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My Russian Diary—III

By GARETH JONES.

I WALKED down a typical cobbled street this morning. Nearly all the shops, except a few dirty tailor's places, were "Co-operatives," and had the usual long queue outside of women with baskets, "You're not in the right order. You've pushed your way into Priority," shouted a woman to a thin woman.

"You liar, I've been here since six o'clock this morning," was the reply.

Posted up in the window was a notice, "No Milk To-day!" A little further on, in a Co-operative butcher's shop, I saw the words scribbled in an untidy handwriting, "Meat to-day only. In small portions for people with manual workers' tickets and for children."

No wonder that the forgers of manual workers' tickets are doing a roaring trade!

To-day, I saw in a big Co-operative restaurant in the wonderful Park of Culture and Rest the following notice —

BEHAVE YOURSELVES AT TABLE.
1. Wash your hands before eating.
2. Do not put your hat on the table.
3. Do not help yourself to salt with your fingers.
4. Do not share the same plate with another person.
5. Do not scatter crumbs and cigarette ends on the table.
6. Do not spit or gargle at meals.

I was wondering as the tram travelled towards the station if I had time to catch the train. So I glanced at my watch. A fat woman next to me said: "Be very careful of that watch! They're a set of thieves in this town. I can see you're a foreigner and I'm just warning you."

There was an uproar of protest from the workers around: "What do you mean by calling us thieves?" "You stink, old woman!" "Thieves, indeed! Hold your tongue, fatty!"

She had a reply ready: "Of course, they're a set of thieves. I don't mean you. But there was my cousin had his ration card pinched from him yesterday. And I could give you a lot of other cases." She turned to me: "You be careful, young man. Don't let you're German if you're not. I'm an Englishman, or what you are. Still, take my tip, and keep your eye on that watch of yours."

Whoever remembers in England now that British soldiers occupied Georgia? But the fact is drummed in every day in Russia that the English capitalists made their troops shoot 14 Soviet Commissars in Baku.

"Don't on any account repeat this story," said the man in the train, "or you'll get into hot water. It's counter-revolutionary."

The train was travelling across the gloomy monotonous steps in North Caucasus, and I had talked to this dark Georgian for a long time. He had also given me some bread and honey. We were saying goodbye.

Shouting: "Nine men shot for hoarding small coin. Nine men shot for hoarding small coin!"

This morning I pushed my way through shopping crowds to the small square in the open-air market where the private traders, who are frowned upon by the Bolshevists, sell their wares. There was an old pair of trousers going for 50s. "Buy some meat. Two roubles (4s.) a pound!" shouted a butcher to me, brushing away the flies from the dirty scraps of bone and flesh littered upon his wooden trellis.

A peasant woman sat on the ground with a little attaché case of the kind one buys in Woolworth's. A small crowd had gathered round her. Peering over the people, I saw that the contents were two or three dirty portions of butter. "How much?" shouted somebody. "Five hundred, eight roubles (16s.) a pound," she said. Most of the people shrugged their shoulders and walked away.

A great event. Managed to get a seat in a tram and ride round a large part of Moscow, along the river, past the ramparts, castles and churches of the Kremlin. fortress, the most impressive centre of any city I have ever seen.

Instead of "Smokie Robinson," or "Buy British," the advertisement spaces were full of striking propaganda posters. One ran as follows:

"LET US REPLY TO THE FURIOUS ARMING OF THE CAPITALISTS BY CARRYING OUT THE FIVE YEARS' PLAN IN FOUR YEARS!"

Dust blew about the town. Looking out of the window, as the tram rattled over the rails, I saw a cinema placard, with a familiar face upon it. "Who could it be?" Then underneath I read: "Sylvia Chaplin."

Moscow is the city of contrasts. To-day I went to see some workers' hats which had recently been built and had just been occupied. One woman whose flat we visited seemed very flurried and excited at the appearance of these foreigners. Then I noticed in the sitting-room one of the strangest of contrasts. One would never expect a religious person to admire the man who said "Religion is the opium of the people." Nevertheless, there on the wall was a picture of Christ and on the desk a picture of Lenin!

I guarantee the Museum of Revolution to make any average discontented person into a full-blooded Bolshevist in a few minutes.

The revolutionary colours are presented in glowing colours, as the heroes of civilization. Their methods, plots, bombs, letters, newspapers, daggers, photographs and pictures are displayed so vividly that but for one event I might have returned to London determined to undermine the British constitution by the foulest of means.

The one thing that saved me was the sudden entry into the Museum of Revolution of a Scottish college friend, dressed in a
fat woman next to me said, "Be very careful of that watch. They're a set of thieves in this town. I can see you're a foreigner and I'm just warning you."

"There was an uproar of protest from the workers around. "What do you mean by stealing us thieves?" "You shut up, old woman!" "Thieves, indeed! Hold your tongue, fatty!"

"She had a reply ready. "Of course, they're a set of thieves. I don't mean you, but there was old man had his ration card snatched from him yesterday. And I could have a lot of other cases." She turned to me, "You be careful, young man. I don't know if you're a German or an Englishman, or what you are. Still, take my tip, and keep your eye on that watch of yours."

"Whoever remembers in England now that British soldiers occupied Georgia?"

"But the fact is there's nothing to be said in the newspapers; that the English capitalists made their troops shoot 17 Soviet Commissars in Tiflis."

"Don't cry any account, repeat this story," said the man in the train, "or you'll get into big trouble. It's counter-revolutionary."

"And I was crying across the gloomy, monotonous steppes in North Caucasus, and I had talked to this dark Georgian for a long time. He had also given me some bread and tomatoes, because I was hungry."

"It's a story about the dictator Stalin," he continued, "He is it. A pilot was flying in a seaplane when suddenly he was shot down and he saw beneath him in the sea a drowning man, waving his arms frantically. The plane glided down and alighted just in time to drag him out of the water. As the man stood dripping in the seaplane the pilot looked at him, and, to his astonishment, he saw that it was none other than Stalin, most powerful man in Russia."

"Then Stalin shook him warmly by the hand and said, 'You are a brave man. You have saved my life. You shall have a reward. You have but to make any request, and whatever you ask for shall be done."

"The airman scratched his head and thought. Then he said, 'Well, there's only one favour I want, and it's very important to me. For goodness sake don't tell a single soul I saved you, or my life won't be worth living."

"The young Commissar have an idea that all English are rich, cunning, and cruel people. The proportion of our money always goes to top hats and monocles. The English upper class, in their opinion, are always plotting war against Soviet Russia. To carry this war to a successful end, they are manipulating the Church and the Socialists."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the scramble of getting on to the tram this afternoon. I was on the back, with one foot on the seat and one dangling in the air. One man had hold of a rail, the other had a roll of bread—which I munched, as we travelled along into Rostov. Then the tram stopped and a paper boy rushed up with 'The Age', the Rostov daily. He was"