

# My Russian Diary-III

By GARETH JONES

I WALKED down a typical cobbled street this morning. Nearly all the shops, except a few dirty tailors' 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 in," shouted a red-faced 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 quarrel 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 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 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. 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 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 bad trouble. It's counter-revolutionary."

The train was travelling across the gloomy monotonous steppes in North Caucasia, and I had talked to this dark Georgian for a long time. He had also given me some bread and

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 Bolsheviks, 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 trestle.

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. Peeping over the people, I saw that the contents were two or three dirty portions of butter. "How much?" shouted somebody. "Fine butter, 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 "Smoke Abdullas," 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 flew about the town. Looking out of the window, as the tram rattled along, I saw a cinema placard, with a familiar face upon it. Who could it be? Then underneath I read "Syd Chaplin."

Moscow is the city of contrasts. To-day I went to see some workers' flats 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 an ikon with the image 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 Bolshevik in a few minutes. The revolutionaries of the world are presented in glowing colours, as the heroes of civilisation. Their methods, plots, bombs, letters, newspapers, daggers, photographs and pictures are displayed so ably that but for one event I might have returned to London determined to undermine the British constitution by the foulest of foul means.

The one thing that saved me was the sudden entry into the Museum of Revolution of a Scottish college friend, dressed in a

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"It's a story about the dictator Stalin," he continued, "Here it is. A pilot was flying in a seaplane when suddenly he looked down and he saw underneath 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, the 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, but it's very important. It's this. For goodness sake don't tell a single soul I saved you, or my life won't be worth living!'

The young Communists have an idea that the English are a crafty, cunning, and cruel people, a large proportion of whom always wear top hats and monocles. The English upper classes, 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 as fools.

I thoroughly enjoyed the scramble of getting on to the tram this afternoon. I clung on to the back, with one foot on the buffer and one dangling in the air, one hand 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 "Labour" the Rostov daily. He was

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Perhaps my presence saved this college friend also from emerging out of that building a red-hot plotter, for the museums in Soviet Russia are so wonderfully arranged and so exceedingly effective that they leave a deep effect upon one.