

'RUSSIA DRENCHED IN BLOOD'

'Revolution in Russia.  
All Russia fighting.'

MOUNTAINS, FORESTS, BROKEN ROADS.

On footpaths, on goat tracks, soldiers like rubbish carried down by spring torrents.

At a small station an encampment of thousands—at night the glow of camp-fires spreads up the sky—all struggle to get into the train but no passenger's fare taken.

Rare trains fly to the North roaring—

Singing—

Sighing—

Whistling . . .

The clattering trucks have been filled with people, like sacks of grain that are ready to be tied up.

'Let me in, boys!'

'No room.'

'I've got to go, haven't I? We've been waiting a fortnight. . . .'

'Carry on then, we're not keeping you back.'

'Can't you get me in somehow?'

'Full up.'

'Comrades. . . .'

'Where are you shoving? Give him one in the gob, Aphonka!'

'I'm a deputy! I'm carrying votes!' shouted Maxim hoarsely, and he raised an armful of soldiers' votes as though it were an ikon.

No one listened to him.

'RUSSIA DRENCHED IN BLOOD' [75

Faster than the wheels a thousand hearts were beating,  
Stuko—truk—truk traking

homewards—

homewards—

homewards . . .

Maxim extracted from his bag the last crust of bread and began to wave it alongside the waggons that were running past him.

'Hi! Hi!'

A pock-marked Cossack, as he flew past, seized the crust and Maxim's bags and dragged Maxim himself through the window into the van.

A tight squeeze, but bearable.

In the same van was a grey-haired general. He had been knocked about and was bruised all over. His bare legs, wrapped round with string, were loosely encased in torn felt shoes, and a short sheep-skin coat from a government store covered his shoulders. He was gathering crumbs of food from the floor into his battered kettle, and sucking at them. Lean, and humble as a small child, he slept on the floor, putting his red-rimmed cap under his head.

The old man wanted to go to the closet, but they wouldn't let him through the door.

'Climb out of the window,' they shouted—'do as we do.'

Maxim began to feel sorry for the old man. He asked him to sit down on the bench.

'Thank you for your kind words, brother. I am not worthy to sit alongside soldiers . . . I've served my time and I am pensioned off' . . . and the tears fell from his eyes. From all sides curses showered on him like sticks.

'He ought to have pegged out long ago. . . . See how they've pulped his snout.'

'Perhaps they've thrashed him for a lark.'

'They wouldn't have beaten him for nothing—people are not beaten without a reason.'

'Throw him out of the window while the train's going, no one will be the wiser. We used to walk—let them walk now.'

'Stow it, boys,' broke in Maxim, 'it is no use tormenting the old man. He's here and that's the end of it—he isn't taking a seat from anyone.'

'That's right,' chimed in a story-teller, with a high forehead, from the top bunk. 'He wants to go as much as we do, and the likes of them were sometimes good to the likes of us.'

The general was going to his daughter in Penza. Maxim kept him fed all the way to Tiflis, and gave him a pair of woollen socks when he said good-bye. 'Here you are! Wear these!'

At every stop soldiers sprang up as though from under the earth. Roaring and yelping they climbed through the windows, hung on to the foot-boards, took the buffers by storm, and clambered on to the roof.

The uncoiled wheels screeched under the carriages, the rails sagged.

The town was loud with music and flowing with wine; but to the men from the front they gave no heed. They did not allow them in the town—they were afraid of a pogrom—but forced them to go on in detachments to Baku.

With thunder of guns and curses the trains went off to the east.

'Ugh!' shouted the drunken Maxim through the open door of the waggon, shaking his rifle at the town that was fading away into smoke. 'When we were off to the front you strewed flowers in our path; now you welcome us with

burdocks. But wait a bit, you — —, you'll meet us in some tight corner yet.'

'Don't get angry, mate,' his neighbour tapped Maxim on the shoulder. 'We know all about the Mensheviks now, a good party. God prosper it. When we've got farther, maybe, we'll find something better still.'

'But it's so dirty of them. . . . They shout about equality and fraternity, and watch for a chance to catch you in the wind, and they don't even give you a crumb of bread.'

'All right, wait till one of their curly heads falls into our clutches, no use begging for mercy.'

'We won't let him off.'

'Don't get parted from your gun, boy. Hold it fast till your death—it's your mother—and don't let any dogs come near; though they do like to bite, still they've only one head.'

Beyond Tiflis fighting began.

Streaming from their villages in large bands or small groups, the Tartars fell repeatedly on the squadrons, and, luck favouring them, plundered and disarmed them and rolled them down the steep slopes.

Along the roads men were starving, horses were dying.

In the station garden three groups. In the first they were playing at shove-halfpenny, in the second they were killing the station master, in the third a Chink was doing tricks.

A huge, black-bearded soldier, pushing the crowd aside, sucking the while at his last chicken bone, swooped like an eagle on its prey to finish off the station master (there was a rumour that he was still breathing).

Amongst the soldiers the harmonicas were laughing and wailing, and jolly songs rolled out. From sunburnt faces, weathered by sweat and frost, eyes shone in gay suspense.

Over the railway line the zusskaya and the gopak were being danced. The beating of nailed boots, the yells, the clapping of hard hands covered the sound of not far-distant guns.

In the telegraph office, the soldiers' delegates were worrying the clerk, demanding engines.

The telegraph clerk, glued to the wall, muttered as though scarcely awake. Before his staring eyes danced the chins, dirty moustaches, sweaty faces and roaring mouths of the soldiers. The breast of his uniform coat was seized firmly by the hand of the leader of the gang.

'For the last time, will there be engines or not?'

'We'll drag them out of you with the flesh.'

'We must — well get on!'

'Look at the white soul in a horse-collar!'

From his starched collar the goose-like neck of the telegraph-clerk stuck out; his blue lips were foaming.

'Dear comrades—oh, Christ! I am for the new regime, myself. . . . I have actually fought, I have documents to prove it . . . . I can't manufacture engines for you. . . .'

Voices rang out.

'Cut him up into halves, into two's.'

'Don't try to put us off.'

'Produce them.'

'These people are all bought by the bourgeois.'

'Holiday-making! Walking out!'

'Rotten jokes.'

'Why should we waste time cursing him. Try shaking him. Then there will be engines.'

'Brothers, on my word of honour. . . .'

Hands were stretched out against the telegraph clerk's life, the shining button fell from his coat. . . .

'Speak up, will you give us an engine?'

'Tap a telegram to Baku, you son of a b—— Get engines from Baku by telegram.'

'Comrades, you have broken the apparatus yourselves.'

The soldiers' eyes darkened evilly.

'Death or life?'

'It's up to you to make an effort. You eat the moujik's bread, and now you won't show respect to the moujik himself.'

'Go for him, Lukin!'

'Don't give way—do him in!' The fist of Lukin was effective; the telegraph clerk's head was crushed against the wall which was plastered with placards :

#### 'LIBERTY LOAN'

'Oo—oo——'

Explosion.

The walls of the station tremble.

With a glittering ring the glass splintered and scattered.

Abandoning the telegraph clerk they rushed away.

The smarting smoke caught their breath and blinded their eyes.

In the morning agitators poured out of the town in requisitioned motor-cars. They damned the bourgeois and praised the soldiers. In the strongest language they could find they cursed the Constituent Assembly and praised the Bolshevik Soviets.

The men from the front listened with interest—in the stream of curses they were greedily trying to catch news of their villages: in Russia the Constituent Assembly has been scared away, in Russia the moujiks are plundering the land-owners, in Russia the fight for power is in two streams—Bolsheviks and Bourgeois; in the Caucasus the mountain-folk are shouting 'Freedom! down with unbelievers!'

in Chechna every rich man and every robber has his own party—they are all cutting each other's throats, the Ingushes have hoisted the white flag of submission and Dagestan is being given up to Islam and the Turk.

The engines snuffled; and the soldiers, not waiting for the end of the long resolution in support of the Bolsheviks, with cries of 'Hear! Hear! Down with War!' began to disperse.

A meeting was summoned—it was decided to send help against the attacks of the Chechens.

They fired a few shots from the guns, without taking them off the train.

They rushed into the outskirts of the town.

Farther on—a dark forest, howling dogs.

A village is burning; it crackles, and tiles fall—the natives are firing to the last, women and children waiting.

Night, darkness, not a damn thing can you see—they turned back.

They bartered their weapons for bread from the moujiks and went off.

The iron body of the stove was red hot. The firelight was dancing on the blackened walls of the cattle-truck. The men slept, sitting or standing—adapting themselves to their places as well as they could.

Karaulov, the appointed Ataman of the Terek Cossacks, was giving the war-cry, 'Cossacks and mountaineers are brothers! Cossacks and mountaineers are brothers! The Cossacks and mountaineers are the lords of the Caucasus and we must chase out the moujiks with whips!'

The men from the front met Karaulov at Prokhladnoy—just one carriage attached to an engine—a thousand voices shouted curses.

'You, Sir Ataman, stand up for the Cossacks, the Bolsheviks stand up for the working-men, the bourgeois shout themselves hoarse for the Tsar, but who is going to think of the moujik?'

'Get out, you devils!' yelled the Ataman's pig-tailed *haiduk*, 'be off from the carriage.'

The soldiers did not turn a hair: they only shouted louder.

'And you, Sir Ataman, are joy-riding alone with an engine to yourself, while for us who are on business, there's no means of transport. You put on flesh and fat behind the lines while we fall in foreign lands like flies.'

'Be off, you demons!' shouts the Ataman in a deep bass, and thrusts the snout of his machine gun through the window.

Then all the people who were in the station shouldered their rifles and started to fire salvos at the Ataman's carriage.

They fired till they were sick of it. Then they rushed into the carriage. It was riddled with bullets and Karaulov was finished already. He was huddled up on the floor in a pool of blood, with his *haiduk* by his side. The sportsmen counted half a hundred bullet-holes in the bald patch of the Ataman's head, and in his shoulders.

A young Cossack climbed into the engine drivers' cab, and shouted out a speech which pleased everyone.

'Soldiers—gentlemen! . . . You are fed up with fighting, and we are fed up with fighting! You've quit the front, and all our first Volga regiment has run away from Pyatigorsk. Your generals are scoundrels, our atamans are scoundrels, the town komissars are scoundrels too. They don't want to listen to our grief, they don't want to wipe away our tears. From now onwards and for evermore, they'll have no more obedience from us, they can wait for ever for our salutes. What they're after is our destruction, what they're after is to enrich the soil with our blood. It shall not be. They are few, we are many! We'll tear their epaulettes

from them and their medals, we'll kill the very last one of them and return to our native villages—to plough the land, drink wine, and love our wives!

And soldiers fraternized with Cossacks.

Little by little they got into conversation, and argued about which party is best.

Some want the sort of party which will let the common men look up; some want, first of all, to learn to walk on the earth; and others need no kind of party and want nothing but to roll back home, press their little children to their sunken chests and throw themselves hungrily into their wives' arms.

Some shout one thing, some another, and all the time a harmonica-player is droning away on his pet theme.

'All Parties,' he says, 'are inclined to revolution; but each has its own grip and its own dance-step. Social Revolutionaries, the blighters, are a good party; Mensheviks, the reptiles, not so bad; but the Bolsheviks, the rascals, are best of all. . . . The Mensheviks and Socials hammer away: "Not too fast, not too fast"; as for us we give one great yell: "Get up steam, speed it up!" This cry of ours spread like fire all over Russia—the workmen went a-beating the bourgeois, the moujiks went a-plundering the landlord, while you've broken the front and are going home. The Bolshevik party is worth a lot, Comrades: we haven't a well-fed man in the party; it is a party without parlour-tricks.'

And again sentry-boxes at every verst, sleepers, rails.

Soldiers inside the train, soldiers on top of the train, soldiers on the buffers, soldiers streaming in gangs over the railroad.

#### 'THE ORCHARD'

THE SPRING FLOODS ALWAYS COINCIDED WITH THE BLOSSOMING of the orchard.

The orchard began on the hill and sloped gently towards the river bank, where there was a fence and a row of willow trees which looked as if they had been trimmed.

Through their thick foliage gleamed the sacerdotal brocade of the water, while above them was a shining line—of the river perhaps, or perhaps of the sky or the air—of something dazzling and ethereal.

Higher up the river began another orchard, then a third, a fourth.

On the other side spread a small meadow cut by a shallow gully, its sides gay and curly with Tarlarian maple.

That is all there was to that corner of the world: behind it nothing but barren ground with patches of wormwood and feather-grass, with immortelle bushes, corn-flowers and convolvulus along the orchard hedges.

A veil of whitish dust covered the waste, and two or three deep-rutted tracks ran in different directions, twisting and turning rather absurdly.

That year the river spread almost as far as the fence, and the willows stood heavy with excessive moisture, dressed in a glossy, youthful foliage. The wattle fence had sprouted in places and the old, bare stumps of trees were curly with fragrant young shoots. The muddy-yellow flood waters purred like a cat and caressed the slopes of the hill.

The whole of the hillside put on a spotted shawl of white,