

Woman Journalist Back From Russia

When in July, 1921, certain American prisoners were released from the Soviet prisons as a Hoover sine qua non of American relief measures, there stepped forth from the Novenski prison in Moscow the curious figure of a woman—her sex scarcely discernible at first glance. She was clad in an exceedingly dirty khaki suit, in a man's pongee shirt, a cap made from the tail of the same shirt, and a pair of men's shoes retrieved from a Red Cross contribution. It was Mrs. Marguerite E. Harrison, American newspaper woman and representative of the Associated Press, who had grape-vined her way across the Polish frontier into the heart of Russia some eighteen months previously for the purpose of studying first hand the workings of the Soviet government and its social order, and to try to find out and tell the world the truth about conditions there as they might be disclosed to the eyes of a trained journalist with no axes to grind and no political or sentimental propaganda to peddle.

It was a remarkable undertaking for a woman to venture upon, in the middle of a Russian winter, alone, and without official protection from her own country—though the latter perhaps would have availed her little. But she accomplished her purpose—woman's wit and American audacity carrying her through. Officially, she had been repeatedly admonished that the thing couldn't be done, so she did it. She saw the machine and gods of the machine. She saw where the wheels were going around and where they stopped. Ten months she spent in Soviet prisons, where she had rare opportunities of studying the social fabric from beneath as well as its superstructure. She suffered unimaginable contacts and privations, but came out of it all with no resentments, no personal bitterness, no apostolic obsessions. Her job was to see things and she saw what was to be seen and she brought to her day's work wherever she was, an observation that was wide and acute and femininely intuitive. Her story told in a volume recently published by George H. Doran company, New York, under the title "Marooned in Moscow," is merely as a record of human experience, intensely dramatic, and as a record of sociological studies, impartially and penetratively made, unusually informative and of fascinating interest.

In her book Mrs. Harrison makes no defense of anyone or anything—neither does she attack either man or institutions. She tells merely what she saw in that kaleidoscopic blur of social and political elements through which Republican people are struggling towards still hazy ideals of representative government. After her experiences, "I believe," she writes, "that I know the heart of Russia, and no one in these troublous times of transition can ever know it unless he lives with the Russian people both in and out of prison. I had gained a just perspective and I felt that I understood all that is good and all that is bad and all that is historically inevitable in the great upheaval which is in spite of everything, modernizing Russia." At the end of her story she adds a chapter of her own conclusions, which she leaves up to the reader to accept or reject in the light of her narrative.

In "By the Back Door."

Her mode of entry into Russia was simple in its boldness. She went in, as she says, "by the back door." Reaching Warsaw in midwinter, at a time when a state of war was existing between Poland and Russia, she was refused a permit to cross the border, talked a tentative permit out of another division officer who warned her of the great risks she was taking, and then—here is the way she tells it—"I passed through the Polish lines into No Man's Land and gave myself up to the first Red Army patrol. By this means I succeeded two weeks later in reaching Moscow, where I stayed for eighteen months, during which I was twice arrested by the Checka, living for six months under surveillance and for nearly ten months in prison."

Even in this border war zone she encountered the efforts of the Soviet government to function, in a school and hospital. In the school there were three class rooms with about thirty pupils. The benches had been knocked together from boards, with log supports. The blackboards were home-made and the pupils were doing their exercises on sheets of wrapping paper, cut the required size, with pencils that had been divided into three to make them go around. In the hospital, a well arranged building with light, airy wards, each containing twenty beds, "there was not a piece of linen, a yard of surgical dressing, a pound of soap, or disinfectant, nor an ounce of medicine. The physician in charge said it was impossible to receive pa-

tients, although the number of typhus patients averaged twenty a week."

The last link of her journey between Vitebsk and Moscow—a 36 hour ride—Mrs. Harrison made in a box car in charge of a red guard. A very vivid idea of the Soviet description of the accommodations. "Our quarters in the staff car," she writes, "were close, to say the least, but we were lucky, it seemed, to have those. A compartment for two was reserved for four of us, and there, with the exception of a few venturesome visits to the toilet, we spent the next thirty-six hours. I occupied the lower berth, the doctor (a Jewish woman) and the commissioner's wife the upper berth, and the soldier slept on the floor. Standing in the corridor was impossible, because it was filled with a solid mass of soldiers, who insisted in defiance of discipline on occupying it. They made it almost impossible for us to open the door and our escort had to fight his way out to get hot water to make our tea from the samover machines that are in operation at each station. The rest of the train, which was entirely composed of box cars, was packed, people even sitting on the roofs and bumpers, and there were fights at every station between persons trying to get on and off."

Shadowed by the "Checka"

Arrived in Moscow, an unwelcome guest, she went through the usual forms of search and inquisitorial investigation and was finally allowed by Checherin, head of the foreign office, to remain, at first for a few weeks in apparently unchecked freedom, later to become conscious of the fact that wherever she went, the lurking shadows of the checka—the secret police bureau of the Soviet—were dogging her footsteps and watching her every action. Her first glimpses, of Lenine, and Trotsky were obtained at an open Soviet meeting at the opera house, arranged with dramatic effects—garlanded portraits of Lenine, Trotsky and Marx were everywhere. Red flags draped from the galleries and around the stage, multitudes of banners in evidence displaying the matter of the red republic, "Polietariat of the World, Unite." Lenine delivered an address on the government's policy of reconstruction.

"When I saw him come out on the stage," writes Mrs. Harrison, "my first feeling was one of disappointment. He is a short, thick set, unimposing looking little man, with colorless hair and complexion, a small pointed beard, piercing gray-blue eyes, and a quiet, unemotional, almost monotonous manner of delivery. After a few words, however, I, like every one else, began to listen attentively. It was not magnetic eloquence that held me, it was the impression of tremendous sincerity, utter self confidence and quiet power. He is absolutely sure of himself and his idea and when he speaks to the people he has a talent for picking out the simplest possible words to express his meaning. Trotsky, while Lenine was speaking, sat with his head bent scribbling industriously on a pad—a broad shouldered man of middle height slightly inclined to stoutness, but erect and military in his bearing. The line of his mouth was hard, cynical, almost forbidding, until he began to speak, and then I suddenly realized that there was something compelling about the man's personality. There was something almost exultant in his expression as his eyes swept the enormous crowd in front of him and it seemed to me that subconsciously it was mingling with a certain radical pride. I could almost imagine him as saying, 'For the first time since the days of the Maccabees, I, a Jew, am the head of a great army.'"

Naturally interested from a woman's standpoint in the position of women in the Soviet scheme and the much mooted question of sex relations, Mrs. Harrison called upon Kolontai, "the only great woman publicist among the Communists," and found her a Bolshevik de luxe, living in luxury at the National hotel. "She was wearing an exquisite boudoir gown of green velvet, trimmed with sable, her little feet were encased in velvet slippers of the same shade and she was altogether chic and charming. Evidently she has great regard for her personal appearance, and although not young, she is an extremely pretty woman of the fragile blond type. She is the daughter of an imperial general and a lady to her finger tips. We talked principally about the education of children, which is her chief hobby. She told me that she considered family life absolutely subversive to the interests of the Commune, that children born should be regarded as the property of the state, that they would develop a much more genuine sense of social responsibility in the atmosphere of the institution reproducing the Commune than in the home, which is under the influence of patriarchal system. As regards the relationship of the sexes she felt that it should exist merely for the purpose of reproducing the race without re-

straints except those imposed by the observance of the law of eugenics.

A Woman of Many Husbands.

Kolontai herself, by the way, has had "any number of husbands," the last a young soldier many years her junior. A widespread looseness of sexual relations is found everywhere, much of it, however, the correspondent says, an inheritance from the old regime. The number of "kept women" in the Soviet offices is enormous. Trotsky is notorious for his open liaisons. "In prison," says Mrs. Harrison, "I met a young Ukrainian girl of great beauty and charm, who had been his mistress for a few weeks. 'Trotsky told me once,' she said, 'that I was the only woman with whom he had had an affair who never asked him for food supplies.' Among the lower classes, however, old-fashioned ideas still prevail—as a matter of fact people get married and divorced by Soviet decrees in Russia very much as they do in other countries, but irregular relationships "are not looked upon as askance" and there are no legal disabilities attached to illegitimate children. There are thousands of officially orphaned children in the public homes, hundreds of them wandering the streets, speculating and stealing while their parents are at work and the amount of juvenile immorality among children of this class appalling.

Even bathing suits, it seems have become part of the Bolshevik scrap heap, as this refreshing incident told by this venturesome American correspondent will confirm. With some American acquaintances she made a provincial trip to a neighboring village. "The sun was blazing hot and we were tired and dirty when we arrived at our destination on Saturday afternoon. We had walked at least ten versts from the station and the village was situated near the Moskwa river, which looked very cool and tempting. 'Let's go in bathing,' said my companions. 'I'd like to,' I answered, 'but I have no bathing suit.' 'That makes no difference,' they answered. 'Nobody wears a bathing suit in Russia. Come down to the river and see for yourself.' When I got there I saw the most startling sight I have ever witnessed. At this point the river made a sharp turn, throwing up a bank of fine white sand which made an ideal beach. On the beach and in the water beyond were hundreds of naked people, men, women, boys and girls, all indiscriminately mingled. Some of them were standing knee deep in the water chatting with their neighbors, others taking a sun bath, quite undisturbed; no one seemed in the least self-conscious or concerned."

German Dominance an Eventuality.

Long before the Russo-German entente coup that so disturbed the Genoa parleyers, Mrs. Harrison found the trend in that direction plainly evident in Bolshevik circles. In an interview with Karl Radek, the "Peck's Bad Boy" of the Soviet government, she was frankly told that "if the German communist revolution did not come off he believed that a profitable deal could be made with the German junkers to join with Russia against the entente." And it is one of her conclusions, upon things she heard in bureaucratic circles in Russia, that the coalition between the two countries may have far reaching objectives. "We may as well recognize the fact," she sums up in her afterword, "that the Germans will eventually dominate Russia commercially. At present, in their desperate financial situation German business men are willing to take chances and embark on enterprises which the large interests in other countries are unwilling to undertake. They have nothing to lose and everything to gain from the exploitation of Russia and they can afford to wait for returns. But there is also a political side to the situation. Things may not remain as they are in Germany. If the country ever swings to the right there will be a renaissance of militarism, the desire for revenge on England, the old Berlin-to-Bagdad dream. I have told how I saw in Russia more than a year ago evidence that many Germans have not altogether abandoned it. There will be an attempt at political domination with a view to utilizing the vast man power and natural resources of Russia to bring about the 'Day,' which many Germans regard as only postponed for a matter of ten years or so."

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