

Strictly Personal

by RUTH McKENNEY

FIFTY MILES FROM WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE little Virginia town reeked of decay and dirt. The beauty of the rolling hills, the carefully kept plantation houses of the fox-hunting gentry, ended abruptly at the village limits. I hesitated—I could imagine the sort of doctor this wretched tumble-down community was likely to enjoy.

But I got the shock of my life when I walked up the shaded pathway to the little white hospital. Mike Gold had said in his column a few days before that the South was changing; and here was remarkable proof. The young doctor's diplomas, ranged in his pleasant waiting room, included special certificates from the two best-known medical schools in America.

The doctor was brisk, and exceedingly efficient. In this sordid, poverty-stricken hamlet was a whole collection of the most modern, the most advanced scientific equipment. When I murmured my interest, the doctor blushed with pleasure, and showed me through the neat hospital—ten beds, to be sure, and as he was not a surgeon, the operating room was equipped for only special purposes. Still, in this Virginia town, a woman could bear her child with every assistance science affords.

"Of course, in emergencies," the doctor said, "if I couldn't get my patient to the big hospital twenty miles from here, I could do even major operations—in a pinch, that is. I have some surgical training. I consider it necessary for a general country practitioner. Just in case, you know."

I settled into the station wagon in a pleasant glow; driving back to the old plantation house where I was "boarding" while I finished up a piece of work, I poured out my enthusiasm to Mr. Singleton, my "host." Mr. Singleton listened to my praise of the young doctor. Finally he said, in that soft Virginia drawl I can't put on paper, "Well, now he's a good doctor. Yes. A very good doctor. We don't like him much, though."

I was irritated; I said, with exasperation, that the countryside was very lucky indeed.

Mr. Singleton nodded. Yes, he agreed. He and his wife were grateful to the doctor; their second son had been in a bad hunting meet accident last year. The young doctor had made the boy good as new—all those fancy machines of his—why twenty years ago the lad would probably have had a limp all his life. Yes, he was a good doctor. But still Mr. Singleton didn't like him much. "He don't treat our n—s right."

The word made me grit my teeth; the

ugly word, casually said, implicit with its dark story of rapacity and inhumanity.

Mr. Singleton began laconically, "You remember that hill you drove past comin' down here? About eleven miles from town, it is. You saw that patch of huts there?"

The young doctor had been called to the patch to visit an ailing boy, two months ago. The boy was eleven years old. He and his mother, who took in wash and made a bare living for herself and her fatherless son, lived up the mountain a mile or so, on a back road. The young doctor saw, as he walked into the one-room, tar-paper hut, that the boy had acute appendicitis. He had made a quick, expert examination. Yes, appendicitis, quite far advanced.

The young doctor said to the mother, "You'll have to get him to the city; they have a colored ward there. He has to be operated. See you get your boy there within five or six hours. Otherwise he'll die."

The Negro mother, of course, could not appreciate the skill that allowed the young doctor to make such a quick diagnosis; to set such precise time limits for her son's eleven-year-old life. Not every country practitioner could be so sure. But this young doctor had diplomas from the proudest medical schools in the United States of America. And as he picked up his bag and went to the door of the shack, he repeated, "Five or six hours; be quick about it."

The Negro mother said, "There ain't no auto here in the patch."

The doctor did not bother to answer.

The Negro mother, in the extremity of her terror, committed a social error. She cried, "Doctor! Please! Just this once! Give us a ride to the railway station!"

The young doctor was truly shocked. This woman was suggesting that she and her son ride on the cushioned seats of his private automobile! He answered coldly, "I haven't a truck here, you know."

The Negro mother heard the motor fade away down the lonely country road. She hoisted her pain-racked son to her back; and she walked eleven miles to the village railway station. Now and then she had to stop, for breath; now and then the little boy screamed with such agony, that she had to put him down on the roadside grass and sponge his face with water from the ditches.

And so, with these ill-advised halts, she missed the train to the city twenty miles away.

Mr. Singleton said, "The boys driving our

truck happened by just then; and when they saw her, they quick got on the phone to ask me if they could take her to the city."

Mr. Singleton saw nothing odd in the fact that his "boys"—two grave Negroes of over forty—telephoned him for permission before they took the mother and her child on the white bosses' truck.

"It wasn't any use," Mr. Singleton said. "The boy died before they got ten miles away."

I said, my voice trembling, "But the doctor said he could do emergency operations!"

Mr. Singleton stared at me curiously. "You maybe didn't understand," he said politely. "His hospital don't have a colored ward; nearest colored ward is in the city, twenty miles from here."

Mr. Singleton said judiciously, "It wouldn't of hurt him so bad if he took the boy to the railroad station; everybody knows there's only one train a day. Suppose if he did have to get new seat cushions?"

"New seat cushions?" I stammered.

"Well," Mr. Singleton said patiently, "you couldn't sit where one of them sat, after all. But the way I look at it is this: the doctor didn't do right, leaving that woman alone with the boy dying. He shouldn't have let the boy die. That's why Mrs. Singleton and I don't like the doctor. He don't treat our colored people right."

I said, my voice trembling, "I wish you'd told me this first. I wouldn't go near such a doctor with a ten-foot pole."

Mr. Singleton said, with surprise, "Why he's a very good doctor! And he's nice enough in some ways; he was in to dinner a few nights ago; you ought to hear him talk; he's right interestin'."

"You had him to dinner? I thought you didn't like him?"

"Well," Mr. Singleton said, "of course . . . but his mother was an Abbot . . . from around Lynchburg way . . . after all. . . ."

THE events of which Mr. Singleton spoke occurred two months ago, fifty miles from the capital of the United States of America, a nation now engaged in a life and death struggle for the preservation of democracy.

And so vast are the issues of this war, so immense its scope and geographical sweep that it is not an exaggeration, but rather an exact statement of fact to say that on the outcome of military battles fought half way across the world rests the issue: shall the little Negro boy be avenged? For if the people of this country win the war against fascism, the oppressors everywhere shall at last tremble before the power of an outraged democracy. And conversely, if the war be lost, the endless agony of that Negro mother watching her little son die shall be multiplied a hundred fold.

But my question is purely rhetorical. We, the people, mean to win this war; and we shall win it, at home, and abroad, across the whole face of the earth—including, and as far as I am concerned—especially, Virginia!

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The Great Battle of Kharkov

THE third week of the great battle of Kharkov finds the Soviet armies advancing again after a brief pause to consolidate their gains. It is tough going and the Germans are throwing in large numbers of tanks and fighting desperately to hold on to their strongly fortified positions. South of Kharkov, the Nazi counterstroke in the Izyum-Barvenkova, after making initial progress, is being held, and this attempt to outflank the main forces of Marshal Timoshenko, while still potentially dangerous, has for the present failed. Around Kharkov itself the Red Army still retains the initiative as we go to press, refusing to heed the dictum of Hanson W. Baldwin in the *New York Times* of May 24 that "the initiative in the Kharkov sector was passing, as expected [by whom?] to the Nazis."

It is now clear that the fighting in the south of Russia is of a limited character and no large-scale offensive has been launched by either side. Yet these battles are, nevertheless, of major strategic importance. After two weeks of bitter fighting the Soviet forces were driven off their precarious foothold on the Kerch Peninsula and the Nazis now occupy almost the whole of the Crimea. But unless they can hold Kharkov and smash through the Rostov-Taganrog sector to the southeast, the drive for the Caucasus, for oil, for the gateway into Asia remains wish rather than reality. Kharkov is the pivot for all offensive plans in the south and by beating the Germans to the punch, the Russians may well have upset Hitler's long-heralded spring offensive. The fact that the Berlin radio has begun minimizing the importance of Kharkov shows that the Nazis are preparing the public for even worse eventualities. And, as Maj. George Fielding Eliot points out, "even a stalemate is a Russian victory." Which means, of course, a victory for all the United Nations.

Undoubtedly the Germans are also bothered by fear that a Western Front may be opened in their rear and by the need to divert part of their air power to meet the Allied air offensive in the west. Yet the longer Britain and the United States delay in putting the

Nazis in the death-grip of a two-front war, the greater the danger that Hitler and his vassal "allies," backed by the war production of the whole of Europe, will mass their still formidable strength for a blow that may be difficult to retrieve. The most cautious policy today is to invade in the west at once while the bulk of the Nazi armies are tied up in the east.

China in Peril

ONE of the direct consequences of the Allied defeat in Burma is the heavy pressure upon China. From Chungking last week came what amounted to an SOS appeal, calling attention to the fact that the Japanese enemy seems to be concentrating for manifold blows on China. First, there is the threat from the south; the Japanese followed their victory in Burma with a thrust up the Burma road into Yunnan province, and its capital, Kunming. In Chekiang province, just below the Yangtse delta, heavy fighting is taking place around Kihwa, with the Japanese spearheads aimed at the major central Chinese city of Changsha. Lower down on the coast heavy Japanese landings have taken place in Fukien province, and there are also reports of renewed activity in the northwest.

It would be too early to say whether the Japanese are developing this concentric pressure against China instead of projected offensives against India, Australia, or Soviet Siberia. But the chances are that with their communications secured all around the coast of the Asiatic mainland, the Japanese can afford to combine intense pressure on China with offensive operations on still another front. In brief, China's position is difficult, and is going to be more so. The problem of getting help to her becomes a major one confronting the United Nations, especially Great Britain and the United States.

British responsibility revolves mainly around India, for it is from India that China must now be supplied. Some way out of India's deadlock must be found, so that her vast resources and her willing millions can be organized—not only for India's own defense—but for China's sake. There has been little news recently from India; the British authorities are undoubtedly making some progress in building up her defenses and expanding her production, but it is a fraction of what could be done, if the Indian people were given what Chiang Kai-shek called "real political power."

As for America's responsibility, it is bigger than the good work of our technical mission in India, and the valiant efforts of our fighters led by Lieut. Gen. Joseph Stilwell. This is the moment to convince the Pacific peoples that we will see them through; this is the moment for some intervention to break the Indian deadlock. And now also, despite

our heavy commitments to the European theater, our fighter and bomber planes must be gotten across Africa, the Near East, to India, and finally to the airfields that wait in central China. With our planes, China's able fighters can still throw back and disorganize the menacing ring of Japan's many-pronged offensive.

Mexico's Example

PERU's President, Dr. Manuel Prado, is back in Quito after a tour of our country; Chile is still treading water about breaking off relations with the Axis; in Argentina the dictatorial pro-fascist government of Ramon Castillo is still riding high; but by far the most significant event in hemisphere affairs is the imminent declaration of war against Germany by our most immediate good neighbor, the Mexican republic. In the last three weeks two Axis submarines caused the loss of two Mexican ships in the Gulf. Both went down with considerable loss of life. The Wilhelmstrasse perfunctorily rejected a Mexican note of protest, and this week, on the wave of popular anger, the Mexican Congress meets to discuss a declaration of war.

For a number of reasons this is a very important development. First of all, Mexico is still the leader among Latin American nations. What Mexico does is really a bellwether for the hemisphere, and her declaration of war would do much to solidify the unity of the Latin American peoples against Hitler. Secondly, although Mexico was among the first to break off relations with the Axis, she has been a sort of concentration point for all the vile anti-American and anti-democratic propaganda. A declaration of war would make it easier for the Avila Camacho government to clean out all the hidden—and open—agents of the enemy, who have been trying so assiduously to turn the Mexican people against the common cause.

Finally, this crisis is affecting the inner relationship of forces in Mexico. The labor movement has taken the lead in demanding war with the Axis: at a great demonstration a few days ago the Confederation of Labor and its former secretary, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, were in the forefront. Thus, the distinct setback which Mexican labor experienced in the general rightward trend since the close of the Cardenas regime is evidently being repaired. The workingmen of Mexico are finding a greater unity within themselves and with the Camacho government in face of Nazi attacks.

Men of Steel

THERE's a new union in the land and it's something to write home about. Of course, the United Steel Workers of America isn't entirely new; it's precursor, the Steel Work-