for 300 miles, the line never left the side of the Ingoda or Shilka rivers.

Once—only once from Moscow to Streitinsk—we ran through a bit of a tunnel, not a hundred yards long. For half a minute the train was plunged in darkness. There was shrieking of women and bawling of children, and when we got into daylight the men looked scared. Tunnels were things they knew nothing about. When some of them saw I was laughing at their fright, reassurance gradually came back.

For hours we would roll between mountains, skirting the edges of great swampy basins. At long intervals I would see a rugged patch on a plain far off and knew it was a village.

We saw clusters of tents exactly like Red Indian tents. They belonged to the aborigines, Buriat Mongols, who are vanishing before the Muscovites as the Redskins are vanishing before the Saxons.

When the train halted I had a good opportunity of seeing these people. They are first cousins to the Chinese, but all I met struck me as being broader, more sturdily built than the Chinese. Their faces are round rather than long, but their cheekbones are prominent. The eye is a warm, good-natured brown. Their skins are not the Chinese sickly sallow, but a ruddy bronze. They are good-looking men, but had I met them in Nevada it would never have struck me they were not Red Indians.

The women folk, however, would have put me right. Without being accused of lack of gallantry, one may say that the Indian squaw is one of the last ladies on earth for whom it would be possible to rouse admiration—coarse, fat to unwieldiness, and with as much expression as a potato.

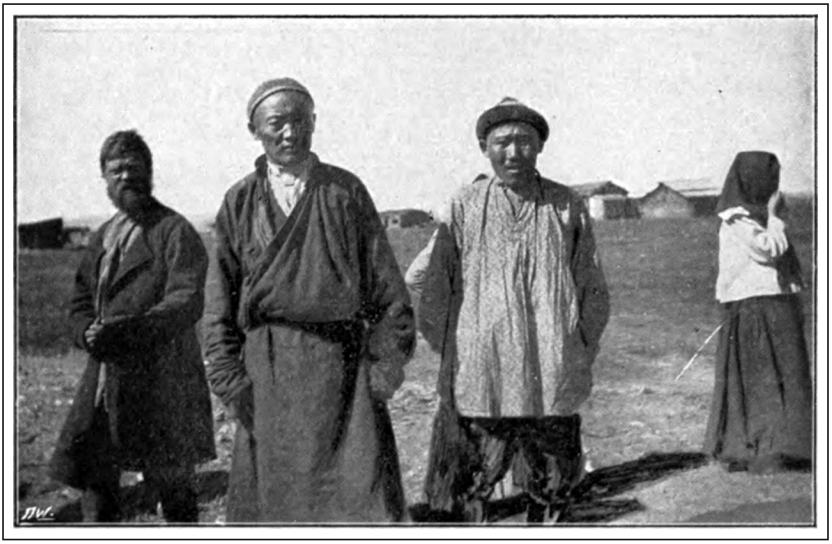
But these Buriat women were often handsome with the kind of good looks you sometimes see among Spanish Jewesses, only much darker. The features were well cut, the nose refined, and the eyes black and brilliant. Their hair was really black. As they walked about in their gay, red print frocks—and no other colour would suit them so well—they had a long, easy swing of the limbs that showed good physique. The elder women get wrinkle-faced and rather uncertain in their gait. Yet distinction remains with them.

About both men and women there was a shyness which was blushingly apparent when I wanted to take their photographs. They didn't quite understand the camera. But when it was explained they were pleased, and laughed, and hung back, and after many persuasions from the onlooking crowd—what a medley we sometimes were, Russians, Chinese, English, French, German, in all sorts of costumes—they would stand forward with the awkward delight of a yokel who is getting his five shillings from the squire's lady for showing the best cabbages at the village flower show.

I found the Russians had a kindly admiration for the Buriats, extolling them for their simplicity and honesty. These Buriats, though they live in tents, are not really nomads, but keep to one particular district. Although the children of Mongols, once the terror of the world, there is nothing of the warrior about them, except their splendid horsemanship. High banked and uncomfortable do their saddles look, but they manage their horses, which are light brown with black manes and very swift, with wonderful agility. They know well how their ancestors once swept Europe, and they have a firm belief that some day a leader will arise and regain their lost kingdom.



My Lady Acquaintances Buy Fruit.



A Couple of Buriats.

To me there is something very pathetic in this confidence among races once powerful, but now subjected, that the day will come when they will reinherit their own. Perhaps it is well they should have this little glow of patriotism in their hearts.

To-day the Buriats are pastoral. They live chiefly on milk, millet, and sheep killed on feast days. Their wealth consists in immense herds of cattle; some of them even possess forty or fifty thousand head. Though sons and daughters marry, the new wives and new husbands must come and live in the family camp.

In religion they are Buddhists, but have only been so for three centuries. They are fond of making pilgrimages to Urga, where there is a "living Buddha." So great is this devotion that a Buriat will frequently surrender the whole of his property to some shrine on condition that he receives just enough to live upon.

So, among this wild, Scotch-like land we took our slow way, the shriek of the engine making long, eerie echoes among the hills.

Then we got to Chita, a big place that got its name from a band of Italians who came here gold-hunting long ago. Just as usual, the station was two miles from the town, though the line, in American style, runs through what is practically the main street. First the train stopped at Chita station in the late afternoon, and gave us half an hour to go into the buffet and swallow dinner.

I saw the town ahead, and asked the usual question, "Why isn't the station in the town?" A shrug of the shoulders was the reply.

The train puffed along, and stopped in the very centre of Chita. Here was a shed with "Chita Town "painted on it, and twenty yards behind was a big station in course of erection.

"But why wasn't this made the station when the line was put down eighteen months ago?" Another shrug of the shoulders.

The train halted for an hour at Chita, and as this was in the evening, at the time the Russian has his promenade, all the town came down to peer at the passengers.

It was a bright and merry sight, just as un-Asiatic as you can imagine. There were plenty of slouching, unwashed Chinese coolies and moujiks in rough sheepskin coats and hats. But they were alien to the town, and kept well away from the other folk,

The other folk were well-dressed Russians, mostly wearing the conventional peaked cap, but still there were plenty of hard felts to be seen—even one silk hat and a frock coat—and tan shoes and tan gloves.

Some of the women retained the old Siberian habit of just a shawl thrown over the head, but most had feathered hats and light jackets.

Groups of young fellows stood about smoking cigarettes, and casting glances at the young ladies who walked up and down, arm-in-arm, three in a row. There wasn't much taste or good fitting in the ladies' garments. It was apparent all this finery was a thing of less than a year. But everybody was happy, and the air was full of light chatter:

Again and again I marvelled at the way Russia was throwing its cities far east, bringing to the people all the trappings of civilisation. I had to look long and continuously at the map to understand I was to the north of Mongolia, and almost as far east as Pekin,

## Chapter XIII

# The California of Siberia

❦

Just as Siberia, west of Lake Baikal, has everything to make it a grain-growing region, east of Baikal, as far as I could gather, it has everything to make it another California, or another Klondyke, or another South Africa, or whatever you call a stretch of country full of mineral wealth.

Most of the mines belong to the Czar, and there is much secrecy about their output. But every American or English miner I came across, and who had seen how the Siberian gold is worked, smiled broadly at the primitive methods. Maybe he would produce an ounce-weight nugget that had been lost in the washing, and then suddenly grow serious, and say, "I've been to California and Klondyke and South Africa, but—well, may I have some claims when proper machinery can be set to work!"

All the men I talked to agreed that the Russian is something of a "fuddler" in mining. He lacks scientific training. If he sees the gold he can get it, but he doesn't know a gold district when he is in it.

About £5,000,000 worth of gold has been officially sent out of Siberia into Russia every year, but this is probably not half the produce, for gold-stealing is rampant. In Western Siberia there are over eleven thousand gold miners employed, and in Eastern Siberia only some thirty thousand, though the production is nine or ten times as great. In Eastern Siberia the men are well paid, getting 3s. 4d. a day, which is a high wage for Siberia. The Western

miners, in the neighbourhood of Senipalatinsk, for instance, only get fivepence a day.

The men work hard from three in the morning till seven at night, recognising neither Sunday nor feast day except that of the patron saint of the mine.

This continuous work is insisted on by the government because the men have far more money than they ever earn—obtained, of course, by selling—stolen gold to some slit-eyed Chinese, who ostensibly purveys tea—and their free days are given up to riotous debauchery, sometimes ending in bloodshed. - Money is thrown about in the usual mining camp fashion. The recklessness among the miners is now being stopped by a government official holding as deposit the amount earned by the men, and only handing it over to them when they go home for the winter.

The Russian mine-owners are all enormously wealthy. They make for Irkutsk in the winter, and the man who has the wildest orgies and squanders the most money is regarded as the best fellow.

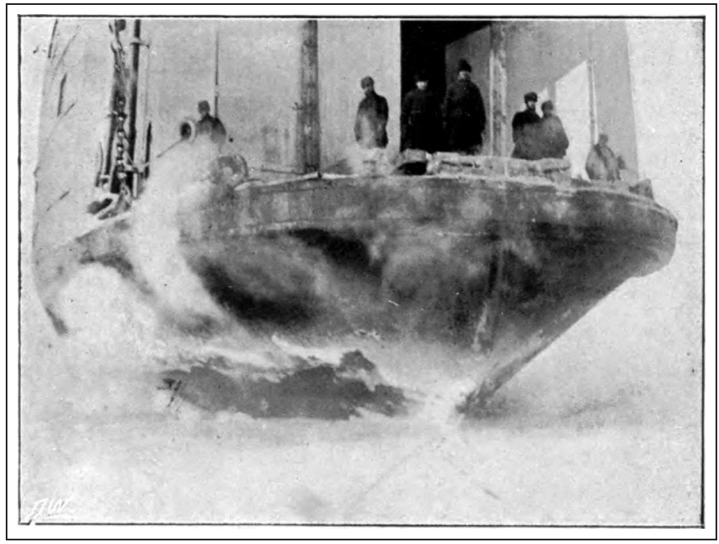
The government, anxious to develop the gold-mining industry—for Russia is in need of money—has temporarily remitted all duty on gold-mining machinery sent into the country.

All over Siberia, therefore, is the intruding Kayoshnik, gold-hunter—English, French, or American engineers sent out usually by a syndicate to inspect places where gold is said to exist.

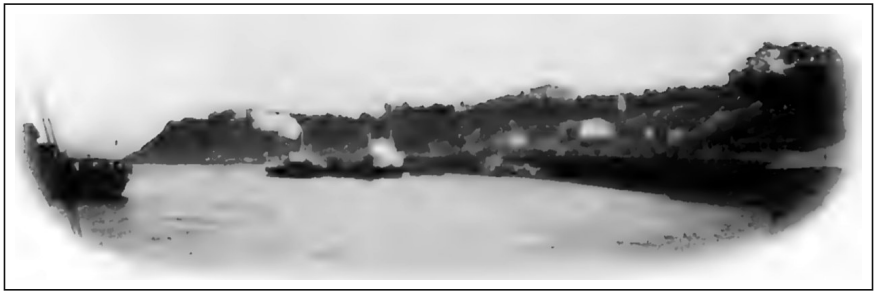
A Siberian prospecting party consists of a leader, an overseer, eight workmen, ten horses, eighteen saddle bags, provisions and tools, the outlay being about £500. When a likely valley is found, the gold-hunter seeks in the riverbed for pyrites, iron, slate, clay, or quartz coated with crystals. If the verdict on these is favourable trees are felled and a hut built.



The "Baikal" in the Ice.



The "Baikal" Breaking the Ice.



Khabarovsk.



Bartering on the River Side.

The thickness of the earth covering the gold varies from two to twenty feet, and in regard to this I should point out that owing to the almost continuously frozen state of the soil and the dense forests, the gold deposits are protected against the denuding action of the water. If the tests yield 2 oz. of gold to 14 tons of earth, the result is good. If there is less than an eighth of an ounce it is poor. Sometimes as much as half a pound weight of gold is found in a ton and a half of earth.

If it is found worth while to mine, two posts are stuck up, one at each end of the ground, and the place is registered by the Commissioner of Police, or under an authority from the Director of Mines. A government surveyor next inspects the ground and prepares a map. After that the finder can borrow money on the security of his mine at the rate of from 20 to 30 per cent.

A claim is usually about three miles long. The breadth is determined by the distance between the two mountains in which the gold seam lies, but it is generally from 500 to 1,000 feet. No one is permitted to hold claims of more than three consecutive miles, but if you want to hold more the claims can be entered in the names of your wife, partner, or friends. When a mine is once registered it must be worked. If the finder has not the means, he may sell his claim or transfer it. But if it is not worked it is forfeited to the Crown.

All gold pays a tax to the government of from 5 to 10 per cent. on the yield, according to the district. On land belonging to the Czar, or on what aro known as State lands, there is an additional royalty of some eight or ten shillings an acre.

What for many years hindered mining was that all gold won had to be sent to the government smelting-houses, either in Irkutsk or Tomsk. The gold having been smelted and assayed, was despatched to the St. Petersburg mint. The miner had to wait till it arrived there before receiving bills on which he could locally draw coin or gold ingots. This was an evil system. It tempted the merchant to circumvent the government and also, when short of money and unable to wait, obliged him to have his government acknowledgments discounted locally at a very high interest. All this, however, has recently been abolished. The gold is assayed on the spot, and after paying the tax, either in coin or in metal, the miner can proceed to sell.

The system known as place-mining is the usual method adopted. But that is giving way to heavy machinery now there is the Trans-Siberian Railway. Quite recently a whole trainload of American mining machinery for one firm was run through from Riga to Irkutsk in twenty-one days.

We halted for a while at Nertchinsk, amid charming scenery, which has led at least one traveller to dub it "the Switzerland of Siberia." It is here there are silver mines, though not, as far as I could gather, very profitable ones. They are mines that have been worked since the opening of the seventeenth century. There have been some ninety mines, but at present nothing like that number are working. It seems that owing to the superior attractions of gold mining, voluntary labour is extremely difficult to get.

This explains the employment of convict labour. Indeed, the Nertchinsk mines are the only mines where there is convict labour. There are two convict villages, Gorni-Zeruntui reserved for criminals, and Akatui reserved for political offenders.

In the silver-mining district, two hundred miles long by about a hundred miles wide, there are seven prisons, and in the dozen government mines between three and four thousand convicts are engaged. There are women prisoners, and though they have to work, none of them are sent underground.

Those who are regarded as the worst of political offenders—men, for instance, who want to argue for political freedom with bombshells—and condemned to penal servitude, are kept at Akatui. I did not go there, for it lies 140 miles from Nertchinsk. Still, the opportunity was offered me. Those, however, who have visited it, told-me it is the dreariest of all Siberian prisons. Sentries are everywhere, and no man has ever escaped. The rules are severe. The place is 3,000 feet above sea level, and its winter lasts long—from August until May—whilst the short summer is intensely hot, the thermometer registering 95 degrees in the shade, though at a depth of two feet the soil is frozen.

I made particular inquiries, but could hear nothing about any cruelties practise in the convict mines of Nertchinsk, such as keeping exiles in mines

day and night, working them in a dying condition or in chains, or of making them sleep chained to wheelbarrows.

Though they are expiating their Anarchist opinions by a punishment that must be fearful, it cannot be said they are otherwise than humanely treated. For instance, if a man gets recognition for good conduct, he becomes a "free command." That is, though he must wear the convict dress, he is only under police supervision, and is at liberty to make what money he can by any art or trade. A "free command" may marry, and if he has any private money he can receive it. Also his friends are at liberty to visit him.

Mining cannot be followed all the year round, and so the prisoners work at other trades. The difficulty, so I was informed in various quarters, is not overmuch work, but how to find enough for all the exiles, who often hang about listlessly the whole day. The summer hours are from six to noon, and from two to seven; the winter hours from seven to four; there is no work on Sundays or saints' days, and eight months' labour is reckoned a year's work. There are plenty of books in the prison. Any books are allowed so long as they are not socialistic.

Round about Akatui are local committees, which specially look after prisoners' children, the wives, and the sick. There is a discharged prisoners' aid fund, which does much the same work as the Samaritan Prison Society in England. At Gorni-Zeruntui is a large orphanage built by private subscriptions collected by Madame Narishkine, a lady-in-waiting to. the Dowager Empress. Most of the children are not orphans at all, but the offspring of incompetent or incarcerated parents.

So through this district of convict mines and prisons, and picturesque mountain land, the train went rolling on at about eight miles an hour. On the hills were clumps of spruce and ash and white birch. Next came stretches of round-shouldered, treeless hills, such as you see from the railway carriage between Leeds and Carlisle. Then, when the line clung all day long to the northern bank of the Ingoda, there was swelling upland exceedingly pretty.

I was now travelling in the first breath of autumn. Old Siberians told me that as long as they could remember there had never been such a spell of fine weather. So I was fortunate All the trees were beginning to be tinged with

the rich hues of the fading year, and on the banks were masses of brilliant wild flowers, flaunting red, and pale puce, and strong yellow, and gentle blue.

Each evening I spent a delicious hour standing on the gangway. The rattle-rattle, clang-clang of the cars over the metals I didn't hear. I only saw the day dying in exquisite sunset, and the rippled reflections in the rivers. Then sumptuous dusk fell on the land. When the train stopped the silence was like a pall.

A light moved mysteriously along the line. The murmur of the trees was heard, and away China-wards a shooting star streaked across the blackness. The awe of night hung heavily. Far off there was the sound of a horn. The engine roared loudly, and the roar went reverberating from hill to hill, so you were not conscious when it actually ceased. There was a creaking of the brakes, and once more we were on the move.

When we reached the river Shilka, born in the hills of Mongolia, there were often clearings to be seen with little homesteads on the water-side. Now and then was a village, and youths were sitting on tree-trunks fishing. The boats were just "dug-outs," long, narrow, and easily capsisable, and propelled with a paddle. We passed rafts on which little huts were built, and there were women-folk making the midday meal.

Always were there the lone section huts on the line, and unfailingly the man and woman with the green-flag signal. The bare-footed children—and generally plenty of them—ran out and shouted gleefully.

Gradually the Shilka widened until it was a broad, noble stream. We overtook a light draught steamer with a stern paddle. That indicated we were near Streitinsk, and practically the end of the great Trans-Siberian Railway. From there onward there would be 1,428 miles to journey by boat on the Shilka and Amur till Khabarovsk was reached. Then the railway would be met again, and 253 more miles in the cars would land me at Vladivostok, "the gate of the East."

The Russians kept telling me that very soon the whole line by the river-side would be completed. That I doubt. Indeed, I doubt whether Russia ever intended to lay the line along this route. Glance at a map, and you will see it would have to make a great journey half round Manchuria, which is divided

by the Amur from admitted Russian territory. But Russia is in Manchuria ostensibly to keep the peace. I believe Russia will evacuate it about the same time England proposes to evacuate Egypt.

To the east of Chita I saw a little line branch south. That line strikes straight across Manchuria to Nikolsk, sixty miles north of Vladivostok.

The Manchurian line will enormously save the distance between Irkutsk and Vladivostok, and do away with the dread which haunts all travellers on the Shilka and Amur of the water running low, and the boat being left stuck on a mud bank for a month. We Britishers think it is a high-handed proceeding for Russia to plant this line across Manchuria, Chinese territory, with hardly as much as "by your leave." But there it is.

Of course, it was only to be expected that Streitinsk station should be on the opposite side of the river to Streitinsk itself.

It was pitch dark when the big funnel-chimneyed engine gave its last snort, and the porters began to drag our luggage out. There was noisy vituperative haggling before getting a wheezy dray to carry one's belongings. The carts kept smashing into one another on the crooked, jolting little path down to the water edge.

On the other side of the river blinked odd lamps along the town front for nearly two miles. But we had to stand in the slush till the ferry came. Then all the carts tried to get on at once, and boxes tumbled into the water, and the police fought back the drivers, and the passengers fought each other.

Only about a third of us did get the ferry, which swung from an anchor in mid-stream. Horses got restless and backed, and were sworn at, and altogether the fifteen minutes' journey across the Shilka was not without its perils.

The baggage belonging to my two Russian and French acquaintances, together with my own, was lost. So we had to roam among the carts trying to find it. It was decided the Russian lady should jump into the droshki, hasten off to the good hotel in Streitinsk, and secure rooms before others got there, while the other two of us ferreted for the lost property.

I found it, but the driver was a fool—at least I thought him so at the time for not understanding my Russian. He cried "Nitchevo!" and with a clatter

disappeared into the darkness. He wasn't such a fool after all, for he made for the hotel—the only decent, clean, respectable hotel in the town.

Streitinsk that night looked like a few old barns stuck anyhow on a humpy wilderness of dust. It was a melancholy-stricken hole.

I asked my French lady if it didn't remind her of the Grand Boulevard in her beloved Paris? She shuddered.

The hotel was a big darksome place. There was a Slavonic concert in one of the rooms—quite a barn, but tricked out in blue and gold and red, and beneath swinging, smelling oil lamps sat the dite of Streitinsk, the military and the merchants, and their wives and children.

We didn't intend to, but we disturbed that concert.

The bedrooms, little boxes of places with large cracks in the walls, the doors without handles or keys, and having to be fastened with a padlock run through staples, abutted on a gallery in the concert-room. The landlord, a thin man with short grey hair on end, didn't seem to care a rap for the concert. Here were three distinguished people who had come to his hotel, and they were his consideration! We told him we would wait.

Wait! He wouldn't think of it. Up the creaky wooden steps did his men struggle with our baggage, and the two ladies had as many boxes as ladies usually have. These were dumped in the gallery. Would we inspect the rooms? They were poor places, but we selected two. The baggage was distributed anyhow. It had to be sorted.

I found my room was bigger and better than that of the ladies. Would they care to change? They were delighted.

Then the baggage had to be re-transferred. Next it was necessary an extra iron bedstead should be carried into the ladies' room. The sheer cussedness of things insisted that the bed should shed its stays all up the stairs, and then double and tumble to pieces when the gallery was reached.

The three of us sat down and laughed till the tears came. There was nothing else to do. Had the audience risen and slain us they would have been justified. They, however, looked on, but with the eyes of those accustomed to little things like that. They didn't object in the least.

But all was fairly well in the end. The ladies decided to take their evening meal in privacy in their room. I hunted out the restaurant, and had my supper among a crowd of Russian officers who had come along from Streitinsk barracks to the concert. They were nice, rather noisy fellows. We became quite merry, and toasted eternal friendship between England and Russia.

But the recollection of that iron bedstead shedding bits of itself, and finally collapsing in the concert-room, will make me laugh on my death-bed,

## Chapter XIV

# Down the Shilka and Amur Rivers

❦

So it was at Streitinsk, exactly 4,055 miles east of Moscow, that I bade good-bye to the twin thread of steel, winding over hill and plain, called the Great Trans-Siberian Railway.

All along I had inquired whether at Streitinsk I would find a steamer to carry me down to the Amur that fringes Manchuria. Ignorance was everywhere. There were steamers, but whether they ran once a day or once a month—a shrug of the shoulders!

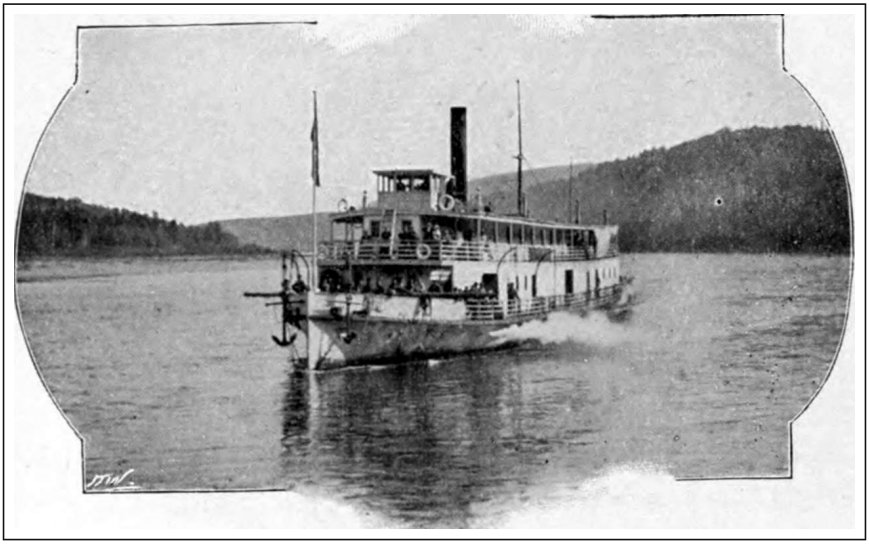
Job's comforters pointed out there had been comparatively little rain for weeks, and the Shilka would be nothing more than a sandy gully.

When I got into Trans-Baikalia I was certain there must be a post connection, and imagined the railway officials could tell me.

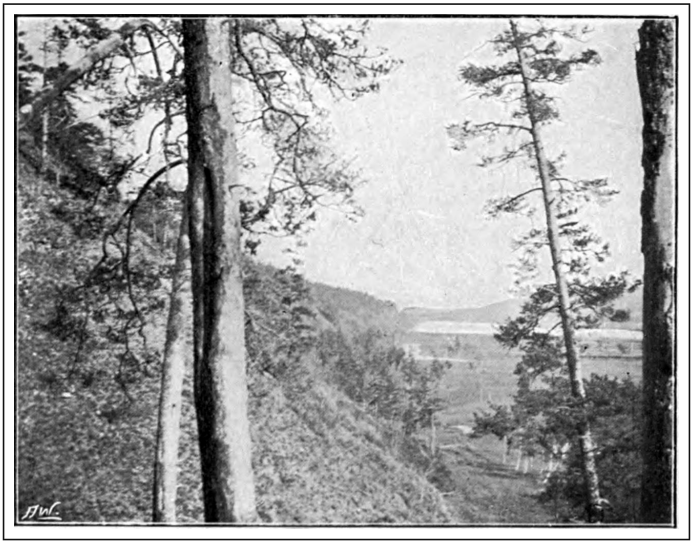
No! They knew nothing. Also they were indifferent.

Fancy the station-master at King's Cross not knowing how long was the journey from London to Edinburgh! Yet at Irkutsk the chief of the railway could not say to a day how long it took the train to reach Streitinsk. Maybe three days; possibly four; he didn't think it could be more than five.

"Letters for Vladivostok, China, and Japan are going by my train; how are they taken on from Streitinsk I inquired.



Down the Amur River.



On the Banks of the Amur.

"By water, I suppose, but don't know; I have never been there."

It was not till I reached Streitinsk itself that I learnt a post-boat went down stream once every five days. As luck would have it, a boat had gone the day before. So I had four days to wait in this dreary, bedraggled little town that stands like an ugly grey wart on a beautiful hillside.

Let me try to describe Streitinsk.

Along the banks of the Shilka stretch a higgledypiggledy lot of shanties all unpainted, all with little dirty windows, and all with a yard that is more than ankle deep in cattle filth. There is usually a rude fence, but broken. The cows, poor thin brutes, and the pigs, ridge-backed, flabby, and bristled, wander anywhere.

On the roadway, which happened, because the weather is fine, to be a six-inch layer of dust instead of a foot-deep mass of slush, which it would become if it rained, come scampering a herd of Siberian ponies. You get to one side and shut your eyes while they skelter by. You hear strange yells. Slightly raising your eyelids you see, as in a fog, tawny jowled Tartars with huge sheepskin hats about their ears, the wool inside, and with great sheepskin coats, the wool also inside, riding sorry nags and whipping up the straggling ponies with long biting thongs.

At one spot, behind the string of shanties, is a square. There are big, blue-painted signboards with names on them, and now and then a board on which is painted, badly, a fur coat, or a plough, or a kettle, or a cabbage, or a lump of meat, and inside you know you will find clothing or agricultural implements or food.

The place seems deserted. But every now and then your attention is caught by a lady hurrying along in all the finery of Europe. Round the corner spins a Cossack officer, in a white linen jacket, but distinguishable by the yellow band round his cap, and the broad yellow stripe down his trousers, actually riding a bicycle!

Over the place, indeed, hangs a filthy Eastern slothfulness, rent every now and then with evidence of Western ideas. The shops, so dingy from outside, surprise you when once inside. They are big, full of commodities, generally have plenty of attendants, and not infrequently many purchasers, chiefly,

judging by their dress, from the far interior. These shops in so wretched a place amaze you till you remember that Streitinsk, like all other towns in Russia with railways and water communication, is the centre of trade for many hundreds of miles round.

A smile comes to your lips as you notice how the reckoning is done—with one of those little appliances of coloured beads on wires, with which the infant mind at home is beguiled into the first principles of arithmetic, by learning that two blue and two yellow beads count four. The Russian cannot count without the instrument. Mental arithmetic is beyond him.

You buy something for sixty kopecks, and present a rouble in payment. He must clatter his beads backwards and forwards before discovering that the change is forty kopecks!

Siberia is truly the land of distances.

I met a man on the train who told me he had found much advantage since the railway ran near his home. He lived fifty miles from the nearest station.

With always immense distances to cover, the Siberian has not yet realised the advantages of anything being near. I have already given one reason why the stations on the Trans-Siberian Railway are so far from the towns—the insufficiency of the bribes to the engineers to place them nearer—but another reason is that the Siberian doesn't appreciate the use of a station being only two miles off and not ten. To go ten miles takes longer time than to go two. But what is time? Nothing! The Eastern trait in his nature makes him heedless of time. The Britisher who wants something done now and not next week he regards as a foolish person, who gives himself a lot of trouble.

The post office at Streitinsk might be in the main square, approximately in the middle of the town. It isn't. It is two miles away up the river bank.

Each day in Streitinsk I had a walk through the place. I confess its sordidness weighed heavily. One was indeed right out of the world. There were no newspapers. No news ever came there.

I did not possess sufficient courage to fight against the inertia of the place. There was just the petty community, the trading, the tea-drinking, the eating, the sleeping all the year round—and nothing more. Every Russian town is the same. So when you see how each place must be a world to itself the sur-

prise after all is not that the Russians have so little energy, but, indeed, that they have any.

A striking change, however, came over Streitinsk at night—at least, over my corner of it, "the best hotel." In the daytime it was just a barn with some gewgaws on the walls and imitation plants on the table to make a dining-room. So dilatory was everybody that if I could get a modest lunch of two courses in two hours I was fortunate.

But about ten o'clock, when you would conceive such a drowsy, out-of-the-world place should be all abed, "the best hotel in Streitinsk" burst into rollicking uproar. The officers from barracks, the official engineers—those who have gilt buttons and green braid—the river officials, the post office and telegraph officials, officials of this, that, and the other, all in the uniform of their posts, tramped into the hotel, ordered meals, drank many glasses of vodki and many bottles of beer, and grew uproariously merry before the food was ready. There was a wheezy piano, and in front of it a brass-fingered instrument, which on the turning of a handle ripped tunes out of the old piano. Then came card-playing and more eating, and continued hand-turning by a boy. And this in a shed of an hotel with no handles on the doors, where your clothes-hook was a nail, and the gaps in the woodwork so open that you could easily see your neighbour going to bed. It was always four in the morning before quiet came.

I went to the boat office to book a berth on the post-packet. It was closed. The next day I went. It was open, but nobody inside. I waited one hour. At last in came a heavily whiskered man. Could I engage a place on the post-boat? He didn't know because he had not anything to do with it. But the manager would come in an hour or two if I would wait. I didn't wait, but went back in two hours. Yes, there would be a boat the day after to-morrow, but he hadn't the tickets with him, and if I came tomorrow he would have them. On the morrow I went still again. Well, the boat was not in yet, but if it did come in, and all was well, it would leave on the following day. So. I paid my thirty roubles (about £3), and secured a place to Blagovestchensk.

Having made up my mind there would be no boat, I was agreeably surprised to find on Monday morning, September 16th, the Admiral

Tschchachof! had come in and would go out again in four hours. It was a long, shallow-draught, paddle steamer.

Every place was taken, and first and second passengers, chiefly officials, jostled one another in the passages. Third-class passengers, who had to be content with the deck, were left on the wharf till a signal was given—a crowd of coarse beings in all kinds of nondescript garb, Russians, Tartars, Chinese, bundles of clothes, with wizened and grim old features peering out: a tatterdemalion throng!

Presently came the post-bags, great leather sacks of whole cowhides fastened with heavy steel chains and locked. Half a dozen coolies staggered under each sack and pitched it into a hole on the main deck. All the bags having been put in, the hold was supposed to be fastened with a cord, and the cord sealed to a tablet. There were the marks of old sealing-wax on the tablet, but no sealing-wax was used during this voyage. But Nitchevo—What did it matter?" as the Russians say.

When the siren shrieked for the deck passengers to come aboard, there was a scamper. Everybody was carrying bedding, bundles of clothing, chunks of bread, a jangling kettle, and often a big flapping-tailed dried fish which would slap the face of the next person.

The whole pack tried to get down the narrow gangway at once. The purser insisted on seeing tickets, but these were often stored away in the middle of a bundle for safety sake. It was a quaint scene.

Now and then an excited Chinaman would declare his friend had gone ahead with both tickets, try to force a passage and then be hauled back by the pigtail.

When we were at last off, I noticed we had in our wake a barge, a low-built thing with a sort of iron barred cage running the entire deck. It was a convict ship, in which prisoners for the dreary island of Saghalien on the east coast were taken down the Amur. There were no prisoners on board, but the merchant company owning the Admiral Tschchachoff had a contract to haul the barge. So, occupied or unoccupied, up and down the Amur and Shilka was it continually tugged.

We first-class passengers were a nice crowd. There was a general and his wife, who would not eat in the saloon, but "messed" in their own cabin. The wife was a stout, fussy little dame who knew her position and put on airs, greatly to the amusement of my French and Russian lady acquaintances.

We each paid two and a half roubles a day for our food, which consisted of tea and bread and butter in the morning, a greasy meal at midday, tea and stale buns in the afternoon, and at seven a hot dish of sorts and more tea.

All the saloon passengers, save our general and his wife, fed together. The table was covered with oilcloth, rather ragged. At the midday meal there was brought a huge platter, on which was generally a hash of meat and onions, undercooked peas and macaroni, and oil-smeared potatoes. Everybody helped him or herself with his or her own knife and fork. There were no salt-spoons, but a knife, greasy with meat fat, carried quite a lot of salt if stuck in the salt-cellar. If you wanted a second helping, you dived into the big plate with your knife and fork and fished out what you fancied.

There was none of the inconvenience of your serviette ring going astray, such as you usually have on English boats. There were no rings, but just sufficient serviettes to go round, and these were thrown in a bundle on the middle of the table. If you had made a mess by cleaning your fork at midday, you let somebody else have that serviette in the evening. And the somebody else didn't mind.

The oilcloth got rather sticky at times because there were never any plates to put your bread and butter on, and only one knife for the whole company to butter their bread. When your neighbour talked to you he did so with his forearms spreading along the table, and his knife and fork pointing to the skylight. When you required bread it was not expected at all of you to take the first piece. You took up four or five pieces and helped yourself to the one you liked, and threw the rest back anyhow for the next person to maul. Then between the mealséals and the bringing of tea—you have tea with every meal in Siberia—everybody brought out a little wooden toothpick and picked and sucked their teeth for ten minutes. I've an idea some fastidious Britishers would think this rather disgusting.

But the crowd was very select and very official. That must not be forgotten. The most distinguished man at table was the colonel of a Tartar regiment —a drab-faced man with black, cropped whiskers and spectacles of black glass (for his eyes were weak)—who was on his way to Manchuria to civilised the heathen Chinese. He ate with his fingers and salivated after the manner of a Mexican cow-puncher.

Next to him was a lady proceeding to join her husband, a military man at Vladivostok. She smoked cigarettes incessantly, especially between the courses at meal-time. She threw the little cardboard cigarette stems about indiscriminately.

There was a fur merchant and his wife. He was a big man with rugged eyebrows, and a beard iron-streaked. He was most agreeable. The one word of English he knew was "porter," and after two days' acquaintance he said I was not like the other Britishers he had met, because I didn't get angry because there was no "porter" on board the ship. He put spoonfuls of strawberry jam into his tea, and insisted that I should join him. He had a great admiration for Britishers.

In the evenings, when it was dark and rain spat, I wore a mackintosh on deck. The pockets were so made that I can slip my hand behind a lapel and get at my trouser pocket without unbuttoning the front of the mackintosh. He was enthusiastic about this contrivance. He watched me bring out bunches of keys, and a penknife and kopecks, and had all the delight of a child seeing an ingenious trick. He tapped his beard, and said Britishers were clever people. His wife was a kindly old body, so kind that I had not the courage to raise objection when she handed me a piece of butter with her fingers.

Lastly, there was my stable-companion, the man with whom I shared a cabin, an inspector of schools. Most of his time was spent lying on his back smoking cigarettes and drinking Crimean wine. At night-time he snored with the snort of a tugboat. I can't sleep with a snorer. So when he snored I whistled "Annie Laurie," as shrill as I could. Whistling is the one thing that stops a snorer without any show of offensiveness. So whenever my gentleman snored I began with the air describing the picturesqueness of Max-

welton's braes, which made him twist and half wake, and gave me an opportunity to doze before he started again.

I have used the phrase "stable-companion." I've known cleaner stables than our cabin. You can get used to many things in time, but when the first night I felt things dropping on my neck and crawling on my cheek, and making excursions along my arm, I struck a light and found the place swarming with cockroaches.

My companion laughed and exclaimed, "Nitchevo!"

"Nitchevo be hanged!" I muttered, and I packed up my belongings, walked the deck for several hours, and then caught furtive snatches of sleep on four chairs I arranged in the dining saloon.

The second- and third-class passengers had no dining saloon. They just "pigged it," and after my account of how the élite on board fed you may get a little idea of what that for "pigging it" was like.

There was a stove for common use under one of the hatches, and a great cauldron of water always on the boil. There were no regular meal hours, except that there was no eating, as far as I could see, between midnight and four in the morning. The second-class passengers had cabins, but the third-class folk slept on deck with overturned kettles and chunks of bread and bits of dried fish strewn round.

So away went the Admiral Tschchachoff down the Shilka river till it joined the Argun river, and thenceforth the stream was the Amur, Russia on the left bank and Manchuria on the right. Scant villages were on the Russian bank, a few huts, and a church.

The vessel swung round with her nose up-stream, the anchor was thrown overboard, and there were halts of an hour while a gang of coolies scurried on shore and brought together logs of timber for fuelling purposes. The native women came with bread for sale, and tousle-headed moujiks sat and blinked and laughed at the boat.

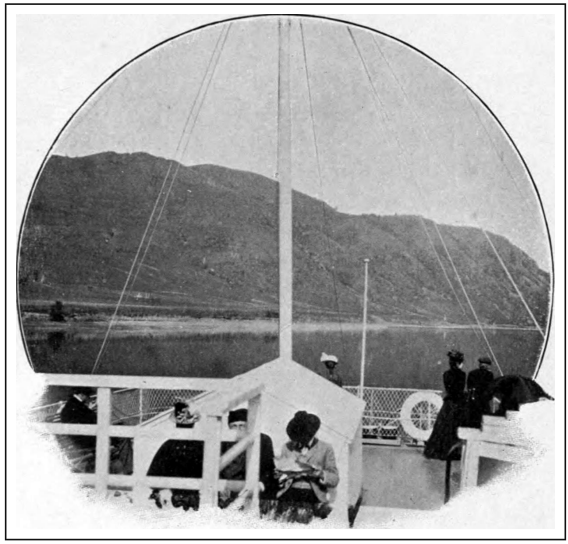
The rivers wound through a thousand miles of pretty scenery, neither grand nor majestic, but just pretty. The hills billowed. They were all wooded, and as autumn had set in, the larch and the birch were only green in sheltered hollows. On the crests they were a mass of burnished gold, with

here and there a splash of deep crimson, as though the sun had given them a hurried kiss in passing. Sometimes, when there was depth, the water swirled beneath scarped and grey rock, with mosses and flowers in the crevices.

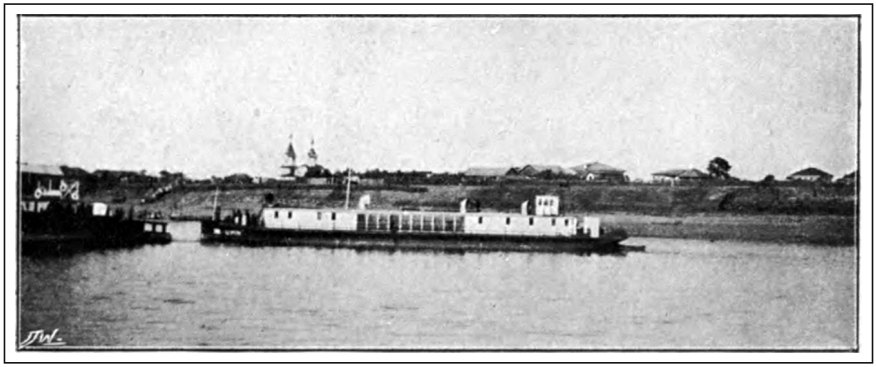
The sun always set in a purple haze, making the river a sheet of claret. Then a biting chillness sent one downstairs to hunt out a heavy coat. Night was born with a rich blueness, and the pale crescent of a moon came up from behind the China hills, but sank in an hour.

We overtook great rafts of tied timber, a hundred yards along, floating on the stream, and kept in mid-channel by three giant oars at each end. Often there was a hut erected, and in front of it could be seen a woman cooking the evening meal.

The Shilka and Amur are shallow rivers, studded with islands and sand-banks. In places the stream is half a mile wide, and yet the navigable channel often not a hundred yards.



Down the Amur.



A Prison Barge on the River.

So always in the prow were standing two men, one port and one starboard, pitching poles into the water and shouting the depth: Five feet; six feet; seven feet; four feet and a half; five feet," the day and night through.

All along were posts, white on the Russian side red on the Chinese, and the vessel zig-zagged from one to the other, for that way lay the channel. At night the indications were white and red lamps. Eerie were these little oil lamps, fringing for hundreds of miles the low countries of Russia and China, and pencilling the stream with their rays.

We would go for half a day and never see a hut. But occasionally we would notice, clinging to tho shore, a slim, paddle-propelled "dug-out" boat—such as our prehistoric ancestors used, and which we put in museums when we find them in swamps—and in it would be the lamplighter. Each man attends to about six lamps. What lonely lives these men must lead!

But the Amur is notorious for its fogs. Stalking up the river came white wraiths. With imagination sufficient you could think them lost souls wandering in the dusk. Soon they became embodied into a thick clammy cloud. Then the Admiral Tschchachoff sought the bank, the anchor was let loose, and there we stayed, a little bundle of humanity hid on a river in the far mysterious East, till morning broke, when the sun swallowed the mist and we moved Pacific-wards. '

Chapter XV

# The Black Crime of Blagovestchensk

For hundreds of miles the broad, shallow, but swift Amur river curved and swept eastwards among the hills—the left bank Russian, the right bank Chinese. Then it made long stretches to the south. Never the site of a hut was there on the Chinese side, but at long intervals a ragged grey patch on the Russian slopes told of a village.

To the eye it was an exceeding fair land. Yet, as I have pointed out, the Siberian is no agriculturist, and the lethargy of the Tartar makes him mentally rheumatic. He won't work to-day because it is a saint's day; he can't work to-morrow because it is Sunday; then comes Monday, and everybody knows it is unlucky to commence anything on a Monday. So the crops fail.

The winter months stretch from September to May, when the land lies frozen. There is no spring. In three days, or a week at the outside, winter disappears and blazing summer comes. All nature strives to make up for lost time. Everything grows with a rapidity that is amazing.

Then, the Siberian has no eye for opportunity. He sows his corn when it is too late, and he does not think of reaping till the wheat is full ripe and half rotten in the August rains.

Twice a day the little steamer Admiral Tschchachoff—called after a former Minister of Marine who never rose to popularity, chiefly, I fancy, owing to the

unpronounceability of his name—would drop anchor near one of these villages to take on passengers. At every place were slither-limbed, pale-faced Chinamen, who had no money and wanted a cheap passage. Some of these Celestials were in their native attire, blue-bloused, baggy-breeched, with greasy little skullcaps and their scanty pigtails elongated with pieces of black cord. Some, however, had met, civilisation half-way. There was one skinny fellow with parchment face who had on a Russian cap much too large for him, so he held his head far back and squinted down his nose to look under the brim. Also he wore a huge pair of Russian top-boots, far too large for him. So in walking he made a clatter like a small son, aged three, who has a liking for his father's shoes. There was a long-shanked Chinaman, whose nether garments were truly Chinese. But for jacket he wore a red and black striped "blazer," and for hat an old English straw with a dirty yellow and blue band.

Their tales were voluble, and their countenances melancholy, and so they got their free passage and grinned triumphantly.

The captain of the Admiral Tschchachoff was a smart young man, quite the sailor, blue-eyed, with flaxen, torpedo beard, and clad in the conventional navy blue, with gold braid.

Along with him was a pilot, a hulking Muscovite, who wore an enormous fur coat and a great fur cap through all the heat of the day.

It didn't take long to work up admiration for the Amur pilots.) The river is full of traps, and the channel must be sought even in broad sheets of water. Now and then there was a jar and a quivering as the vessel touched and scoured the river bed. The captain said that often he had to land all his passengers to lighten the ship so that he could force it to go bumping over the rocks for five or six versts.

If there was no fog the steamer journeyed through the night. We had starlight, but the deep shadows of the enclosing hills seemed to bulge out banks where there were no banks. But always there were the twinkling little oil lamps for guidance—blinking white on Russian soil, dim ruby on the Chinese —and by steering from light to light there was a fair certainty of being in the channel.

Yet I should not use the word "always." On the second night we were in the Amur there was missing a red lamp on the China side. The consequence was that going full steam from white light to white light our ship just at "the witching hour" climbed with a crash on a bank of shingle. Then was excitement.

The engines were reversed and the steamer dragged herself off. But she was tugging the convict—barge I have already mentioned, and this barge, with considerable way on, came tilting her nose right into the stern of the steamer.

There was a crunch of broken wood and ripped iron plates.

In the darkness no one could see what had happened. The convict ship, however, swung off. The captain of the steamer gave orders for the helm to be put over on the starboard side, and the engines to go full steam. The engines did go full steam. But alas! the rudder had gone, and this was not known till the steamer, as a sort of revenge, went furiously into the convict ship, which she did not injure, though she smashed in her own bow.

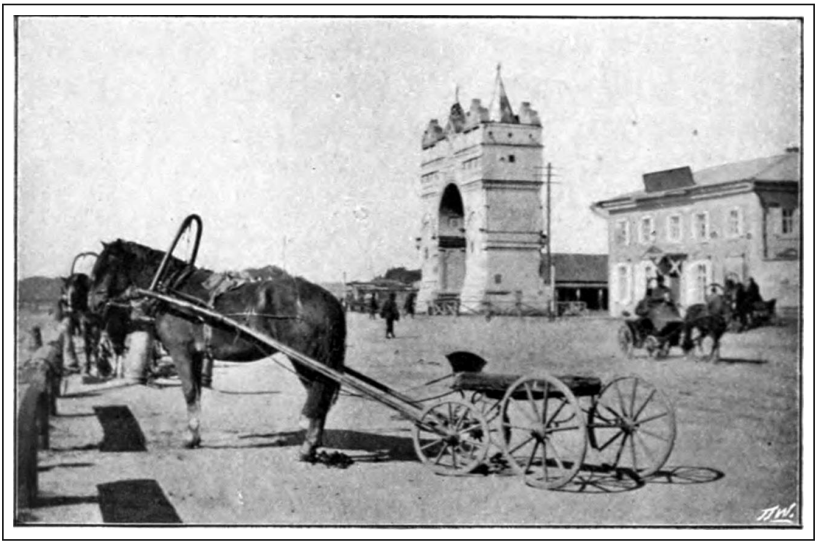
We had a really lively quarter of an hour.

It was pitch dark, and the lamps on the ship accentuated the darkness. Everything was at sixes and sevens, and everybody shouted orders and cursed the captain, and the women wailed and were certain drowning was their lot. The two boats, however, got alongside the Russian bank, and there we hung till morning light came.

Meanwhile a horse had been got from somewhere, and a man was sent off a thirty-mile ride to a telegraph station, to wire up the river to check a tugboat we had passed, and bring it back to take us in tow. This caused a delay of thirty-six hours.



The "Grand Hotel" at Blagovestchensk.



The River Front at Blagovestchensk.

Personally, I didn't regret it. We were struck in a pretty curve, with the distance lost in a purple haze and the river widening out like a bit of scenery in the "Lake District." Two hundred yards away was China, and the thick trees were a mass of saffron and ruddy tints. On our side stretched a plain dotted with leafless birch, the bare boughs stretching like grey antlers, and a couple of miles off reared bluff crags.

The morning gave me opportunity, for which there was no provision on board ship, to have a bathe. I took a walk some miles up stream through long and tufted grass, and there had the luxury of a swim.

The day was warm. There was no sound of bird or of animal. Even the river flowed with a strange stillness. The silence played curiously on the nerves. I sat for an hour, a sort of amateur Robinson Crusoe, fairly certain that no other man had ever before been there, musing on the scene.

There was a rustle among the trees, coming nearer and nearer. A graceful antelope sprang out not twenty yards from me. For nearly a minute we looked at each other, neither moving. Then it tripped down to the brink and swam the river.

In the afternoon I took a tramp inland—rough going, for the ground was broken, reedy, and swampy—and had a stiff climb among the pines till I got on the hilltop. As far as eye could reach was a land of wooded hills all splashed with autumnal hues. The river stretched far away like a streak of silver.

At night, as dusk was falling, fires were lit on the bank, and here the peasant passengers cooked their meals, making picturesque figures in the glow of the flames. Then many of them sang. They were untutored folk, but instinctively they seemed to take up different parts, and with winning, soothing cadence they sang their Slavonic songs far into the hushful night.

In the morning the tugboat had arrived. We were tethered to it, and side by side we went our way without further mishap.

The Amur became deeper and broader until indeed it was a magnificent river. We passed other boats going up-stream, stern-wheelers, two-deckers, with long, thin chimney-stacks—exactly the kind of boats to be seen on the American rivers. The hills fell away to undulating pasture land.

At one place there was a heave, and the hillside presented a sandy face. High up could easily be traced a black streak of antediluvian vegetation 'twixt sand and sand. The Russians called this "the smoking mountain." There had been spontaneous combustion in the vegetation, and in places smoke was oozing. Without attention being called to the real cause, you might imagine the smoke was from smouldering fires left by wandering peasants.

On the afternoon of Saturday, September 21st, we reached Blagovestchensk, the principal town between Irkutsk and the waters of the Pacific.

Half a dozen steamers lay moored to floating wharfs, a large one flying the mail flag, leaving in a couple of hours for Khabarovsk, a three days' journey further down the river. Through passengers having to make a hurried transit, I bade bon voyage to my acquaintances, the Russian and French ladies, who were getting a little tired of Siberia and eager for the prettiness of lauded Japan. They went on. I decided to stay in Blagovestchensk five days, till the next post boat went down-stream.

Therefore I piled my belongings on a droshki and told the hairy-faced driver to take me to the "Grand Hotel," with much misgiving about the kind of place it would turn out to be. And as I have grumbled about other hotels I will give this its due. It was. excellent. Its front was tawdry, blue and white stucco, much like the French hotels you find overlooking Swiss lakes, but it was clean, well furnished, electric lighted, and its manager, a Frenchman, could appreciate a Britisher's desire for water and plenty of it.

Blagovestchensk was the briskest Siberian town 'I had yet come across. It was proud of its position, and as it is the fashion to compare this new land with older lands, it has dubbed itself "The New York of Siberia." It wasn't that. But again and again I was struck with its likeness to an American town.

It is laid out on the T-square plan, every street running at right angles. The houses are of wood, mostly single-storeyed, and yet in the middle of these stand great three-storeyed public buildings, which you would cross the street to look at if you saw them in Moscow or Petersburg. The roads are in quite a transatlantic neglected state, but fringed with wooden side walks, and the main streets are festooned with wires for electric lighting, telegraph, and telephone. The shops are "stores," selling everything from cigarettes to reap-

ing machines. All these stores are in the hands of Germans or Russians from the Baltic.

The droshki is old-fashioned in Blagovestchensk—all right for slow-moving, slumbrous old Russia, but behindhand for a bustling Siberian city. A light American rig, three parts spring, with a horse that can "move," is the proper thing.

The youths are keen cyclists, and whizz along on German and American machines. Just outside the town are athletic grounds, with a well banked-up cycle track.

On the river front is a promenade with a double row of trees and seats beneath them, where you can rest and watch the setting of the sun over the shoulder of China.

It is what the Americans call "quite a town."

Till twenty years ago it was little more than a Cossack outpost. Now it has a population of nearly forty thousand. There is a public library with ten thousand volumes, a little museum, not much to speak of, however, two newspapers, one daily and the other weekly, four banks, two large ironworks, seven tanneries, two soap factories, three breweries, three steam flour mills, three saw mills, and two rope yards. Also there is a medical and charitable society, which maintains a hospital for the poor, two dispensary rooms, and a home for the aged, cripples, and orphans. A fine brick-built club-house has a hall adapted for theatricals.

Blagovestchensk is rather too far out of the general world for touring dramatic companies to call though last winter a touring operatic company settled in the town, and three nights a week performed, more or less successfully, all the well-known operas. There is an amateur theatrical society and an amateur orchestral society.

It is a great military centre, and young officers in Blagovestchensk, being like young officers anywhere else, make the town anything but the dead-and-alive place you might imagine if you know no more about it than a spot on the map of Eastern Siberia.

Educationally there is what is called a "classical gymnasium," really a secondary school—but Siberians, like Western Americans, who call barber shops

"tonsorial parlors," are fond of high-sounding names; a gymnasium for girls, three public schools for boys and one for girls, a number of church parish schools—even in Siberia the church schools and board schools are often in conflict—and a special school where "grown-ups" neglected in their youth have the opportunity of receiving instruction.

There is a good deal to be seen. In the first place the people struck me as moving with a sharper, more decided step than was discernible in towns further west.

With the exception of the peasant class the clothing worn is European in style, barring, of course, the officials, who are as numerous here as elsewhere, and march about with full appreciation of their dignity in all the glory of many-coloured braids.

The manual labour of the town is chiefly done by Chinese coolies. When John Chinaman has some spare kopecks it is his delight to get into a droshki, loll back, and have a Russian under his orders to drive him about. Indeed, that Saturday evening, when I went out to stroll I saw crowds of droshkis sweep by, all laden with grinning Chinamen, their pig-tails flapping about them and in some danger of being caught by the wheel-spokes.

Rich gold-mining is in the hills within a hundred miles of Blagovestchensk, and there are plenty of miners in the town—Koreans, as a rule, but of a distinctly better type than the coolies. They are men who have taken to the miners' dress: loose shirts, open at the throat, thick belts, and big slouching Californian hats, and, judging from the way they swaggered along, full of the Korean equivalent for picturesque though unprintable Californian oaths.

Like all gold centres, the cost of living in Blagovestchensk is expensive—quite three times as much as in London. I am a man of few wants, but my hotel bill was over £2 a day. A cup of coffee cost a shilling.

On the Sunday morning, when all the church bells were clanging and good Blagovestchensk folk were hastening, armed with prayer-books, to worship, I took a solitary walk along the Amur side.

On the way I passed through the camp where are stationed some 3,000 soldiers. It was well situated near a wood. The officers' quarters were of timber, painted white, and there were scraggy gardens in front. There were great

long sheds for the troops, but most of the men were under canvas. Their tents were pitched on quite a different plan to that adopted by British troops. There was first built up a square of sods, not unlike a sportsman's shelter you see on the moors at home, with an entrance on one side. On the top of this was fixed the tent, which was really a sort of square canvas lid which would throw the rain beyond the bank. In each were six beds, and there was plenty of room to stand up. At every point was a soldier on guard, bugles were continuously sounding, officers and their orderlies were galloping about.

"Foreigner "was, of course, stamped all over me, and, although I received many curious glances, I strolled where I pleased, with never a word of hindrance.

These Russian white-bloused Tommies were just as "larky" as their red-jacketed friends at Aldershot. In one or two places men were out on parade, but most of them were spending their Sunday as they pleased. From some of the tents came the bleat of accordions, and young fellows were laughing and singing. Then I came across a group having wrestling matches; next some young fellows were testing their jumping powers; then groups squatted in the shade of the trees smoking and gossiping. I must say they were all sturdy, well-set, and healthy men, clean and neat, and quite happy.

Still, hardly a tithe of the barracks was occupied. There were rows of buildings with not a soul to be seen; also plenty of sheltering for horses, but no horses. After traversing a mile of rough country road, I came to another camp, barracks, and officers' houses, but all forsaken and neglected. The windows were smashed, the doors were broken away from their hinges, rank grass grew around. For an hour I sauntered here, and never saw a soldier. It was as though I had come upon a city of the dead. Yet a few days would put all these buildings into habitable condition. In a straggling way the camp covers some three miles, and there is accommodation for quite a hundred thousand troops. Russia has an eye on future possibilities in this great military provision.

I had sauntered out to this spot with a particular object. It was a beautiful, fresh Sunday morning, and I sat down on the banks of the Amur, with the

river racing at my feet, and a couple of stones'-throw away the reed-fringed boundary of Manchuria. The place had an eerie attraction, for here in July of 1900 was perpetrated one of the greatest crimes.

In the spring of that year there was in Blagovestchensk a Chinese population of from eight to nine thousand people. Seven of the largest stores of the town belonged to Chinese merchants: there were smaller dealers, and a great crowd of labourers. When the siege of the Pekin Legations began, Blagovestchensk, like the rest of the world, imagined all the Europeans in Pekin had been massacred. They themselves were far from help, and on the other side of the river drums began to beat and banners waved, and then bullets came dropping into the Blagovestchensk streets. The only Russian troops in the town were some sixty Cossack soldiers—not a large force if the place were attacked. The Chinese in Blagovestchensk, however, remained in their homes, absolutely quiet.

Fear, however, was in the heart of the governor. He issued an order that all Chinese must pass over to Manchurian territory before twenty-four hours.

"Yes," replied the Chinese, "we will go; but how are we to get across the river if we have no boats?"

The twenty-four hours passed.

"Why have you not gone across the river?" demanded the governor.

"We have no boats. Give us boats and we will go," urged the Chinese.

The only answer was that the Cossacks, with fixed bayonets, surrounded a hundred Chinamen.

"Now march!" said they, and they marched, weeping, pleading, round the back of the town, along the dusty country road, till they came to the very spot where I sat solitary, smoking my pipe on this Sunday morning.

"Get across the river!" was the order.

The Cossacks made a half-circle round the Chinese, who were like a flock of distraught sheep.

"Across the river you get!" and the bayonet points pressed the Chinese into the water, up to their waists, further still up to their necks, and then further still.

When they were all drowned, back marched the Cossacks to the town for another batch of Chinamen. These, too, were driven to the same place, where the same fate awaited them. Backwards and forwards came and went the Cossacks.

At the end of two days there was not a single Chinaman in Blagovestchensk. The authorities admit that 4,500 were drowned. Probably there were more.

For days there floated down the Amur, past the full stretch of the town, a sorry, silent procession of the dead. Now and then, like a tangle of weeds, bodies massed against the wharves and between moored vessels and the shore. Men were employed with long poles to push the corpses into the stream again.

Then the Chinese on the Manchurian side began to pester Blagovestchensk with rifles. A few windows were broken, but not a single person was injured, though I believe official accounts state forty were killed. Presently troops began to arrive from Russia and Western Siberia. There was instantly an expedition into Manchuria, whereupon the Chinese scattered like the wind. But their towns and villages and farmsteads and crops for fifty miles round, including the great Chinese city of Aigun, were laid waste by fire.

The drowning of these poor defenceless Chinamen has fixed a brand on Blagovestchensk never to be forgotten. The people don't like to talk about it. They know it was a barbarous act, and they are ashamed. Those, however, who spoke to us freely and openly, were stirred with indignation. The man who gave the fiendish order was still governor of the town, and no one can understand why the Czar, one of the most humane of men, has not banished the offender, to show reprobation of an act which has placed indelible stain on a young and flourishing city.*

Well, there was no trace of the crime that Sunday morning, as I—a wandering Britisher—sat and listened to the distant ringing of the church bells and thought of the death cries that had gone up from this spot. The river was like burnished steel, and flocks of birds made the trees musical.

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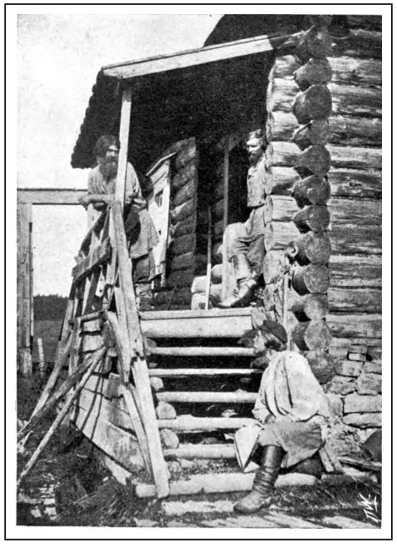
*I have since learnt that the offending governor, General Chitchegoff, has been degraded and moved to a minor post near Archangel.

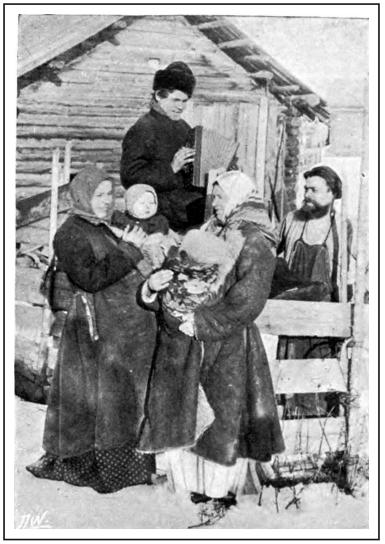
Then I heard the clatter of hoofs and young laughter. Along the country road, through a veil of dust, came half a dozen droshkies. In the first sat a bride, radiant as the sunshine, half reclining in the arms of her husband. In the other droshkis were friends, the gayest of village throngs, off to the town for the marriage feast.

It was well they had no remembrance just then for the place that will be pointed at with a shudder when they and their joys have passed out of all knowledge.

Then I re-filled my pipe and strolled back to Blagovestchensk.



A Peasant's House.



A Village Scene.

## Chapter XVI

# Some Companions and Some Tales

❦

At Blagovestchensk I stayed five days, and made the acquaintance of many Russians. They were hospitality itself. Everything was done to make the visitor have what is called "a good time."

But I could not fail noticing an absence of those cosy comforts which go so much towards making an English home pleasant. There was little taste shown anywhere. If a man was wealthy he let it be known by gold and blue ornamentations and by his wife wearing a gown of blue plush.

A boat from down river brought to the town two French officers among its passengers. They were on their way from Pekin to Paris—a couple of typical Gauls, young, with pointed black beards, quite à la Française. They wore uniforms, and uniformed French officers had never been in Blagovestchensk before. The town is full of military, and therefore the appearance of these gentlemen in baggy red pantaloons created as much sensation as though the entire French army had honoured the town with a visit.

On the day I left the Russian officers gave the two French officers a luncheon.

A boat had also come down river from Streitinsk, and at the hotel table I spied a bright-eyed, alert little fellow. He spied me also.

"Hello," he cried, "guess you're a Britisher. I'm an American from San Francisco. I'm in the commission line, and been working hard for nine years and never gave way. Had to take a holiday; so thought I'd just run over to Eu-

rope and through Siberia and home. No,I didn't go to London or Paris; went straight to Hamburg, then two days in Berlin, two in Petersburg, and half a day in Moscow. Wonderful country Siberia! Only know one word of Russian; but I've done business—yes, enough to pay cost of my trip. Now, what's your line?"

We fraternised. America and Great Britain had a bond in common, for just then Russia and France were in each other's arms. Russian hospitality ran riot in honour of those two young French officers. It filled them with vodki, caviare, salted roes, onions, and tomatoes—just to raise an appetite. Then they fed. There were fifteen courses.

The American and I had a. dispute whether there were twenty-three or only eighteen separate toasts. Russian officers sprang to their feet, were voluble in bad French, every wine-glass was overspilt with champagne, "Vive la France!" was yelled, and a regimental band stationed outside struck up the "Marseillaise."

Somebody produced a tricolour flag, and the shouting was glorious.

They started eating again. Once again up bounced a big and burly Russian, with orders all over him, holding a glass of champagne and trickling it down his tunic as he splashed a speech of convivial French and Russian, all mixed. More yells of "Vive la France more banging of the "Marseillaise," more waving of the tricolour, more champagne—a great deal more.

"Say," remarked the American to me, "I'd give ten dollars to have the Stars and Stripes waving here just now. How do you feel

Well, I think I'd prefer the Union Jack."

"Now, if I could only speak Russian I'd go out and buy that band, and make it play 'Yankee Doodle. How do you feel?"

"Well, were I man of wealth I think I'd choose 'God save the King' or perhaps 'Rule Britannia.' I feel very Rule Britannia-ish listening to all that talk about Russia and France licking the world."

"Here's to old England!" said the American, raising his glass.

"And here's to the bald-headed eagle!" said I, raising mine.

After more speeches and more champagne, and more vivas, and more band playing, and then more champagne again, our warriors got sentimental. They put their arms round one another's necks and kissed each other.

That made me laugh and my new friend swear. He swore what he would do if any drunken Russian attempted to kiss him.

Then the Russians took the Frenchmen's hats and donned them, and put the Russian caps on French heads, which was rather ridiculous, for the caps were big and the French heads small. But two French caps would not go round a company of fifty officers. The next move was to swap epaulettes. Still there were many unsatisfied. "Leave us a button, anyway!" was next the cry, and instantly those Frenchmen were attacked with knives, and buttons were hacked from them.

The Frenchmen were as lambs. They looked with glassy eyes at their entertainers, and we came away, for we shuddered at their ultimate sartorial fate.

On the steamer De Witte, called after the Russian Minister of Finance, I journeyed down the Amur from Blagovestchensk to Khabarovsk.

Besides the usual crowd of officers and ordinary Russians, there was my American friend, another American, an engineer looking for openings for American machinery, a German engaged in starting stores for a Hamburg firm, a young Austrian sent out by the Vienna Chamber of Commerce to report on trade possibilities, two Frenchmen and their wives, and myself, the solitary Britisher.

Broad and majestic swept the Amur southwards. At first great plains stretched on either side, while tufts of distant trees on the right marked where were a few huddled huts constituting a Manchurian

village.

At dusk, that first evening out of Blagovestchensk, Thursday, September 26th, we halted for an hour at Aigun, or rather all that remains of Aigun. Fifteen months ago it was a thriving Chinese city, the largest in Manchuria. But at the Boxer rising it poured its soldiers along the bank to the big Russian town. Terrible was the Russian revenge. The Chinese fled to the interior; the

few that remained were put to the sword, and the city was reduced to a mass of ashes and gaunt charred walls.

A few Cossack soldiers were moving about the banks with lamps, but others were standing on the shore front with fixed bayonets to drive back any of us who might show an exploring inquisitiveness.

Later on we came to mountains. The frosty nights that were now setting in had nipped the leaves from the trees. So no longer were the hills garmented in gorgeous hues. They were stern and solemn. The river Hingan joined the main stream, and then the pace between the jaws of lofty rocks was that of a torrent.

Beautifully blue was the Amur. At one place there was no indication we were on a river. For a day we seemed to be sailing over a gigantic still-faced inland sea, dotted with a thousand isles.

All down the Russian side we were constantly passing settlements of Cossacks, the semi-barbarous, fearless bandits of the Don regions, that Russia has turned into capital soldiers.

Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the Cossacks were first sent over the Urals, these men have set their mark on this territory. Yet after the first thirst for empire extension Russia left the Amur region alone, and it is only comparatively recently that the spirit has broken forth again. As Russia has advanced, China has retired. Every fresh treaty has widened the frontiers of Russia. I am a young man, and yet it has been within my lifetime that the Muscovites have set about the colonisation of the Amur region. It was in 1869 that a body of two hundred Russians first squatted on the banks of the river intent on farming.

Excellent and picturesque as the country looks, the Amur region is not likely to ever do much in agriculture. The winter lasts eight months, and it has the disadvantage of being snowless, so that there is no sledging except on the frozen rivers. Indeed, the snowfall east of Baikal is trifling. Quite two-thirds of the Amur province is forest, mostly dwarf trees. On the remaining third it is calculated there is room for quite six hundred thousand settlers, but on the whole track there is, as yet, not a tithe of that number.

A steady flow of immigration, however, is going on. But a great body of the newcomers get tired and go back to their old homes before they have given the land a chance. Quite a number of our deck passengers were folk who had come here in the spring, grown homesick, and were journeying to Vladivostock, where they expected to find a cheap ship that would take them back to Odessa and Southern Russia.

I had a talk with a Russian administrator of the river district, and he bemoaned the way agriculture was pursued by peasants who have already settled. Their husbandry was wasteful. They would grow five or six crops on the same patch of land, never manure it, and when it was exhausted abandon it and move elsewhere. I pointed to the considerable importation of agricultural machinery as a good sign. In reply, I was pessimistically told it was nothing of the kind; that, indeed, machinery only tended to the more wasteful exploitation of the land.

White Manchurian wheat is grown in the Amur province because it is more suitable to the Chinese than Russian red wheat. The horses are poor, kept in droves in the summer, and in the winter fed with hay soaked in salt water. The cows are small and lean, have udders covered with hair, and the nipples are quite undeveloped, so that the milk obtained is infinitesimal. This is the result of the settlers having crossed the cows first sent out to them from Russia with the Manchurian cows, which are never milked.

The proportion of pigs to the population is at least three to one. If the pig doesn't exactly pay the rent in Siberia, he provides practically the only flesh food the people have. But he is a disreputable rascal—compared with the fat, wallowing, clear-skinned, panting old porker at home—as thin as a rail, mouse-coloured, all bristles, and goes grubbing for his food in the most offensive quarters.

Away in the interior are little settlements of gold diggers, winning quantities of the metal, leading riotous lives and making for the town when the winter sets in and digging becomes impossible.

The thing, however, out of which the inhabitants—immigrant Russians and the Mongolian tribes, with squat noses and high cheek-bones and slender wrists and ankles—scratch an existence is hunting Several of the big

Moscow fur firms have travellers continuously going about this district, buying the skins of sable, fox, squirrel, wolf, and indeed all fur-providing animals. With the money so earned the folks of the Amur are able to purchase a little wheat and tea, and so with the aid of the hardy swine they exist—a life which the Western European cannot understand.

We were quite a friendly party on the steamer carrying us to Khabarovsk. There was singing and card-playing and general steamboat agreeableness.

There was an iron-haired, smart-set old Russian officer, who was full of good stories of the expeditions in which he had taken part for the conquest of the Amur when he was a young man. He chuckled with glee narrating how the needy officers got the best of the poor natives by using labels of champagne bottles, or the pictures off boxes of chocolates, as "All the same as ten-rouble notes."

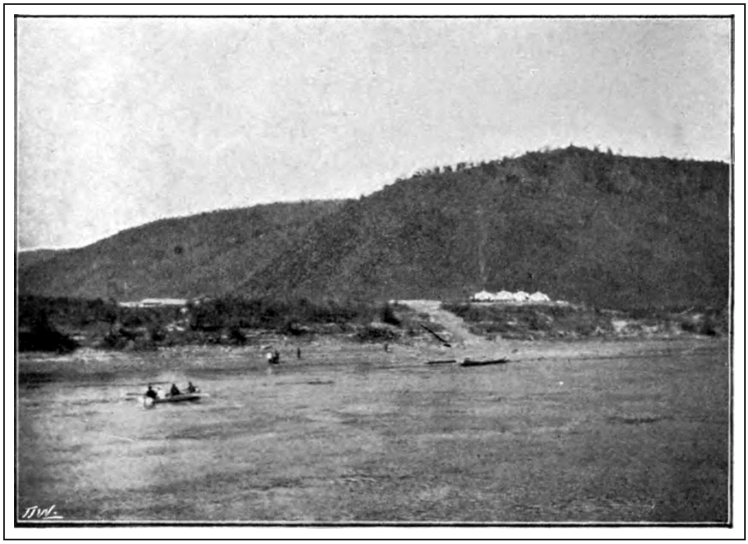
The weather was delicious, the sky wonderfully blue, the air genial in the middle of the day, but at night with a bite of frost in it. Then the moon, seeming larger than we sight it in old England, hung like a great silver lantern in the high south, and the steamer followed its quivering reflection down river as though it were the appointed trail.

Remarked my San Francisco acquaintance one day:—"Say, I guess you're laying it down pretty thick in the newspaper articles you're writing about adventures in Siberia?"

"No," I answered, "I can't say I am. I'm telling the approximate truth—just one's impressions in going through Siberia."



My Fellow Passengers on the "De Witte."



Cossack Camp on the Manchurian Side of the Amur.

"Why,h—l! If an American newspaper man didn't send home some good stories about fights with Cossacks and shooting bears, and being arrested as a spy, and about nearly dying in the snow, he'd be thought nothing of. See here!"

He showed me a great sheepskin-lined coat, unwrapped a bashlik to wrap about the head, produced great wool feet coverings and general Arctic gear.

"That's my Siberian outfit!" said he. "I'll have to dirty them a bit just to make them look real, for I've never worn them. Why, if I went back to San Francisco and told them how I just wore my ordinary summer clothes, and that the cars in Siberia were as good as those of the Southern Pacific, and that these boats are just first-rate, where you can get champagne and all the delicacies, do you think they'd believe me? No; they would put me down as a gordarned liar. They think I'm in the country where snow and ice are made, and they'll want me to tell'em things. And I'll tell 'em! Oh, h—I, but I've got some good stories. You see, there's that ride my mate and I and you had on the prairie when we had to eat our candles for food! You know the driver was so cold that we had to hit him to prevent him closing his eyelids, which would freeze together! Then there's the raft journey; how we were sweeping down the great Amur river when the Chinese opened fire on us from the Manchurian side, and how we had to get under the raft with just our mouths above the water and so float down till we got out of reach! Here's my revolver! The time I used that was when I was arrested because the Russians thought I wanted to steal a bit of their Siberia, and I kept off sixteen Cossacks when they wanted to put me in chains."

"And your friends will like that sort of talk?" I ventured.

"Like it! Why, it's the only thing they'll believe. You know, they thought I was going to certain death in coming to Siberia. When I get back to'Frisco I'll not go up to my house. I'll register at the Palace Hotel. The clerks'll ring up the newspapers and say, 'has just come back from Siberia.' Then the newspaper men will come along. H—1! do you think they'd put a line down if I told them I'd never seen a bit of snow, never saw a prisoner, that it's a wonderful country for cattle-rearing and wheat-growing, that it's just like stretches of our own country? No; a man who has been to Siberia is a great traveller in

America, and if he don't play the part he's pretty slow or else he's a liar. And you're just telling exactly what Siberia is like—and you a newspaper man

Yes, as well as I can."

"Well, you're a wonder. You may be all right for England, but American newspapers don't pay men for that. They want a good story."

Now, none of us on the steamer developed much admiration for our captain. He was the greatest sluggard that ever sat on deck, for he was usually in a chair smoking cigarettes—when he was not in his cabin sleeping. When he slept the boat was hitched to the bank, and Chinese coolies were leisurely trotting on board with logs of wood for fuel.

We went ashore, walked among the long withered grass, startled wild fowl, came back, found the wood all on board, and the captain still asleep.

Some of us were anxious to get on, but when we mildly remonstrated he gave us a "Nitchevo! what did it matter when or how we arrived at Khabarovsk, he would be there within the broad-margined time allowed for the delivery of the mails.

He evidently planned to land us a couple of hours before he reached the limit of his post time. But as luck would have it, just when we were within thirty miles of our destination, and had packed our bags and were ready to go ashore, clouds of smoke came rolling up the river. The adjoining forests were on fire, billowing the heavens with dun smoke.

So, in late afternoon, we tied up to the Manchurian side, and stayed there till eight next morning, when the wind veered, and we could go on. We arrived nearly a day late, and all of us, Russians and foreigners alike, much disposed to lynch the captain. He drew up a long protocol stating that the delay was due to no fault of his, so he might escape the fine for late delivery of the mails). He wanted us to sign it. We said we would see him hanged first.

Khabarovsk is magnificently situated. Look at the map, and you will see how it is just where the Ussuri river joins the Amur, which stretches off to the north and tumbles into the Pacific. The town, divided by deep ravines, is connected with long rows of stairs, whilst on each ridge runs a main street, with the branch streets tumbling down the mounds, so that the place almost looks like three towns tacked together.

Its importance, however, is purely administrative. There are huge public buildings of red brick, and overlooking the river are barracks. The Russian population is but a handful, and every Russian man is an official of some sort, and uniformed.

Most of the stores are kept by Chinamen, and five out of six people I met in the broad, wind-swept streets were Chinamen—not fine, broad-faced men, as I have seen in the interior of China itself, but crowds of weak, withered-faced, slouching men, who slunk on one side when a Russian came along.

Also there were many Koreans, slim, gentle-looking, sallow-skinned, slit-eyed, with scraggy tufts of thin hair on the chins for beard, but all having a certain picturesqueness in their white bunched-up garb, and singular hats, black, and in shape not unlike those you see worn by countrymen in out-of-the-way corners of Wales. There are hardly any women in Khabarovsk; indeed, the official census of last year put down the proportion as eleven men to every woman.

High over the river is the residence of the governor-general, a first-rate museum, chiefly filled with loot as the result of the Chinese disturbances—robes and cannon, carts and coffins, and also a library with some forty thousand books. Public gardens, with nothing in the way of flowers, but pleasant paths, nicely shaded, adorn the slope overlooking the Amur.

There was the broad, steel-breasted river below, with slim Chinese dug-outs floating on the current. A little to the left clustered half a dozen white-painted steamers, lying silent. Ahead and to the right curved the Amur, down which I had journeyed a thousand miles, and in the far distance the purple hills of Manchuria.

On the topmost height of Khabarovsk, standing on a granite pedestal and surrounded by cannon, is the bronze statue of Count Muravieff, the man who won Eastern Siberia for Russia. He completed the work begun centuries back by Yermak, the Volga pirate. The march of empire had been eastwards for Russia.

It was Muravieff who saw the dream of the Muscovite turned into a reality. He founded Vladivostok and gave Russia a port on the Pacific. His statue now

overlooks the great region of the Amur, and Russians as they pass take off their hats.

## Chapter XVII

# The Land's End of Siberia

It was necessary to rise early at Khabarovsk—when a chill grey dawn was crawling from the Pacific and lifting the mist from the Manchurian hills—in order to catch the train from Vladivostok.

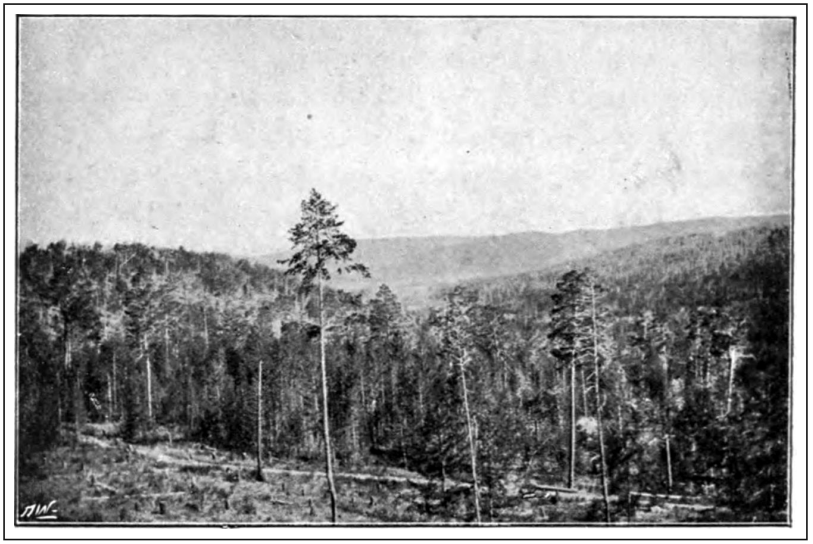
This was the last section of the great trans-Asian line, and exactly thirty-two hours was taken to cover the 483 miles.

Of course the railway station was three miles from the town, and the roadway was just a network of tracks among a tangle of undergrowth, all decaying and colourless beneath the first breathing of winter. I had to grip tight the little droshki or the violent thuds against tree stumps and the sudden lurches into holes would have pitched me out a dozen times. The two horses were sturdy, energetic little brutes—one running in the shaft and the other running at the side, like the hitching of an extra tram horse to help the car up the hill: the approved method of driving a pair in Siberia—and rattled along in good style.

The station itself was all bustle and noise. The entrance hall was packed with Chinamen shouting gutturally and bumping about with loads, while meek, white-robed, and quaint-featured Koreans squatted on their heels in corners. Russians, chiefly officials in their greys and blues, gilt epaulettes, white-peaked caps, and top boots of pliable leather, took possession of the buffet with their bundles,



Three Koreans.



From the Carriage Window in Eastern Siberia.

Here was constant tea-drinking and the dipping of long rolls into the tea and eating them in a soppy state. These rolls are sprinkled with little seeds that make the food look as though it was fly-blown. Indeed, as every mirror and candlestick and picture in Siberia is speckled by industrious flies, I have an idea that the seed is sprinkled on the cakes to deceive the eater who cannot tell by eyesight whether the spots are seeds or fly-marks.

Half an hour before the train started there was the clang of the bell, the doors were thrown open, and a pell-mell rush to the platform and carriages took place. The scene was one that had a close comparison to that you see in India. Instead, however, of British officers walking up and down with the confident stride of superiority while the Hindus and Mohammedans gave way acknowledging inferiority, there were Russian officers clean and smart promenading the platform while the slithering, cowering Chinese and the cringing, frightened Koreans made room for them.

I strolled about watching the scene. There was little that was arrogant in the demeanour of the Russians, save the consciousness of importance that every man shows more or less when in uniform. But marked was the dominance of character displayed by the Russians and the recognition of it by the Chinese and the Koreans.

The Russian has a strong streak of the East in his nature. But this is covered and hidden by ready adaptation of Western civilisation. The Russian, as you see him in Petersburg or in Moscow in direct contact with other civilisation, often gives indications of his Tartar origin. These traits, though they remain, fail, however, to strike you when you see the Russian in the far east of his empire, the master of a hundred races. There he is the white, civilised Westerner, whose stride is that of a conqueror. The Mongolians, who once scourged the world, now bustle and make an avenue to let pass a young lieutenant with eight brass buttons on his coat, gold epaulettes on his shoulders, and a black scabbarded sword at his side.



On the Ussuri Line.



A Wayside Station.

In earlier chapters I rather dwelt upon the free and easy, almost democratic life of the Siberians, largely due to the fact that the genuine Siberian was never a sert as the Russian was. He, therefore, shows hardly any servility in his disposition, and is free to talk about his government as no man dare speak in Petersburg. I noticed this as soon as I crossed the Urals, and was impressed with the fact by the time I got to Irkutsk.

But-at Irkutsk there ended the great stretch of Siberia that had been inhabited by Russian settlers and political exiles. Eastwards beyond Lake Baikal reared a mountainous territory, undeveloped, unfavourable to settlers, with scanty, decaying Buriat. tribes in the valleys, and occasional gangs of convicts or adventurers working for gold and silver in the hills. All through the trans-Baikal and Amur provinces, however, with the thinnest of population, consisting of immigrants from Russia, who had not come under the influence of the Siberian freedom, this democratic aspect was missing. Troops of Cossack soldiers on the banks of the Shilka and Amur rivers were the directors of policy, and bayonets the arguments,

At Khabarovsk and down to Vladivostok I found myself in another stratum. Not one in ten of the Russians had come here through Siberia. The great majority had travelled round from Odessa by sea. They were Russians proper, and all the severe, rigid, official discipline was in evidence. Everything was in accordance with regulation.

For instance, I went out on the gangway between the railway coaches to admire the scenery. "That is against the rules; you must not stand there; it is strictly forbidden," said the conductor.

Later on he came to my compartment, where the back of one of the seats was raised to allow the lower seat to be broader to make a bed.

"You must please let me alter that seat to its usual state for daytime," he said.

"But I want it to remain as it is,' I replied, "because I may desire to lie down and sleep."

"But the regulations!" he urged.

"Never mind the regulations," I answered, "that is going to remain." He brought a superior, who, however, only shrugged his shoulders, and let the foreigner have his way.

All the officers on the train by paying third-class fare were able to travel second-class, which is almost as good as the first. There was not room for all, however, and many were obliged to actually travel. third. But the third-class coaches were already heaving hives of Chinese and Chinamen's multifarious bundles. From one of these carriages the Chinamen and their belongings were ignominiously ejected. They went like cattle. An ordinary goods van, without seats or windows, and with sliding panels for doors, was in the rear of the train, and into this as many Chinamen as possible scrambled, filling it till there seemed to be only standing room. Still other Chinamen attempted to struggle in, but were driven back.

"Are you going to put on another waggon for them?" I inquired.

"Oh, no, they are only Chinamen, and they will have to wait till to-morrow's train."

The night was bitterly, bitingly cold. We first-class passengers were comfortable enough with our double windows and hot-air pipes. But those shivering Chinamen! I heard a hubbub at a wayside station in the darkness of the night and jumped out. There were a few flickering lamplights piercing the blackness.

What's the matter?" I asked an official.

"Oh, those Chinamen in the waggon want to have the doors closed because they say it is cold."

"Poor devils! and so it is," I said. "Why can't they have the place closed up, and so keep themselves a little warm

"Well, it is against the regulations for them to be shut up so that the conductor can't see what they are doing."

On the train was a first-class restaurant car. At one end was a buffet where all sorts of snacks were on sale, and a white-bloused, white-capped chef presided. There were, however, no regulation hours for meals. You had what you liked, when you liked. In the morning, when I had my coffee, there was a telegraph official, yellow braided, sitting next me drinking vodka, and oppos-

ite was an engineer, green braided, noisily slithering soup into his mouth; and a little up the table was a military officer, gold and red braided, drinking tea and eating cakes.

The country we ran through in that two days' journey was first over a stretch of country wooded with thin-limbed trees, but mountainous in the hazy distance. At places the ground was ripped with torrents. There were stretches of dreary, drab-coloured grass a yard high.

Compared with the railway journey between Moscow and Streitinsk, this Ussuri section of the trans-Siberian line was badly laid. It was jolt and jerk and bump all day and all night long. I felt at times that if only the engine managed to get off the metals the running might have been easier.

Long sweeps of the line were under repair, fresh metals being put down and better ballasting provided. All the work was done by soldiers, well-built young fellows, with their shirts open at the throat, their braces hanging loose, and a little yellow-banded cap stuck on the back of their heads.

On the second day we ran through a wild country, with huge, round-shouldered hills and shadowy dells reminiscent of wildest Scotland if, instead of heather hues, you can conceive sides bunched with rich variegated undergrowth.

Somebody shouted something.

On the right, far off, like the gleam of a sword blade, was the glitter of the Pacific Ocean. I had travelled far since I saw the sea before. And then the sunset! I have a weakness for sunsets, and this one was wonderful; a mass of gold and blood, like a great cauldron into which other worlds were thrown, banking up the heavens behind a mass of clouds.

The train reached the edge of the sea and hastened along, between cleft rocks, shrieking its progress, and the echoes came back from the hills. A few Chinese junks were stranded on the shore. We began to run by a suburb of shanties. Then we stopped beneath a hill.

What place was this? Well, this was the original Vladivostok station, and you had to drive by droshki a few versts over the hill to the town. This was in strict accordance with the planting of Siberian stations.

The train grunted on up an incline and round an elbow of rock. Dusk was closing in. I stood at the window. There was the Pacific, smooth and now as dull as a sheet of lead. By the line tramped soldiers who had ceased work for the day. There was a little log-built, drab-painted hut. Before it stood a man holding a green flag. I am sure it was his brother I saw at the first signal-hut out of Moscow nearly two months before. He was wearing a beard like him, and his peaked cap was pulled well over his eyes. His red shirt was hanging just outside his trousers just in the old way. And the green flag was wrapped round the little stick in umbrella folds, just as it was a verst east of Moscow.

Those signalmen and those green flags I had seen all the way, save on the Shilka and Amur rivers, and there the signals were red and white posts.

The back yards of rows of houses crept into view just as they do when you are introduced to an English town by rail. Then came the crossing of a broad street, and the iron barriers were checking a surge of traffic—carts and carriages, uniformed Russians, white-smocked Koreans, blue-shirted Chinese.

We were in Vladivostok station, the end of the great trans-Siberian railway line, and it was tho only station from Petersburg to the Pacific that was right in the town. As I jumped from the carriage, my eye was attracted by a big board on which, in massive letters, was inscribed: Vladivostok to St. Petersburg, 9,877 versts." It was five o'clock in the evening of Wednesday, October 2nd, but nine o'clock in the morning by Greenwich time.

Most of us take to towns as we do to persons—at the first blush or not at all. I felt attracted to Vladivostok before I had been in it ten minutes.

About the station was vigorous, energetic life. A porter seized my baggage, and instead of slouching ran so that I might secure a carriage. He was the first Russian I had ever seen in a hurry.

The drivers were alive, and swung up their horses with a crack. Most of these men were fair-whiskered and light-eyed, picturesquely clad in cloaks of blue velvet and with red shirt sleeves sticking through the armholes. On their heads were curly astrakhan hats.

The carriage rattled over the stones of a strongly paved street. On the right was the harbour, a fine fifty-acre kind of lake, hill locked. In strong array

were anchored in line eight Russian men-o'-war ships, all painted white, and apparently ready for business. Little launches puffed and snorted.

On the quay side were two passenger steamers, one in that morning from Japan. The singing of the Chinese gangs as they trotted along under the weight of bales was heard above the clatter of wildly driven droshkies—and all the carriages in Vladivostok tear along as though there was a chariot race, so that, as there is no rule of the road, you are on the brink of a newspaper paragraph whenever you go out—while little bunches of sailors went rolling by rather drunken, and with their arms round each other's necks.

On the other side of the street reared huge white painted balustraded and ostentatious stores, as big as the shops in Regent Street, but not so continuous.

Building was everywhere, a big hotel here, a colossal magasin there, a block of offices somewhere else, everything telling of a new town in the throes of development—a broad asphalted pavement at one place, planks broken and uneven in another.

On the slope of a hill I saw the stars and stripes of America waving over a house. I looked about for the Union Jack but could not see it.

When I had settled in my hotel, run on the American plan—so much a day for room and board, and you pay whether you have it or not—I went out to visit the English Consul. There wasn't one. So I called upon the American representative, Mr. Theodore Greener, whose position is that of Commercial Agent for the United States. I found him in a neat office, with walls decorated with stars and stripes, the bookcases full of reports on trade, and all odd corners filled with catalogues of American firms who want to open up a business connection with Eastern Siberia.

"And there isn't a British Consul or British representative here?" I moaned with patriotism in the dust.

"No. There are commercial representatives of Trance and Germany and America, Holland and Japan, but no British representative. One or two of the Britishers here have been worrying your Foreign Office this last year or two, but they don't take much notice. Guess you Britishers don't want trade. Wo Americans and the Germans have the most of it. Still this would be a chance

for England. America and Russia have a tariff war on now, and there is a 40 per cent. duty on American goods." (

"And that had crippled American imports?" I asked.

"Yes, quite considerable. But the war will soon be over."

"Do many commercial men come here opening up business

"Oh, yes, but not many Britishers; they're chiefly Americans. My commercial reports are published by the State Department, and every mail brings me a letter from firms all over the States asking if I'd distribute a few of their circulars. Of course I would. I tell them to send plenty right along. That's what I'm here for. Quite a few American business men—maybe paying a visit to Japan—run up here just to see if there are any dollars about. Well, I take them about, introduce them to men who are likely to do import trade, and explain to them Russian methods. Vladivostok looks out of the world on a map, but it is going to be a great place for trade in a year or two."

All my investigations during a stay of over a week in Vladivostok were, I confess, not particularly appetising to my nationality. There is one English firm working a coal mine, some little distance out of the town, and making it pay; the same firm send a steamer once a year up to Kamschatka, and barter rice and cheap guns for skins; also, they hope to have the concession to illuminate Vladivostok with electricity and run electric cars. But apart from this firm little is done by English folk.

The impression left on my mind, after inquiring into the foreign import trade all through Siberia, is that Germany comes first, America makes a good second, while Great Britain is a very bad third, with France and Austria on her heels.

Vladivostok certainly needs a British Commercial Agent. A university man is not necessary, but a man who understands trade, who is not above finding out the price of candles in local stores, who will keep his eyes on things in demand, and knows how cheaply they can be made in England, would be invaluable.

One day I lunched with the representative of the Vienna Chamber of Commerce, who was travelling through Siberia looking where there were openings for Austrian wares. He was spending five weeks in Vladivostok alone. He

was acquainted with the manufactures of his own country. He bought samples of Russian goods, sent them off to Vienna, reported the genera price and gave a list of Russian firms who would be likely to buy Austrian articles.

Another day I met a Britisher from Shanghai who was half despondent and half blasphemous about British trade not holding its own.

Personally I know the majority of British Consuls in the East are capable men. But he was furious against the whole tribe. He gave me what he called an instance of how the British Consul is "too big for his job." He went into a consulate recently and asked:

"Could you, please, give me a list of all the merchants in this town who are in such-and-such a line?"

Who are you?" asked the Consul,

"Well, I'm travelling to push this particular line in the East."

"Look here," said the Consul, "you musn't think I'm here as a sort of directory to help men who have got something to sell."

"Then what are you here for?" asked the traveller.

"Your manner is rather rude," said the Consul.

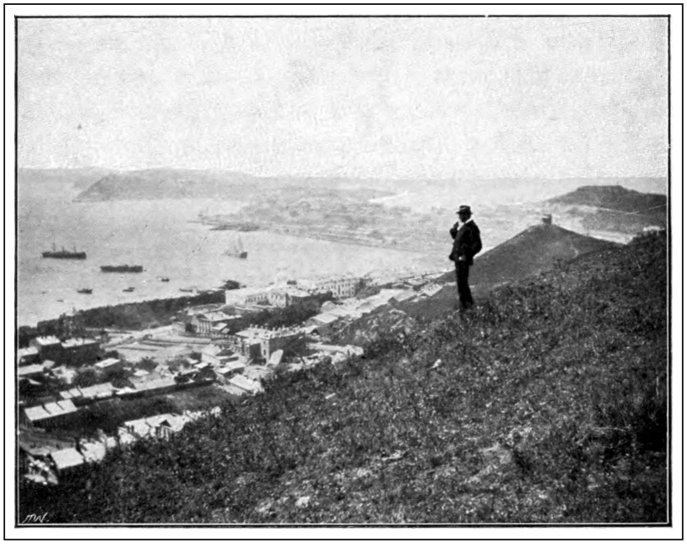
"Please tell me what you are here for, if it is not to help the British firms who want to develop trade, and I will apologise," said the traveller.

"You quite misunderstand a Consul's duties," replied Great Britain's representative.

"Now," continued this wrathful Englishman to me, "I went straight to the German Consulate and asked as politely as I could if he had a list of firms who dealt in so-and-so. Of course he had; he told me all about the local prices and who would be likely to do business with me. And all this very kindly to a Britisher, not a Dutchman, whereas that "then came a purple-worded description of the Consul.

The first idea I got of Vladivostok remained during my stay. It is a busy and lively town. It hugs the side of billowy hills and at the same time clings to the harbour side. This harbour is made by nature, not large but deep, absolutely shut off from the Pacific and guarded by a row of fortress teeth. Once or twice I went roaming with my camera, but everywhere on the hills around I was checked with a 'notice to keep off forbidden ground. All the hills over-

looking the channel way from the ocean to the harbour—where all the navies of the world could be smuggled away and nobody find them by searching the coast line—seem burrowed with forts. Every day one or more of the eight warships in harbour went out and did target practice. I climbed a mound behind the town, about as high as Arthur's Seat at Edinburgh, and obtained a fine view of the town and harbour. The Russians are very proud of the way they have guarded Vladivostok against attack. Yet friendship to other navies is always outstretched. A couple of Italian men-of-war ships came in during my visit, and there was firing of salutes, dinner parties and junketings, whilst the Russian and Italian sailors fraternised and drove about in droshkies, generally five in a droshki that can really carry two; and the Russian sailor was affectionate to his visitor, put his arm round his neck, and kissed him.



Overlooking Vladivostok.



The Main Street in Vladivostok.
*(The New Post Office is on the right.)*

Only two foreign battleships are allowed in Vladivostok harbour at once. This is a regulation the British squadron on the Chinese station is responsible for. A few years ago, when one of the many fogs was hanging over the harbour, some ten British warships came in quietly, dropped anchor in position facing the town, and made all the Russians gasp the next morning when the fog lifted. They did more than gasp; they were furious. Hence the regulation.

You cannot exhaust the sights of Vladivostok in an afternoon as you can most Siberian towns. There is much to be seen. Most attractive to me were the street scenes, the officials, military and naval, the business men really moving and not dawdling the day away, which most Russians do, to the tantalisation of all brisk Westerners; the gangs of Chinese labourers, who work from sundown to sundown, and are always happy; the perky little Japanese, aping European costume, whilst their womenkind keep to their winsome Nipponese garb, and go clattering about on wooden shoes; and the Koreans, all in white and with features so soft that you mistake them for women: a polyglot crowd indeed, all helping to make the town prosperous.

No man can come through Siberia to such a place as Vladivostok and give a thought to what Russia has done in the generation without being amazed. We may criticise Russian manners and growl at Russian diplomacy, and wonder how people can live under an autocratic government! But Russia has laid hold on the East.

I went a walk one evening in the public gardens. There was a statue fronting the Pacific to General Nevelskof, who laboured long and successfully for Russian dominion. On the plinth are inscribed his own words: "When a Russian flag is once hoisted it must never be lowered!"

Chapter XVIII

# A Plunge into the Forbidden Land of Manchuria

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It was at Vladivostok, after I had traversed the entire length of the trans-Asian Railway, that a particular idea began to ferment in my mind.

Crossing the mountains east of Baikal many of my companions had been officers, with green facings upon their uniforms. The green braid indicated they belonged to that part of the Russian army which guards the frontiers of the Czar's dominions. And one night while I was asleep, they disappeared at a station in the hills, called Katiska Rasiez. They had gone to Manchuria, which, for the peace of the world, has come under "temporary occupation" by Russian forces.

At Vladivostok I heard much about what Russia was doing in Manchuria, how 150,000 Cossack troops were in possession, carrying dread punishment to any bands of Chinese that resented the invasion, and how, under the name of the Eastern Chinese Railway, ostensibly Chinese, with a Chinese chairman of the board of directors, and the money largely provided by the Russo-Chinese Bank—though every penny comes out of the Russian exchequer, and nobody has a voice in the route, or the building, or the control, but Russians—the Muscovites were rapidly laying a line across Manchuria to Port Arthur and Vladivostok, with a junction at Harbin, so that, in case of war, military legions could be hastened to Pekin.

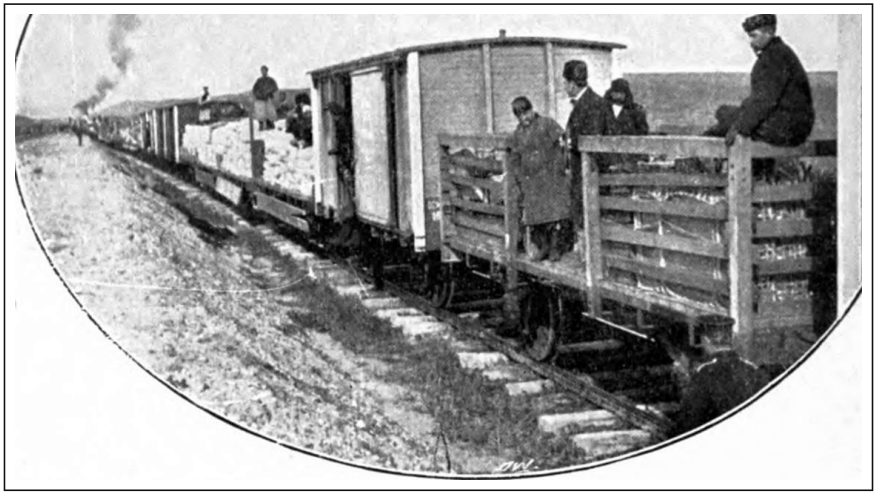
I heard stories of how the Russian cities were springing up in a way that outstripped the mushroom growth of "boom towns" in Western America, how money was being made, and, above all, how night and day hundreds of thousands of men were working on the railway, and laying it at the phenomenal speed of three miles a day.

It is the policy of Russia to keep everything dark about what she is doing with her "temporary occupation" of Manchuria. She publishes nothing about the number of troops or how they are engaged, nothing about the Russian settlements, nothing about the railway. A strict watch is maintained that no prying foreigners should see what is being done. An English colonel, after serving in Pekin, proposed to return to England by way of Manchuria and Siberia. He got into Manchuria, but at Mukden was arrested in the politest manner, detained for a fortnight, and then, because it would be so dangerous for him to travel through a country so unsettled, he was, again very politely, though to his own chagrin, conducted to the frontier, and invited to return to his native land some other way. A brilliant war correspondent made a dash for it, got as far as Harbin, and was then turned back. I heard of other correspondents who had applied to the authorities for permission to cross Manchuria, and in every case were refused.

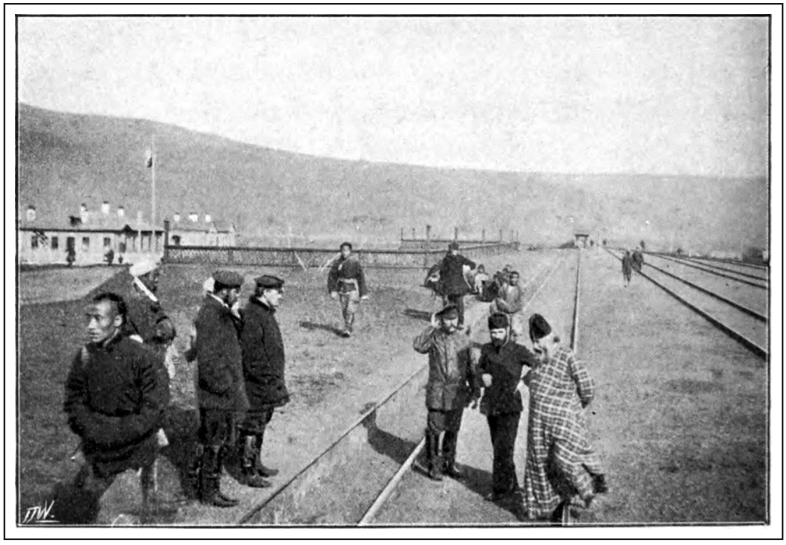
My journey across Siberia, from Moscow to Vladivostok, had lacked incident. And as a love of adventure first suggested a trip to Siberia, and as I had been disappointed in this, the thought of a plunge into the forbidden land of Manchuria laid hold on me.

I knew that if I sought official permission I would be refused. I decided not to ask but just start off and take chances.

At the last moment, just as an indication where I had gone, should anything untoward happen to me, I confided my intention to one or two Englishmen and Americans in Vladivostok. They smiled.



How I Went across Manchuria.



A Station in Manchuria.
*(Russian workmen saluting a Greek Orthodox priest.)*

"Well, goodbye," they said, "and good luck; but you will be back here under arrest within a week."

On Thursday morning, October 10th, I went to the Vladivostok station, ostensibly to return to Khabarovsk and thence make my way up the waters of the Amur and the Shilka to Streitinsk, where I would strike the Siberian line. But I was equipped for another route.

I was dressed like a Russian. I wore a curly woollen Astrakhan hat, a great sheepskin coat, no cloth but the skin outside and the inside soft and warm—comfortable, though heavy, and giving off a stench like a tanyard—and I donned a pair of long-legged Russian boots. Further, I had a hamper packed with tinned provisions, meats, fish, jams, tea and sugar, for while I expected to get hot water and bread on the way, I had my doubts about anything else.

In the Khabarovsk train I travelled about eighty versts to the military town of Nokolsk, which bristled with soldiers.

It was with just a tinge of regret and foreboding I then saw my train slowly puff away northwards, leaving me to my own devices.

It was a dull, chill afternoon, with the wind sighing drearily over the sandy wastes and making the air brown and thick with dust.

There would be no difficulty, I knew, about getting as far as Grodikoff, a Cossack town founded last year on the branch line that turns off to Manchuria and Port Arthur. So I bought my ticket, and rejoiced in the information I would not get there till dark.

We trundled through low-lying land, all dun and dismal, for though there was no snow, winter. had stricken the land and it lay dead and bare. The sky was low and grey, suggesting a snowstorm, 'and the gale whistled about the crawling train as a storm sings in the rigging of a ship.

There were not many passengers. My few companions were officials—military men or engineers, or men having to do with the telegraphs.

I got into conversation with a chubby young Cossack officer who was proceeding to Mukden for two years' service, and did not seem to enjoy the prospect. In the dusk I pulled out my pipe-case intending to smoke.

"Ah!" he said, "I've got one of those," and he whipped out a loaded revolver from his hip pocket. He laughed when I showed him only a pipe.

"But what revolver are you carrying?" he asked, "a Colt or a Smith-Wesson? "

I told him I was a sufficiently experienced traveller not to carry a revolver at all. Thereupon he gave a not very appetising account of the things likely to happen to a man foolish enough to go into Manchuria without a revolver—about train thieves and marauding bands of Chinese. He knew, of course, I was a Britisher, but never once did he inquire if I had permission to cross Manchuria.

Rain was falling pitifully through pitch darkness when we reached Grodikoff. I saw nothing of the town.

The station was just a barn place, with two wheezy oil lamps blinking in the wind. I got hold of two jaundiced Chinamen to carry my baggage and dump it down at an outhouse that served as a restaurant. Here a Tartar provided a supper of shashlik—bits of skewered mutton cooked over the ashes of a wood fire—a tender and juicy dish.

At ten o'clock came a scramble to the train, for we heard the snort of an engine that came along with goods waggon and open platforms and one third-class carriage.

This train would go on to Pogranitsa, the frontier station over the Manchurian. border and twelve miles away. There were no tickets to be bought. It was just a train for the military, and if a civilian travelled by it he was supposed to have received military permission.

Those Russians who were not warriors made for the goods waggons, into which the ordinary soldiers climbed. The officers climbed into the third-class carriage.

I knew that if I went into the goods waggons suspicion would be aroused. So I just joined the officers and made friends at once. They offered their cigarettes and tea, and were laughingly indulgent over my execrable Russian. Instead of resenting my presence, they were delighted, and two of them insisted on using their baggage as seats, so that I might have one of the benches to lie on if I desired sleep.

However, I was in no mood for sleep. I had still to pass the frontier, and it was possible I might there be checked.

It took the train two hours covering the twelve miles between Grodikoff and Pogranitsa, over badly laid metals, dipping and rolling not unlike a ship in a troubled sea, and now and then giving a lurch with a thud as though she had been hit by a monstrous wave.

It was midnight, and rain was falling, when a few jerking lights and the groaning of the train to a standstill proclaimed we were at Pogranitsa and in Manchuria.

So far so good. We all tumbled out upon a soaked bank, slippery with slush. There were folks already waiting for the goods train that would be going on to Harbin and Port Arthur, including women and children, and all rather like bundles of clothes squatting in the darkness.

It was bitterly cold. Some of the soldiers got wood, however, and soon there were fires blazing.

The anxiety about being stopped soon passed from my mind. The only thing I was anxious about was for the coming of the train that would let us.get out of the cold and wet.

It appeared a waiting of many hours, though it was just half-past one when, like a glaring-eyed dragon, a train appeared from I don't know where.

There was one third-class carriage again, and the women and children got into that. There were three covered vans with sliding doors, a great deal less comfortable than any goods car in England. But they afforded shelter, and there was a wild fight in the darkness to get inside, because they were high perched, and there were no steps, and it required an acrobat to twist to mount.

Cumbered as I was with baggage, I was among the vanquished. But there was plenty of room on the platforms used for carrying rails and sleepers, although it was not cheerful being obliged to spend a night there. Anyway, I found myself among some rails and rolls of telegraph wire.

Rain had ceased; but as the boards were damp I spread my mackintosh on the floor, put my felt-lined goloshes over my boots, charged my pipe, wrapped myself in my sheepskins, and, with a coil of telegraph wire as a pillow, settled down to be comfortable.

At the other end of the platform I noticed a heaving mass. Presently two men emerged, and crawling to me, asked if there would be much trouble with the officials, because neither of them had passes to enter Manchuria.

I was obliged to laugh at finding others travelling under much the same condition as myself, save that they were Russians and I was a foreigner.

Indeed, to my amusement, later on, although at times there must have been a hundred and fifty passengers, including Chinese coolies and moudjiks, not half a dozen in the whole crowd had formal authority.

These goods trains were moving up and down the line irregularly, working to no time-table, really carrying no passengers, for no fares were demanded, yet free to anybody who cared to take rough luck, and who were not particular to a week or ten days.

It was a means of progress that suited me admirably. If successful in getting through the country, I would be able to form a very good idea about that "temporary occupation "of which we have heard so much.

One of my companions was an elderly, grizzle-bearded man, a better class trader, who wanted to see if he could open a store at Harbin, or Hingan, or at Hilar, the three towns in close touch with the railway. The other was an excitable little Jew from Moscow, travelling with cheap jewellery, and the possessor of a revolver, which he was always taking out and unloading and loading, and carrying first in this pocket and then in that, and once dropping it, so that, high-handedly, I threatened that if he didn't put the thing away and keep it away I would pitch it as far as my arm would throw.

In the midst of our talk a braided official with a lantern came along, and climbed upon the platform. I was huddled and apparently asleep when he flashed the light on me and wanted to see my permit.

I blinked and yawned "Nitchevo," at the same time sticking a couple of roubles into his hand, and then burying myself in my wraps drowsily.

That was the end of it. He went away, and I supposed generally gathered roubles from everybody without a pass.

So at last I was fairly embarked on my adventure. As the train slowly jerked its uneven way through the black night, and I lay looking at the stars, I

was happier than I had been for along time. The train surged among scant plantations, nothing but thin bare poles.

Now and then, however, blazed a log fire, and tired workers were lying round or squatting and drinking tea and chatting.

Maybe for a couple of hours I slept, but woke in the raw dawn shivering with the cold. Heavy rime lay on everything.

The train had come to a standstill at a siding. There were tents about, and Cossacks with sheepskin hats hanging shaggily over their eyes, giving them a sinister look, were moving up and down, heavily cloaked and with guns slung across their shoulders.

A Cossack was boiling his kettle over a log fire, and I followed the example of half a dozen other travellers by getting out my kettle, jumping from the train—how one's limbs ache after a night's exposure—and boiling water for the ever-good Russian tea. I asked a soldier if he could sell me some bread. No; he had none. But an officer standing by said he could let me have some. He sawed me off about two pounds from a ten-pound loaf. I asked him what I should pay, but he laughed at the question.

Then, hunting out a tin of sardines and asking him to join me in eating them, I sat on a log and had a frugal but hearty breakfast, just as the young day was peeping over the land.

All day we jogged along fitfully, never travelling faster than five or six miles an hour, and halting often and long. The track was like a couple of lines drawn by a palsied hand. There was little or no banking up. As far as possible the ordinary earth surface was used. The metals, however, were heavy, of the same weight as those general in England, and much stronger than anywhere on the trans-Siberian stretch. There was evidence that this line had been thrown down with haste. It was nothing more than a makeshift line.

What, however, was not a makeshift line was the permanent way in course of construction, either on one side or the other.

Here were thousands of Chinamen at work. Proper levellings were being made, banks built up, cuttings delved, everything indicating that the new line will be for heavy traffic.

The Chinamen swarmed the banks like ants, though with a less show of industry. They were all going about their work in a slow, leisurely way. So the joke of the Russians was to shout, "Hello, tortoises!" whenever a dawdling group was passed.

The Chinese used silly little shovels with big, thick shafts, and all the earth, whether to bank up or to clear a cutting, was carried in baskets certainly not holding more than six pounds' weight of soil.

Along the way were sleepers and piles of rails, telegraph poles, coils of telegraph wire, and a hundred things necessary in railway building, but all lying about apparently in utmost confusion. Heavy engines were snorting over the new line in places—all American, built by Baldwin of Philadelphia—and in one place, where the bank had slipped under the weight, and on its side, among a mass of wrecked trucks, was one of these fine machines.

Though very cold the day was bright, and, as there was plenty to see, the ride was by no means unenjoyable. All along the route were Cossack guards.

In places the railway workers were not Chinese but Manchus, and in other places groups of gentle-featured, white-garbed Koreans were labouring with Russian overseers.

We began to climb great sweeps of upland covered with rustling, bleached grass until our altitude was 1,915 feet. There was little to indicate that we had gone up a mountain. The descent on the other side, however, was sharp and quick. In about four years' time a tunnel, being made by a firm of Hungarian contractors, will be completed, and then there will not be the long curves to the top nor the sudden zigzags to the bottom. They were real zigzags. A Baldwin engine was fastened to the back of the train, and held the trucks in check while the leading engine slid down the mountain side until she ran into a cul-desac, and there stopped. Then the engine that had been in the rear went first on the other track. So the train zigzagged down the mountain. From its height the view was impressive. The valley below lay in black shadow. But the eye could range over the knuckles of neighbouring hills, flushed with sunshine, to mountains in the far distance that reared like masses of purple haze.

We halted at decrepit, dirty villages, half Manchu, half Russian, with everything opposite to the picturesque about them, many of the houses sloping from top to ground, all roof as it were. Any cooking was done outside. At each station was flying a Chinese flag of yellow, showing the contorted, spiteful dragon. But one corner of the yellow was cut away, and there was inserted the red, blue, and white of Russia.

That afternoon we pulled up near three shanties on a woodside, and a gang of Chinese—all squabbling and making noises like dogs growling over bones—fought with one another to get on a platform, where a boiler, made by a New York firm, was chained. There was a scuffle. One Chinese was pushed backwards and fell. His head hit the metals and cracked like a nut. He gave a wriggle and died. The Russians who saw the accident were affected. The Chinese laughed. He lay for an hour in the sun until I undid his sleeping rug and spread it over his face.

He was soon forgotten. A Chinese threw some hot water over a growling dog and made it howl. At this there were shrieks of mirth. The engine puffed and groaned and jerked the waggons into progress. The last I saw of this spot was two Chinamen pitching mud at the same dog to keep it from sniffing at the 'body of the dead.

## Chapter XIX

# A Manchurian "Boom" Town

Iron rails do not make the best bedding, and a coil of telegraph wire is not to be recommended as a pillow. Further, sleeping in the open on the top of a railway truck is more uncomfortable than adventurous.

So, when rain threatened on the second afternoon out of Vladivostok, I made ardent friendship with a Cossack officer. He discovered that in the goods van in which he was travelling with brother soldiers room might be found for a wandering Britisher.

It was a dingy place, half filled with boxes of iron bolts and bags of American flour, but almost luxurious compared with an open platform. Everybody was unshaven and rather grimy.

We were eight in that van, cramped and huddled. Yet from the pleasantries that prevailed you might have thought we were on a picnic instead of going through a disturbed country and open to attack at any hour. Provisions were shared in common—bread, tea, tinned meats, cigarettes. There was sparsity of knives, forks, plates, and cups. But no time was wasted in having these articles washed. A wipe with a bit of newspaper was all they got.

The whole country-side swarmed with pheasants. A Chinese boy coming along with a bunch swung at either end of a pole, somebody bought ten for a rouble (two shillings), and soon the soldiers had them plucked, cleansed, and in a stewpot.

For five hours we were at a standstill. The sky was low and sullen, and as soon as night set in down went the thermometer. For exercise I took a few sharp turns the length of the train, and felt sorry for the poor moujiks and Chinese closely crouching on the platforms to get the warmth of one another's bodies.

The Cossack soldiers do not mind the cold. They had large felt cloaks swathing them, and big bundles of hay to lie upon. Much of their time was spent in singing—and who that has heard a Slav song, crooning, pathetic, weird, sung by a Cossack at night in the middle of a plain silent as death, can forget it? From the chinks in the doorways of the covered vans came rapier thrusts of light and the low mumble of talk. When the night was at its blackest rain fell, and the drops rattled on the vans like shot.

Once more we went on, jerking and jolting, and often we lurched and banged as though we had run into a wall.

Suddenly there was a shaking and a clatter. We were almost knocked to pieces. Then quietness.

Our van had jumped the rails. I was the only one who seemed surprised. Everyone else took it as a matter of course, turned over, and went to sleep again. There was a good deal of shouting and lamp-flashing, but in an hour the van was back in its place. Once more we went on.

Just at dawn, as we were running past a siding, the points did not work. This time it was the engine that jumped the rails. Again, nobody minded. We might be stopped a couple of hours or a couple of days.

But Nitchevo—most blessed of Russian words in the hour of possible vexation!

Indeed, there was a general evidence of gladness. So long as the train was moving there was no opportunity of a fire, and hot water and tea A breakdown, however, meant great fires, with people roaming round for wood and water, and consequent tea drinking by the gallon. This break turned everybody out: Russian officials, officers, soldiers, engineers, telegraph workers, traders, moudjiks, Chinese, Manchus, Koreans, and one British journalist.

It was like a camp. There was the roasting of fowls, boiling of rice, frying of fish.

A way back from the line was a Cossack post, a long, low-roofed, white-washed house, like a Scotch clay biggin', with a rude stockade, and the hardy little ponies tethered at long wooden troughs in the open. On one side was a high scaffold-like tower, and on the top was a Cossack on duty, letting his eye roam over the country on the watch for the coming of the Hung-hos, marauding bands of Manchus, who raid native villages and Russian settlements indiscriminately.

Along the whole stretch of the railway across Manchuria are Cossack posts, planted, as it were, in the midst of a wilderness.

They are not Hyde Park-looking warriors, these Cossacks. They are semi-savages, black-eyed, fierce-browed, the finest horsemen in the world, caring little for your life, little for their own, absolutely fearless, of the dashing, reckless, break-neck sort of bravery, ever impetuous. For a charge there are no troops that could equal them. But Russian officers told me that for modern operations they are not much good, that they have not the patience to seek the shelter of sand banks, nor make strategic moves, nor remain quiet for hours in the hollow of a hill ready for a particular manœuvre at a particular moment.

The Cossack soldier, in return for the land the government gives him, provides his own horse and equipment. A Cossack, therefore, with all the independence of his wild race, thinks himself more than the equal of a Russian officer. There is no servility about him. It is difficult to make him obey orders. When there is fighting he must get amongst it at once with his bare sword.

From Russia's point of view these Cossacks are the best possible guards to place along the Manchurian line.

First and foremost, the object of that line is to carry troops to the shores of the Pacific, and the phenomenal haste with which the building of it was being pushed on was—as I gathered from many Russian sources—a fear that Japan intended to precipitate a conflict for the possession of Korea From this very line between Grodikoff and Harbin, a branch is made to the Korean frontier. Its purpose is obvious.

Russia wants no mishaps to the Manchurian railway in time of war. So it runs through a more or less desolate region, north-west, over the Hingan

mountains, across a corner of the Mongolian desert, until it jos the Siberian line at Katiska Rasiez, near Chita, in trans-Baikalia.

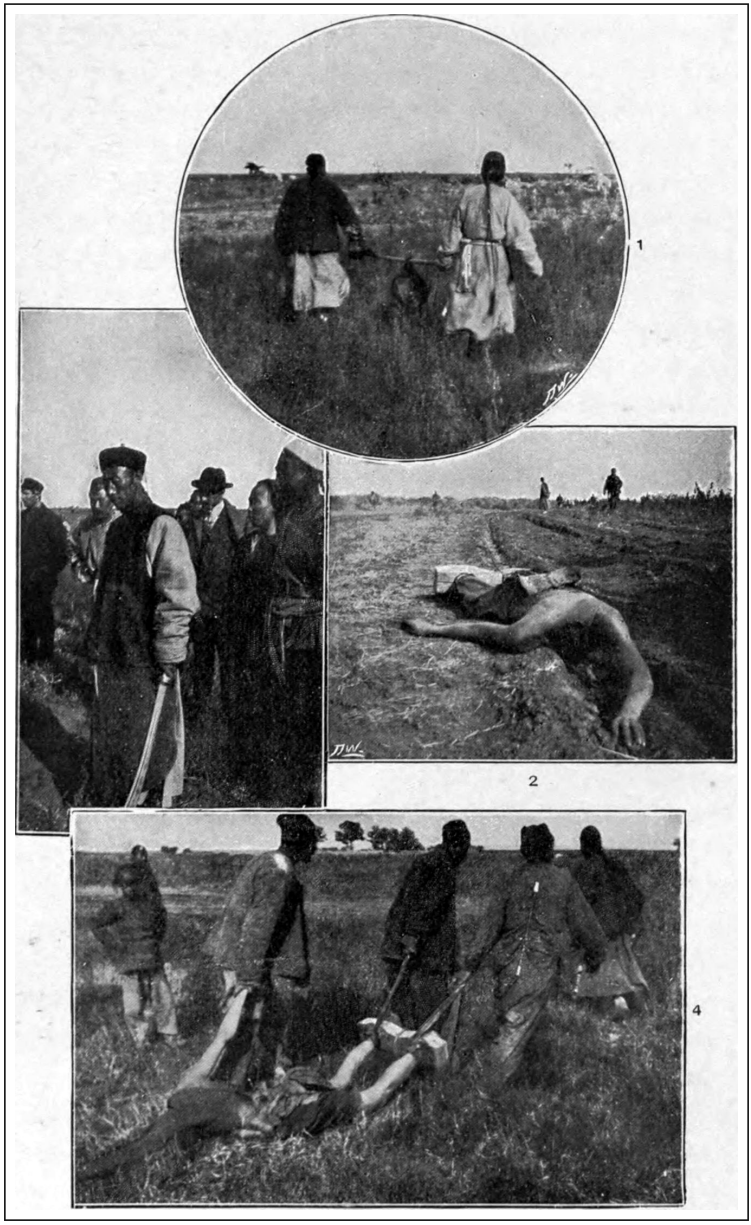
All the towns on the route are new and Russian. Where there are Chinese towns they are contiguous to the Russian towns, which are also military centres. For twenty miles on each side the line the Chinese and Manchus have been driven back. I heard gruesome stories of what has taken place when there has been any show of resistance—the men slaughtered, the women violated, and then their throats cut.

There were some hundreds of thousands of Chinese coolies engaged on the railway, and near Harbin, and Hingan, and Hilar were also Chinese settlements. But I did not see any Chinese women. They had all been sent away for fear of the Cossacks.

Naturally I saw much of the Cossacks. Their attire, the sheepskin hats struggling over their eyes, made them forbidding. But it did not take long to find a good deal of bluff animal kindness about them. They were rough and rude; they knew nothing of town life; their tastes were simple and very primitive. They made fires for us, lent us their pans, and gave us bread, and none of us dared insult them by offering money in payment.

A couple of Cossack patrols came along, swung themselves from the saddles, and throwing their carbines. aside, lay on the ground by the fire, and were served with cups of hot tea by their own mates.

It was a damp, moansome day. The Cossacks on the train got a piece of canvas sheeting, and rigged themselves a tent on their open truck.




1. Carrying the Head of a Chinese Robber. 2. A Decapitated Chinaman. 3. The Chinese Executioner. 4. Dragging Decapitated Chinese to Burial.

But in the dark the wind came shrieking and snapped the cords. We heard the engine snort and shriek. It was a sign all was well again. So we curled up and went to sleep, while all night the train cumbrously jogged on. We were running through scant forest.

There were no leaves, and the trees were skeleton, save when there was a brush of fir.

We stopped and we jerked, and then stopped again. It was dreary. The mists hung round the trees and blanketed the landscape from view. It was impossible to wander more than fifty yards away, for that would have provoked fate to send the train on without you.

First we stopped seventeen hours; then we crawled for two hours; next we stopped for five hours. That makes twenty-four hours, and tells how we spent Sunday, October 13th. We probably travelled ten miles.

On the Sunday we pulled up at a struggling hamlet of new houses. "

What is the name of this place I asked.

"It has not got a name yet," I got as a reply.

Besides Russians there were many Chinamen about. The policeman, porcine and pompous, with a willow-plate kind of design on his chest and back, and carrying a red-painted stick, was a Chinaman. He looked important. But standing near were grey-cloaked Cossacks with fixed bayonets.

Next we ran through a plain of sodden wilderness. It began to snow, followed by sleet and snow again.

Thus we reached the town of Harbin; not to be found on most maps except under the name of Hulan. It is a great junction. It came into prominence in 1900 because the Boxers destroyed the line here, and besieged the town for several weeks. The station itself is a paltry place, but there are eight tracks of rails. Huge stacks of stores for troops are guarded by soldiers.

Seven years ago there was not a single Russian in Harbin. Now there are nearly nine thousand. Old Harbin, or Hulan, where the Chinese live, is a distance away, and there are some ten thousand Celestials, a weak and puling lot of men.

But New Harbin, where the Russians are, is for all the world like a "boom" American town. It has sprung into existence in a few years. Rig stores and

hotels are being pushed up, and everywhere building is to be seen. Fortunes are made by men who have got patches of land centrally situated.

Theoretically this is Chinese territory, and therefore goods coming in from the sea at. Dalny—Talienwan on our English maps—pay no duty.

But you do not buy them cheaper at Harbin because of that. Indeed, everything costs about double what it does at Vladivostok. Two hundred per cent. is the profit a trader must make, or he thinks he is doing bad business.

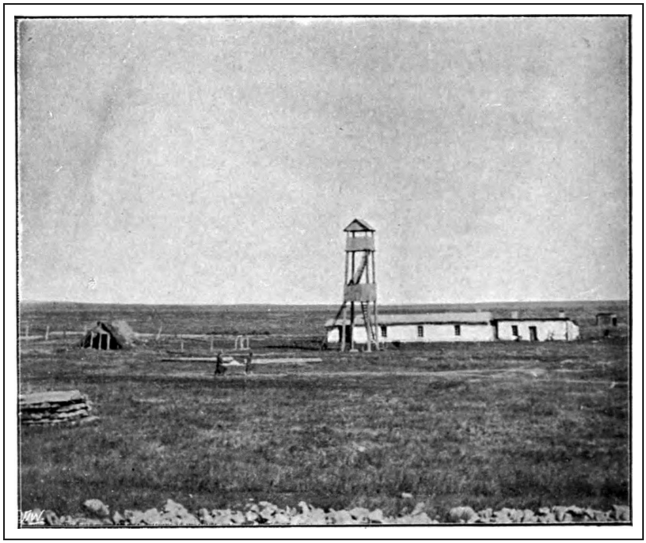
Harbin is now the principal town in Manchuria. It is a magnet to all the adventurers in Russia. - There are two or three murders every week. Respectable folks who go out at night do so in bands, the men armed, and with a Cossack guard.

Russian officers, and the army of engineers engaged on the railway—they are all excellently paid to stimulate them to hurry the line to completion—make for Harbin when they get a few days' leave. A Russian's idea of good-fellowship, when in his cups, is to squander, to pour champagne on the floor, just to show he doesn't mind expense, to light his cigarette with a three-rouble note, and generally splash money round.

There is a café chantant at Harbin, which has the laxity of café chantants in other parts of the world. The night before I was at Harbin, an engineer arrived, his pockets bulging with roubles, and he showed his idea of money by making all the girls sit in a row while he poured champagne on hundred-rouble notes, and then stuck these notes (£10) on the foreheads of each of the eight girls. That is the Harbin idea of having a good time.



Cossacks and a Chinese Cart.



A Cossack Guard Station and Watch Tower.

Now, though Harbin is in the "temporary occupation" of Russia, the Chinese have the administration of the country round. Chinese robbers, the Hunghos for instance, are tried by Chinese authority, and the beheading that takes place is by Chinese law, and not by Russians. All these robbers when caught are executed. They are made maudlin drunk on sumshu, and are then pulled to their knees by a tug at the queue, and a swish of a sword takes off the head. These heads are stuck on poles, and planted on the wayside as a warning to evil-doers. I saw several.

Harbin and the country round provided the strongest possible evidence that, whatever diplomatic language may be used, Russia is in possession of Manchuria, and intends to stay. It is a very large plum drawn out of the Chinese pie

Roughly, Manchuria has a population of some seventeen millions, comprises about one-tenth of China's entire area, is six times as large as England and Wales, and possesses a climate resembling that of Canada; its mountains are said to ooze gold, and its harbour, Port Arthur, is splendid, free from ice all the year round.

Though the railway does not run through a fertile region, the land is full of possibilities. And there is this thing to be said in favour of the Russian occupation: before the Russians came it was little more than a sterile waste; now money is being poured into the country, and another ten years will probably reveal wonders.

It is not, of course, so wealthy as the great western Chinese province of Sztcheum, contiguous to our Indian territory, and which the French are doing their best to slice off for themselves by running a railway to it from Tonquin, by way of Yunnan, but gold mines have already been worked, though only in a primitive way. Petroleum, copper, and tin have been found. Coal beds lie close to iron beds, and that means much. All that is wanted is machinery and enterprise.

Remember it is only five years since (1897) that a party of Cossack military surveyors, accompanied by Russian engineers, made a journey across Manchuria to spy the land for a railway. There were a couple of chains of mountains to be crossed, and on the plains the soil was unstable. The report

of these surveyors was unfavourable. But political reasons pressed the importance. In 1898 the Czar said, "Let the line be laid!"

And there it is, 1,200 miles long, from Nikolsk to Katiska Rasiez, and 890 miles of it through Chinese territory. It is the seal to Russia's power in the Far East.

Nominally China conceded the right to build this railway to an anonymous company. Everybody, except people who frequent Downing Street, knows the line belongs to the Russian government. Shareholders must be either Russians or Chinese. But bonds can only be issued with the consent of Mr. De Witte, the Russian Minister of Finance. The president of the Eastern Chinese Company, as it is called, is a Chinaman. Mr. De Witte, however, appointed the vice-president, all the engineers and officials, and gives sanction to any improvements or modifications. Colloquially the Chinese president is in Mr. De Witte's pocket.

I spent part of my afternoon at Harbin shopping, buying another sheepskin, a big German sausage as hard as wood, and half a dozen tins of Singapore pineapples, exported by some patriotic Britisher, for they were of the "Jubilee Brand," had a picture of Queen Victoria, decorations of Royal Standards and Union Jacks, and displayed views of soldiers and battleships.

But nobody seemed to know when a train was to go northwards to Hingan and Hilar.

It would be easy enough to get down to Mukden and Port Arthur, and it took me an hour to make it clear I did not want to go either to Mukden or Port Arthur. Then I was informed that three miles away, on the other side of the river Sungari, it was possible I might find some goods waggons going north to-day, to-morrow, or next week. That was what I wanted.

It took me hours, however, to extract the simple fact that there was a bridge over the Sungari, and trains on the other side.

The station-master provided a trolley, and I piled my belongings on it. This was pushed along by four Russian workmen. Then I borrowed a couple of Cossack soldiers to act as guard, and I set off to walk.

The sleety tempest of the day had waned, and the late afternoon, with a watery sunlight playing over the country, was not without beauty. The rail-

way bank was strong and well built; it had a double track, and led to a great eight-span iron bridge over the Sungari. This bridge had only been finished four days, and no train had yet passed over it. It was protected by Cossacks, but a word by my guard opened a way. So I walked over.

The Sungari here is about twice the width of the Thames at London Bridge, and as I was high perched I could see the waters of this mighty stream for far, flowing northwards until they join the mighty stream of the Amur. On one bank was the native town, a long, bedraggled street with the Chinese slithering in the mire. On the river were hundreds of pug-nosed, 'hump-backed Chinese junks with long venetian-blind kind of sails, dropping down stream, the men singing as they dipped the large oars, while in and out among them dodged noisy and perky little Russian government steam launches. The clouds broke, and a flush of crimson spread along the distant hills.

It was dark evening when I reached the station, a white-washed hut with a dirty oil lamp by the door. The station-master was friendly. As far as he knew a train would be going on some time in the night. So with a lantern we went exploring and found.an empty goods car. That was excellent.

Then, wrapping myself in my sheepskins and making a rough pillow, I lay down in a corner with a candle stuck in a bottle as light, smoked my pipe, fell asleep, and when I awoke in the darkness I was delighted to feel the jolting motion of making progress.

## Chapter XX

# Suspected and Arrested

❦

For a whole day, Tuesday, October 15th, the goods train in which I journeyed trundled the Sungari plain, called the eastern Gobi desert.

The eye ranged across a sea of dun-coloured, rank grass. A bleak wind whistled mournfully.

The only excitement was when the train got off the line, which it did thrice in the day. Then as my waggon was cold and my limbs ached, I was able to get out and run to stimulate warmth. I never saw a village, though there were plenty of Cossack guard stations.

My quarters in the van were wretched, but they were better than those of the other passengers—maybe twenty, excluding Chinese coolies—for they were in open trucks, and looked blue with cold. A big, black-bearded Russian, and the little Jew I met near the frontier, came and asked permission to travel with me. As far as I had any authority they were welcome enough, and they showed their gratitude by boiling water for me whenever I showed a disposition towards tea-drinking. I would not like to hazard a guess how much tea I did drink. It had the merit of providing warmth.

There was a closed waggon under the guard of eight Cossacks. Two young fellows jumped out at one of our many halts, and we got into conversation round a wood fire. They were Russians, but one of them spoke English like a Britisher. He had lived for some years at Shanghai. He and his companion were in the employ of the Russo-Chinese Bank, and were taking along some-

thing approaching a million roubles to open a branch of the bank at Hilar, in Mongolia.

The line was too unsteady for night travelling, and so the train pulled up at dusk, and remained stationary till morning.

I was out in the open before daylight to watch the break of day, just a leaden streak, then a gleam of silver, then a crimson flush, and then the sun, like a great pear, climbing over the edge of the world. Fires had been blazing all night, with Cossacks lying around, or sitting chatting, or making ready the eternal tea.

Once more we went on, and by nine o'clock we were at the station of Tsitsikar, a flourishing Chinese city, but twenty-five versts from the railway. So I saw nothing of it. We had a long wait, for what nobody knew, except that when my Russian banking friend and I went into a little inn where we might get some soup, we found the engine driver very drunk, and still drinking. In the afternoon he was willing to take the train on, and though the driving was reckless and we were banged till we were sore, the fates were kind and we did not leave the metals.

What I saw that evening will long remain in memory.

We were beyond sleet and rain, and sundown came over the land majestically. Far off was a prairie fire, and the last rays of the sun, catching the volumed smoke, illuminated it like a purple mantle, while the dreary, drab grass was burnished into old gold. The ground was marshy with a hundred lakes dotted with islands, and broken by peninsulas, and millions of wild fowl cluttered over the water and screeched at our coming. So night fell.

Suddenly, straight ahead, as though the palace of a genii had been lit up, there blazed a hundred lights. Electric lamps!

Yes, electric lamps, so that the Russians might see for the building of their great iron bridge over the Nuni river, which is really the parent of the Sungari. The train came to a standstill under the glare of those lamps alongside other tracks laden with waggons and cars. Russian officials were moving about with lanterns, and growing hoarse yelling orders to hordes of Chinese coolies.

The electric light gives a blue, pale, eerie look to the human countenance in the streets of an English town; but here, away in middle Manchuria, the light pouring down on heavily clad and top-booted Russians, and wild-featured, sheepskin-hatted Cossacks, and the lean, shining-faced Chinese all screaming, and with glint of the electric light flashing to you from their slit eyes—well, it was a curious scene!

Great wooden sheds reared at intervals across the river. These were built about the foundations, already laid, and the clang of iron smote the ear. For there are two thousand Russians and five thousand Chinese working night and day, seven days and seven nights in the week, pressing on with the building of that bridge.

When I looked upon that spectacle of iron shafts being reared, heard the snort of steam cranes swinging girders into place, and beheld how everybody seemed animated with an almost demoniac haste, I understood what the Russians can do when they are really determined.

Alongside this rearing structure was a creaking temporary wooden bridge laid with metals. No engine dare attempt to cross it, but it can bear two or three waggons ata time. The waggons of our train were uncoupled. Some fifty or sixty Chinese surrounded them and started to push and sing.

The singing was a low, melodious monotone, such as I have heard from the Yang-tze boatmen in Western China. One man had the solo, and the rest was a rich chorus. When the waggons yielded to the pushing and ran easily, the singing became more catchy, sprightly, and the chorus was a series of short gleeful barks at every step taken.

I stood on an open platform while we went across the huge, clanging bridgework on the left, with great electric eyes looking down on us, and half lighting the sallow faces of the Chinese, and on the right the black waters of the slothful Nuni.

A village of workshops and huts, called Falardi, is on the north side of the river, and here the Russians live, and have a rough and ready restaurant, where I was able to get my first honest meal for a week.

Sometime in the night we went on again, but after an hour we stopped; then a few more versts on, and then stopped again, and then at a place called

Bukarto we pulled up for what seemed the better part of the day. In thirty hours we had travelled eight miles,

Some of the time I had as companion a fine stalwart Russian officer of the frontier guard. The only word of English he knew was "Shocking!" That one word he made do good service. The line was "shockeeng!" the condition of our waggon was "shockeeng!" the delay was "shockeeng!" I gathered that he learnt the word by the fact that English characters in Russian novels most frequently use it!

Bukarto consisted of not, more than a dozen log-houses, spread over about ten acres of shingled hillside. Near at hand were low hills with black knuckles of rock protruding. A gusty wind swept up from the Gobi, and made eyes ache with sand. A caravan of dromedaries, maybe sixty of them, came out of the wilderness with slouching foot-pats, and disappeared away into the wilderness again.

Round an elbow of hill was a Cossack encampment, and as I was told the line was being re-metalled some dozen miles on, and the train might be delayed two, three, or four days, possibly a week, I went roaming the camp.

There was none of the smartness generally associated with military camps. The huts were of wheezy boards. There was no furniture except rude tables and rude stools. The beds were sheepskins thrown on the floor. All the cooking was done over log fires, out of doors, and the food chiefly consisted of black bread and tea.

The Cossacks, rough and dark-featured, lounged round or squatted on the ground cleaning their rifles.

Strolling back a Cossack came to me and said something gruffly. I told him I didn't understand what he was talking about, and went on. He followed me to the train. I jumped into the waggon. Two other Cossacks came along, and the three climbed in beside me.

They wanted me to do something, but I couldn't make out a word they were saying. The first soldier showed a disposition to throw my property out of the waggon.

Then the Britisher in me got uppermost, and I snatched my bag out of his grasp and told him to clear out. After a while he and his friends went.

But in a quarter of an hour they came back, accompanied by an officer. We exchanged respectful salutations, and speaking in German he said I was not a Russian, and he wanted to know to what country I belonged.

I told him I was a Britisher, and a journalist.

Then he must ask me to accompany him to see the colonel of the guard!

I confess I had some misgiving. Here I was, checked at last, without any authority to go through Manchuria, and liable to uncomfortable treatment. I had come so far without any trouble, and I felt chagrined. I was practically under arrest, for as I walked along with the officer the three Cossacks fell in behind with fixed bayonets.

We marched to a bare-looking building, and I was left in custody of the soldiers while the officer went inside. I sat on a log with these grim Cossacks close by, ready to bring me down if I attempted to escape. So I put the best face on it I could, lit my pipe, and smoked.

In ten minutes the officer invited me to enter the building, which I did.

Tt was a bare kind of room with accoutrements hanging on the walls, an oleograph of the Czar, and some official papers. The colonel of the guard, a well-set, iron-haired man, rose as I entered, and we exchanged bows. He was very polite, and said he was sorry to trouble me, but as I was a foreigner he must know what I was doing in Manchuria.

I explained I had been across Siberia to Vladivostok, and was now on my way home.

But why, he asked, did I not return the ordinary route by the Amur and Shilka rivers?

Because, I said, the ice had stopped the steamers.

Ah, of course; but was I a military man?

? I laughed and let him understand I hardly knew one end of a gun from the other; I was just a journalist travelling, and writing about what I saw.

So, then, I probably had papers explaining who I was?

Of course; and I produced my passport, and also my letters from St. Petersburg, recommending me to the courtesy of the Russian officials in Siberia. I knew there wasn't a word in them about Manchuria, and I stood patiently awaiting my fate.

Very slowly he went through those papers; then he carefully folded them and handed them back to me with a bow.

Yes, he said, they were all right, and he was sorry to have put me to inconvenience. Would I join him at dinner?

I accepted, though my inclination was to laugh. To be arrested as a spy and the arrest to lead to an invitation to dinner had something decidedly humorous about it.

Over the dinner it came out that the train was likely to be delayed at least four days owing to the relaying of the line. I grumbled mildly.

"But," said my host, "the line is all right at Hingan, twenty versts on. I'll give you tarantass and horses, and you can get on there in a couple of hours, and I will telegraph to the station-master you are coming."

I was infinitely obliged.

So the very Cossacks who had worried me and followed me with fixed bayonets were sent as porters to bring my baggage from the train.




Examining Permissions to Travel in Manchuria.

And just as dusk was falling two tarantasses, uncomfortable-looking carts, each drawn by three horses, pulled up; my goods and chattels were thrown into one; I climbed into the other, settled down among the hay, pulled my skins about me, received wishes for a good voyage from the officers, and so, with the bells on the harness jangling merrily, set off over the hills.

It was a long and cold drive. I lay at the bottom of the tarantass, with furs piled about me, and was cosy. There was no road—just a track, and all round were low black hills. Here and there were tufts of drifted snow. Twice we crossed streams, and the wheels crunched ice. Much of the way was through swampy woods. The earth was frozen hard.

A heavy, sombre stillness was on the world, broken only by the tinkling bells and the clatter of the cart.

Now and then we met Manchus journeying in their quaint vehicles—long, and covered with matting, so that they looked like casks, and all lined with skins, making them warm, and the driver, slit-eyed, with high cheek-bones, sitting well inside so that he could hardly be seen.

In time we got back to the railway, and the road track ran alongside it. Beneath the trees fires blazed luridly. Gangs of coolies were cooking the evening meal. We struck a defile in the hills, and wound about them following the trail of a stream.

Hingan town was a long, straggling, distorted place, the houses new and built higgledy-piggledy, as like a Western American "boom" town as can be imagined.

It was not till I reached here that I discovered the drivers of my two carts were a couple of lymphatic Tartars, whose knowledge of Russian was as limited as my own. They did not know the way to the station.

So I jumped out at a drinking saloon and found myself among a number of Pole overseers in charge of the four thousand coolies working on the two miles of line under repair. They said the station was some versts on, up a hillside.

Off we set, slowly climbing zigzag a lean, dark mountain, with a few trees blasted and dead by the way. We stopped to give the horses breath, and then

the only sound was the bark of dogs down in the town below. A thin sprinkling of snow was on the ground, and the air was biting with frost.

We reached the top, and there was a canvas camp, With again many fires lighting up the gloom, and with Chinamen flitting everywhere like shadows. It took half an hour winding among tree stumps before the station was reached—a barn of a building.

I was so cold I had hardly strength to push open the door. I found myself in a big room packed with piles of baggage and folks squatting on the floor. Russians don't like fresh air, and the place was fetid with the odour of unwashed bodies. It was a mixed crowd—soldiers, traders, moujiks, women and children, some curled up asleep, but most sprawling in awkward attitudes. I got a man to pull my sheepskin coat from me, and sighting a samovar in the corner, I drank tea till I thawed.

It was not a savoury spot to spend a night in. The nostrils, however, soon got acclimatised, and the place was warm, which was the principal thing.

Presently in came the station-master, a thin slip of a man, extremely nervous, and anxious to do anything. He gave me his office to sleep in, and helped in arranging skins on the floor as a makeshift bed.

Inquiries about a train in the direction of Hilar brought out that there would not be one till six the next evening, I shrugged my shoulders, and was resigned to wait till then.

"But," said the station-master, "an engine and some trucks are going along to Mindenken, some sixty versts from here, and you can go by it, and it will start any time to suit you."

I was in luck's way again.

Five o'clock in the morning, I suggested. Yes, five o'clock in the morning for certain, and as there was a fourth-class carriage about, he would have it put on for me.

I woke myself at half-past four in the morning, and went out to see if the train was about.

Not a sign. It was pitch dark, save for a few blinking stars. It was so cold that hoar lay on the boards half an inch thick.

On the other side of the line some Chinese were making tea. I went to their fire to warm myself. They offered me a cup, and delightful it was, though muddy. Then I went back to the station, and entered the room where the crowd of poor folks were.

Everybody was asleep, and the lamp flickered on upturned faces, unshaven soldiers, rough and thick-lipped peasants, plain women with the sadness of long patience on their faces, tiny mites of children dead tired, sleeping open-mouthed across the mothers' knees, and the little chubby fists hanging carelessly. They all, poor souls, were coming to this land of Manchuria from Siberia to labour and to earn their bread. I shut the door gently, not wanting to break the sleep that shutters care.

It was eight o'clock,a bright morning, but with cold that cut like a wolf's tooth, when the engine came.

There was a grey-painted fourth-class carriage, bare and dirty, with a broken window, but still. a carriage. There was shunting to get some trucks to go along.

The news spread that this was a train bound Siberia-wards. Then the trucks were besieged by an army of men who sprang from beneath the trees where they had been sleeping, men clad in woollen garments, with velvet breeches, huge felt leggings, sheepskin hats, but with the hair inside, making them look as though they had stewpots on their heads, great bundles swung behind them, and most of their beards a mass of icicles. They were labourers from Little Russia, in the south, with their work now over, returning home as best they could, and snatching the opportunity of a lift. With their padded clothes and great bundles, they were hampered in their acrobatic efforts to clamber into those three trucks. However, they all got on, though they were wedged as tight as sardines.

Away dashed the train with its light load. The soil was stony, and so the ballast was good.

The country, however, was a featureless plain, but with the shoulders of hills heaving in the distance. I was nearing the terminus of the line, so far finished on the Manchurian side of the Hingan mountains.

There were stations by the way. One had been opened two days before and consisted of a single goods waggon.

With a shriek and a long whistle the train stopped opposite a few huts. This was Mindenken, the last spot to which trains that day ran.

So I had my belongings thrown on the bank, and set about finding means to take me over the mountains into Mongolia.

## Chapter XXI

# In a Corner of Mongolia

❦

You will not find on a map the cluster of wooden huts called Mindenken, where the Manchurian railway, on Saturday, October 19th, 1901, came to a sudden stop. But you may easily find the Hingan mountains, breaking north-east between Mongolia and Manchuria, and if you draw a line from Hilar, spelt sometime Chailar, in the land of the Mongols, to Sitsikar, spelt sometimes Tsitsihar, in the land of the Manchus, you may suppose Mindenken to lie within the eastern shadow of the Hingan range.

I have said that on that Saturday the railway stopped suddenly at Mindenken. On the Sunday it would stop further west, and on Monday further west still; whilst all the time, on the other side of the hills, the line was creeping south. So within a fortnight after I had passed that way the two sections would have joined, and the dream of travellers to make a journey from Paris to Pekin by rail be complete.

For never since man has been able to wield a spade has any work been pushed on with such rapidity as this eastern Chinese railway.

I took a walk several miles up the line to where the building was in progress. Towards a great. cleft in the mountain a track was staked over the barren plain. Three thousand Chinese coolies were doing nothing else but shovel the adjoining earth into baskets, swing two baskets at the end of a pole across their shoulders, carry it to between the stakes, and build a bank

some two or three feet above the level. They worked slowly and carried paltry amounts of earth, and dawdled on their way back for another load.

Yet what a lot of blue ants they were, surging to and fro and gradually, at the shout of the Russian overseer, moving further along the plain.

On the new bank marched men, levelling the earth where it humped. Stacked near by were piles of sleepers. Coolies seized these and flung them across the track, not always straight, and at distances sometimes a foot, sometimes three feet apart.

Not many yards behind where the rails were being laid came a trolley. On this were other rails. A dozen men on one side, a dozen men on the other, caught two rails, ran forward with them, thumped on the sleepers, and then —with a Russian foreman holding a stick to measure the exact distance they should be kept apart—there came the clang of hammers and the driving of clamps. That finished, there was possibly a levering up of a sleeper, and the shovelling under of earth to get something approximate to evenness. Then the trolley rumbled forward a few yards, and other two rails were seized and laid.

Behind all was a long goods train, filled with railway building material, crawling in the wake of the workmen and feeding them with sleepers, and rails, and bolts.

I walked over the section built on the Friday. It was humpy; the two rails were like the first effort of a child to draw parallel lines; in some places the rail was holding the sleeper end from the ground instead of resting on it.

But here was the great fact: the railway was being built, trains could run over it, and troops be carried. And the laying of that line was at the extraordinary rate of three English miles a day!

That day, a distance of 40 miles (60 versts) separated the two sections of the line working towards one another. This I was to cover in a tarantass.



The Author as he Travelled over the Hingan Mountains.



The Post in Manchuria.

For the convenience of engineers and officers, and British journalists, there was a post station, rather like a cowhouse, exceedingly dirty, and when I looked at the roof, not more than six inches above my head, I shuddered at finding it simply heaving with bugs.

The peasant Russians have a superstition about these creatures. They won't kill them Indeed, when they build a new house they fill a hat full of bugs from the old residence and turn them loose in the new one, for a house without bugs is an unlucky house. The things kept falling on the floor and the table, and on my person.

I had a bowl of cabbage soup, but, while eating it, it was necessary to hold my hat over the dish like a lid to avoid accidents.

With much patience, I got three horses and the tarantass. A few kopecks led to a double quantity of hay being thrown in the bottom of the tarantass so I might be more comfortable. The horses—one in the middle with a big wooden arch, painted green, red, and yellow over it, and with jangling bells, and one on either side—were sturdy animals. The driver was a lean Tartar who had taken to Russian dress. With him on the front of the car sat a sharp-faced Russian soldier, whom it was thought necessary to send with me in case a few Boxers threatened attack.

There was no road as we Britishers understand a road, only a well-marked track into the mountains.

There was a low wind blowing, so that at times we were enveloped in dust. The day, however, although bitterly cold, was fine, with the bluest of skies.

And what a joy it was to escape from the evil-smelling, jolting train, and sit at one's ease behind three horses that were racing like the wind! The intoxication of motion settled on me, and the ride was delightful.

There was nothing impressive about the mountains. They were old mountains, rounded with age, the valleys all filled in and as level as plains. We took great sweeps up a mountain side, but once over the ridge, there stretched another filled-up valley, with here and there the head of a rock sticking forth as though refusing to be buried.

Twice we passed halting caravans in charge of Mongols, who looked at us drowsily as the sweating horses scampered by.

The country was desolation: long, rank grass with patches of swamp on the hillsides, ragged sheets of black marking the range of summer fires. Not a tree was anywhere. It was a barren region. And yet when the horses stood panting after a long climb there was satisfaction in looking at this corner of the world, so far from the bustling, active West, and watching the heave of the hills till they faded in a purple haze.

In the middle of a plain we came upon a newly built hut, half a dozen low-roofed felt tents, and a fenced yard with horses and tarantasses about. This was Yackshi Kosatshi, where horses were to be changed.

The postmaster was a pock-marked, red-whiskered, surly rascal, who gruffly told me he had no horses.

I pointed him out thirty.

Well, those had just come in and were dead tired, and he couldn't let them go out under four hours!

Next I pointed out that twenty of the horses had not been out all day, judging from their appearance.

Oh, well, he expected some officials along.

Of course he was lying. He was simply wanting to be bribed into doing his duty as a special favour. I gave him two roubles and told him I would expect three of his best horses to be ready in half an hour. Then I crawled into one of the tents where some moujiks were eating, made myself tea, and ate a hunk of bread. Coming out I found the horses waiting.

I've never seen horses in my life that could go like those three.

The driver was a wiry old man, with tiny, twinkling eyes, and a huge flowing beard. And the pride he took in the pace of his horses! Standing up, he swung the loose end of the reins round his head and gave a yell. The horses bolted. There was no fear of collision with anything except a mountain. With practically no weight for three horses to draw the animals tore along, their heads in the air. I gripped the side of that tarantass, enjoying it immensely, but with a little wonder at the back of my head what exactly would happen if

something gave way. Russians love their horses to go fast, and frequently the old fellow would turn round and grin and ask me if the ride was good.

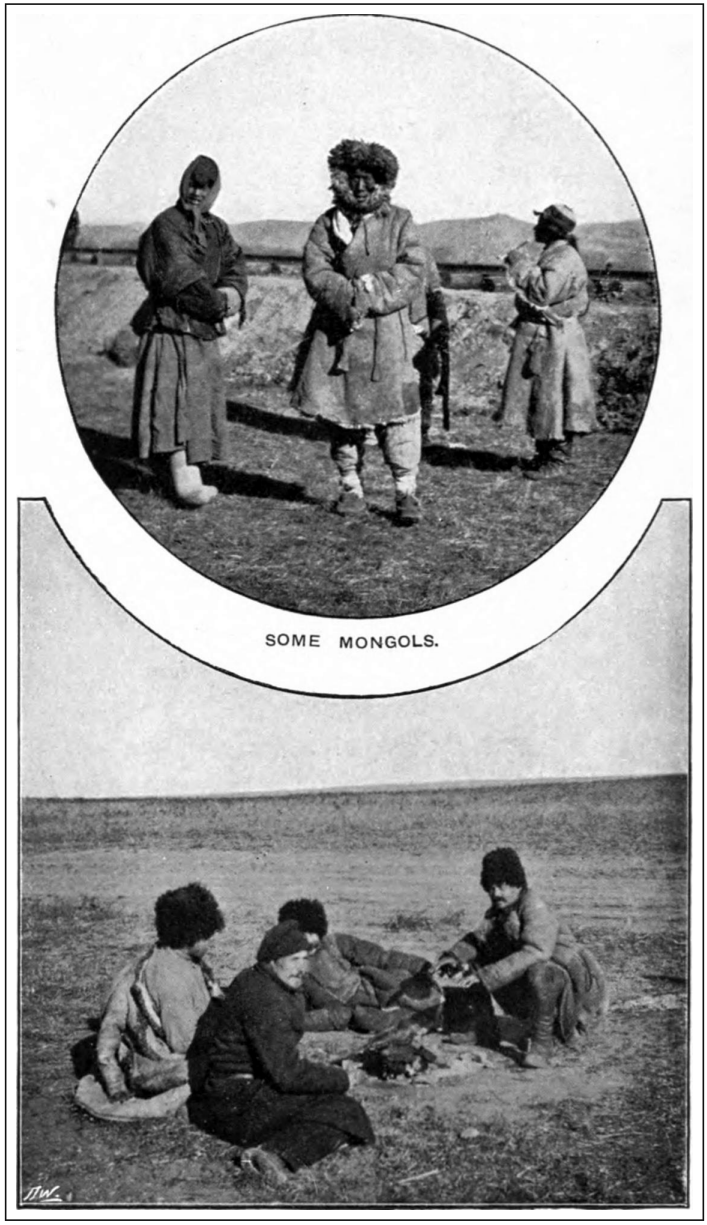
A steep hill with the uneven track hugging its side, reduced the horses to a walk. I got out and walked also.

The day was just beginning to soften to grey when I stood on the top of the Hingan Mountains, Manchuria behind and Mongolia in front. There was a pile of stones close by, accumulated through the ages. Every traveller, Mongol, Manchu, Chinese, Russian, or wandering Britisher, is expected to contribute to the pile. I roamed till I found a loose stone, threw it on the heap, had one last look at Manchuria, and, climbing into the tarantass, was carried at a breakneck speed down upon a corner of the great Gobi desert. It was all a wild waste, with the wind sobbing fitfully.

'There was something, however, that attracted my attention. It was a rude wooden cross. Some wayfarer had fallen, and here had been buried, and friends had raised this rough emblem of his faith.

Mad hallooing on the part of my driver, and spurring on of the horses, that should have been spent, but were not, symbolised our arrival at Bolshei Yackshi. It was a lanky Russian village, crouching in the shelter of a hill as though it would escape the sweeping sandstorm that roared along from the Gobi. The houses were of logs, but, with the exception of a little passage for the doorway and a little aperture for the window, every house was like a pile of earth, for sods had been planted over to help in resisting the winter cold.

We drove some versts beyond, out to the plain again, bumped over a railway crossing, saw workmen's tents, and pulled up at a wooden house, which was the station. The dust had given me the face of a collier fresh from the pit.




A Meal on a Corner of the Gobi Desert.

The first thing I did was to hunt up the stationmaster, a youngish, anemic man, shivering from the cold, and asked about a train to the frontier,

"Next morning, at daybreak," said he sourly, and he pointed out the cars a long way off, and told me I would find a fourth-class carriage. So off I trudged.

The fourth-class carriage was under the charge of a poor, cringing wisp of a man, who had the place heated with a stove to an absolutely unbearable temperature. But he was willing to do anything to oblige. So the windows were soon open, and he tramped off to get a pail of water from somewhere. Then, with him holding a lantern and my converting the carriage step into a dressing table, I stood out on the desert and had my first wash for two days.

Next, in Saturday cleanliness, I went away back to the station to hunt for food, because the successful progress of a journalist, like that of an army, largely depends on the stomach. In a dirty hovel of a place I got a man to sell me a tin of sardines for 4s. Bread was cheaper, and I got a two-pound chunk for tenpence. When I returned with my provisions the train attendant had boiling water, and soon tea was ready. That carriage was full of the odour of blistered paint.

Therefore I preferred to sit on the railway bank, while my wisp of a man rummaged round and gathered chips from sleepers to keep a fire going.

The next morning, Sunday, October 20th, no engine put in its appearance.

"When would it I inquired.

"Ce chas! At nine o'clock; at midday; certainly in two hours; without doubt at five o'clock

It was a raw, drear Sunday.

I was the only person waiting for a lift, and it was lonely. The man was, of course, a sort of companion, but he had a smirking Uriah Heep way of raising his shoulders and rubbing his hands that was irritating.

I walked up and down for an hour or two for exercise, and he sat watching me as though I were some animal that amused him, yet which he wanted to please.

In the afternoon some Mongols came along on camels and driving a herd of sheep. They camped for the night and killed a sheep. I bought part of it. It

was something to do, for while the man made a fire, I cut up the meat for soup, and when the blaze had gone out and nothing remained but glowing embers, I threaded bits of the mutton on a wooden skewer and cooked them over the glowing wood.

That is what is called shashiak. I don't know what it would be like in an English dining-room, but eaten on the Gobi Desert, though it did taste of the skewer, and there were ashes on it, it was one of the daintiest and most luscious dishes imaginable.

No signs of any incoming train that night! No signs either in the morning! At noon, however there was a puff of smoke on the horizon, and in about two hours in crawled a train.

What had been the delay? There had been three trucks off the line! But in two hours, when the engine-driver had fed, he would take back our train.

Two hours, four hours, six hours went, and the engine, which had gone on with material for railway building some twelve versts further, did not return. Why? The same three trucks had gone off the line a second time!

So another day went.

The wind never ceased blowing from the desert, bringing with it a haze of sand which gave the sun a dull, bronzed hue. Night came in an angry mood, and the gale hissed and spat around my dreary habitation. Far in the night, however, there was a bump and a jerk. It was impossible to sleep, but I didn't mind, for the train was going on at last.

What a morning!

The sky dark and lowering, the train staggering over a world widowed of all beauty! There was snow and sleet and rain.

In a hurricane of the elements we reached Hilar, a great Mongol city. When I jumped from the train and felt the full blast of the cold, it was as though i had been shot with a thousand needles) There were new-built Russian houses about, but no evidence of the Mongol city.

Rubbing up acquaintance with a Russian, I learnt the city was two miles away, and we set out to see it together. On the way we came to a Chinese temple with low, fluted roof, curled up at the corners in the customary Chinese temple style.

We had hardly stepped over the threshold when a Russian soldier dashed at us with fixed bayonet, and threatened nasty consequences if we didn't get out. It is unwise to argue with a man holding a fixed bayonet, and accordingly we went out.

My Russian companion was indignant. We sought the colonel, who in turn was wroth with the overzealous warrior, and himself offered to show us the temple. In the courtyard were a number of quaint old Chinese cannon, mounted on wooden wheels and studded with iron nails, captured by the Russians during last year's disturbances. Soldiers were loading into a cart a quantity of flint-locks. The temple itself was in disorder. The Russian troops had run riot. The chief god, a big, brown-featured monster, had been battered with sticks, and one eye had disappeared. His nose was a pulp, and altogether he had a very dissipated air. Another god was pockmarked with revolver shots.

About half a mile off was Hilar itself, a walled city, entered by a double gate surmounted by a picturesque turret. It was like going into a place that had been stricken with some fell disease. The city consisted of one long street with Chinese houses on either side, but many of tem were in ruin, and there wasn't a Chinaman to be seen.

The town was in possession of Russian troops, and the Russian flag fluttered in a dozen places. I asked the colonel if there had been any fighting here.

"No," he said, "all the Chinese fled on the approach of the Russians."

The principal building was now used as an Orthodox Greek Church, and three bells from the pagan temple were utilised in calling Christians to worship. Buildings had been demolished in the centre of the town, the space cleared, and in the centre stood a cross.

"That," explained the colonel, "is the site for our new church."

The train halted for nine hours at Hilar, till another train from the opposite direction came in. It brought a crowd of officers and their wives and children, all on their way to Manchuria. On we went again.

The line improved, and without a mishap we trundled a whole day through a featureless plain.

There were no villages, although there were stations at intervals, and many little settlements of Cossacks to guard the line. We began to pick up officers on their way home fora holiday. Then late on the Wednesday night we reached the frontier.

Here the Eastern Chinese railway ended, and my free trip came to an end also. There was a branch line of the Siberian railway running third-class carriages to the main line. The price was some ten shillings for over a day's ride. We sped through a snow-smothered country to Katiska Rasiez.

I was back in Siberia, at a spot I had passed two months before. From there I returned to Irkutsk, crossing Lake Baikal in a storm, the ship's side a mass of ice and the thermometer registering 44 degrees of frost, Fahrenheit. It was Sunday evening, October 27th.

I drove through the snow-slashed streets of "the Paris of Siberia," just a little sorry my adventure of crossing the forbidden land of Manchuria was over.

But the delight it was to remove one's clothes, have a bath, and sleep in a bed—for the first time in seventeen days—is not to be described in words.

## Chapter XXII

# A Cold Drive to a Great Prison

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Back in Irkutsk I availed myself of the offer the governor-general of the province had made two months before, to visit the largest prison in Siberia, that of Alexandrovski.

The convict town lies just fifty miles to the northwest of Irkutsk, over hills and through a wild and wooded region. The journey was to be made by tarantass. As it was the closing days of October, and all Siberia lay beneath a cloak of snow, sledges were scudding through the broad streets of Irkutsk, everybody was wrapped in furs, and it was likely to be a cold trip. As companions I had the secretary of the inspector of prisons and a young German, who spoke Russian well, and who was delighted to have the opportunity, by acting in the capacity of interpreter, to see the inside of a famous prison.

It had been arranged that we were to start in the early afternoon, and reach Alexandrovski in time to have an evening meal with the governor.

But you must always allow a margin of a few hours in Russia. So I was not surprised at it being close on five o'clock and the daylight waning when I heard a great jangle of bells in the streets heralding the arrival of two tarantasses.

They were like great country carts, roughly built, with the back covered with a hood lined with skin. Everything had been done to secure comfort. The bottom of the cart was filled with hay, and over this had been thrown

sheepskins) There were pillows under the hood, sheepskins to throw over us, and a big leather apron that buttoned three parts up the cart.

I donned a pair of clumsy, knee-reaching felt boots over my ordinary boots, and besides an ordinary topcoat, suitable for winter wear in England, I put on my sheepskin shuba, and on the top of that a mighty enveloping furskin travelling coat lent me by the prison inspector. Thus, with a warm Astrakan hat, I felt I might brave a visit to the North Pole, though I was as ungainly as a walrus.

My companions were clad much the same, but they carried revolvers, and threw them on their pillows ready for use; and at the last moment a friend pushed his revolver into my hand, and insisted on my taking it. There had been fourteen murders in the outskirts of Irkutsk the previous week. Desperadoes were about, and it was unwise to go unarmed.

It was just dark when we set off, the German and I, in the big tarantass, and the official following in a smaller tarantass. The six horses were fresh, and with much bell-ringing away we clattered into the country. The road was little other than a track, roughed up in the rains and now frozen hard, and with not sufficient snow to deaden the jolting. We jolted till I was certain my bones were splintered.

The night was beautiful. The moon, a great arc of light streaming upon a world of snow, gave a brightness almost as of day. We climbed into the hills that had a whiteness only broken by tufts of gaunt fir trees. There were long stretches of slowgoing, then stretches at a rattling pace, then crawling again. There was no wind.

Around us was a great moon-swept silence but for the bells that sang crisply in the icy air. After fifteen miles we reached a posthouse, and were glad to throw off our heavy coverings and move our chilled limbs while the wife of the postmaster made tea.

Here we decided to have sledges.

Travelling by sledge on a moonlight night, through still woods, and with not a sound but the hoof pats of the horses and the merry ring of the bells, is a delicious experience. The driver forsook the road and took short cuts by copse sides, going gaily, with now and then a pelt of snow kicked by a horse

striking us in the face. The bank was often steep, and our sledge swerved over like a yawl hit by a sudden gale, and the driver slipped to the ground and pushed back to prevent an upset. It was exciting and exhilarating.

The cold? Oh, it had become cold when midnight was past. It was the first time in my life I had any conception of what real cold was like. I make no guesses at how many degrees of frost there were. But my cheeks felt as though they were being pared with a knife. The German and I lay at the bottom of the sledge and pulled sheepskins over us, though we were already swathed in furs. Yet the cold struck us, and seemed to freeze the marrow in our bones. We huddled, too numb even to speak.

When we finished the second stage of twenty miles we could hardly walk. We could not get rid of our wraps without aid. It was a full half-hour before any sensation came into my hands and I could lift a glass of tea to my lips. Then we went on by sledge again.

I remember the night was bright, and that I rebuked myself for not sitting up and musing poetically. Ugh! but all poetry was frozen.

It was four o'clock in the morning when we arrived at Alexandrovski, having, with two halts of an hour each, taken eleven hours to come from Irkutsk.

There was a great forbidding building. But all was quiet except that on the corners of the wail tramped soldiers with rifles.

Lights shone in a house. This was a club for the prison officials. The attendants, all good-conduct convicts, helped us to remove our burdensome clothes, showed us our bedrooms clean and warm, pulled off our boots, and brought slippers, and in a quarter of an hour had a meal of cutlets and coffee on the dining-room table.



The Governor of Alexandrovski and the Chief Warder.



Bringing in the Prisoners' Dinner.

Whilst at breakfast, five hours later, I was called upon by the governor of the prison, the governor of the "étape" or distributing station, the chief medical officer, and other officers.

Had it not been for his uniform, epaulettes, top boots, and military cap, I might have taken the governor for the conductor of a German orchestra—a smallish, well-set, grey man, with long, iron-streaked hair thrown straight back, and features that reminded me of the portraits of Liszt before he became a very old man.

We set out in a group, tramping the snow to see the village, the governor on the way telling me that all the men I saw about, except those in uniform, were convicts whose conduct had been good enough to warrant their being allowed out of prison to act as workmen or servants. Now and then, he said, a man escaped. But Siberia is a difficult place to get out of, because everybody may be called upon by the police to show their passports. The only way a man has any chance of freedom is to waylay a peasant and murder him to get possession of his passport. Convicts do not try to escape in the winter. The climate is too terrible for them to live in the woods while making a long cut across country, sometimes a thousand or twelve hundred miles, to some spot where they are not likely to be recognised. Unless they have got a passport arrest is certain. In that case they remain dumb. They will neither give their names, nor say where they have come from. There is no direct evidence that they are escaped prisoners, and, although all efforts are made to identify them, and often successfully, quite a large number gain their liberty after a few months, because it is impossible to keep a man in prison on suspicion of being a runaway, however well founded the suspicion may be.

The governor said he had very little trouble with escapees. With a smile, he assured me that the men were much better cared for and fed in a prison than they would be out of it. The usual plan for convicts is to serve 80 many years in prison and then be obliged for so many years to live in a particular district of Siberia before they are at full liberty to return to Russia. Very few of them do so, for by the time they have full liberty they have probably a good situation, or are settled in business. In the case of deserving men, the governor himself tries to get them situations, for he recognised the evil of

turning men loose with instructions to shift for themselves. All the hotel porters and many of the workmen in Irkutsk are ex-convicts.

The Russian prison authorities have recognised, as I pointed out in the chapter describing a visit to Irkutsk prison, that the present system is a bad one. The convicts, excepting the political exiles, are in many cases of the usual degraded class, who do not return to Russia when they have the chance, but hang round the towns, a danger to the community. The evil reputation of Irkutsk is entirely due to the fact that half of the population are liberated cut-throats, or their children. The respectable Siberians object to their country being the dumping ground of the villainous riff-raff of all Russia, and so gradually the practice of sending convicts to Siberia is being stopped.

Right opposite the club-house is a fine brick Greek church, entirely built by the convicts. All the carvings, decorations, even the sacred pictures, are convict work. The centre of the church is open, but the back part is heavily barred, and so is the gallery. It is here that the prisoners are marched to their devotions.

Then we walked down the street to the soldier-guarded entrance of the prison, where 1,260 men, from all parts of Russia, even the utmost corners of Turkestan, were undergoing penal servitude for all the worst crimes against society.

There is no need for me becoming wearisome by giving a detailed account of what I saw.

The great thing that got wedged into my mind was, how different everything was from the popular idea in England of what a Siberian prison is sure to be.

Alexandrovski gaol is a great square building, severely plain. The passages are high, colour-washed, and with sand on the floors. The prisoners were all in long, grey, and ill-fitting coats. The dormitories had about fifty men in each. These men jumped to their feet, and in a chorus returned our "good morning." They were mostly heavy-jowled, brutish men, who eyed us with sullen gaze.

- The governor, whose manners were not official but friendly, picked out a man here and there, asked him what was his crime, gave a grieved "tut-tut"

when it was horrible, now and then patted a young fellow on the shoulder, and when a prisoner showed a stick he had been carving he admired it as a father would admire the work of his boy.

I saw no restraint or check. Several of the men came up and said they were shoemakers, or tailors, or carpenters, and asked that they might be given work—for a reason I will presently explain.

These men in the large dormitories do nothing but lounge and talk the day away. They get brown bread and tea for breakfast, soup and chunks of meat in it for dinner and more bread, and in the evening bread and tea again—the usual food of the artisan Russian, but much better in quality, as I know from experience. The sanitary arrangements were the best I have seen, and I raised a smile by wishing that at my hotel in Irkutsk they were but a tithe as good.

In one great hall all the Mohammedan prisoners were together—thick-lipped, slothful-eyed men. In another were all Jews, and on one side was the ark so they might worship. I walked along between a double row of them casting casual glances to. right and left, when suddenly a little bead-eyed prisoner, in a coat much too big for him and trailing the ground, stepped up to me and said, "Are you from England, sir?"

I was startled to be addressed in perfect English in a far-off Siberian prison. So I replied, "Hello! where do you come from? ""I

belong to Glasgow," he answered, "and my father is manager of the Hotel in Edinburgh."

"Well, you've got a long way from home, haven't you I added.

"Yes, sir, I have," he replied. I couldn't well ask him what was his offence, but I said, "How long are you in residence here

He smiled back, "Oh, I'm here for ten years, and another six years to serve." I afterwards asked the governor about him, and learnt that he was a forger from Riga.

Then to the workshops. There was one large room where a band of men were making boots for their fellow prisoners, and another where rough and ready tailoring was in progress. The largest workshop was that devoted to carpentry. Tables and chairs and wardrobes were to be seen in course of manufacture. Also there was iron-work, largely the making of cheap bedsteads.

There was another big and well-lighted room devoted to men who had a faculty in a particular direction. I spent half an hour here. There was one old man bookbinding, another was engaged in the designing of patent locks; one man was mending watches; the man next him was making a concertina, whilst still another was busy with crewel work.

The idea that I was in a prison—one of the dread Siberian prisons, in shaped—shpped from my mind. Instead of convicts, the workers looked like a body of well-contented artisans. There was no hindrance to conversation, and many of the men were smoking cigarettes. This led to explanations.

There is not enough work to be found for all the men, and idleness palls on even the hardened convict. They are anxious to work. The governor, who knew all about the prison system in England, held that men should not be given hard labour just for the sake of the hard labour.

"I never set a man to do anything," he said, "that is not useful; that he himself cannot appreciate. Picking oakum demoralises a man, but teach him bookbinding and you are making a useful man, who appreciates his usefulness, and who will have something better than robbery to turn to when he has finished his term."

Everyone engaged in work at Alexandrovski receives a wage; very small, but still a wage. This is entered up to him, and it can accumulate till he leaves; or he can spend it while he is in prison. This led to a visit to the prison shop, very much like any other shop, with a counter and all sorts of things stacked round. Here a prisoner could buy niceties up to the amount of the balance standing in his name—white bread, cheese, sausages, sardines, cigarettes, etc.

My exclamation was that the prisoners were a great deal too well treated.

"No, no," replied the governor, "if we are doing anything to make the lives of these poor fellows a little brighter, we are doing right."

Then he button-holed me with both hands, and turning his kindly grey eyes up to my face, he said, "I know you are a journalist, and that you will be writing about your visit. All I ask is that you tell the truth. I am sickened and grieved at times when I read what is said in English and American papers about our prisons. A prison is a prison, and we have to be very, very severe

with certain types of prisoners. But that we prison officials are vindictive and cruel, well—well, all I ask is that you will tell what you have seen."

I was struck by the sincerity and kindness of the old man, and I remarked, half in jest, "It is a wonder you don't have a theatre."

"We have," was his immediate reply. "This is the only prison where there is such a thing, but I believe in amusing my men. Would you like to see it?"

So we climbed to a big upper room, and there "was the stage and scenery and drop curtain complete. This was luxury indeed.

"I cannot give you a special performance," said the governor, "but we are very proud of our singing here. Would you like to hear it

We sat down and smoked cigarettes while a messenger was sent to hunt up half a dozen singers. They came in their prison garb, six intelligent-looking men, and they sang three part-songs as finely and with as much verve and expression as many a renowned choir.

Then to the library. All the men are allowed several hours of liberty each day, and those who can read—not a large proportion—make for the library. As we walked along the corridor I noticed a number of pictures upon the walls. They all portrayed the evil consequences of drink. There were some thirty men in the reading-room, and had it not been for the prison garb, I might have been visiting a small public library at home. There were heavy books, novels, and, strangest of all, newspapers.

The talk turned to the wives of prisoners. The governor told me that the authorities quite appreciated the evil straits to which a woman might be put through being stranded and alone while her husband was sent for a long term of years to Siberia. When a man is banished from Russia to Siberia his wife may claim divorce by right. But should she prefer to follow her husband the government will pay the passage for herself and children to the town where the prison is situated. After that the woman must shift for herself, though the government make a meagre contribution of about three-farthings a day towards the maintenance of each child. As far as is possible, the prison finds work for the women in the shape of washing and sewing. A married convict who behaves himself is allowed to work outside the prison, to live,

indeed, with his own family, provided he reports himself every day, and pays a certain proportion of his wages to the authorities.

Sledges were waiting for us, and away the horses scampered up a hill, where we visited the school for the children of convicts, clean, neat, and in charge of a gentle-natured matron. The little girls, who were sewing, made us dainty curtseys as we entered the schoolroom.

It happened to be the hour when the boys had finished schooling, but we found them in adjoining workshops, all busy learning trades. Though there was a pathetic side to it, a smile crept to the lips on seeing a chubby little chap, aged seven, mending a big boot, and doing it awkwardly and with flushed cheek—for the high prison authorities and a couple of foreigners were looking on.

Next a quick ride to another part of the town to the "étape," guarded by a wooden wall of fir trees standing close and on end, and all sharpened on the top. Every twenty yards there marched hither and thither through the snow a soldier with musket across his shoulder.

This was a distributing station, to which batches of convicts are sent from all parts of the Russian Empire to await decision where they shall spend the years of their punishment. Just as we entered a batch of forty men, muffled in heavy grey coats, were starting out in the custody of exactly the same number of soldiers, to walk seventy miles to a small prison up country.

I was not favourably impressed with the "étape." The rooms were overcrowded, and the stench almost choked me. The men looked dirty and ill-cared for. They had no work; they were just huddled together, waiting often six or eight months before they were sent off.

In the yard I caught sight of six young fellows in ordinary civilian clothes, and with certainly nothing of the criminal about them.

Afterwards, on entering one of the rooms, the brightest and cleanest in the "étape," these young men stood up and greeted us. Meeting them was the one thing, during my visit to Alexandrovski, that filled me with sorrow. They were boys, the youngest seventeen, the eldest twenty-two, bright and intelligent. They were political exiles! They had taken part in some boyish socialistic demonstration against the government. For this they had already

been in prison for a year, and were on their way to the dreary frozen province of Yakutsk, under banishment for ten years.

There is much the traveller is forced to admire about Russia. It is a pleasure to find things so much better than sensational writers describe. But for a mighty government to wreak vengeance on boys inclined to socialism is so mean and paltry, so very stupid!

The lads, however, didn't seem to mind. With money supplied by their friends they have had what food they liked; they had plenty of books and newspapers. One of them had a little writing table, and on it were photographs of his mother and father.

It was now afternoon, and the governor invited me to dinner with his family and the chief prison authorities.

It was a bleak, snowy afternoon. But the Russians are full of hospitality, and at the table the talk drifted to more pleasant things than convict life. After dinner the governor got out his violin, the doctor produced his'cello, and with the governor's daughter at the piano we had an hour of Mozart's trios.



Three Prisoners.



"Politicals" Starting Up-country.

It was a little strange: in far Siberia, in a pleasant drawing-room, a young lady at the piano, and the governor of the biggest prison in Siberia—who ought I suppose, to have been a brutal-visaged man devising cruelties—throwing back his long hair, while his grey eyes sparkled in the ecstacy of musical enjoyment, and then just across the road the dark walls of the prison, with hooded soldiers standing on guard.

It was night again when I bade good-bye to Alexandrovski and climbed my sledge, and from beneath bundles of furs waved an adieu to my friends of a day, and started back on a fifty-mile ride through a snow-slashed land to the city of Irkutsk.

Chapter XXIII

# The Homeward Journey and Some Opinions

I came back to the Western world, from Irkutsk to Moscow, by the famous bi-weekly express.

When my face had been set eastwards, Siberia was in the first flush of summer. But now, from the Hingan mountains, bordering Manchuria, till I crossed the frontier into Germany, a stretch of seven thousand miles, I saw nothing but a wilderness of white—the woods bare and the trees frosted, the plains like a silent snowy sea.

The cruel wind came in a whisper from the northwest, sweeping a crystal spray into drifts. The villages, ugly and gaunt, lay as though dead. Now and then along the trackside were seen sledges, rough boards on a couple of runners, and the Siberians crouched in a bundle of sheepskins, shivering with cold.

The wayside stations were dismal and desolate. There would be the clang of a bell; then the redcapped station-master would run out, heavily furred, and with one shoulder raised to ward off the icicle-teeth of the north; there would be a double clang; then the bell would ring three times and on the train would go again, on and on, a trailing speck across the white prairie. The country was at last like the Siberia of the novelists.

But the travelling! You good folks who get into the Scotch express at King's Cross, and have a fine dining-car and talk about how very luxurious travelling has become in these days, must journey between Irkutsk and Moscow to know what really can be done in railway comfort.

It was not a big train. There was the heavy engine, there was one first-class car, there were two second-class cars, a restaurant car, and another car for cooking, carrying baggage, and so on. The train was luxuriously fitted, and first-class passengers (there not being many) had each a coupé to themselves, double-windowed to keep out the cold, hot-air pipes in plenty, and a thermometer on the wall so that they might see the temperature; a writing table, a chair, a movable electric lamp with green shade, two electric bells, one to the car attendant, and the other in communication with the restaurant.

Each night the attendant would make up a comfortable bed, soft and clean, and the regulation is that the linen be changed three times in the eight days. A touch of the bell in the early morning, and a boy brought a cup of tea Ten minutes later there was a rap at the door, and the attendant entering, put down your boots he had polished, and told you the bath was ready!

As the rails are wide, the coaches heavy, and the speed something under thirty miles an hour, there was none of that side-jerking which is so inconvenient on an English line. The train ran smoothly, with only a low dull thud, to remind you that you were travelling. So steady was the going that I shaved every morning without a disaster.

Returning to my coupé, I found the bed removed, the place swept and aired, and the attendant spraying the corridor with perfume.

In the middle of the car was a lounge, and at the tail of the end coach a little room, almost glass encased, to serve as observation car.

The restaurant was a cosy place, with movable tables and chairs, a piano at one end, and a library at the other. Outside were some forty degrees Fahrenheit of frost, but the heat of the carriages was kept at about sixty-five degrees, which was warm, but suited the Russians.

I am afraid I ministered to the general belief on the Continent that all Britishers are mad. Whenever the train stopped at a station for ten or fifteen

minutes I jumped out, just in a light lounge suit and cloth cap, and started a little trot up and down for exercise. The Russians, who never put their noses outside the door, regarded me through the windows with open amusement. One told me I was known as "the mad Englishman," for, they argued, a man must be mad who forsakes a nice warm carriage to run up and down in the snow while an icy wind drags tears from his eyes.

How the railway administration makes that Siberian express pay is a wonder. The first-class fare for the entire journey is just over £8, while second-class passengers, who have all the advantages of the first, save that their coupés are not so finely decorated, only pay about £5.

Russia is determined to get all the quick traffic between Western Europe and the Far East. Now, if you go by boat from London to Shanghai it will occupy thirty-six days, and the cost will be from £68 to £95. If you travel express all the way by the Moscow- Vladivostok route you can get from London to Shanghai in sixteen days. Travelling first class the cost will be £33 10s., second class £21, and if you don't mind the rough of third class you can be taken the whole 8,000 miles for just £13 10s.

You go riding over the trans-Siberian line for one day, two days, a week, and still those twin threads of steel stretch further and further. The thing begins to fascinate, and you stand for hours on the rear car and watch the rails spin under your feet—miles, miles, thousands of miles!

It is not the gaunt, lonesome waste of Siberia that frightens you. What grips you and plays upon your imagination is that men should have thus half-girded the world with a band of steel.

The Russian is an easy and agreeable traveller He puts up no barrier of chilly reserve between himself and his fellows.

On board that train was like on board ship. In a day everybody was friendly with everybody else. Russian military officers played cards all day long with German commercial travellers; a long-limbed, fair-whiskered naval officer, on his way home after four months' starving adventure in the far north map-making, became the devoted slave of the stout Moscow Jewess, who wore diamonds that made one's eyes ache, and who was constantly tinkling with one finger on the piano the refrain in Chopin's "Funeral March";

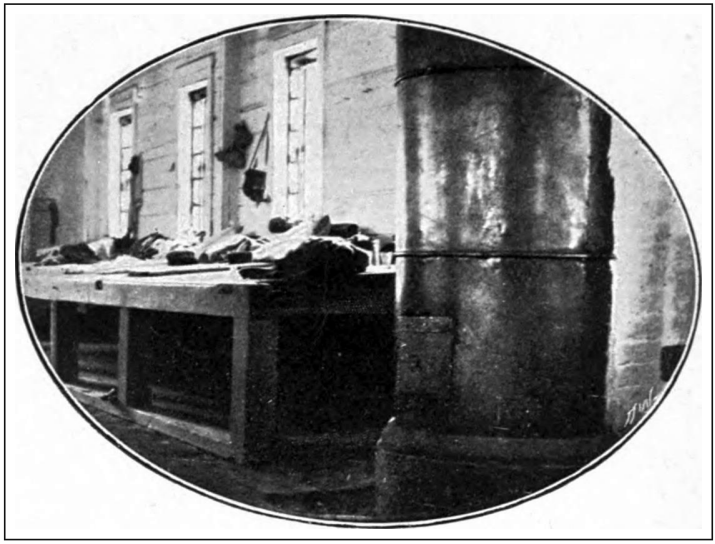
three rugged, good-natured American gold miners, returning from the Mongolian mountains, lay on their backs reading novels, except when they turned over on their sides to spit; and a couple of Boers from the Transvaal, who had been gold prospecting in Southern Siberia, became the best of friends with myself. We avoided any reference to the war.

Twice there was an impromptu kind of concert on board. Dreary, grey, snow-driven Siberia was all around, but in that car, warm and light, with wine bottles about, the air filled with smoke, and the pianos jangling music-hall airs, we were the merriest throng.

So day by day we rolled to the west, leaving Siberia behind, climbing the Ural mountains and descending them into Europe. We left Irkutsk on Friday evening, November Ist, at midnight, and on Saturday evening, November 9th, 1901, we roared into the great station at five minutes past seven, exactly seven days, twenty-three hours, and fifty-five minutes on the way—arriving to the minute by the time-table—if allowance is made for the difference in time between the two cities.

Moscow was brilliant with lights. It was all wrapped in beautiful white, and like silent meteors there dashed thousands of sledges up and down and along its broad streets. To appreciate a Russian city, you must see it in frosted winter glory. And Moscow, one of the most striking of cities—quaint, Eastern,' Byzantine—was aglow with happiness and mirth.

So I ended my mission of curiosity.



A Sleeping Room.



Prisoners at Work.

IT went to Russia with, at least, some of the average Britisher's prejudices against the country. I came away with none at all. There were things, of course, which no Britisher can put up with, such as the unflinching iron of autocratic government, that crushes and kills all freedom in political thought. Whenever I got an English newspaper, with great black splotches by which the censor had obliterated criticisms of Russia, I always felt like mounting a table in the hotel dining-room and delivering an impassioned address upon the liberty of the press. Smearing out criticisms and sending boys to the hungry region of Yakutsk, because they have boyish ideas of socialism, strike the Britisher as puerile.

Russia, however, is an empire of contradictions. If you try to study her along a parallel of Western thought, you bungle and stumble, and are wroth. The actions of a country, like the actions of a man, should be judged from its own standpoint, and not from the standpoint of another. Heaven forfend that I, a scampering journalist, should play the dogmatist. But even a helter-skelter sightseer, if he keeps his eyes very wide open, and stretches his ears to their full length, may see and hear some things that give him a glimmering of vision of what is beneath the surface of a nation's characteristics.

The fact of the matter is, as it struck me, Russia is half Eastern, and the Eastern man doesn't understand rule by reason. He only respects government by force. And honestly, knowing something of the crookedness of the Eastern character, how absolute is the lack among Russians of what I might call the arrogance of race—which is revealed in the very walk of a Saxon—how the Russian wants to be Western and yet stamped across him there is the likeness of his Tartar mother, and his nature restrains him, I hesitate to think that an autocratic rule is not the best for Russia. Many pressing reforms are undoubtedly needed; but they are reforms in detail and not in principle.

It was my fortune to come into contact with all classes in Russia, from personal advisers to the Emperor to moujiks undergoing imprisonment for petty theft. Although corruption is rampant throughout the public service, I am convinced you would not stop it by establishing another form of government. You would simply raise a different brood of vultures. The towns have

municipal representative control. But, in a general sense, from the mayor to the lowest scavenger, everyone has his price.

I saw evidence of what is called "Liberal Russia," people who are strongly imbued with Western ideas, and are in a kind of passive revolt against the Russian mode of government. The word Nihilist is an obsolete term, so I may call them Revolutionaries. Most of them were charming people—cultured, widely read, and full of kindness.

I liked them without admiring them. They argued like emotional women: they were all love and compassion for the human race, frenzied antipathy for all restraint; but they spoke of freedom in a way that left the impression on my mind they did not understand what the word implied.

Whenever I tried to get the conversation into a fixed rut in what way Russians could be given a voice in the government of their country, away they soared into the air with generalities about the rights of mankind. They were delightful folks, but impracticable.

Now, as to Siberia, generally, I have made it clear it is not a land waxing great in beautiful landscape. There was much that interested me and had an individual fascination, but from the time I left Moscow till I reached Vladivostok, and from Vladivostok across Manchuria back to Moscow again, I never saw a bit of country which in beauty could not be easily rivalled during an afternoon's bicycle ride in Surrey.

Dismissing, however, the picturesque, and regarding Russia and the wide stretch of Siberia from a useful standpoint, I do not believe there is another region in the world so full of agricultural possibilities. People who talk enthusiastically about the wheat-growing possibilities of the United States should restrain their breath for when they come back to speak of Siberia. It will be the ultimate feeding ground of the world. But the Russian as a farmer is contemptible. Here is a land that only wants to be tilled; yet the Russian peasant is lazy, and prefers to buy flour from Portland, Oregon, than grow it himself. I saw the ship-loads of American flour being landed at Vladivostok.

And here again I must refer to the one little sore I felt all the time I was in Siberia—the way the Germans and Americans are pushing forward and supplying everything in the way of foreign goods which the Siberians want, cloth

stuffs, general merchandise, railway locomotives, and agricultural implements, while Britain has done nothing save build a few ships. I must have met a hundred German commercial travellers in Siberia; I never met a single English commercial traveller. I talked trade whenever opportunity presented, and the offhand manner in which England was always dismissed as being, commercially, quite out of the running, stung my patriotism deeper than was pleasant.

In previous chapters I have endeavoured to describe Siberia as I saw it. There was much in the country that Western folk might criticise, much that raised more than a smile.

But if I were asked to express in one word what were my impressions, I would write "favourable." Whatever might be the evils of the convict system, Russia is removing them. The convicts are well cared for, and as for the political exiles, apart from the hardship of exile, they are left much to their own devices. I have been told by returned exiles that the pleasantest part of their life was when they were living in a little republic of their own, far from the outer world.

I am cloth to destroy a delusion. But the popular idea that it is hard for the foreigner to enter Russia, that his steps are always dogged by the secret police, that ears are at every keyhole, that every letter is read by the censor, who is sniffing for a plot, that it is necessary to keep one's tongue still if you don't want to suddenly disappear, and your friends never hear of you again—all this, and its like, is just a bundle of rubbish.



A Siberian Road in Winter.

There are certain things that Russia doesn't want you to know, and they do their best not to let you know. It is, of course, necessary to have a passport; but with the exception of handing it to the hotelkeeper on the evening you arrive, and receiving it back on the morning you leave, there is no more trouble travelling in Russia than in any other land. Indeed, the foreigner is welcomed, and is given privileges the Russian himself often finds it hard to procure.

One word in conclusion.

Russia is no longer a second-rate power. She is in the front rank. Whatever be her methods, she dominates the politics of the Far East, and has her share in directing the politics of the world. Her march is east and south, inevitable and unchecked.

It was Bismarck who described Russia as a colossus on clay feet. But those feet have hardened since the words were spoken. They have clattered to the Pacific; they have clattered across Manchuria; they are in Mongolia; they are about Persia and about China. Not yet—Never!" cries the Britisher—but they hope some day to clatter through Afghanistan to India.

India is what the statesman in St. Petersburg, looking over his coffee and straight into your eyes, calls "Russia's destiny." And when your eyes throw back a defiance, he offers you a cigarette, smiles, and says "We will see—in the future!"

THE END.

## About this edition

This is a reset edition of the 1904 reprint of *The Real Siberia*, made from the Internet Archive's scan of the University of Toronto copy. The text was re-read from the page images with Tesseract 5.5.4 on a local machine, and nothing was sent to an online service. Where Tesseract and the scan's existing hidden text layer disagreed, the reading that formed a known word was kept. The book's spelling and punctuation are otherwise the author's.

- Hyphenated line-endings are joined, running heads and page numbers removed, paragraphs rebuilt, and quotation marks and dashes normalised.
- Remaining character errors are certain to exist. Automatic fixes were checked against a word list and against the second text, and about thirty slips found by reading the output were corrected by hand.
- The publisher's catalogue at the back, the advertisement leaves at the front and the library card pocket are left out.
- Several plates listed in the original List of Illustrations are not in the scanned copy (both facing page 6, and those facing pages 18 and 22, among others). The List of Illustrations here lists only the plates reproduced.
- Two plates carry no printed caption in the scan; their captions (*Dinner Time on a Farm* and *The Great English-built Ice-breaker "Baikal"*) are inferred from the order of the original list.
- Italics and small capitals within the text were not captured by the OCR and are not reproduced.
- Photographs were cropped from the scans, turned upright where the plate was printed sideways, and cleaned of the halftone screen and paper tone. Plates are placed near the pages they originally faced.