

tea in her hand, and spoke, oh so languidly, nasally, "aristocratically." How Zhrebovich, a good, simple fellow, ever tolerated such a woman is beyond me.

Nor could I ever understand how he lived in the same room with that mother-in-law of his, that big, gross-looking woman, reclining on the big, gross-looking couch. As I learned later, she was detested by everyone in the apartment. In the old days she had been the wife of a moderately well-to-do Jewish dry-goods merchant. Her husband died at the beginning of the N.E.P., and she carried on and developed the business to the very end of the N.E.P. According to the neighbors, she was secretly doing a bit of speculating, liquidating some of the stock which she had managed to salvage. She would parade through the hall of the apartment with her nose way up in the air, contemptuous of hoi-polloi. Even in my brief conversation with her she managed to refer to Communists as "they" and to the gentile neighbors as *poierim*—both words indicating her attitude of utter disdain.

And her daughter was a chip of the old block. "I must be paid for six months in advance . . ." she nasalized, "*valuta*. . . I have to buy clothes in the Torgsin [the Torgsin was still operating then]. You know how it is. . . Zhrebovich is an engineer, we'll have to meet people, contacts, visits. . ."

The repulsive little bourgeoisie was ready to break the law, to speculate and charge for the room six times as much as she herself was paying for it, just in order to keep up with some imagined or real Soviet Joneses.

But one cannot afford fastidiousness when one is trying to get a room in Moscow. I promptly paid all the "lady" asked for.

NUMBER 10 Novo Basmannia Street is a huge house, built before the war, with elevator, electricity, gas, hot water, baths, toilets, modern plumbing. The house has six entrances, and about eighty apartments of various sizes. The one in which I lived, Number 8, accommodated five other families, some with children—twenty-five people in all. We had one large communal kitchen and two lavatories. There were apartments in the same house serving as many as ten families.

It was Kaganovich, I think, who said that not until the housing problem was solved would Socialism be solidly established in the Soviet Union. He was not exaggerating. The discomforts, trials and exasperations caused by the acutely inadequate housing conditions in most Soviet cities are universally known. It will probably take another decade before the problem is completely solved. In the meanwhile, life in a Soviet apartment is, to express it mildly, not sweet. Everybody knows your affairs, loves, hatreds, linens,

moles, esthetic principles, food preferences and health habits. Under the circumstances, it is surprising how comparatively peaceful the average citizen's domestic life is. Fights and quarrels and intrigues occur, but not nearly as often as one might expect.

MARFUSHA'S mother went to church every Sunday and holiday. When she returned she always reported to me how crowded the church was: "Such a jam, people actually fainted." Once I asked her a mean question: "How many churches are there left in Moscow?" The old woman looked so pained that I hastened to add, "There must be hundreds of them." "More than *they* know," she said haughtily and walked off. She never talked to me about the church again.

ON the whole the Russians are an amiable lot. Once I discovered bedbugs in my couch. The thought of them, more than their actual malice, kept me awake all night. I confided my secret to Marfusha. After work she and Polia came in with kerosene, essence of vinegar, a miniature torch, some soft soap and started out on a hunt which lasted fully three hours.

The news that bedbugs dared disturb the sleep of the American comrade spread through the apartment. For days after, every morning, dozens of times I had to answer the same



—Allow me to answer instead of my husband. He's very shy and he's certainly not used to answering for himself. I am for children, but they spoil the shape of a pretty woman. That's why I have this dog Jack. He harmonizes with my clothes and figure. Children have to have shoes, clothes, while Ivan Petrovich is scarcely able to provide me with new clothes every season. That is why our marital life is purely spiritual in character. Now I write to him from Crimea—now he writes to me from the Caucasus. Wifely duties? Don't know. Haven't heard. Although a young man in the Sochy summer resort did mention them to me as he was sending me back to my husband in Moscow.



—What do they want me to do? Support my family? Certainly. But it should only be taken out of my basic salary [the minor part of the income of the Soviet employee]. As it is they take out 35 roubles and 9 kopecks every month. What? I should help my parents! I don't refuse. Last year I sent father a package of smoked fish by parcel post collect. Let the old man eat, I have nothing against it. But why is the law so heartless? If things go on this way, I shall never buy an automobile.

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The projected large family size of husband has been attracted. The proposed office, factory and papers print some approving suggestions. Here is a sample by the Soviet cartoons and an imaginary satirical journal of the future issue of EDITORS.

solicitous question as if I were suffering from a grave illness: "Well, Comrade, how are the bedbugs?" I felt ashamed to be disturbed by such trifles as bedbugs in the midst of the glorious victories of the second Five-Year-Plan and the thunderous achievements of the Stakhanovites.

THE wonderful thing about the Soviet Union is the host of colorful, symbolical impressions it stamps indelibly upon one's conscious and subconscious memory, incomparably more so than any other country, I am sure.

The avidly curious tourists, the shaking of the train, the mixed strains of the old anthem "God Save the Czar" and the "Internationale" I seem to detect in the rhythm of the wheels, all together, in some mysterious fashion, bring back to mind an endless chain of events, meetings, conversations, observations and contrasts, which, when they actually occurred, I had scarcely noticed, but which now come back fresh and luminously meaningful.

When one is in the U.S.S.R. the minor but numerous irritations from the surviving past often obscure the grandeur of what is being done at present. It is only when one is on the way out, in retrospect, that the emergent, rather than the receding in Soviet life, begins to loom larger and larger. One

gains the required perspective, and things assume a different significance.

THE lady "author" drops her cigarette butt on the coupé floor, she steps on it, flushes, picks it up hastily, and demonstratively deposits it in the cuspidor. General hilarity! "She must have received a lesson in Soviet culture!"

Culture . . . culture . . . culture . . . culture . . . In Moscow I grew inexpressibly weary of the word. At times I felt as anti-cultural as a Nazi. You cross the street before the light changes and you are exposed to a militiaman's lecture on culture; you jump on a street car while in motion, you step off a street car before it stops, you get on a street car at the wrong end—the front instead of the back—and almost invariably you will hear a long discourse about culture. You walk into a movie house, a theater, a restaurant, an office building, forgetting to remove your topcoat, and the doorman is bound to stop you with a few admonitions about culture. The Russian masses have discovered culture, and they seem to be resolved to let one another and the world know about it.

Thus something quite typical and amusing happened to me last summer. I entered the Soviet Union through Leningrad, after two years' absence. In the evening I took a stroll with the group of Open Road tourists who

were in my custody. Absorbed in conversation, I absent-mindedly pulled out my cigarette box, lit the last cigarette and most naturally, in typical New York fashion, threw the empty box into the gutter. It happened that a group of Russians, including a military man, were standing on the curb waiting for a bus. The expression I caught in their eyes was vaguely disturbing, but I was too intent on what I was saying to pay it any heed. When we were about a half a block away from the group, I felt somebody tapping on my shoulder. "Citizen!" I turned around. It was the military man. Bowing very politely, he handed me the empty box. "You lost that," he grinned. I realized my misdemeanor immediately, but I kept my bearings. "Oh, yes, thank you very much." I took the box and put it back in my pocket. The Russian smiled knowingly. My chief embarrassment, however, was before my tourists: I should have known better—"culture!"

OF course, all this I suppose is necessary. When I think of the millions of raw peasants who have been inundating the Soviet cities, of the way they push past you without apologizing, of the way they manage to be-foul public lavatories, of the way they blow their noses without benefit of handkerchief, when I think of the terrible quarrels of the peasant women in our communal kitchens, of

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ment's recently prohibited abortions, encourage the responsibility of alimony, deal of attention. discussed in every farm. The Soviet letters from readers, approving and some the projected law. propaganda carried on of the law. The ts are taken from e published by the A serious discussion will appear in a W MASSES.—THE



—The creative personality does not need a family. Children, diapers. . . . Henry Byron lived alone. So did Jack Wilde. When I went from Valya to Sonia, lived with Henrietta and courted Nina, I certainly realized the full horror of family life. Not only did I lack the time for creative work, but I didn't even have the time to see Katya. The family is the corpse of love, the crematorium of wages—all in all not a business for a man of inspiration. As regards wives, they're faithless. And besides, please don't annoy me with these everyday trifles. For two years I haven't been able to work and I live only on the faith three publishers have in my talent.



—I am not against an honest, industrious family. On the contrary, until recently I myself had three families. And all three of them, as if in spite, needed support. Now I have fewer. One family married an architect, now she doesn't need my money. She even sent me some goods for a summer suit. But why all this fuss about children? I prefer grown-ups, especially blondes. Brunettes, too. No, we who are overworked in responsible jobs are not yet in a position to think of families with children. As for women, they ought to be free. Let the State pay them a salary. Why should they have to depend on a private male owner?

the blood-curdling curses and profanities they hurl at one another, the petty nastinesses they are capable of—overturning the neighbor's teapot, throwing soap into the hated neighbor's soup, swiping something for no other purpose than to start trouble—when I think of all this, I can see the need for even a little more emphasis on "culture."

And now that I come to think of it, I must confess that I myself, on many occasions, found it necessary to indulge in a bit of "culture" propaganda.

Naturally. It's a transition period. Habits and attitudes stick with amazing tenacity. Nineteen years of revolution have accomplished wonders, but they have not removed all the ugliness of the Czarist days. In the search for new social forms and attitudes, the Soviet citizens help one another, teach one another, lecture to one another. The sophisticated stranger coming from a more or less conventionalized society views the whole thing with amusement. Not so the Soviet citizen. He is in dead earnest.

Once on entering the Moscow subway train I heard one citizen admonish another: "Don't push, please. Where do you think you are? This is not the street car."

This is to say: street cars belong to the past. In street cars egoism and bad manners are more acceptable or, at least, not incongruous. The fine, commodious Moscow subway belongs to the good Socialist present and here old street car modes of behavior cannot be tolerated.

ANOTHER episode illustrating the same thing: Moscow. Bitter cold. The car is crowded. A woman in a heavy nondescript brown fur coat elbows her way to the front of the car. Her determined advance creates something of a sensation. She leaves bunches of brown animal hair on everyone she touches. Obviously, there is something very wrong with her fur. People, half-indignant, half-titillated, begin to brush themselves. A discussion starts over the ethical and cultural aspects of this queer case. The general opinion is that the woman is sadly lacking in social consciousness and culture. The woman, on the other hand, insists that she has no other coat, that it is fiendishly cold, and that she intends to wear the coat regardless of whether they like it or not. There seems to be justice in what she says. The people are stumped. Suddenly, one old man hits upon an answer: "If you were cultured and socially conscious," he says, "you would have worn the coat with the fur inside. Why should you make other people suffer?" His comeback is crushing.

THE story that makes the biggest hit among the people in the coupé and releases a long and speculative discussion on the subject of cultural continuity is the one I read from my Moscow diary: The dining room of the Savoy Hotel. The atrociously gaudy baroque, the mirrors on walls and ceiling, the pool and fountain with goldfish,

lobsters and crabs, everything here is reminiscent of the vulgar ostentation of the rich Moscow merchants of the beginning of this century.

Now the dining room is filled with out-of-town workers, factory directors, Stakhanovites, who are here on business.

At the nearest table, there are two workers—blue serge suits, collars, ties. They seem to be having a grand time, the table is loaded with food and bottles of wine. They laugh, exchange pleasantries with the waitress and keep on ordering things just to have her around.

The orchestra is playing a popular sentimental gypsy tune. When it stops, one of the fellows sends the waitress to invite the conductor to the table. The conductor accepts with alacrity. After a couple of drinks, the host says rather importantly: "What I wanted to ask you, Comrade Conductor, is why you play this kind of music?"

The conductor, a suave man, twists himself into an eagerly expectant question mark. "Why don't you play opera?" presses the worker.

"What opera would you like to hear?" bows the conductor as he rises to rejoin his men. The fellow flushes. He knits his brow, pulls at his cheek, making a great effort to

think. It is clear that he cannot recall the name of any opera. The pause is becoming embarrassingly long. I catch a glimmer of malicious amusement in the old conductor's eyes. He is waiting. Finally, the worker's face lights up. Triumphantly he blurts out—"Carmen!"

And as the strains of the Carmen arias fills the room, the worker, with an expression of beatitude on his face, leans back, shuts his eyes, and beating time with his foot hums the universally familiar tune. His entire attitude seems to say: "It is not for nothing that we fought, suffered, struggled and built *piatiletkas* . . ."

One of the tourists in the coupé comments condescendingly: "A Soviet Molière might write a play entitled *Le Prolétaire-Gentilhomme*."

To be sure. There is something amusing about the first steps of the masses in acquiring a new and to them heretofore quite inaccessible culture. There is no doubt that this worker is just beginning to discover that he has been speaking prose all his life. But anyone understanding what is going on in the Soviet Union also knows that a few years hence the same worker will with as much or even greater pleasure hum Moussorgsky, Bach and Beethoven.

Accident?

DAVID SHREIBER

The laughter the curls
Were ground to death
Beneath the wheels of a ten ton overload
And the father weeps
without tears
without anger
Behind the blueness of his eyes.

In the long darknesses of these winter nights
He rages against the nameless truckman
Or the groaning overlord on the machine

But to men he is silent

And silence is no answer.

Still father,

It was no truckman killed your firstborn

16 hours at the wheel with the night rain and the fog
against his eyeballs

two days working and an electric numbness gets his calf
and his foot on the clutch

the cold makes brittle strangers of his fingers. . . .

Father . . . listen father

Listen to me.

All around us—whipped to the limit—

Ten million cogs gone clattering mad

The truckwheel caught, knit tooth for spoke

Ground your son.

The world is on a conveyor belt

And silence is no answer,

Father.

Listen father!