

WRITTEN BY

L. AUERBACH	VERA INBER
B. AGAPOV	V. KATAEV
S. ALIMOV	Z. KHATZREVIN
A. BERZIN	G. KORABELNIKOV
S. BUDANTZEV	B. LAPIN
S. BULATOV	A. LEBEDENKO
S. DIKOVSKY	D. MIRSKY
N. DMITRIEV	L. NIKULIN
A. EHRLICH	V. PERTZOV
K. FINN	J. RIKATCHEV
E. GABRILOVICH	V. SCHKLOVSKY
N. GARNICH	L. SLAVIN
G. GAUSNER	A. TOLSTOY
S. GECHT	B. YASSENSKY
K. GORBUNOV	N. YURGIN
M. GORKY	K. ZELINSKY
V. IVANOV	M. ZOSHCHENKO

EDITED BY

MAXIM GORKY, L. AUERBACH AND S. G. FIRIN.

THIS EDITION PREPARED FROM THE RUSSIAN
AND EDITED, WITH A SPECIAL INTRODUCTION,
BY AMABEL WILLIAMS-ELLIS

BELOMOR

AN ACCOUNT OF THE CONSTRUCTION
OF THE NEW CANAL BETWEEN
THE WHITE SEA AND THE
BALTIC SEA

NEW YORK 1935

“I want to live in a country where there are no locks on the doors.”

M. ZOSHCHENKO

“Our writers must tell about all this. For facts appear first and are then followed by their artistic reflections.”

MAXIM GORKY

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The English translation used in this edition was prepared in Moscow from the Russian edition.

The special thanks of the publishers and editor of the English edition are due to May O'Callaghan for her invaluable help in the work of collating the translation with the Russian edition, and checking and reading the proofs.



J. V. STALIN

INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This book answers two questions: the first and most often asked is, "What happens to political prisoners in the U.S.S.R.: does a Soviet labour camp differ from a concentration camp in, say, Nazi Germany?" Of the second less is heard, but it is one that I, as a writer, have often asked, and to which I had not until now managed to get a comprehensible answer. What—I wanted to know—is this method that Russian writers have of writing a book as a group? What is "group composition"? To what sort of subject do they think it suitable, and what is the finished article like? *Belomor* gives an answer to both these questions. It is in itself an example of "group composition" and it tells of the fate of the political prisoner.

The world outside the U.S.S.R. is curious about more than one aspect of the first question. Did the engineers who were accused of "wrecking" and "sabotage" and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment really set out on such a dangerous enterprise, and if so why did they do it? It is impossible to read the story of Riesenkampf (page 151), Zubrik (page 149) of Vyasemsky (page 27), and of Ananyev (page 80) without seeing that such actions were logical—granted the men and the situation. The reader sees at once that there were motives and that there were even inducements. There are passages in these biographies and autobiographies that make the English reader able to understand a point about which many people have been very sceptical. They put the matter in a new light and show that wrecking, ca' canny, and the whole method of sabotage was possible—even perhaps inevitable. We see men who felt quite sure that the Soviet regime was not going to last, that the old times would come back, and the capitalist reappear. They drew a perfectly comprehensible conclusion from their premise. It was this: when the capitalists come back, then it will be the faithful steward, who has everything connected with the estate at his fingers' ends, who will be the favoured one. "The first man later will be he who remained on the job, who saved the property." To see the working out in action of this proposition is extraordinarily interesting.

But the story of the White Sea Canal is much more than an answer to conundrums. This tale of the accomplishment of a ticklish engineering job, in the middle of primeval forests, by tens of thousands of enemies of the State helped—or should it be guarded—by only thirty-seven G.P.U. officers, is one of the most exciting stories that has ever appeared in print. The book, moreover, enshrines

BELOMOR

some of the best pieces of comic writing that even Russian literature can afford. The story of Budassy (page 109) is one of the most perfect examples of “the sell” ever recorded. The reader will echo the laughter that shook the camp when the story of this “gracious, gratuitous swindle” got about. Nor will he fail to observe that, like all good jokes, the Budassy joke is also something more. The story of Firin (page 217), the story of The Man from Pentonville (page 185), of Pavlova (page 140), of Lederkin and the horse (page 169), are all extremely diverting where they are not exciting.

The account of the last dramatic push when personal histories drop away, and the Canal itself becomes the hero, is not only a good story, but is, like so much in the book, also almost perfectly told.

Here it is that we come to the second of the two questions: What about group composition? For if group composition can produce this sort of thing it is worth enquiring into. This book, it turns out, is not a “symposium,” not a series of views, not a “special number” of a newspaper, but a bit of interpretative work as skilful as the playing of a theme by an orchestra. The reader will observe the names of no less than thirty-four authors on the title page, and those who are acquainted with Russian literature will see that among them are some of the best writers of the Soviet Union. The authors’ own notes on the writing of the book (including an amazing time schedule) seem to the present writer so novel and so interesting that she has persuaded the translators to include them in the English edition. But the book itself must be read before the full flavour can be extracted from the authors’ laconic summary.

Here then rests the double claim of the present volume to the attention of the English reader.

For the first time we are here told the story of what goes on in a Russian labour camp, and gain some insight into the motives and trains of thought which led skilled and intelligent engineers to take up the dangerous work of sabotage.

For the first time a book composed by the new and peculiar method of group composition is available to the English reader. Finally, this tale of Belomorstroy gives us the thing of which no reader ever tires, a series of exquisitely observed, sometimes comic, and sometimes tragic stories of vivid individual experience. “Only to this man” we feel, “Only in these extraordinary circumstances...” Surely no more touching tale was ever conceived than that of the “little man with tired eyes” (page 279).

It should be added that the book has had an immense success in Soviet Russia.

INTRODUCTION

I should like to add a reflection that may perhaps occur to the minds of some English readers when they have finished the book. It also occurred to John Ruskin in the year 1860 and he set it out in these words:

“A great cry rises from all our manufacturing cities louder than their blast furnaces... We manufacture everything there except men. We blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery: but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form, a single living spirit never enters into our estimate of advantages.”

AMABEL WILLIAMS-ELLIS.

NOTE ON THE METHOD OF WRITING "BELOMOR"

All the thirty-four authors take full responsibility for the text. They helped one another, corrected one another. On this account it is difficult to indicate just who wrote the various sections. But the fact must be stressed that the real authors of the entire book are the workers who collaborated in the construction of the historic White Sea-Baltic Canal, dedicated to Stalin.

CALENDAR OF THE WORK

August 13th, 1933.—The chief editorial board of the "History of Factories and Industrial Enterprises" declared its intention of including in its plan of work a book describing the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal."

August 17th, 1933.—A delegation consisting of 120 writers from the R.S.F.S.R., Ukraine, White Russia, Tadzhikistan and Uzbekistan undertook a trip through the Canal.

September 10th, 1933.—The plan of the book was drawn up and the work was divided up among the various authors.

October 20th, 1933.—The Collegium of authors began their conferences to discuss and criticise the manuscript.

November 28th, 1933.—The illustration of the book was begun.

December 12th, 1933.—The MS. was handed over to the printers.

January 20th, 1934.—The book was published.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The documents used by the authors included:

Government decrees and instructions issued in connection with the White Sea-Baltic Canal; the Moscow-Volga Canal; the White Sea-Baltic industrial combine, etc.; orders issued by the G.P.U. and G.P.U. official bodies in charge of the construction of the Canal.

A set of the camp papers "Reforging," "Reforging on the Job, and the bulletin "Quality"; the wall newspapers from the various camps; slogans and posters; diagrams, tables, reports, etc.

Information from the G.P.U. men concerning the prisoners' careers; scores of stories about the working squads; shorthand records of conversations the writers held with the engineers who designed and built the Canal, with the Chekists in charge of the job and with the prisoners themselves; also prisoners' letters, and material from the archives *re* the pre-revolutionary projects for the White Sea-Baltic Canal.

The illustrations, maps, binding and general style of the book were entrusted to a collective of artists under the editorship of A. Tikhonov. The artists who participated in the work included M. Babenchikov; A. Deineka; N. Dmitriev; J. Gausner; N. Ilyin; A. Lemberg; E. Machalskoya; A. Rodchenko; P. Tyazhny; A. Tikhonov and Y. Yanosch.

The printing was undertaken by a picked group of 122 shock' workers who finished the job in thirty-eight days. The Russian edition runs to over 400 pages, measuring twelve inches by nine.

CONTENTS

	INTRODUCTION	vi
	NOTE ON THE METHOD OF WRITING THIS BOOK	ix
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	x
I	THE PROBLEM	15
	STAGE I	
	WORK BEGINS	
II	THE BIG HOUSE AT THE CORNER OF LUBYANKA	23
III	THE G.P.U. MEN	41
	STAGE II	
	PRISONERS AND G.P.U. MEN ON THE WAY TO THE JOB	
IV	PRISONERS IN THE TRAIN	53
V	THE G.P.U. MEN NEED THE PRISONERS	58
VI	A KULAK ARRIVES AT THE CAMP	65
VII	AN ENGINEER ARRIVES TOO	78
VIII	KAGAN THE CHEKIST MANAGER AND RAPPOPORT HIS ASSISTANT	90
IX	THIEVES, EMBEZZLERS AND BUDASSY	106
	STAGE III	
	THE CAMP AND ITS INHABITANTS	
X	ROTHENBURG OR THE HISTORY OF THE MAN REFORGED (WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS ON MORALITY, THE CAMP, AND ON LITERATURE.)	113
XI	WOMEN AT BELOMORSTROY	138
XII	ENGINEER MASLOV'S SELF-DEFENCE	143
	STAGE IV	
	SOME JOIN IN, SOME <i>REFUSE</i>	
XIII	CHANGES OF PROFESSION	154
XIV	LEDERKIN REFUSES. THE STORY OF HASSAN UMAROV AND WHAT THE KARELIAN PEASANTS THOUGHT	160
XIV	"THE STABLE"—KOVALEV'S EFFORT TO CLEAN IT—LEDERKIN ONCE MORE, AND THE DISAPPEARING BOOTS	171
XVI	THE MAN FROM PENTONVILLE	183
	STAGE V	
	THE LANDSCAPE BEGINS TO CHANGE	

BELOMOR

XVII	APRIL AND EARLY MAY, 1932	191
XVIII	THE CAMP NEWSPAPER	196

STAGE VI

THE SHORT KARELIAN SUMMER MUST BE MADE THE MOST OF. SOME NEWCOMERS

XIX	JUNE AND JULY, 1932—YAGODA'S AND FRENKEL'S OPINION OF WORK AND WORKE	202
XX	KAGAN'S ORDERS—YURTZEVA WHO WOULD WORK ONLY "ON PRODUCTION"	208
XXI	PORTRAIT OF FIRIN	215

STAGE VII

DECEMBER DISILLUSIONMENT WITH PROGRESS AND QUALITY

XXII	FIRIN COMES TO INVESTIGATE	222
XXIII	WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN SPRING COMES?	231
XXIV	"MAKE THE SOUP FIRST-CLASS AND FEED UP THE HORSES"	237
XXV	THE MASS ATTACK ON THE WATERSHED SECTION	243
XXVI	QUICKSANDS, AND A CHANGE IN THE LOOK OF THE SNOW	251

STAGE VIII

THE FINAL EFFORT

XXVII	SPRING COMES TO KARELIA	260
XXVIII	THE RIVER VYG BREAKS OUT	263

STAGE IX

SUCCESS: THE FIRST STEAMERS GO THROUGH

XXIX	"LET US PLANT THE BANKS WITH PINES"	269
XXX	STALIN GOES THROUGH ON THE LITTLE BLUNT-NOSED STEAMER	271
XXXI	MEN AND WOMEN—WITH A SPECIAL ACCOUNT OF THE LIT- TLE MAN WITH TIRED EYES	275
XXXII	"THEY SLAUGHTERED MY BULL AND STOLE MY HORSES"	281

STAGE X

SUMMING UP

XXXIII	THE PLACE IS CHANGED, BUT NOT THE MEN OR THE WORK	287
XXXIV	THE LAST CONFERENCE	290
XXXV	MAXIM GORKY SUMS UP	299

ILLUSTRATIONS

J. V. STALIN	<i>Facing Introduction</i>
	<i>Facing</i>
BERMAN.....	48
POVENETZ AGIT-BRIGADE	83
STREETS GROW in THE FOREST	98
REMOVE THE ROCK. MAKE WAY FOR THE SLUICE!.....	99
FRENKEL	206
IN CHANGING NATURE, MAN CHANGES HIMSELF	226
AMONG THE HORSES THERE WERE ALSO SHOCK WORKERS.....	241
THE POVENETZ BRIGADE SINGING “CHESTUSHKAS” ABOUT CARING FOR THEIR HORSES	242
WORKING TO THE STRAINS OF MUSIC	256
A COMPETITION BETWEEN THE WOMEN’S AND THE NATIONAL MINORITIES BRIGADES	257
THE FIRST STEAMERS ON THE CANAL	268
MAXIM GORKY.....	303

Chapter I

THE PROBLEM

It was in 1931 that the Soviet authorities decided that a canal was immediately to be dug by means of which ships could get from the White Sea to the Baltic without going all the way round by the North Cape, down the coast of Norway and through the Skagerak and the Kattegat.

It was an old, old project. In the eighteenth century Bakin the merchant had felt that something ought to be done, and had handed in at St. Petersburg a scheme for such a canal. His contemporary, Adam Armstrong, an Englishman, thought so too, and, backed by three Russian merchants, simultaneously proposed just such a scheme. After a while the tsar's government exerted itself so far as to send a General of Engineers to survey the place. The General was not pleased—too many rocks and waterfalls.

Nothing was done, but the alternative voyage was so long and so dangerous, and the canal route would be so short and so safe that planning a White Sea-Baltic Canal became a sort of habit. Almost every year one department or another of the tsar's government would have some sort of a canal plan laid before it. Projects were handed in all through the nineteenth century by all manner of people. That a fisherman from Soroka should have wanted the canal was natural: but why the Secret Police? Nevertheless, they handed in their plan too, as did the Regular Police, and from one generation to another many and various groups of enterprising merchants petitioned the tsar, grew old, and in due time died.

Nicholas II's government had three types of response—delay, silence and direct refusal. On one occasion the Ministry of Ways and Communications held up a plan for a year, and in the end answered that the canal was not feasible. Their reason for this opinion was the unfortunate fact that they could spare no one from their technical staff to go and make a survey. Time passed. Still, in the short time when the ice allowed, the ships set out on the long voyage. If the tsar would do nothing, perhaps if private capital financed the canal entirely and the Government were only to be asked to supply free lumber would they at least give permission? But nothing came of this request.

Then came the day of the Zemstvos, the councils of local landowners. Perhaps now something would be done? Promoters besieged the Karelian Zemstvos. The Zemstvos scented a profit—why

let it go out of the family? They decided that they themselves would construct the canal! Having decided, they did nothing. The forests, the swamps and the waterfalls remained undisturbed. Karelia was still “the land of unfrightened birds.” Then a rival plan for a railway was made. The railway promoters inspired a campaign in the St. Petersburg press against “the fantastic canal.” Nicholas II decreed that the idea of the canal was to be abandoned.

Ships could continue to make the 370-mile-long voyage into the Arctic Ocean round the North Cape, down the coast of Norway through the Skagerak and the Kattegat and up the whole length of the Baltic Sea.

And then in 1931, the new rulers of the U.S.S.R. decided that there should be a canal. Not some day, but now, immediately—say in about fifteen or twenty months. Would the Soviet Union succeed where tsarist Russia had failed?

In 1931 it seemed as though the map of Russia had come to life. To read it was to trace the birth of myriad enterprises, emerging, as it almost seemed, from some geological upheaval. New names began to appear upon the map of the U.S.S.R.: Magnitogorsk, Igarka, Zaporozhye—ten, a dozen new giants of industry were planned—factories and great cities were to rise out of the empty steppe. There was a harmony about this new map, a co-ordinated pattern of giant details that merged into a whole. It was the map of a whole country born anew, but it was almost as simple to read as the plan of a city.

“We have lagged behind the advanced countries of Europe for a hundred years: either we overtake them in ten years or we go under,” said Stalin. The country set to work. Transport in Russia had always been a “narrow place.” With small-scale production goods may be consumed near the places where they are made, but these new giants were going to inaugurate mass production, and each of them to turn out thousands upon thousands of tons of steel and iron, bale upon bale of textiles. What they produced must be distributed all over the U.S.S.R. More than ever transport would be the “narrow place.”

In 1931, on the sites where these great centres of production now stand there were then only small beginnings, a few huts full of plans and blueprints, some excavations; but these things showed the vastness of the projects to come.

“In the realm of water transport the construction of giant artificial waterways must be undertaken; the White Sea-Baltic Canal, 227 kilometres long; the Moscow-Volga Canal, 127 kilometres; the Volga-Don Canal, 100 kilometres in length; the reconstruction of

the Mariinsky and Moscow River water systems, together with considerable hydro-technical work required to be carried out in connection with the waterways now in operation, will provide a united system of waterways in the European section of the U.S.S.R. which will connect the White, Baltic, and Caspian Seas."

So wrote Molotov and Kuibyshev. In the ears of the planners of transport sounded the spades, the steam shovels, the hammers of the men who were building the giant enterprises that were still dots on the map. The new world had attacked the old.

2

But there were still enemies within the new world. Resistance to the transformation took many forms. The Soviet Press of the year 1931 recorded accidents and delays. Those who went to the villages to carry on the country's work were prepared to find machines wrecked and plants damaged. In scientific journals and treatises (as later findings proved), "essentially unscientific and untrue hypotheses" were propounded in order to impede and obstruct the nation's progress. The stories of Ananyev the engineer, and of Riesen-kampf give finished pictures of how within the planning organisations themselves this resistance took shape, and such stories show the motives which inspired it. A group of engineers was found to have a well-concerted plan by which they carried on wrecking activities on quite a large scale in machine shops and power plants, in chemical works and mines, and in such enterprises as irrigation works in Central Asia. All this was united into a deliberate attempt to undermine the Soviet regime. These men were not fools. They knew that the Bolsheviks must, in Stalin's words, "either overtake the advanced countries of Europe in ten years or go under." The new regime depended upon the success of the Five Year Plan. The time of armed resistance was over. Now it was the turn of the professors and of the engineers to accomplish what Denikin and Koltchak had failed to do. The Plan had behind it the efforts of an army of millions, the common enthusiasm of an overwhelming majority of the population. The G.P.U. carried out mass arrests among the wreckers, for if they were allowed to continue their activities the Plan might be a failure. Thousands of those who were arrested were sent to labour camps.

But two problems remained unsolved. In the first place the demands of the new enterprises under the Five Year Plan were so enormous that there were hardly enough hands to do the work,

BELOMOR

particularly too little skilled labour. No one who was good for anything could be spared. That was one side of the problem. On the other hand, there was a contrary problem: what was to happen to the thousands of men and women who had been sent for two, three or sometimes ten years to a labour camp? What was to happen to them during their time of detention and what was to happen to them afterwards? Were they to remain branded as criminals for the rest of their lives?

Stalin proposed that the construction of this Canal should be entrusted by the Communist Party to the G.P.U.

It was in 1926 that—in speaking with F. E. Dzerzhinsky—Stalin first raised the question of work with criminals and homeless waifs. Stalin was the initiator of the G.P.U. labour communes and of the policy of reform through labour. Stalin it was who started the idea of building the White Sea-Baltic Canal with prisoners, because under his leadership such a method of reform appeared possible. Work in the U.S.S.R. has in reality become a matter of honour, a matter of glory, a matter of valour and of heroism. Over the entire country there is this new attitude towards work. Labour is no longer a hateful means of existence, but the rational expression of a happy life.

3

What precisely did the planners expect to achieve by the building of this White Sea-Baltic Canal? It was to be much more than an improved and safer route for shipping. In the first place it was intended that the Canal should be a channel by which new life would flow into Karelia itself. There was to be a well-knit system for the development of the whole North West region, a tract greater than that of Central Europe.

In Karelia too, the map was alive—but so far only the map—cities, factories, settlements, appeared on paper where there was in fact only forest and bog; roads were marked that ran through what was indeed still the sighing depths of a forest of pine and birch. In the charts and projects grain was shown rustling in the wind in what were still undrained swamps. The icy brown water of the rivers was to rush into the intake of new turbines: the long night of the polar region was to be lighted by electricity. Where only yesterday people slept on pine needles near dying fires and “the master” or “he” (as the polar bear is called in this region) still sniffed cautiously at the smoky human smell of some little solitary bivouac,

towns with theatres and clubs were marked on the map. Could all this be made real in the three years that the plan allowed?

4

If all this is to be done, first of all come ways of communication, the water route from the White Sea to the Baltic must allow the passage of deep draught vessels. The ocean port is to be at Soroka, the northern extremity of the Canal. Soroka must be changed. The fury of the northern storms must be broken against new breakwaters and ships which now toss in an open roadstead because of the shallows must be able to anchor within their shelter. At the southern end of the Canal—at Svir below the rapids—a new hydro-electric station is to be built. Karelia has deposits of iron, copper and—at Lake Vyg—even gold. Karelian granite is excellent for building. Hitherto this wealth has been not only unused, but even unexplored.

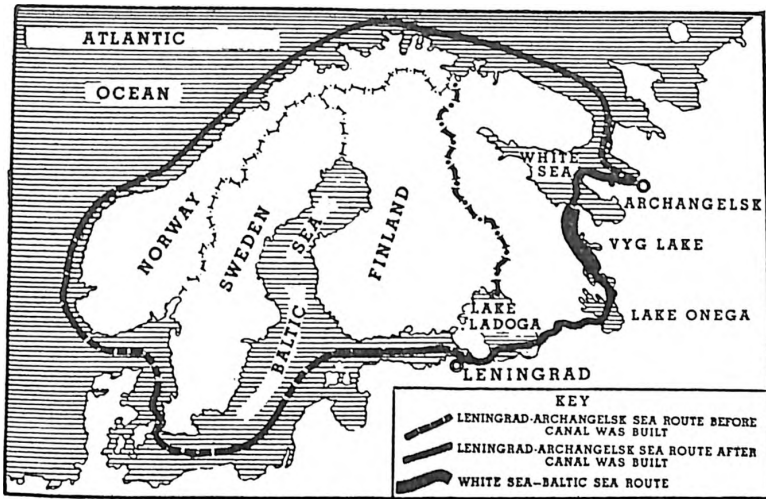
In 1931 Soviet steamers took seventeen days to reach Leningrad from Archangel, which is excessive for a distance of 600 kilometres. The steamers still went round North Cape via the Gulf Stream and turned southwards. But it was sufficient to cut through 240 kilometres of rocks and swamps to open a direct route. A canal here would not only connect the Baltic with the Northern seas, but would become the first section of the Great Northern way: Leningrad, Povenetz, Soroka, Cape Chelyuskin, Bering Strait—Vladivostok.

The White Sea-Baltic Canal will be the most important artery of the Northern regions. If it can be built, it will open up new economic prospects for Karelia, for the Soviet North, for the entire Soviet Union. Grain, salt, oil, metals, machinery, lumber, fish, all sorts of goods will pass through the Canal.

If the Northern shore of Asia and the islands in the Arctic Ocean could be equipped with a system of radio stations provided with aeroplanes, it would be possible actually to observe the movements of the ice and secure uninterrupted navigation in the Arctic Ocean during the summer months. The still savage Arctic regions would come to life.

All the rivers of Soviet Asia flow northward and many are

BELOMOR



navigable. They open into this new Northern sea route. From the new waterways roads will extend in all directions; from Okhotsk-Yudomskaya to the Lena; from Okhotsk-Seychan and Yansk-Lavdon connecting the maritime region with the Kolim and Indigirka river system, in the direction of the Ob and Lena—everywhere some of them are already being constructed. The White Sea-Baltic Canal will be the key to these roads.

The Murmansk Railway will be electrified, beginning with the unwooded section beyond the Arctic Circle. A hydro-electric station is being built for this purpose on the Tuloma River: an auxiliary one is being built on Lake Not. Five hydro-stations for the Southern section of the railway (of the nine that are planned) are being built on the sluices and dams of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, where the River Vyg and Lake Vol roar over the ten-metre high weir.

Fleets are needed for both canals—tugs and barges.

The Petrozavodsk wharves and metallurgical factories are being reconstructed for shipbuilding. Yards for building barges are being constructed at Soroka and Segezha. The newly developed region is to use only its own materials—nothing imported. Iron is to be smelted at the eastern inlet of Lake Onega, at Mount Pudozh, where there are beds of magnetite which contain the rare metals vanadium and titanium. The blast furnaces will use charcoal prepared from waste wood, and local dolomite will be used as flux in the smelting.

And by whose work is all this to be accomplished? This sounds the most Utopian part of the plan, for the work is to be a double

THE PROBLEM

one; the task is to be attempted not by tried heroes of the revolution, but by the very men who have set themselves to work against it; the men who are to forge this new tool for the Five Year Plan are themselves to be re-forged.

STAGE I
WORK BEGINS

Chapter II

THE BIG HOUSE AT THE CORNER OF LUBYANKA

Qualified engineering talent from different places of detention was drawn together to Moscow. To be precise, to the big house at the corner of the Lubyanka. Engineer Vyasemsky, who was brought from Tashkent, was summoned by a representative of the economic department. "Would you like to work in your specialty? projecting?" Yes, yes, he would. Anything you wish, only give him work. He may, he can, he wishes to work. A regular torrent might have flowed from the lips of Orest Valerianovich, but he was a self-controlled person—he simply consented.

He and other Tashkentians "were taken with their belongings," he writes, "and transported in a Black Maria through the streets of Moscow to the Lubyanka. An enormous house had grown up there. We were taken to the very top, into a large hall with a parquet floor, where 120 people were easily quartered. One-half of the hall served as a dormitory with beds furnished with spring mattresses—the other half as a dining-room. The people were well dressed; some even had flowers in their buttonholes; and there was only one man in a uniform cap—the guard. We were informed that we were in the *Osoboye Konstruktorskoye Buro*—O.K.B. (Special Construction Bureau). It turned out that we had been appointed to work on the *Belomorstroy*—White Sea-Baltic Canal."

The Chairman—an elderly professor—called the new arrivals together and delivered a speech in which he stated the technical problems. On the wall there was a chart with the plan of the future waterway. Then a big, heavy-set man got up and began to speak in a calm, somewhat high-pitched voice. This was A. G. Gorianov, the of the Special Construction Bureau who was working under the direct guidance of the chief of the economic department.

"It is necessary to submit to the will of the Bolsheviks," he said. "Prove this by concentrated, honest work. The time limit set for the accomplishment of the Canal is pretty hard. You will get all possible help from the G.P.U.; serious help in every field."

He promised neither privileges nor reward. He only referred to the fact that this sort of work had been done before by former wreckers. The first Soviet steel-rolling enterprise, for instance, had been constructed in record time by former wreckers entirely without foreign help, and had been directed by Engineer Neumayer. It

was noteworthy—the Press had given prominence to it—that this metallurgical enterprise was built entirely by ex-wreckers without foreign aid.

Gorianov sometimes passed by the desks—big, corpulent, calm, a person who could always take care of himself. “He looks like an intellectual,” the engineers used to say, thinking they were flattering the chief behind his back.

He spoke in a quiet, measured way, leaving nothing unanswered. The chairman of the engineers would come and ask him about the problems that arose—what for instance to do with a young engineer who was in a depressed mood and did almost no work.

“Has he been to see the doctor?”

“The doctor? He says it’s nerves. We know that much ourselves... he grumbles and whines.”

“Send him to me.”

The young neurasthenic came. The chief of the Special Construction Bureau began to question him. He gently but steadfastly avoided discussing his troubles. The prisoner suddenly said:

“What beautiful weather, Anatoly Georgevich. Have you ever been at Peterhof on a nice autumn day?”

“Yes, I have.”

The prisoner became animated. The chief let him go and called the assistant.

“We must arrange for a drive in the country for our charges,” he said.

It was no good. Gorianov summoned the young engineer again.

“I cannot stand it any longer, Anatoly Georgevich,” the young engineer almost shouted. “I have a feeling that my little son is ill. My wife writes me that he is well, but I don’t believe her.”

He does not believe his wife, the chief said to the assistant. “We must let him have a visit from his wife out of turn. Let us summon her from Leningrad.”

After the visit the engineer worked with all his might.

A cross little old man, a professor, sometimes got angry and would begin to scold, crying that the Bolsheviks would never be able to manage without them. The little old man forgot that the Bolsheviks and the proletariat had managed even when the entire dormitory were sabotaging by wrecking activity. The little old man grumbled: “Why does this Gorianov poke his nose into the drawings? We were given—well, what shall I say—wide autonomy in that respect.... It is his duty to stay in his office and be in command.

And he pokes around. Do you know he sat with me for an hour and questioned me minutely about the method of working out wooden conductions."

And did he understand?" the little old man was asked.

'He seems to. Not too much of course—well, as much as a second year student, let us say. But what does he want it for? Why such dilettantism? I hate dilettantes."

The supervisor of the projecting division had given Gorianov a complete course of lectures. He had been followed by the hydraulic and construction engineers. Vyasemsky had taught him about concrete. Gorianov had asked questions from which it was evident that he had understood what he had been told.

"He evidently intends to become chief of the construction—if there ever is a construction, of course," they thought in the dormitory.

They liked simple explanations there. But Gorianov was not a dilettante. He was not going to be appointed to work at the Belomor Canal. But what he had done was tactfully to improve the prisoners' frame of mind. He had searched for and had always found a way to rouse and maintain a cheerful efficiency in them. He strengthened it by talks, by taking an interest in their work, by help, by permitting visitors, by arranging outings. Gorianov himself had no time for outings: he managed a complicated institution, and studied at the same time, in order to know what the people in the dormitory knew, and to know how they might make their work obscure and useless. Comrade Gorianov has now received his engineering diploma.

Vyasemsky was given a desk, a set of drawing instruments and books. Among the professors and famous engineers, Vyasemsky was distinguished only by his youth. He was ordered to work out calculations for a canal. Well, let it be a canal then! The pencil in his hand, the slide rule refused to obey. What did the chief say? (He had a thin voice; he made a little movement and choked—a weak heart.) What did he say, what was he hinting at when he mentioned that former project on which wreckers had worked—the "blooming mill?" Yes, I understand. For us good work might spell Liberty. What a remarkable thing a sheet of Whatman's paper spread on a drawing board and fastened with drawing pins is! In prison they don't let you have even a fork, and here—whatever you please—drawing pins, compasses, a pen-knife. Wonderful things; haven't seen them for over five months. To work, to work. And the blue-prints of a drawing like lace—splendour. And the June sunshine

splashing in through the round windows. What storey is this room on? It must be high. And then the walk on the roof garden, and the excellent dinner—from the commanding staffs' dining-room they say.—They say there are doctors, barbers, a shower. Live and work. One may forget everything.

Every prisoner exaggerates the insignificance of his own position and at the same time his own importance. It seems to him sometimes that the prison was built specially for him, that the privileges were invented for him; and now they had even devised the project of some canal! The prisoner shuts himself out of the creative vital process, out of everything that is going on in the life outside; so bright, so complex. Only distant, disconnected sounds find their way into his enclosed world.

2

The story of how this young man, Orest Valerianovich Vyasemsky, came to be in prison began a long time ago. In the spring of 1926 he arrived at Tashkent and called on Engineer Vershbitzky with letters of recommendation from König and Riesen-kampf. Vershbitzky, somewhat dry and sarcastic, received the young man coolly, but attentively. Were it not for the impressive recommendations and the aristocratic name—maybe a prince? —the representative of the Central Technical Group of The Water Ways Economy of Central Asia, would not have deigned to speak to this awkward fellow, who looked more like a fitter than an engineer. They had a talk. Vershbitzky suggested that he call on Engineer Khrustalev, who was chief of the management of the works in the Tchirtchik-Angrensky Basin. But he took more than just an official interest.

“Where are you going to live?” asked Vershbitzky. “You see, I am leaving, you may have my room.”

Vershbitzky's room was comfortable, in accordance with his position. Vyasemsky was in luck. He worked only for a few days on projecting details; he showed his qualification and was promoted on the spot and transferred to the management of the Amu-Daria works under Engineer Baumgarten. There he had to work out plans and estimates. These plans and estimates even in those days were very unsafe. Why unsafe? Because a trained and careful eye could detect in them a deliberate distortion of facts and perspectives, false projects, incorrect orientation, the portent of millions of frozen capital. Vyasemsky worked with Baumgarten dutifully, but

unwillingly. It seemed to him that he could not digest bookkeeping details and pen-pushing. He decided not to stay long on the Amu-Daria job. The management refused to grant him a transfer. The management was disappointed.

Professors Riesenkampf and König were at the head of the wrecking activities in the waterways' institutions of the Union. The engineers Vershbitzky and Khrustalev were the best known and most influential leaders of the wreckers' organisation in Central Asia, where hydro-economy is of chief importance. The wreckers were preparing successors for themselves. Not for wrecking, no—wrecking will not go on for ever. The time will come when there will be restoration, the capitalists will be back again and then they will work honestly. Their instincts and intellect prompted them to look for successors among the young, successors true to their idea. But it was not an easy matter to find among the engineers who had graduated from Socialist universities those who would be ready and willing to defend the idea of the restoration of capitalism in the U.S.S.R.

But young Vyasemsky was such a find. He had grown up in Soviet conditions; he had graduated from a Soviet school. But he was chained to the past by all his memories, by his family's mode of life which is so powerful among these solid bourgeois-intellectual families. Think of it, what a past!

Orest Valerianovich Vyasemsky knew from childhood that he belonged to the same family as the Counts Vyasemsky, and that he was a descendant of the Ruriks. The family was only of the same stock as the counts. The plebeian Vyasemskies made little use of their ancient family connections, which at times became a heavy load and drag on them; the career of a bureaucratic functionary was too petty and unprofitable. Young Engineer Vyasemsky was proud of the fact that he constituted the third generation of railway engineers. His grandfather had constructed the railway from Tashkent to Krasnovodsk, and the famous railway around Lake Baikal and had the rank of privy councillor and all the Russian honorary orders, and even a Chinese and Japanese order. This grandfather was the pride of the family. His son was active in the construction of the Amur and the Armavir-Tuapse railways. Towards the end of his life he became professor at the Imperial Institute of Railway Engineers in St. Petersburg.

The only son, Orest,—our Vyasemsky—received an excellent education. He was taught three languages. He worked with his father at photography and carpentry. He knew from childhood what

the preparation of material meant; and he was preparing to become an engineer when the revolution interrupted the education of a good bourgeois specialist. He graduated in 1924 from the same institute as his father in the eighties, and his grandfather in the sixties. But the name of the institute had been changed and it was now called—the Leningrad Institute of Railway Engineering.

At the Institute there were all kinds of people. For instance a nucleus of the Communist Party, a Trade Union Committee and there were many of the same origin and from the same environment as himself, as well as professors who were utterly hostile to Soviet rule—but who had not yet been exposed. He left the Institute when he was twenty-two. A brilliant student, he graduated early just as his grandfather had done after a most exacting course of studies. The young man was tall and clumsy and did not know what to do with his hands; it would be a long time before he learned this art—he was vainglorious and shy. His face was plain, almost coarse, and marred with moles—the devil knows whether moles are aristocratic or not! He dressed badly—in fact “didn’t trouble about dress”—well, this is the style of a construction engineer, of a pioneer-explorer somewhere in the jungles or the backwoods. But when a vainglorious, ambitious youth from a well-to-do family dresses poorly and carelessly, it is a proof that he despises the mode of life and the society in which he lives. This youth loves meditation, is sulky and inclined to sarcasm. He is inclined to the disdainful sneer of a son disappointed in a father who had squandered his fortune. Yes, the fathers messed up their regime—the capitalist regime—so rich, so generous and so easy for them. They died, and thrust their offspring into a cleft in history, called “the transition period.” One should have been born sixty years earlier or later—earlier preferred. The youth is willing to shorten the transition period. He knows that there will never be Socialism: in his father’s and the professors’ study they repeated over and over again, without stopping, that the N.E.P. (New Economic Policy) was the beginning of the restoration of capitalism.

The youth is nervous and efficient. He feels within himself “the blood of an engineer” (although such a conception is unknown to either physiology or technology). Only it is a pity that the Institute is, after all, Soviet and that the diploma is not that of the Imperial Institute. He will have to prove to his old, esteemed colleagues that this Soviet diploma has been received by a not too pro-Soviet young man. This is very difficult, because the work has to be excellent, and at the same time must not help the Bolsheviks, but the Bolsheviks

are the masters.

Direct from the class-room, the 22-year-old engineer went to work for the concession enterprise "Mologoles." He worked on the measurement of the railway taken over by the firm. It was bad luck that the concession enterprise promised a lot but paid little. Vyasemsky's father died and it became necessary to look for connections and new paths. Vyasemsky turned to his acquaintances and some of them introduced him to Professor Riesenkampf, a waterways specialist. Thus the young man entered the circle of wreckers. He was no longer a railway man; he was working in Daghestan on investigations for the improvement of land. In 1925-1926 he did not believe in Soviet improvement, and level in hand he and other young engineers tramped about the environs of Makhatch-Kala city, tramped about the banks of the canal of the October Revolution from the river Sulak to the river Manas, tramped about the Baccas marshes—malarial spots all the way through. The lads were young. Once accidentally their tent failed to show up, and they lived under a driving rain for three days and did not even catch cold. But the work seemed senseless. "The results of these investigations will never be embodied in the shape of real construction," thought Vyasemsky.

The older specialists busied themselves with other affairs of a somewhat doubtful nature. They lived in tents and padded their expense accounts with living expenses. They would undertake to make a survey for a collective farm, do the work at the office and receive payment for field work. Petty thievery. How does a young counter-revolutionary, true to his idea, feel about that? From family traditions, Vyasemsky undoubtedly knew that in the good old times they used to cheat the treasury. But then it was a matter of tens and hundreds of thousands of gold roubles, and not merely daily expenses in chervonetz. The pettiness of such dishonesty irritated him—was this how they had lived in the days of grandfather Orest Polienovich?

Vyasemsky's chief, the Engineer Emirov, believed that the mountaineers should not be given the lowlands from which they had been driven after the victory over Shamil, and that it was the duty of the department of water economy to correct the most outstanding crime of the Communists in their national policy. But this is nonsense, only a superficial view. To drive a wedge between nationalities, to fool the Ingushetes, Lesgians, Ossetins, Chechens, who trust to revolutionary justice, more than Allah and a holy war, means to return both to Allah and the idea of holy war. To show

skilfully and practically to the Cossack villages (where the ex-ata-man still lives and prospers), where the ideology is in the hands of the Cossack Cornets and non-commissioned officers—to show them that somebody in Soviet economic institutions is working for their good, to strengthen their agitation is a great matter. But Vyasemsky considered this too as intangible. The interests of the Cossack village parasites seemed like a mirage to the young engineer, who in his fancy imagined the blossoming of the liberal bourgeois fatherland. Oh, it will come, it will come imperceptibly!—no shooting! no reaction! imperceptibly!—politely! something like elections to the State Duma.—Politely, provided the blackguards do not resist.... No, no, it will come. And then we'll really begin to build. Then the engineers will flourish. What matter the Von Macks, the Poliakovs, grandfather Orest Polienovich. Young Vyasemsky will throw himself into projecting and production. No loitering in malarial swamps receiving pennies and acting as a white crow in a bevy of petty larceny specialists. The fathers have let the power slip; the fathers are decaying in Daghestan; the fathers correct some little things in the central institutions and reinvent some little practical work in the Tashkent water department. But even here they are hard and cold. If you don't want to work with Baumgarten on dangerous estimates—then take care of yourself.

“During the first months of my work in Tashkent I had no connections, but from acquaintances and through official channels I learned that a scientific institute of water economy is being organised; I liked this undertaking, as I do any kind of research work. Work in an institution undertaking rationalisation work in water economy seemed suitable to me.

“One fine morning in June 1926 I called at the Institute, which was under the management of the water economy. I entered the office of the administration and saw a man with a young face but grey hair. This was the director, V. D. Jurin.”

Jurin was one of the most interesting figures in Tashkent at the time. Even now Jurin stands in the front rank of Soviet engineering. He headed the projecting department of Belomorstroy brilliantly, and is now at the head of the projecting department of the Moscow-Volga Canal, where he is devoting all his strength and great ability to the work of building up Socialism. But at the time of his first acquaintance with Vyasemsky he was different.

At Tashkent he was shoved back into scientific investigation work. The old hierarchy of pre-war salaries, relationship with former industrialists, and personal connections with Riesenkampf

predominated at Tashkent. Jurin was too young for them. He forced his way heroically along Soviet lines. He was poor. In 1921 while dean of a faculty he walked barefooted to the University. For people with fat salaries in the recent past this was somewhat too eccentric. He belonged to the intermediate generation, did not get there in time to make a career under the bourgeoisie—he was only 27 years old in 1917—and as a matter of fact lived to regret it. He desired to play an active role in the wreckers' organisation. He undertook the organisation of ideology; the wreckers used to meet in his drawing-room on Fridays. Friday was the Moslem day of rest. In those days it was observed just as Sunday was in Moscow, and it is easy to imagine how much jesting there was in the drawing-room about the respect of the Soviet Government for national religious prejudices. The list of visitors to this drawing-room included Livanov, Ananyev, Ladigin, Khrustalev, Vershbitzky and Budassy—bigwigs in the past and men of business at present. What relations, what connections abroad! But Jurin—witty and merry, an indefatigable worker, the host-organiser—was worth something too. On one occasion Vyasemsky saw the bigwigs dividing up some money. A drawing-room where obscurely obtained money is divided up is called “a raspberry” or a “shalman.” But only later Vladimir Dmitrievich Jurin found this out—at Belomorstroy.

For Vyasemsky, Jurin represented a support, a prop. He helped the young man on, made him secretary of the Institute, advanced him as a lecturer. From this grumpy, inert young man, as he seemed to the water economy management bosses, Jurin, a pedagogue and organiser, succeeded in drawing out, if not all his abilities—he had no real scope—at least the assurance of these abilities. Jurin was playing a difficult game. After the Shakta case, after the arrest of Ramzin, he applied for admission to the Communist Party. In handing in his application, Jurin acted on the principle that all's fair in love and war. If conspiracy is the game, then let it be conspiracy. The master—his father-in-law Budassy, or whoever else there may be—will come to see that in reality it was he, Jurin, that showed courage and not they. He penetrated into the very camp of the enemy. To grumble, mutter and play loyalty is nonsense. But to participate in the sessions of the Communist nucleus and wreck at the same time—that was something.

Vyasemsky was young and ambitious. About the of his modest successes at Tashkent, a new ideology arrived: the Technocratic Dream. One Tashkentian technocrat would say to another: “Great idea! H. G. Wells himself is preaching the right of the engineers to

governmental power.”

The conversation would run on government by the Industrial Party. It is impossible of course to come to a peaceful understanding with the Bolsheviks. They have to be overthrown. So runs the story of how Vyasemsky came to be in prison.

During the first days in the big house on the corner of the Lubyanka, Vyasemsky did not reason, he just enjoyed himself: a desk, a set of drawing instruments, a slide rule. In his work he was building a bridge between himself and life on the other side of the prison wall. So far he only perceived that these canal calculations were similar to those real calculations which he had made in the past. In the meantime a bond with the world developed, an industrial bond. He did not notice it as yet. The canal seemed a fantasy. It is true that with the fantasy of a canal one does not have to rot in the barracks of a remote camp, but may live in excellent lodgings, mingle with decent people, and not with dangerous thieves and wreckers.

Here it is possible to rise in the world. You work side by side with great people. You are cheek by jowl with professors and leaders. They will help you, you must hold on to them. It is a pity that they give you such a trifle—a canal. But everything begins with trifles. This is what simmered within Vyasemsky, while he worked silently at his desk. His sensations were manifold, his hopes naive and great; words could not describe them.

This young man was climbing into politics, and did not understand a thing. He was still struggling for the past. But the Communist Party and the G.P.U. thought of his future. The Party and the G.P.U. were telling him through the Special Construction Bureau: you were a criminal, a wrecker, a counter-revolutionary. You thought the might of Socialism so weak that it would be crushed by a Basmak raid, or by your wrecking activities; and that you would then get back your much desired capitalism. But the Government exposed you and the secret intrigues of your associates, and now, it takes a slice of this reality, a part of the Socialist plan—the Belomorstroy—measures a tiny dose for you and it will cure you, the criminal, with the truth of Socialism.

But days passed, the Tashkentians were getting used to the work and Vyasemsky was getting used to his new surroundings. Around Vyasemsky sat people who had left the Butirk prison before him. These old-timers drew, calculated, discussed the project. Pretty soon he understood that they had no belief in a canal that was to be constructed for no known purpose, somewhere in the

Tundra or may be in the Taiga by incompetent workers: concentration camps for prisoners, bandits, petty thieves and women of easy morals. They made drawings and calculated, but they did not believe that these calculations would ever be translated into real locks, feeding canals, rivers held up by dams out in the tangled forests of Karelia.

One hundred and twenty people worked in order to convince whomever it might concern, that they could, might, and would, work on a more useful and important matter than this fantastic canal; and Vyasemsky, unknown to himself, was penetrated by the same desire to show himself capable of some rational work in the future. He, the youngest of them all, could draw, calculate and contrive as well as any of them. The main thing was not to think that life was interrupted, shattered. At the age of twenty-nine he had worked out a consistent career, an independent course as a technician; thirty scientific papers, valuable under any regime—most of them published. But everything had been shattered. In the dormitory they said, "The only thing left is to live somehow until we die." He listened and agreed. He drew, calculated and thought. He thought, as it seemed to him, of the very root of things.

A respectable, whiskered engineer said in his presence to Gorianov, the chief of the Special Construction Bureau:

"If we could only take this canal matter seriously! Really, it would be profitable both for the country and for ourselves."

So, you think that it is not serious," asked Gorianov.

The bearded fellow protested. He protested because he considered that the measures of the Soviet Government—except those directed personally against him—are never serious.

Private enterprise is a serious matter, but the removal of private trading from the market is a fad. The Kulak very seriously holds back the grain, but the liquidation of the Kulak is not seriously devised. Thus, they had to be convinced that the Belomor Canal was not a serious matter.

From calculating, references to old projects looked over and corrected with blue pencil, from the entire pile of folders, one thing became clear: the project was a very difficult one. A thing like this cannot be accomplished by application only. It cannot be overcome even by years of work. It is necessary to take risks, and invent and improvise, but how can one invent in prison? In prison one thinks of how to get away, and here one had to contrive and calculate. They calculated from habit, from habit they turned to the slide rule—nay, grabbed for it. The slide rule and the adding machine

BELOMOR

seemed a means of salvation, even though they had no faith in the project.

“You see,” the engineer was thinking, “I am useful; I can do this. You see what complicated calculations I am doing for you!”

But the calculations had their conclusions and these conclusions had no joy in them.

Most of the old specialists who worked there were not old hydrologists. The hydrologists, hydrotechnicians, irrigation specialists, collected here knew their work; but most of them had worked in a different climate, the climate of Central Asia, where there are different atmospheric precipitations and different soil. And most important of all, they had worked at a different speed and on comparatively insignificant constructions.

They projected all day long. They got up in the morning. The trams were already passing down there in the street, beyond the round windows. From early morning there would come the thoughts of the impossibility of the project. The thoughts were simple, convincing as the address of your own flat to which you cannot now return.

3

The project was difficult. The main thing was that the geology of the region, especially in the northern part, was not sufficiently known. The glaciers created very complex tangled-up ground in Karelia. They left in their wake long hills of sand, layers of gravel, sand and quicksands; like a rag passing over a kitchen table and leaving ridges of

Twice did the glaciers go through Karelia—advancing and then retreating. Then underground forces raised the entire Scandinavian Peninsula. The rise was not uniform, and the ground is contorted; the strata have been washed away and in places stand up on end: great surprises may be expected here when the work is begun. The rock comes up to the surface at some spots, at others it is covered by unexpected alluvial strata. The entire ground is covered with peat, as though with a sour black crust, and you cannot build anything on peat.

The project is difficult. Hydrologically Karelia is *terra incognita*.

The rise and fall of the rivers has not been verified, and most important of all, Karelia is a land of uncertain weather. There is not a single month in the summer without frosts, or in the winter

without a thaw. It is therefore a land where it will be difficult to pour concrete, and where unexpected thaws will be particularly dangerous. In hydrological constructions water is both a friend and an enemy. Locks and canals live by water. But water washes away your constructions. During construction it is necessary to accumulate water, especially in the watershed sections. As the water accumulates, it becomes ever more threatening. Thus, you yourself must raise an enemy and this enemy gets more dangerous every day.

It is a complex project. The entire length of the waterway is 227 kilometres; 80 kilometres have to be passed through canalised lakes, 97 kilometres through flooded rivers, 47 kilometres through artificial canals, and 2.3 kilometres over the Morskoye Canal. There will have to be a rise from Lake Onega to the watershed. The rise can be planned in seven locks. To diminish the expenditure of water, it may be best to construct the locks in two sections, but who knows what the soil will be under the foundation of these locks?

The descent from the watershed to the White Sea is planned in 12 locks, of which 5 are to be single-section locks. There are to be 19 locks in all. Five dams are to be constructed for regulating the levels and the expenditure of water on the river Vyg, Nadvoitzkaya, Shavanskaya, Palo-Korgskaya, Matkoznenskaya and Vygostrovskaya. Each dam presents a separate problem. What soil there will be underneath is unknown. The dam raises the water level; therefore the water basin will have to be surrounded by dykes. These dykes will have to be joined with the dams, and joints are a weak sore spot in hydrotechnical constructions.

And then—what building materials are to be used? How, and from where, are such quantities of cement to be brought to Karelia? And how is concrete to be poured in the winter? Where is the iron for reinforcing the concrete constructions to be obtained? And iron workers for the iron, and concrete workers for the concrete? “A seigniorial pastime,” said the engineers to themselves.

Beyond the walls the entire U.S.S.R. kept on repeating the words: “Socialism,” “shock-work,” “collective farm construction,” “Socialist competition.” In the dormitory they read these words in the newspapers silently. They did not pronounce them. They endeavoured not to think of their meaning. And by no means did they connect these words with their own fate.

O.K.B., “Special Construction Bureau,” Okabe, Okabist—these conceptions are to-day first-class factors in the personal and industrial biography of many engineers. The O.K.B. has led them out to

BELOMOR

liberty, has turned their convictions upside down, has given them well-merited fame. But at that time it never occurred to them that the O.K.B. was a link in the common chain. The great decisive change in social relations—the entrance into the era of Socialism—dictating also a new point of view in the policy of reforming prisoners through work. This regime was first started in the far north, in the camps at the Solovetsky Islands; where the foundations of labour as a method of educating the criminal were laid. But the Uslag—the institution there—had to be self-supporting; all its enterprises, Soviet farms and workshops were intended primarily for providing the supplies for the institution. The idea of O.K.B. and Belomorstroy was a profoundly Socialistic idea. A mighty political intelligence was poured into the work of the prisoner: he was here to be employed not in serving the needs of his own imprisonment, but in helping to build a social order where there will be no crime. This was the source of that great, at first uncomprehending, uprush of enthusiasm and the self-denying desire to put the job through that was so characteristic of the Belomorstroy, and that made it a phenomenon of world-wide significance.

Vyasemsky lost the timidity with which he had come from the prison to the dormitory. The prison was far behind him now. But strange as it may seem, his resentment against the G.P.U. had not diminished because of the lightness of his punishment. Since he was allowed to work at the Special Construction Bureau, it followed that he could and should be allowed to work in freedom. Around him they worked fiercely. The man at the desk next to him complained:

“Last night I stayed up a little late—I was drawing the belts for the sixth lock, you know, and imagine! Suddenly in comes the janitor and declares: ‘You must go to bed. Everybody is asleep. It is past midnight.’ Took away the papers, closed the books, rolled up the drawings. I am entering a complaint against the janitor. The devil, they won’t even let you work.”

However, the complaints received no attention and they kept on sending them to bed in time. Everybody, from the chief to the janitor, distributed his time accurately. And it appeared that in spite of the enormous amount of work there was plenty of free time. Everybody gladly received medical treatment, especially dental treatment. The Russian intellectual always neglects his teeth.

Day after day customs and usages were being established, conflicts took place, relations were established and broken off, quarrels cropped up, mere squabbles and also quarrels on matters of

principle. There were a few free men working at the O.K.B. This fact served as convincing evidence that the Belomorstroy project was not an idle undertaking, but a serious matter. If there was any sense in occupying the prisoners with such an idle suggestion, it would have been absolutely absurd to draw free people into it, and throw away money on their salaries.

The group of workers from Central Asia was working its way up. It was coming to the fore. It was not for nothing that these engineers had worked in the largest region of water economy in the land. Celebrities, professors, venerable old men, paid close attention to the voices of these experienced provincials. The technical Council was the supreme technical authority of the O.K.B. There the basic problems of the project were decided and approved. There the voices of Khrustalev, Vershbitzky, Jurin, Budassy, Poradzenko and Livanov sounded more and more significantly and Vyasemsky also put in a word. He completed a study of an emergency bar and lock gates. The old specialists thrust his considerations aside. It was a struggle for authority. He proved the correctness of his construction. He said: "Well, I shall demonstrate it in practice."

And he did not believe in the practice, in the realisation. An insoluble contradiction!

During that summer of 1931 they spoke about their infatuation with their work—sometimes with a smile. "We are helping in a seignorial diversion." In a whisper of course; but still, a seignorial diversion is more agreeably than being locked up in a cell.

Before their trials the G.P.U. had seemed something like the Spanish Inquisition, and now, whatever it was, it was no inquisition.

They were getting used to the mode of life. The regime was severe, rigidly measured by hours, by minutes. They got up, breakfasted and went to work. A walk, dinner, rest, work, personal affairs. A prisoner has lots of little affairs, and the venerable professor—the chairman—had his hands full. One asked for permission to have some things delivered to him out of turn, another reported that his wife was being evicted, and had to be protected; the daughter of the third had been refused admission to school; the fourth said his mother had come, would it not be possible for him to see her? There was an hour for reading newspapers and an hour for radio, when they all listened to a lecture, concert or opera.

"A cultural prison, a boarding-house," someone would say pitifully.

“Konstantin Andreyevich, have you got Hütte? Pass it over please.”

“Any reference books can be ordered,” was the answer. “They are delivered almost on the same day.”

4

The project is difficult. The whole way, from the lake canal in Povenetz Bay, Lake Onega, to its junction with the Morskoye Canal in Soroka Bay, has to be studied. The geology of every one of the 227 kilometres of the route must be thoroughly investigated; prospecting wells must be bored, topographical surveys must be made, levelling work must be done.

The geological bed, laid out by the eternal work of nature must be studied. It would be sheer madness to start without this study.

For the realisation of the project three things are necessary: time, time and time again. Engineers are lavish in their creative work but the Bolsheviks still urge them on, for the construction must be carried through in a certain period of time. Otherwise it may result in a miscarriage instead of a mature project.

Twenty months is the time limit set for the construction of the canal. By May, 1933, the canal must become an operating waterway of the U.S.S.R.

On April 18, 1931, the final task was formulated by a decree of the Council of Labour and Defence. The depth was specified. All preparatory work for the draft project previous to this decree was almost completely superseded by the new requirements. The plan had to be created anew. The basic directions for the elaboration of the project laid down in three points: to build the canal in twenty months, to apply the simplest and cheapest designs, and to use materials for construction of which there was no shortage in the country.

Engineer S. Y. Zhuk, who was put at the head of the projecting department of Belomorstroy, carried out these instructions. Zhuk had a remarkable intuition for sane proposals and for developing vital ideas, recognising them in their embryonic state among an enormous number of inferior, cowardly, risky or fantastic proposals. The imprisoned engineers from the very start recognised in him the merits of a leader and organiser of the entire creative process of projecting the canal. Zhuk was a “hired” man, and therefore separated from Vyasemsky, Maslov, Zubrik, Jurin and the other imprisoned engineers by a radical difference in circumstances. He was an engineer of high standing, he had graduated from the institute

of Ways of Communication with excellent marks, and had risen to his position at Belomorstroy through a series of large-scale hydro-technical constructions which he had accomplished independently.

He spoke the language understood by engineers.

Zhuk was a man with a biography irreproachable from the Soviet point of view—one of that better part of the technical intelligentsia, which had quickly realised the huge possibilities opened up for them by the Soviet regime. Many hydrotechnical engineers suffered from hydrophobia, sticking to the offices. Zhuk was the exact opposite. In 1925, still a comparatively young engineer, he left a safe position with the Leningrad Hydrotechnical Trust, his flat, and comfortable mode of life, and took up a modest position as works superintendent for the construction of a lock on the river Sheksna.

Since this first contact with water, not on a drawing, but in its physical reality, and up to the completion of Belomorstroy, for which he was rewarded with the Order of Lenin, he was a man with a single purpose; he wanted to work on hydrotechnical constructions.

The hydrotechnical construction with which he was now entrusted not only exceeded the limits of the ordinary, but was expected to upset century-old hydrotechnical traditions.

The anticipation of the complexity and novelty of the work gave him enormous pleasure.

The Belomorstroy project was accomplished by a group of imprisoned engineers under Zhuk's guidance.

Every project of technical construction represents the result of a collective effort. Often it is hard to establish personal authorship, even in cases where the bounds of the individual creation separate one member of the group very clearly from the others.

The technical problem which the Belomorstroy project had to solve was first and foremost a problem of speed. It was Zhuk's task to direct the creative process along the shortest lines, and to secure the selection of essential inventive ideas. This intuitive selection was inherent in him in the highest degree. As chief of staff he had not only to build up by intuition a complete technical picture of the construction, but also to sense the concrete technical individuality of each engineer, in order to be able to distribute the elements of the construction wisely among them and to foster the embryo of a vital idea. Sometimes the embryo promised to become twins, and a decision had to be reached as to which phase of the idea was to be

BELOMOR

sacrificed, or how to rear both of them.

Engineers Maslov, Vyasemsky, Vershbitzky, Zubrik and Jurin, who found brilliant technical solutions, felt that these solutions had been found or devised by this Belomor project itself, which only yesterday seemed fantastical to them. They began to be afraid of their own ideas. The past indifference to the project was broken down.

On the first of July, 1931, the draft project of Belomorstroy was approved by the Special Committee. The planning authorities proceeded to examine the project, but without waiting for official confirmation the draft project was sent out to the job, to Bear Hill.

There they had already begun to dig the excavations.

Chapter III

THE G.P.U. MEN

This was how the work on the White Sea-Baltic Canal looked from the point of view of the imprisoned engineers in their big room at the corner of the Lubyanka.

Look at the affair through the eyes of the G.P.U. men. At any rate the G.P.U. men had experience. Belomorstroy—The White Sea-Baltic Canal—was not the G.P.U.'s first enterprise of the kind. There had been oil borings carried out in the same way, and there was the Solovetsky Islands camp.

Berman, of the G.P.U., began to work at the Head Office of the Concentration Camps—Gulag they called it (making the word from the initial letters of its full title in Russian).

The first month passed.

The Chekists (officers of the G.P.U.) were summoned to “Gulag” one after another. Conversations something like the following took place:

“You will be given one thousand healthy men. They have been condemned by the Soviet Government for various terms. With these people you are to accomplish the work.”

“But permit me to ask where are the warders?”

“The warders you will organise on the spot. You will select them yourselves.”

“Very well; but I know nothing about oil?”

“Get the imprisoned Engineer Dukhanovich to be your assistant.”

“What good is he? His specialty is the cold drawing of metals.”

“What do you want? Are we to condemn the professors you require to concentration camps? There is no such clause in the Penal Code. And we are not the Oil Syndicate.”

And that was what they had to work on when they left. A crazy affair.

After a month or two some of them would come to headquarters on some mission. They would call on Berman and begin to boast, each trying to outdo the other.

“I’ve got a colonel who’s the best lumberjack in the entire camp.”

“And do you know Sizov? You don’t?” another would say with devastating pity. “Eight convictions, 17 trials. He is a fellow that will make a real boring expert. I already foresee it. Even now he knows

BELOMOR

the entire terminology and speaks it as if it were thieves' Latin. And he can tell through what strata the drill is passing by the way it grips."

"I have a field engineer on excavation work—an ex-cashier-embezzler."

The colonel's partisan does not by any means intend to be beaten.

"Who writes the notices you put up?" he asks spitefully. Everybody is silent. "Shame. They don't know yet who writes out their notices."

He waited tactfully for a reply. Someone says at last. "What's the odds! Notices...." indifferently.

And then he tells them:

"The fellow who writes out my notices is a bank-note forger."

Berman reads reports about escapes.

There were few escapes. On the other hand, reports began to come you could not read without being stirred. A report came from Solovetsky Islands.

2

A little steamboat whose crew contained not a single hired free man but where on the other hand the "Penal Code" was represented very picturesquely, sailed on a fishing trip.

The little steamboat bumped along through the White Sea. It was tossed about like a shell on the waves.

Guba, the boatswain, went down to the lower deck. Before he became boatswain, Guba had already been tattooed all over his body. On his chest a mermaid splashed his left nipple with her tail. Young dolphins were playing with the calves of his legs.

"Brothers," said Guba, "I don't like the atmosphere. We're off the map. I am telling you. The captain's wife is sitting on three suitcases like a broody hen. She is dressed up as if she were getting ready to visit the seals. Let's go to the captain and ask him about the course."

Guba had had a feeling of respect for family life from his very childhood. At the age of seven he had known there may be unforeseen circumstances in every family. He knocked politely at the door of the cabin.

The captain came out, stern, wide awake, all buttoned up.

"Citizen Captain, we don't want to interfere with your personal affairs. Your wife is a charming girl," said Guba gallantly. "What

interests us is the boat's course."

The captain turned his back and started for the bridge.

After rudeness like this Guba could not maintain the pose of an intellectual. He grabbed the captain by the shoulder and spun him round so that they were face to face.

Guba hesitated for a minute.

"I shall have to pass a second season at that health resort," thought Guba and hit the captain on the ear.

The captain staggered and said:

"You will answer for this."

Guba knew that himself. He was interested in something else.

"What is the course?" asked Guba again and landed an uppercut on the captain's chin.

"Do you want a thick ear?" demanded Guba, having no more doubt about the case. The captain could only escape by getting overboard.

He confessed that he was heading towards Norway.

"Norway means nothing in our young lives." Shouted the crew in chorus.

The crew took the steamer into Murmansk.

It was Berman who went to report to the board on this little incident.

When it was decided to make use of the exiled Kulaks, Berman was one of those who started out to find settlements for the deportees. He visited northern Kazakstan, Siberia and Vishera.

Berman went to meet a train-load of Kulaks. The Kulaks reluctantly got out of the cars. He gathered them round him. The women began to wail just in case....

"Quiet," said Berman, "you needn't worry. The fields at home have already been sown by the collectives. You will never find the way back to the old farms. Forget your past life and don't fret yourselves ill. Here is the commandant. Settle down together. What regime are you going to live under? You will live under the Soviet regime," said Berman. "Pull together as a kolkhoz and you will be treating me to meat dumplings yet."

Berman sent a plan to Moscow for a special informal kind of collective suitable for Kulak settlements.

Some time later he began to receive reports from the settlement hospitals; the women were beginning to become pregnant. Everything was in order.

Berman made the round of the camps. It seemed that all the dregs and scum of the country were concentrated here. The

BELOMOR

counter-revolution was collected here as in a well-arranged museum.

Boarding a train at Tynda station, Berman noticed a tall man in pince-nez.

Berman called the man over. He had a military gait.

“Are you one of General Popelayev’s men?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ah, then we are old acquaintances.”

The acquaintance dated back to a time when seven thousand priests in lilac-coloured cassocks and army officers in blue-grey uniform coats had started a rebellion. The battle had raged for six days in the streets of Tomsk. Berman had been chief of the red machine gun squads.

“We fought for six days,” Berman recalled, “and were compelled to retreat along the river Ob. The Czechs were coming to aid the rebellion.” And now to-day there stood before him the aide-de-camp of General Popelayev. It turned out that this was his tenth year in the camp, a rare case.

Berman asked the aide-de-camp.

“Why don’t you shave?”

The other answered that he was not going to shave until he was set free.

“Yes, they are not all of them doves,” thought Berman. “Why doesn’t he escape? The guards are few and far between, trains pass through every day, and on either side of the tracks there is forest, before you know it you are out on the old highway.”

And suddenly the thought which had entered his mind more than once of late and which was now firmly established in his consciousness became translucently clear to him.

In the cuff of his coat Berman carried the little newspaper published by the local camp.

This issue of the paper published a letter from a man who had escaped from the camp. He was now at liberty and was living at Simferopol.

Here is what he wrote:

“I earnestly request you to announce through the newspaper to all ex-thieves that there is a strange movement on foot here and everywhere, lawbreakers are renouncing crime and going to work. The criminal world is being deserted. An end is coming to everything we used to live by!”

“This was written by a thief,” Berman thought. “And what is the adjutant to do?” No, he has no place to fly to. If he escapes from the

camp, he may hide from the G.P.U. agents for a time, but how can he elude the thousands of ordinary simple people in the streets, on the country roads and on the platforms of small railway stations. He will meet a girl with a yoke for carrying pails of water on her shoulders and she—a komsomol. In the field he will meet a child—a pioneer.

“No, there is nowhere for you to escape to, Adjutant!” thought Berman, smiling.

“If you tell me to, I can shave,” said the bearded man warily.

He was still standing alongside. “That is your personal affair,” answered Berman unconcernedly as he stepped into the train.

A dense, snow-covered forest, passed by the window, faster and faster.

3

The human material was certainly varied enough.

Far away at Karaganda, Berman gathered the prisoners near the mine.

They stood in a crowd, dressed in black tarpaulin coats with canvas wallets over their shoulders. In the wallets they had their sets of mining tools. When they moved, the iron clinked morosely.

“How are you getting on?” Berman asked them.

“We want to get away,” cheerfully answered a peasant with a full moustache, who looked like a corporal.

“How long have you been here that you have so much love for liberty?”

“No matter for how short a time, one wants to be home just the same,” answered the peasant.

“It depends on you,” said Berman.

“We are all dependent, we shall stop here until we are worn down to the roots.”

Berman caught sight of a young lad with malicious lips.

“What a lively fellow you are,” said Berman jokingly.

“You can’t help being lively when you’re pricked.”

“What article of the code is pricking you.”

The lad did not answer.

“It is not article fifty-eight, paragraph ten?”¹ asked Berman again. “That and some other articles, too,” was shouted from the crowd. Then an old man stepped to the front.

¹ Counter-revolutionaries infringe Article 58 of the Soviet Legal Code.

BELOMOR

“Citizen chief, let’s have the truth; the older men are here for peasant jobs and the younger ones for interfering with other people’s jobs. They’re real Kulaks here, even if they have no bellies.”

“And aren’t you in the same box?”

“No,” answered the old man good-humouredly. “I am of proletarian blood, a regular peasant, but I sold my soul to the priest.

The crowd laughed.

“What are you laughing at?” The old man was surprised. “Had it not been for the priest, father Ivan, I should have been the chief of my kolkhoz.”

The old man straightened his shoulders.

“Truly the priest led me into temptation. I was going along on some community errand and he met me and beckoned to me with his finger as if I had been a little chick. I could not pass him. I went up to him and kissed his hand. He made the sign of the cross on me. And I looked around to see if anybody saw us.

“‘Community business, father, I am in a hurry, in a great hurry.’ Father Ivan put his hand under my arm. I had never had such respect from him.

“You are always busy with community affairs, but do you ever stop to think about your soul?”

“Well, I made signs to him with my eyes—‘keep quiet, don’t start preaching in public.’

“But he git hold of my hand and would not let go. I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“Tell me Alexeich, why is there such a strong aroma of lime trees in the bee garden near your collective farm?”

“So that is what the devil is after,” thought I.

“As per usual,” says I, “the bees brought it.”

“You see, the bees have brought their honey, and you still owe me for Easter. You ought to bring me a little honey.”

“And what do you think—he persuaded me. Thought I, ‘I am an honest man and just, never kept another man’s property, let me settle with the priest; look how he clings to me, it’s a shame.’ So I went to the kolkhoz bee garden and took out a frame. And so I settled with the priest, but there was a scandal at the kolkhoz.

“Have you been here long?”

“No, I have just started.”

“Well, you will work here a little and then return to the kolkhoz,” Berman encouraged him.

“I am not troubling,” said Alexeich, “I am ashamed to go back to the kolkhoz. I’ll do a lot of coal mining here. I evidently made a

little mistake in my old age.”

Berman noticed that some of the people smiled sympathetically, when Alexeich told his story. Berman immediately felt that he had somebody to fall back upon in the old man and in these people.

It seemed to these few men when Berman began to speak that he singled them out of the crowd and drew them towards him.

“Have you been told about the camp regulations and how to get your discharge sooner?” began Berman, in the same manner as on many previous occasions.

The crowd was silent. Although they had been told about this more than once, they preferred not to admit it, hoping to hear from the big chief something that might have been left out by the little chiefs.

Then listen to me, said Berman, watching them all the time, noticing how different prisoners reacted, their gestures, their smiles and the wrinkles on their faces. “There are all sorts of people imprisoned in the camps. There are priests, speculators, all sorts of crooked business men. In our camp there are real counts, real land-owners, princesses, maids of honour of His Majesty’s court. There are also spies,—these are the foulest, scrubbiest people.”

While talking, he endeavoured to keep his eye on the whole silent crowd.

Many of his listeners thought that the people he mentioned were really bad people, and that it was right to keep them at the Solovetsky islands, but that they themselves were different.

“But there are also others in the camp,” said Berman, pointing at Alexeich. “Let us take this man for example. He was honest towards the priest, but stole from the kolkhoz. Such acts can’t be left unpunished; but he has been in sympathy and remains in sympathy with us. Our first care at the camp is for him. A working man is sent here for shedding blood because he was jealous of his wife, or for hurting someone in a brawl. No one should be permitted to do such things without punishment. But we must prevent this worker who has got into trouble from falling under the influence of the counter-revolutionaries, who have been sent here for entirely different things. There is only one Chekist-communist at the camps to take care of thousands of active enemies of the Soviet Government.”

BELOMOR



BERMAN

Here they all exchanged glances and suddenly noticed that the chief who was speaking to them so calmly and seriously was standing alone in the midst of the prisoners, and it seemed wonderful to them.

“So,” continued Berman, “this is what we do. We turn to the working men, the collective farmers, the Soviet employees condemned to camp imprisonment, and tell them, the road for your return to your factory or kolkhoz before your terms expire is not closed, provided you show us here that you work loyally and honestly and will help us to take care of and re-educate the counter-revolutionaries.

Well, article 35¹—raise your hands,’ said the chief suddenly. Somehow it sounded inoffensive and friendly.

A few people in the crowd raised their hands sheepishly.

“Who are these people? Before the establishment of the Soviet Government they stole from the bourgeoisie and under the Soviet Government they have not given up their thieving profession, and continue to get their living in the same manner. They have not understood that it’s different now and that it is possible to work and earn one’s living honestly. Among them there are people so talented and good by nature that it would be criminal not to give them proper attention. We educate them and direct their every step. They become good citizens. I can cite an example....”

And Berman told them about the thief Volodya Kylishenko. At camp he became an artist and a worker in the educational field, and now he is deputy chief of the trade union cultural department at Magnitogorsk.

“And I shall become a chauffeur,” shouted someone in the crowd, seemingly as a jest.

“Yes, you will be a chauffeur,” said the chief, very seriously. “With us everything depends on the work. The better you work, the sooner you become a skilled worker and the sooner you get your freedom. Therefore we say to all the prisoners: You have broken the Soviet laws and you must expiate your guilt by persistent work. And if the working class, the masters of the country, standing at the helm at Magnitostroy, at Uralmashstroy, at Kuznetskstroy, are suffering privations, if they, the masters of the land, work so hard, then you who have been hindering them must work still harder....”

And Berman kept on talking until he had told these people who

¹ Persons guilty of crimes against the social order.

had come here against their wills, those cardinal and important things that were expected from him by the crowd, because of which, strictly speaking, they were all listening to him, the things that transformed their present life into an avenue to the future.

Berman examined the barracks, the bakery, the baths and the camp dispensary.

A middle-aged woman in the laundry handed him a note. Her face was covered with condensed steam drops as if by a mask.

Berman thought that this was one of the usual petitions asking for a revision of her case.

He always tried to answer all petitions and declarations on the spot, he began to read the paper.

“I have never experienced real human joys and sorrows. Everything has been unreal, absurd as in a nightmare. I am over forty. I am the daughter of a landowner in the Provinces. At the age of thirteen I was placed in a convent. I spent twenty-six years there. I have two passions that burn and consume me. The hatred of God started in my youth. I was afraid of this passion, but it got hold of me completely. I am possessed by it. The second passion is an insatiable, inexorable thirst for work. No one knows the curse of inactivity as well as I do. Quiescence is the greatest curse. I want to live, I am already living.”

4

Berman was astonished by the elderly woman's passionate yearning for a new life. Welding into one whole everything that he had seen, experienced and learned during this time at the camps, he was astounded by the novelty and the magnitude of this thing, about which Yagoda had spoken to him long ago in Moscow. He felt that the work had already taken hold of him completely. He was eager to think, invent and push on just that very work with which he had at first been unable to identify himself.

From Karaganda, Berman left for the North—for Vishera.

At Vishera they were constructing a paper-mill. The buildings had already been raised. The winds blew through the paneless windows. Berman got influenza and took to his bed towards evening.

The local doctor, nurse and surgical assistant came to see him.

Poor Berman was lying on a bed, close to a wall made of whole pine logs. There was a smell of turpentine in the room. It seemed to him, as he lay, that a cricket kept incessantly chirping in his ear. This was unbearable. He tried to press his ear as close as possible

to the pillow. The chirping continued.

The doctor began to examine him. It seemed awkward to Berman to show himself naked and sick to these people who were his subordinates.

Berman pulled on his shirt, covered himself with his blanket and asked the physician his name.

“Ginsberg,” answered the other with restraint.

Ginsberg had oily eyes, like ripe olives.

“What are you imprisoned for?” asked Berman again.

“Article 58, paragraph 10, apply the cups, Pete,” said the doctor in a monotone.

Pete’s hands were depressingly heavy. When he touched the naked back, there was a cold, wet sensation.

Pete applied the cups with evident delight, and when he took them away they popped like shots.

Lying face downwards, Berman asked him:

“How long have you been working as assistant surgeon?”

“This is my third month,” answered Pete.

“What did you do before that?” asked Berman, still hoping for something.

“Banditry,” was assistant-surgeon Pete’s curt reply.

Berman felt hot.

The nurse remained for the night. The light fell on her pock-marked face. It resembled white waxen honeycombs.

The patient looked at her. She got up from her stool and came over to him.

“What are you here for?” asked Berman, in despair.

The nurse replied:

“I threw vitriol at my neighbour because I was jealous of my husband.”

Berman licked his dry feverish lips.

“Let me have the thermometer,” he murmured.

His temperature was 102.6 F.

STAGE II
PRISONERS AND G.P.U. MEN ON THE WAY TO THE JOB

Chapter IV

PRISONERS IN THE TRAIN

The train is moving northward.

A flat, wild plain in front. Huge pine trees. A river to the right, a river to the left and all around swamps and marshes. You might search for five years without finding a track. "Yes, it is no easy matter to get away from here; this is the end," think even those most experienced in escaping.

It is Tunguda, the region which is to be flooded. Here is your land, your town will begin here. Cut the trees; don't spare them.

There are forests yonder, but on the site of the future town the forest is much thicker. The timber is of a sage-grey colour, straight, of unusual height and toughness—just try to cut it. Whether it be the short, thick fingers of the village offender, the sensitive fingers of the thirty-fiver, or the white hand of the intellectual—it is equally hard to attack this forest axe in hand.

They put up tents hastily by the sides of huge bonfires, they build huts, because there are not enough tents; detachments of prisoners are continually arriving. The most unexpected encounters take place at Tunguda. Some were thieves together, some met in counter-revolutionary white detachments, others in murder affairs or conspiracies. Half-baked students, police sergeants, commercial travellers and their clients, esperantists, antiquarians.

More and more pine trees are cut down. Roads are cleared. Brushwood tracks are laid across the marshes. The wind tosses the canvas walls of the tents, and blows keenly under the curtains, it is getting too cold to sleep, it is time to think of winter. And still more people come.

A man from the Baku division continues the story:

"More criminals are brought."

"The guards receive the prisoners and take them to the camp.

"The military uniforms, the rifles, the sabres—everything is grim, as they are responsible to the Revolutionary Tribunal for each criminal.

"The criminals are dressed in every kind of garment: some in tatters, some in bast shoes, some in cigarette boxes, others in leather jackets, but their trousers lacked seats. It is a motley crowd: Kulaks who have run away from factories, merchants, profiteers, sharpers, pickpockets and along with them, crying and laughing on

BELOMOR

their way to camp, prostitutes, and those jolly thieves, the underworld women, always dancing and singing.

“ ‘Annuyta, give us the glad eye,’ you would say to her.

“And she:

“‘You old prison rat, you came sailing on a piece of watermelon rind from Sakhalin. There is no steam-heated apartment for you, its Tunguda, rocky marshes and trees stuck in everywhere.’

“The different nationalities here keep to themselves, and apart from one another. The Jews behave quietly, the Tyurks very quietly and apathetically.”

A long mail train leaves Tashkent Station. The chief with a bag over his shoulder, jumps on the step. There remains on the platform a small crowd of people who came to see their friends off on this train. Among the overcoats and cloaks are seen the striped gabardines of the Uzbeks.

At the end of the train, there is a freight-car full of prisoners. In the car there are people who have injured the interests of the workers' republic in remote parts of the Union. They come from camps at Krasnovodsk, Stalinabad, Samarkand, Katta-Kurgan and Tashkent.

The list of their crimes is motley: the Basmak counter-revolutionary movement in Turkestan, counter-revolutionary propaganda, intercourse with enemies of the republic abroad, theft, petty profiteering. Several languages intermingle in the car. The hard endings of Tyurk words drown the drawling vowels of Iran dialects. It is hard for one not used to it to catch the drift of a sentence; conversation seems to be made up of sighs and interjections. In reality, however, the conversation goes on simply and directly.

The passengers converse in separate groups, in their own languages. They swing their bodies, as they speak, with gleaming eyes, ejaculating and sighing.

Some of the prisoners sit apart from the rest.

Nasirov, a Tadzhi, 42 years old, has been sentenced for accepting bribes, swings his body back and forth, his eyes shut. He has a thin beard of a muddy colour, large, fleshy lips all grooved and furrowed, a narrow forehead, yellow wrinkled hands, and a flabby neck, accustomed to the monotony of the ritual movements.

Nasirov stands up between the benches and begins to prostrate himself in prayer. This is a demonstrative appeal to God in the midst of dust, cigarette stumps, cursing and angry spitting.

Koli-Makhmudov, a Turcoman-tekkin, 38 years old, a Basmak, a creature of Djunaid Khan. He is a stout man with a shallow

Caucasian fur cap on his head. His identification marks: bushy eyebrows, a straight yellow nose, a sunken cheek scarred by a sabre cut, and a well-shaped mouth full of strong, big, even and perfectly white teeth. If anybody stands behind his back he jumps up. A muscular ripple goes through his back. He turns around abruptly and asks:

“Why are you standing there?”

Sharayan, an Armenian, 40 years old, a counter-revolutionary with a wild look and a fluffy little beard. His restless fingers move incessantly. Sharayan sits on the bench, dozing. Awakening, he begins mechanically to tell an anecdote to his neighbour: “A French girl came to Erivan...”

He titters insinuatingly, turning to the guard. The guard is silent. The train goes on. Station Aris, the brick wall of a shed, a market, hardly discernible grape-vines in the distance.

The following conversation takes place among the Tyurks; they are all thieves.

Liatif Namal Agli: “We have done 200 kilometres. How many more?”

Abdul Huseynov: “We don’t know.”

Liatif: “I shall jump out.”

Abdul Huseynov: “We don’t know.”

Liatif: “You’re an ass.”

Abdul Huseynov: “Perhaps.”

Veli Kurdov: “Well, what’s going to happen?”

Liatif: “To whom?”

Kurdov: “To us.”

Liatif: “I am no conjurer. I don’t know.”

Gusimov: “As a tram pickpocket I can positively tell you: we are in a bad way.”

Liatif: “One can steal there too, but it is impossible to live there.”

Gusimov (suddenly becoming excited): “They can’t force me. I am no worker. I shall lie down and groan. I shall stretch myself out on the cold ground and groan. They can’t force me.”

Liatif: “Everyone played according to his speciality—one liked window music... another...”

Musayev (walking up and listening): “I used to work at the harbour in Baku, carrying loads. Bales. Summer and winter, near the water. They would tell me: ‘Musayev, turn this grand piano belly-up and take it along.’—‘Very well,’ I would answer. ‘In Baku, I am a Bakuite.’ I hoisted the grand piano on to my back and went where

BELOMOR

I was told. The girls stared. The policeman stared. Everybody stared. Then I became friendly with Kudayev. My hands hung down, my legs were in good order. But tell me, please, who in my place would not have become a bandit."

"And I am as weak as a kitten," said Gurayov. "My fire-spitter (gun) works for me."

The conversation stopped.

The forest came to an end, the steppes began.

The Tadzhiks in the prisoners' car were talking among themselves. There were five of them.

"These are ill-starred times. And justly so. A moonless night. We live in darkness as Piri-Sho-Nasir said."

"What else did he say?"

"He said that we must wait. Work with our jaws and wait. Be powerless and wait."

"And what shall we get for our waiting?"

"A reward."

"From whom?"

"From our mentors."

"Aha, you are talking about divine matters. May they burn," interrupted Munnarov.

"Listen, Rizok, listen, you, listen. The soldiers will come to me and say: 'Dig a pit.' I shall answer: 'I will not dig. God is kind.'"

"And who are you?"

"I am a village mullah. I read to the gangs."

"They arrested me and asked. 'Why did you help the Basmaks at Dzhorfe?'"

"What did you say?"

"Oh, various learned things. They did not believe me."

The train rolls on. On the State farms, long straight rows of electric lamps are lit. The streets of the new steppe centres pass by the car windows. It is possible to shout to passers-by: "How do you do" or "Good-bye."

Then comes Ryazan. Moscow was getting nearer.

Our heroes lay on the benches, crowded at the barred windows, chewed tobacco, spat and sang.

Someone said: "Frost."

Someone sang: "I can't see your hand."

It is hard to guess, looking at these people,—dressed in Bokhara robes, turbans, long mountaineer's coats, jackets, and long shirts,— which of them are the future record-breaking brigadiers

and which the intractable obstructors.

Moscow at last. Their car was left standing on a siding.

The din and glare of the enormous city burst in through the slightly opened door. The windows were blood-red, reflecting the city lights. An elderly Turcoman horse-thief came down from his upper berth and went up to the window, sighing.

"Moscow," he shouted incredulously.

They crowded up and looked out.

Only the skilled thieves remained unconcerned. Their faces were immobile, their iron hands on their bellies. More than once they had visited the capital, working with a complete set of tools in the upholstered cars of the express trains on the Kursk railway.

The train rolled on. A night passed, and a day, and another night. They were in Karelia. The last stop. They had arrived.

The southern prisoners got down. They were cold. They wrapped rags around their necks, and covered their mouths. They pulled the flaps of their long coats tighter, with a bitter gesture.

The end of the journey. Belomorstroy reveals itself with its blown up, hollowed out, dug up ground, with its erect forests, with its lakes, surrounded by hillocks, with its rivers, with its log houses, smelling of forest undergrowth, so that one almost hears the forest rustle; with the red star swinging like a squirrel over the house fronts, the gates, doors and roofs: with hamlets, transplanted like bushes from one place to another, with guards for the criminals, with ice and snow, with shock brigades of the national minorities, who stretched the day like a piece of elastic; with forest highways, with the newspaper *Reforging*, for which the camp correspondents Shurupov, Islabekov and Gurukh-Zude write; with its precipitous rocks, with its excavations, where work goes on day and night, with its discipline, agitation brigades, storm nights and Chekists, who explain, educate and appear at all points of the work.

Chapter V

THE G.P.U. MEN NEED THE PRISONERS

Bear Hill, the central office of the canal works directorate, was working day and night at the desks—without sleep, endless consultations, incessant telephone bells. It was ceaselessly forming new gangs. There was not enough material. Representatives rushed to all parts of the Union to select the necessary gangs from other camps.

A representative—one of the prisoners—had to be sent to Voronezh, for instance, for recruiting. Who was to go? And was a guard to be sent along?

“Let us trust him.”

And they trusted him. The representative went.

Numerous conferences were held at the Belomorstroy camp. After the guards about the camp had been abolished and these vast areas had been entrusted to ex-criminals these ex-criminals were told.

“We will have a conference and decide how we can best work together.”

The records about this period are very brief. Kagan, who was the chief G.P.U. man on the job, brought forward a number of good ideas about management. Amongst the numerous records which we—the authors of this book—examined, it was hard to find an account of the first conferences between the Chekists and the prisoners. We can readily understand this silence, but it is hard to describe it. A barracks, a red corner, a tent, or a newly built clubhouse, or the planning office—it is immaterial which—the meeting-places were filled with furniture and had the appearance of being newly fitted up.

The Chekists were not satisfied. They demanded initiative. It is easy to say that we will take nature by storm, but one must know how to take it. Nature is a crafty customer. It will spring surprises on you, it will play some trick, that will make you gasp and lose courage, and then it will throw a stone into your own mouth and you yourself into the marshes, where you will remain forever.

Before the winds had blown away the ashes of the first camp fires, bath houses and laundries had appeared in the clearing near the barracks. The smell of freshly baked bread drifted out through the windows. There was a kitchen with wide open doors, the cook, in a white coat, stirred the camp kettle with a large spoon, and from

the kettle came a savour that tickled the palate of man and beast for many miles around.

But the Chekists kept on saying:

“Show some initiative. Get on with it.”

The Chekists don't praise much. They measure it out carefully. The doses of praise they administer are just sufficient to be transmuted into action, to encourage a man to work, and not to get puffed up and order the others about.

But we must not deceive ourselves. Many of the thirty-fivers are still scouting for pathways and scheduling routes for escape. It is true, the frontier is not so far away and beyond it the bourgeois countries, but the thirty-fivers prefer to go to their home towns. There the streets, signs, language, money—everything is familiar. Foreign languages are known only by a very few of the “aristocracy,” like the safe-crackers, the burglars, but as for the thieves, the second-storey men—how can they go abroad?

The counter-revolutionary, the wrecker, the white and tsarist army officer, thinks along different lines. He thoroughly scrutinises the sleds or carts in which the campers go to the forest. Within eighty kilometres there is a country where live the people of his dreams—merchants, manufacturers, generals, mill owners, and—last but not least—private property and police. He looks around. Boulders. A vista. The new barrack structure. A red flag over the club building.

He meditates. It is all very well. But if one gets a chance over there to run around the tables with a napkin over one's arm, one must thank God. And what if one has to sleep under bridges, beg in front of shop windows, run like a hungry dog to the gate of the mill where there is an announcement: ‘Wanted—five labourers’? He sneers. “Yes, they have turned us loose, because of the crisis abroad. I wonder if they'd dare do it if there was no crisis over there?” He continues to think: “Yes, and my age—I am getting old, my strength is going.” He is lying about his strength. He gobbles so much that even elderly bandit leaders wonder at the appetite of an intellectual.

Listen to Volkov. He is a stocky fellow with very quick, dexterous movements. He is a second-storey man “with a great past.” He has twice been at the Solovetsky Islands and escaped both times, he was in a labour commune, from which he also ran away. A hard-labour prisoner and a drunkard, he was brought to Belomorstroy from a Siberian camp.

“I was imprisoned at Taganka in 1926,” he relates. “Professors

came there to study criminology. ‘How many times have you been tried?’ I answered, ‘Too many.’ They asked me to come to their clinic, where they cross-examined me too often and too much, and there I told them everything about what happened in my childhood, and how I had performed my thefts. They considered every detail carefully. They questioned me not rudely, but too gently; out of boredom I told them everything, without hiding a thing. They wrote a daybook and a night-book about me, and studied my entire organism, my head, my eyes and my ears. They tried to find out how one person could be so criminal. They wanted to help me. When my term expired they put me to work in a candy factory, rolling candies. But the candy did not make me any sweeter, and again I went my old way, for the ‘criminality’ had not been rooted out.”

Now listen further to Volkov. His sentences become short, soldierlike, he has pulled himself together, he is all action.

“We came as a brigade. The brigade had been got together from different train loads. We did not know one another. Well, they looked. They listened. They thought. Volkov had been everywhere. They elected me chairman. Of what? Of the labour collective. Thinks I—what’s that—a ‘labour collective’? First time I’ve heard of it. I worked for about a month and a half. It’s all right.

This light “it’s all right” is very striking. We believe that this “it’s all right” contains the most important thing. He got to this “it’s all right” through much effort and pain. He fell out with many friends, many even threatened to kill him, and, what is most important, his pride as a professional thief vanished.

“It’s all right.” Things began to move on the line of social activity.

The chief of our camp unit, Chernov, was an educated fellow. He fixed his eyes on me when we first met. And when he took over our camp unit he appointed me quartermaster-sergeant. I looked about. I received 1,600 pairs of boots, 1,100 pairs of new army boots and 500 pairs of swamp boots. I almost went crazy.... I thought: ‘Well, either this will cost me ten more years, or I trust no one but myself.’ Although I had been a well-known dare-devil, I got scared, I had never feared anything so much. I went to the superintendent and said to him: ‘These boots may cost one of us ten years, and what’s more they have been entrusted to me. Please have the windows barred Matvey Ivanich, otherwise, I am ashamed to admit it, I shall be worried.

“They barred the windows. I began to lock up and protect the

State's property."

Or listen to Kirichenko's story:

"We arrived at a railway crossing on the Murmansk line. Nine hundred people came in this convoy. We rested for three days. On May 27, they gave us work—to get the stones out of the bog. We stood near the stones and wanted to work but it was hard.

"Before us stood an immovable rock like a 20-metre pine tree—" granite and diabase.

"Well, we cleared it away, now when we started on the rock work we had already discussed many things.

"So we started to break the rock and carry the stone away in wheelbarrows, to a point 100 metres away. Alongside of me worked peasants, they did not know rocks, they did not know how to handle them. Everyone was supposed to break two cubic metres of rock and carry it away, but we as novices, could do only half of it, one cubic metre and that would be considered as full accomplishment of our task. But we could not do even that, although we worked as hard as we could. And then our hearts wavered, and they began to abuse me, but I stood firm, remembering the words 'a soldier of the canal army.'"

And then he exclaimed loudly:

"Although we did not know exactly what kind of a canal it was, or what its shape was, because we saw in front of us only a small pit."

Winter came. The frozen ground offered stubborn resistance. Many campers thought the daily norm too big, and impossible to accomplish. Sky-blue snow. The snow keeps falling and falling, filling up all the pits. Mountains of snow had to be thrown up around the pits.

Some campers had already got into the isolation cells, some had got cold feet and funkled. Here is Biryuk's convincing story.

"We arrived from Medgora that snowy day, a hundred and sixty strong. Next day we were brought out to the spot which is now known as the upper head of the fourth lock. I looked around and gasped. I saw snow-drifts, mud, a little frozen ground, blown up by an explosion, and gang-planks thrown around in disorder.

"We received tools from our brigadier, and started work. The work did not progress, I tell you frankly. The area was big. You would look at this endless stretch and your heart would sink: It can't be conquered. The wheelbarrows kept falling over, and sometimes the men would tumble down the gang-planks with them and fall with their faces on to the snow. When we stretched out on our

plank beds after the day's work, a discussion would start. Someone would begin:

“This is just some work they've invented.’ The fellows would start their old song over again. ‘Beyond one's strength, invented for the express purpose of working us to death.’

“Digging a gutter for fun, so that the water from all the swamps will flow through it and the birds will swim and the frogs dive in it.

They began malingering, to evade work. Grumbling. Escapes. I got into the isolation camp. There they met me with the same stories. I was as tired of them as of the boulders. I lay in the isolation cell without moving or sleeping for three days. I lay and licked my cracked lips with my dry tongue and thought: ‘it is of no use, Biryuk, to hang your head, it will do no good to come back to the isolation again. Socialism is creeping in everywhere around you, and even within you.

“I raised my head as high as my neck permitted, and went out into the yard after these three days.

“I got into the yard and proposed to organise an extraordinary brigade—‘Keep out of the isolation camp.’ I caused such a shouting and grumbling as I have never heard during my considerable prison career. They shouted at me in husky voices, and some in an ordinary tone, that I had sold them for a drink, that I was a traitor. I said to them: ‘What kind of a traitor am I, when I have been lying for three days on a plank bed and thinking? No one has persuaded me but myself?’

“I organised a brigade of really sensible fellows. Fifteen fellows joined the brigade. The others shouted: ‘You will be lost.’

“We went silently to the track, and received our task. We got finished two hours earlier than anybody else, and carrying these two hours on our faces, we got back to the barracks before everybody else. They shouted at us:

“‘Oh, well, your pals gave you an easy job. You are trying to pull our legs.’

“‘All right.’ We answered, ‘Come out to the job with us, stand alongside of us and check us up.’

“They checked us up. We proved to be telling the truth. Soon there were forty people in our brigade, and we were fulfilling our task 125 per cent.”

Another camper, also from the isolation camp, says very calmly:

“Of course it was very hard at the beginning. In the beginning the unreasoning fellows hindered the construction and everything

else.

“At the camp some drank and others stole. We were the worst kind of jackals. For months we did not wash. We could not leave our ‘isolator’ without a convoy.

“We refused to go to the bath house, as a matter of principle. We mocked at the undertaking aloud, in prose and in verse, and not only at the undertaking but at the entire universe and the whole of humanity. They would purposely lead us, dirty and tattered as we were, past the places where shock brigades were beginning to work, so that the music of their picks and shovels would strike our ears. We felt ashamed down to our very livers, but we kept up our drunken dignity.

“And we gave them a string of oaths longer than any gang-plank I have ever seen.”

2

Yes, the first step is the hardest. This old truth proved itself here at the workings as much as over at Bear Hill in the projecting bureau. It was necessary to keep continually explaining why and how prisoners ought to work and work well, fast and hard.

And at this point there enters what, in the language of our days, is called “the art of speaking to the masses.” Strictly speaking, there is no such art, it is impossible to learn it, and there is nothing to learn. There is in existence a short, simple word, that word must be taken and every difficulty, every idea must be approached with it. This word is called “Truth.” The truth is contained in the following statements: that the land of Socialism must protect itself, that there are no inveterate criminals, no inveterate rascals, but there were once abominable and odious circumstances, which manufactured criminals and rascals, that our country is magnanimous, beautiful and strong, that we must love and beautify our country, that the people are strong and sane, that it can and should accomplish wonderful things, that we are intelligent and cheerful, but must be still more intelligent and jollier, that we must work much and learn much, that we can construct the canal only if we have strict discipline and that this strict discipline must flow not from some place far away but from ourselves. We shall populate these wild forests, we shall till these lands, and in place of rapids our hydroelectric stations shall begin to work, and the arctic waters which wash the shores near Soroka will blink with surprise when our countless vessels begin to sail from this bay to the right and to the left.

BELOMOR

The Chekists speak, dressed in long ash-grey coats and leather jackets, pulling their caps down over their eyes. They speak in the barracks, in the forests, on the fields from the top of a stone near the canal path, from a barge on the river, from a raft, from the porch of a Karelian log-cabin. One is grey-haired, he was wounded near the Polish frontier, another limps because his leg was shot through somewhere on the sands of Fergana, a third one has gone through the hard school of tsarist hard-labour prisons and gaols, another was poisoned by the gases of the interventionists, another, tall and wrinkled, was tortured by Koltchak's atamans, and still another was stunned by a Chino-Japanese shell on the Far Eastern front. All of them, old and young, stand before these dregs of humanity, before these murderers, thieves, bandits and crooks to whose invectives they listen in bewilderment, their grey eyes wide open. They stand and explain what the truth is and what Socialism is. They know what the truth is, they know what Socialism is—they have been defending it for the last fourteen years, the true soul of their Party, gallant Bolsheviks. Their comrades were murdered, their enemies slandered them, fools laughed at them. They marched into a glorious future, not for one moment did their rifles tremble in their hands, their ash-grey coats were light on their shoulders.

And you see, through the savage racket and howl of the hardened slackers, through the smoke and stench of the isolation hut, a swollen face makes its way to the dim light, squeezing a book between its fingers. He has asked the tutor for it, he will read it, and to-morrow he will write a statement over which people will ponder for hours, trying to understand it, because its composition is very confused, although the sense of it is quite simple; it will be something to this effect: prisoner Kulagenko, or Podlepinsky, or Levitanus, or someone else, wishes to organise a shock brigade.

Chapter VI

A KULAK ARRIVES AT THE CAMP

"It is shameful and painful to recall the past....

"I was a Kulak. I had a big farm. My wealth was confiscated and a deep brutal hatred got hold of me. I had one fixed idea, 'Revenge.'

"And then I made up my mind. I picked up my old rifle, selected a dark night, and...

"For murdering a deputy of the Government I was condemned to ten years' imprisonment. I was brought to Belomorstroy.

"I shall speak frankly. I came here a real enemy of the Soviet Government. I thought that in ruining such as myself, the Kulaks, the Government was ruining the peasantry and the entire country. 'I could see nothing good ahead of me.' "

These are the very words with which he later on prefaced the article about himself in the newspaper, *Reforging*.

Plain, rough words.

How much experience, thought, feeling must he have gone through, in order to find enough courage when he at last understood, to say these words aloud and publicly.

Who is this man? What is his name?

There were many like him—ex-Kulaks.

It was the first time he had seen such a place as the canal diggers camp, and he was horrified. It all seemed grim and frightful to him. And ahead of him lay ten years—a term hard to imagine.

"Here I am in a hard-labour prison," he thought.

However, in the forest they were heating an ordinary bath-house built of logs. The swollen door squeaked on its hinges, flapping softly, almost noiselessly, like a padded one.

Thick clouds of smoke came out of the chimney, and steam came through the door...

Enveloped in smoke and steam, covered with a film of ice, all icicles and hoar-frost, the bath-house reflected softly, mirror-like, the rosy sunset.

Among the tall Karelian pines, at a temperature of 40 degrees of frost, large quantities of washed linen were drying.

Three women in sleeveless quilted men's jackets and snow-white shawls were nimbly tearing the frozen, board-like shirts from the lines and throwing them on to the snow. The shirts did not fall down. They stood up, spreading out their sleeves, as though made of plaster of Paris.

BELOMOR

Clothing was being unloaded from sleds; sleeveless jackets, trousers, woollen mittens, boots, felt overboots.

Bundles of clothing dropped on to the snow.

The prisoners passed through to the bath-house.

Together with the others, he undressed and went into the hot steam.

There were many diverse people here. Naked Buriats sat on the wet floor of the bath-house. They drank tea in a leisurely way, taking advantage of the abundance of boiling water. They did not quite understand the meaning of a bath-house. It appeared to them to be something like a tea-room.

He entered the bath-house a peasant. He left the bath-house a camp-prisoner. In prison linen and prison garb, smelling strongly and strangely of disinfectant, he felt very sad and homeless.

Night came on.

A red paper star was shining over some gate in the depths of the camp. Strips of light fell on to the cleared snow through the frosted windows.

The camp was alive with people passing up and down the road and walking about between the huts.

The snow crunched under their felt boots.

Two people passed by with shovels on their shoulders.

They say the Kungurs have come," said one of them softly. "Have you heard?"

"The Kungurs?" asked the other, frightened, and let down his shovel.

"The Kungurs," confirmed the first one, with a sigh. "It's a fact, the Kungurs."

An oppressive silence ensued.

Somewhere a door broke open with a creaking sound. The deep tones of an accordion escaped into the frost, with the steam. The door slammed dully.

Quiet.

There was a smell of cabbage soup and fresh baked bread.

He entered the barrack to which he had been allotted.

So, on a winter night, at a wayside station, one climbs with bag and baggage into the car of a long-distance train.

The car lives a well-established car life. The people have long since become acquainted, got accustomed to one another. Everything is already known. Everyone knows who is travelling, where to, what for, on what business. Everyone knows what baggage is carried by whom, and what place belongs to whom. People visit one

another, drink tea, play draughts, tell stories, sing songs.

A dense human breath, warm and stagnant fills the familiar car. The new passenger enters, letting in a stream of icy air, and stops in the passage looking for a vacant seat. No one pays any attention to him: or rather everybody pretends not to pay any attention, while in reality they all look askance at him, appraise him, at the same time continuing their idle occupations.

He entered the barrack as a new passenger, with a sense of awkwardness and lonesomeness.

The barrack resembled a railway carriage.

The plank beds were arranged in the same manner as in a railway carriage, one over the other, four to a compartment, two and two and a long passage, a corridor just like a car.

People were sitting and lying on the plank beds.

But there were also tables and stools. There was a fire in the stove. The iron chimney was covered with sparks and breathed a dark, crimson heat. A broom stood in a corner. Felt boots were steaming round the stove. Here and there on the long walls were stuck papers, pictures, post-cards.

The elderly orderly showed him his place and stepped back unconcernedly to the door, where he had a complete workshop—a hammer, nails, paint in little pots, three-ply wood, glue and some leather. He was making small ply wood suitcases.

There were yellow ply wood boxes and cases under many of the plank beds. Evidently the old man did a lively trade.

The novice put his things on his plank bed and keeping his eyes glued to them, lest they be stolen—which God forbid.—He bowed to the company.

“Good evening, citizens.”

Seemingly the company did not especially like to be addressed as “citizens.”

“Good evening,” answered someone reluctantly.

And the company continued its conversation.

The novice began to listen.

“One hundred and twenty,” said a gap-toothed young fellow, with a sigh. The heat of the oven had warmed him so that it seemed his round red face would melt and begin running down on to his sweater any minute.

“Who?” asked a murky grandfather with a black pitted neck.

“I.”

“You?” Grandfather screwed up his eyes cuttingly.

“Yes. One hundred and twenty. Honest to God.”

BELOMOR

“When did it happen? I never noticed.”

“It happened.”

“Tufta,¹ they shouted, all round.

“It’s a fact. Other people can prove it. One hundred and twenty.”

“Tufta,” said grandpa negligently.

The young man was almost crying. “Tufta, tufta,” they cried.

The novice walked up closer.

What do you think of that? he thought. “They play brag. How interesting.”

As soon as he came closer to the stove, several people turned to him at once. They looked at him for a long while, squinting suspiciously and menacingly.

“And who are you? A Kungur?”

The novice was frightened.

“No, what for? I came from near Kherson.”

The people laughed.

“He is a new one, from the new group,” said the orderly from his corner, taking a tack out of his mouth and tacking down a piece of leather.

“Ah,” said the players unconcernedly, and continued their occupation.

“One hundred and twenty,” shouted the young fellow plaintively. “You’re lying.”

“Well, one hundred and twelve.”

“Tufta.”

“How much then, if not one hundred and twelve?”

“Not more than ninety.”

“Ah! Ninety?”

The fellow turned red.

“One hundred and twelve at the least,” he shouted excitedly, banging on the table with his heavy hand.

“Tufta,” they roared all around. “Tufta. Tufta.”

The novice hesitated, caught an opportune moment, and said: “Excuse me, what kind of a game is tufta?”

Everybody was silent; they looked at him for at least a minute in a strange, strained stupor, with blinking eyes. And suddenly the silence collapsed. The people fell one upon the other, stamped their feet on the floor, coughed, choked, rolled on the plank beds.

¹ Tufta—slang for brag.

The flue shook from the boisterous laughter, and sparks flew from the chimney.

“Tufta! Ouch, tufta. ... A game—tufta.... Well, well, that’s a Khersonian for you.”

The novice stood still for a while, hesitated, and moved away resentfully.

“To-morrow we shall play tufta!” shouted the fellow in the sweater after him, choking, and dropped his wet head on to the little table, again stamping his feet on the floor.

Suddenly the door was opened with a crash, and a little shaggy, black-haired, sharp-eyed man in a cap with ear flaps, covered with frost, entered the barrack with a light, faltering cat-like step.

“Sh-sh, children!” he said.

And everything quieted down.

“Sh-sh, children. We have a chance. I went to see them.”

“Whom?”

“The Kungurs. In the sixth barrack. Traded tobacco for sugar. Played the fool there for a whole hour. Found a fellow countryman there.”

He took a breath, paused and said in a whisper, like a conspirator, looking around on all sides:

“Their shovels are deep. It’s a fact.”

“What do you think of the sons of bitches! good idea!”

“An absolute fact. They got themselves deep shovels somewhere, and work for all they are worth. They make as much as a hundred and sixty.”

The sharp-eyed fellow looked around once more, and began to whisper something hotly and inarticulately. Then they all started to bluster. The novice could hear only:

“Two hundred and ten!”

“Tufta!”

“Shovels...”

“We’ll beat them!”

“They’ll beat us!”

“We’ll beat them by a mile!”

“Tufta. We shall see about that.”

“Tufta. Shovels... Kungurs...” thought the novice perplexedly as he lay down carefully on his hard bed.

People came and went noisily.

In his dreams he saw a low orange moon suspended over a wall, cold dew on pieces of water-melon rind, and his aged mother wandering about with her skirt pinned up, scouring the pots with ashes

BELOMOR

and a bit of bast.

In the yard a few spots were covered with lilac-coloured ashes. He opened his eyes.

The people in the barrack were already asleep. The red light of the stove shone over the red doth banner in a dark corner of the barrack.

A man lay on the bed opposite him. He was not asleep. Suddenly he sat up and gazed at the novice with his small, brilliant eyes. The tiny reflection of the light of the stove in his eyes seemed red and prominent.

He asked:

“How long since you were arrested?”

“Seven months.”

“What is new out there?”

“They are ruining everyone.”

His neighbour smiled and lay down again. His smile seemed comprehensible and disturbed. Then he jumped up again, sat down raised his knees to his chin. For some time he stared without blinking, then asked:

“What article of the penal code?”

“Article fifty-eight. And you?”

“The same. For the loss of grain. What is new out there? They say much has been constructed. Did you see anything on the way here?”

‘Have they constructed anything?’

He squinted maliciously and sullenly.

So much construction, that there is no room left for the peasantry...

“But still, you passed by so many places on your way here. Is there really nothing at all? Can it all be lies?”

“I haven’t noticed. May be there is something. Who can tell? I haven’t noticed.”

“They talk so much about it in the newspapers.”

“I don’t understand what kind of newspapers there are. I don’t read them.”

An empty conversation.

His neighbour was plunged in thought for a while. Then he smiled, suddenly leaned over close to him, and began to whisper mysteriously.

“Look at that one, the one lying near the banner.... The stout one.... You look at him....”

“Well?”

“Take notice,” he whispered in a still lower voice, “that is a priest.”

The priest lay with his hands spread out, but he had no beard or whiskers. His deep, ample, box-like chest rose as he snored.

“A priest ... a minister of religion.... It’s a fact.... Also article fifty-eight”

“God m heaven.”

“He produces one hundred and fifty per cent,” said the neighbour with quiet respect.

The novice sighed heavily and covered his head with the sheepskin in order not to see. He fell asleep. He heard through his sleep music and the noise of opening and closing doors. Air passed in and out. It came in cold and went out warm. A draught blew over his feet. People were walking, stamping the floor roughly with their heavy foot-gear.

He dreamt of some wild Kungurs. Bandits. They galloped at full speed on foaming horses, and shot into the air.... Tufta. Tufta Tufta “your mother.”¹

2

Through the windows gleamed a green night silvery with moonlight.

The first night in camp was nearly over.

By the clock it was morning, six o’clock. To the sight it was night. The windows were jet black.

“Hey, get up, get up.”

The people in the barrack began to move about. A sound of stamping, coughing.

The radio loud-speaker shouted hoarsely and deafeningly, so loud that it produced a sensation of cracking and bursting in one’s ears”

“Get up. Get up. Everybody out of doors in ten minutes. The Kungurs challenge us to a competition in cubic volume. The Kungurs swear they’ll beat us. Get up. Get up.

“Get up! Arise, ye starvelings from your slumbers!” shouted the sharp-eyed fellow. He had on a three-cornered hat covered with hoarfrost. He had evidently already run across to some place or other.

A match was struck near the stove.

¹ A very common and particularly obscene Russian expression.

They drank scalding hot tea.

“Oh, brothers, but it’s cow-e-o-old.”

“Get up. Get up. File out.”

The novice jumped up hurriedly. The logs of the barrack building cracked with the frost.

The novice shivered. He began to dress hastily, confused. He put on everything he had. A shirt, another one on top of it, a vest, then a sweater, then a jacket, then a quilted waistcoat, and on top of it all a sheepskin overcoat, a warm, well-made “homey” overcoat. (How bitterly and strongly it smelled of fat and home.)

He came out into the yard, all bundled up like a country woman. He stood in the darkness among the others like a regular tombstone. He could not lift his hands. He could only waddle.

The sharp-eyed fellow in the three-cornered hat stepped out sideways from the barrack with the banner under his arm. He unfurled it as he walked.

“Is everybody coming?”

“Everybody.”

“Sh-sh, children. In one word, two words...”

He evidently wanted to deliver a speech, but noticed the novice. “What’s the matter, old man, are you frozen?”

“Not yet.”

“Tell me, what can you do?”

The novice became confused, he did not understand. The sharp-sighted fellow stamped his boots in the snow impatiently.

“Well, hurry up. What can you do? Can you work with the shovel?”

“I can work with the shovel,” answered the novice with dignity. In the hands of a peasant every tool is useful. “I can work with the shovel, and I can work with other things too.”

“Very well, I believe you. You will work with the shovel. Hold it.” He put a shovel into his hand. “We shall see later. And then shrilly at the top of his voice:

“Children, boys, left shoulder forward, right shoulder rearward, heads u-up....”

They began moving like a black mass in the darkness, their boots crunching and squeaking on the snow of an intense frost.

Someone ran by with an electric flash-light.

They were going through a forest. Hoar-frost dropped from the branches above. Light, dry twigs fell with a little cracking sound. The human voice sounded sharp. They walked in a dark column. The unfurled banner dangled in front of them.

"Hello, Kungurs!"

"Hello!"

"Will you make two hundred?"

"We will make it two hundred."

"Rats."

"We'll make it two hundred and fifty."

"Kungurs."

"Tufta."

"Fta. Fta. Fta," echoed back from the forest, the tree-trunks, and dropped somewhere dead, like a bird frozen in its flight.

Fires were already burning on spaces cleared of snow; they were thawing the ground. The fires were in long trenches. Branches cracked, a white smoke came from the juniper twigs. The white smoke crawled over the snow, ran against the people, crawled upward over their clothing, got in their eyes, left a bitter taste in their mouths.

The fire had been kept burning all night.

The Kungurs had not thought of that, their fires had still to be started. The neighbour walked up to the novice, stamping his felt boots on the snow, and said, pointing at the outskirts of the forest, at the rocks, the smooth snowy surface of the frozen lake, and the pine trees:

"Steamboats will sail here."

"Here? Steamboats? What do you mean?"

But there was no time to talk.

"Hey, lads, children, little orphans. To your sho-ovels."

They started.

The shovels hit the ground. The top soil was soft from the bon-fires but a little deeper it was as hard as rock. Sparks began to fly.

He worked with the shovel. He thrust it into the ground, and pressed it with his foot, groaning with the strain. Hundreds of shovels were going up and down to his left and right. He dug without stopping to watch his neighbours. He watched them unconsciously without meaning to. He did not so much *see* them as *feel* them.

At first everybody worked in their clothes. Then gradually one after the other, articles of clothing began to fly out of the ranks. They flew out and fell on the snow. Sheepskin coats, quilted coats, quilted waistcoats, overcoats, scarfs.

The people worked with greater and greater energy.

He wondered why they were working so fast, so "honestly." "What the devil do I want with such feverish work," he thought,

BELOMOR

wiping the perspiration from his brow with his thick sleeve. "Nothing doing!"

And he endeavoured to take it easy, so as not to be overworked. There were ten years of it ahead of him. He must take care of himself. Otherwise he would not last until freedom came, but would die before the end of his term. And who was he really working for? His enemies!

He worked and looked at his brigade, spread out over the width of the ravine. He looked at his own brigade and at the Kungurs, a little farther up.

Chains of people showed black against the snow. And they seemed like two military companies, digging in hurriedly in new positions. Exactly like a battle front. Even down to the noise.

They were blasting rocks nearby.

One saw snow fountains rise in the air. Debris flew about, and people ran and stumbled. The blood-red sun came up.

His fidgety neighbour of the preceding night stood alongside of him. He had already thrown off all his outer clothing including the sweater. He had rolled up his sleeves. He was working like a horse. His long moustache hung down on either side of his pointed, bluish, well-shaven little chin.

The priest, a huge, robust fellow, worked in his shirt-sleeves. His collar was unbuttoned. His chest showed damp and rosy like boiled ham. He did wonders. Sparks flew from under his shovel. His neighbours looked at him with a sort of superstitious horror.

Then one of the "Kungurs" came running over.

He came running as if on some errand, but stopped near the priest, stood still for a minute with his mouth wide open, then spat and went galloping back to his gang to tell them what he had seen.

The novice was getting hot, but he did not want to take off his sheepskin coat. "Nothing doing!"

At twelve o'clock they took a spell. For the first time since they had started, they smoked. The red sun rode above them.

The crowd broke up into small groups. Everyone had his own group.

He had no group as yet.

He must look for one. And he started to look about for someone to make friends with. He must select a respectable man, so as not to degrade himself and so as to remain even in these trying circumstances on a suitable level.

The priest, his face aflame, lay sprawled out under a pine tree

right on the snow and smoked a “goat’s leg.” His shovel and mittens lay scattered around him like unneeded armour.

He walked up to the priest, took off his cap, either out of respect or from the heat, and said, as was seemly in such cases, at the beginning of a politely-sorrowful conversation with a member of the clergy:

“Such doings, reverend father... I look to you, reverend father...”

“You go.... You know where...” said the reverend father in a heavy voice, with a very involved and foul-mouthed curse.

The novice almost fell on his face.

“Excuse me.... So this is a priest, a man of spiritual calling, a minister of religion.”

The minister of religion looked at him with a feeling of languid disgust. He was unspeakably tired of repeating to every Tom, Dick and Harry the history of his case.

Here it is.

At first this priest had been no priest at all, but a war-time ensign: he had been expelled from the sixth grade of a theological seminary. Then he had the misfortune to get into the White Army. Thus a dark stain of a white origin had been engraved in his biography. Under the Soviet Government he had worked in an office. He had been discharged.

“Then,” as he told the prosecutor, “there was nothing left for me to do, but to look for other employment. Since they would not give me employment in Government offices, I decided to look for other employment. For one can’t exist without a job. I went to serve as a priest. Got mixed up with Kulaks and the peasant women. Serves me right. I am lucky not to have been executed. Now, excuse me, I have shaved myself.”

The novice went away from the priest and walked over to his other neighbour, his cubicle neighbour—the fidgety one.

The fidgety fellow was leaning against a tree-trunk, peering into the forest.

He went up to the fidgety fellow and said sorrowfully, winking at the priest:

“Just to think what the priest has been reduced to, to what a secular condition he has been brought? Ah?”

¹ A strip of coarse paper twisted into a funnel and bent in the middle, the large end is then filled with tobacco.

BELOMOR

The fidgety fellow yawned and smiled again. But he did not say anything. And again it was impossible to understand his enigmatic smile.

In the meantime a cart, covered with tarpaulin, arrived from the forest. It was immediately surrounded by a crowd. A man with a sheet of paper in his hand lifted this tarpaulin and began to call out names.

In a box under the tarpaulin, hot pies were steaming.

“Well, well, what is this?” the novice asked the fidgety fellow anxiously. “What is this? An interesting quartermaster’s service. They serve pasties.”

“Not to everybody,” the fidgety one said, worried; “only to those who have raised their norm.”

Then the fidgety fellow was called, he pushed his way through to the cart and soon returned with inflated cheeks, bulging eyes, and a jumping Adam’s apple. He held a second pastry in his hand, eating it with his eyes.

“Mm... m,” said the fidgety fellow communicatively, pointing with his head at the priest.

The holy father was pushing a second pastry into his bottomless gullet.

“Filled with potato... said the fidgety one jerkily, when he had caught his breath. “Sometimes they have’m with cabbage, too....”

And stepped aside.

“So,” thought the novice. If it is the norm, then let it be the norm....

Swallowing his saliva he went to his shovel. Stood awhile, and began to pull off his heavy sheepskin coat.

At four o’clock dinner was brought in a travelling kitchen with a tall smoke-stack.

Soup, buckwheat, bread.

And again some received 800 grams, some a kilogram, and some 1,400 grams.

The bread was given out according to a list.

The novice was not on the list.

When he came up for his ration, without his sheepskin coat, or his quilted waistcoat, just in his jacket, red and covered with perspiration, the brigadier—the sharp-sighted fellow in the three-cornered hat—looked him over from head to foot, as though carefully estimating his value, and said to the distributor:

“Give this one a kilogram. He can work. We’ll be responsible. And then, turning again to the novice, he asked gently:

A KULAK ARRIVES AT THE CAMP

“Well, how is it, old man, aren’t you frozen?”

“On the contrary,” answered the novice gloomily, “I am all steamed up.”

So, he thought. “So. It seems that one can live somehow in this prison.”

Some things began to get clearer.

It was dark. They were returning through the forest.

Two songs went through the forest, overtaking one another.

“Hey, you, Kungurs.”

“Hey, you, Semushkinites.”

“Well, how are things?”

“Well, who won?”

“How much did you do?”

“And you?”

“They are figuring it up.”

“Ours is being figured up too.”

“Ours seems to be something like two hundred ”

“Tufta.”

And again “Fta-Fta-Fta” echoed from the trees in the dark forest.

That night at the barrack, the radio shouted in their ears.

“Semushkin’s brigade had beaten the Kungurs. The Kungurs did 160 per cent., and Semushkin’s brigade did 210 per cent. Hurrah! Hurrah!”

The novice fell asleep.

Falling asleep, he saw his ox. The ox was being led away from the yard. “De-kulakisation.” The white ox moved slowly, twisting its flexible tail with the little whip at its end. Suddenly it stopped and turned around. It looked. It had a pink face, long white eye-lashes, and limped blue eyes, moving and protruding, large as if seen through a magnifying glass.

Chapter VII

AN ENGINEER ARRIVES TOO

The work at Belomorstroy was queer work for Engineer Ananyev. Work without prospects, without hope of the granting of a concession. There was not even the most ordinary salary. Everything, even the engineering hierarchy, was tangled up. He had to work on an equal footing with youngsters, not even graduates of the Technological Institute, but of some unknown Technical College. What if they are also prisoners, if they have so little practical experience?

Engineer Ananyev did not want to work under these circumstances. He was a good talker, a good story-teller, and the stories he told in the barrack were even more interesting than a book. "Let us not hurry," he said. "You see how much these barracks resemble bad railway carriages? Well, let us travel in these cars through the term of our imprisonment." This was the sort of talk that went on between the engineers in the wash-house.

"Build a canal in 500 days! Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"We're in no hurry, Ivan Petrovitch—we're in for ten years."

"Hum—a nice business" (drawl).

"We might build in 3,000 days."

"It's a good thing to hurry when you're chasing fleas."

"Why there are even no roads or plans of roads. In short there's nothing."

"And where are the hands?"

"Yes, there's a fine outfit to overtake America."

"Ha-ha-ha. Love to the Canal."

"Why should I love it? Just to have a chance of washing myself decently?" And the water in the basin gurgles.

"I wonder what we're having for breakfast this morning?"

"Hardly ham and green peas!"

"Nevertheless, my dear colleagues more speed!. It's already half-past nine. Just time to rinse our mouths."

2

Engineer Ananyev was not one of those people who rise easily in the world. He had had to work at first. His story begins in St Petersburg.

On a round pedestal, his back to the Marsovo Pole, stands Generalissimo Suvorov, covering his breast with his shield and

protecting the papal Tiara and the tsar's crown with his sword.

In front of him flows the Neva. Beyond the Neva is the low grey wall of the Peter and Paul fortress, and above it the spire of the cathedral, with its flying angel.

The old wooden pontoon bridge, further down on the right, leading to the Kronverksky Prospect, curved along the line of the ramparts which have long since been demolished.

The new, iron, French Troitsky bridge was built directly opposite the wooden church of the Holy Trinity.

The bridge was built from funds raised by a loan. Beyond the white pillars of the Exchange Building, the shares of the metallurgical factories were going up and down. The bridge construction took a very long time. It turned out that the length of the bridge had not been calculated correctly; it was too short.

The iron arches followed one after the other, but the last pier stood in the water. The Russian engineers had to add a jetty to the French bridge. Finnish boats brought the soil, which was then delivered to the spot by horse wagons. In the hollow there were gangways. Along the gangways rolled the wheelbarrows. Bearded foremen in cloth caps and young clean shaven engineers in uniform caps walked about.

The pier grew slowly. From the engineering point of view, the construction was not interesting. They had simply been filling in ground.

This work alongside of the light French bridge, which looked like steel tracery, seemed clumsy and offensive to an engineer.

The construction was not done by those engineers who travelled in Pullman cars with cream-coloured curtains, not by those who caroused at Donon's fashionable restaurant, and who were related to Generals.

The construction was built by those engineers who had their meals at Dominick's and drank their vodka at Fyodorov's, where, by the way, they were a source of envy.

The construction was built by such as Ananyev.

Shares rose and fell behind the white pillars of the Exchange, and that was what really mattered. The bridge was only a footnote to it.

However if one happened to be an engineer one had to work well, to learn from the foremen how best to lay the gang-planks for the wheelbarrows, so that they would not get in each other's way, how to get more work out of the workmen, how to make them load more on the barrows and move faster with them.

BELOMOR

One had to learn how to measure the work done, how to check the carters.

It was usual to manage all this by making a sub-contract with the foreman, but then, the foreman got all the profit and he would make his way, while you would remain a hack all your life.

It was necessary to learn to utilize the construction season, to learn how to lay the soil in the late autumn, so that it would not freeze.

To learn how to get along with people, how to talk to workmen, to joke with old men and bribe the younger men with vodka. A drizzling rain. The workmen's faded cotton shirts. Over there, far away beyond the leaden river—the Exchange, on the other shore—the palace, the monument, military parades. One's own apartment in a dull street, lit not by blue gas lights, but by yellow kerosene light.

It was in the hollow of the Troitsky bridge that engineer Ananyev learned to organise labour, to lay gang-planks, distribute wheelbarrows, allocate workers. Through it he came to the top. After this his biography rolled on. He grew like a mushroom.

In 1913, on the eve of the World War, Alexander Georgevich Ananyev organised the "Corporation for the Irrigation of the Shifabad Valley" and received from the above-named corporation half a million roubles in cash, and founder's shares to the value of three million roubles. In 1913, one year before the World War broke out, Alexander Georgevich was a real millionaire, a big-wig.

How did it happen?

Herzen speaks in his preface to *Past and Thoughts* of "the reflection of history upon men," the reflection of historical events in the biography of men. Ananyev's biography is to a certain extent, a reflection of the epoch in which he lived.

The revolution of 1905 had been suppressed and driven underground. Unusual crops. The bloom of industry and exchange speculation. The defeat and bloody collapse in the Far East had not weaned the Russian capitalists from adventures. Sallies into Persia. Finally, the advance into Central Asia, the so-called Central Asiatic Possessions, now Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan and Turkmenistan.

The paddle-wheel steamer *Caesarevich* steamed along the Amu-Daria. The capricious, suddenly shoaling river, was all brownish and reddish sand banks as far as the horizon.

The Ananyev couple—a military engineer with the rank of a major and his wife, the daughter of an impoverished prince, were on their way to the fortress of Termez on the Afghan border.

On the saloon-deck there was a characteristic company of Russian "colonists" for Turkestan. Naval officers, banished for Homeric inebriety and debauchery to the Amu-Daria military fleet. Officials of the Department of Irrigation. Diplomatic officials at the Courts of the "independent" Emir of Bokhara and the Khan of Khiva. Priests of the garrison churches, a Greek-orthodox missionary. The contractor Shamsudinov, and young Bokhara merchants, who had received their social polish at the cafe-chantants of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Middle-aged lionesses of the *demi-monde* seeking success, easy money and valuable gifts from the Emirs. On the lower deck there were Russian working-men from the province of Tambov, travelling to the world's end in search of work.

These are the surroundings in which we meet with Ananyev for the first time. In order to understand what brought him to Termez, we must recall that his grandfather was an officer in the Caucasian Army. There was some hereditary tie between the grandfather, a representative of Russian Imperialism, and the grandson, the future large-scale shareholder and promoter of the concession for the irrigation of the Shirabad Valley.

The city of Termez. A quiet "garrison life," not without a certain charm of its own. 1905 was past. The disturbances of the Tashkent garrison were over. The Cossacks had shown themselves and had given the "impertinent soldiery" a lesson. At the garrison club they had balls, cards, romances, stories about the beautiful past, the past of Skobelev, Kaufman, Turkestansky, Kuropatkin, Komarov... He lived in a feudal Khanate of the Russian Empire, amidst mediaeval barbarism, tortures, executions, prisons infested with bed bugs. The Russian officers enjoyed the right of extra-territoriality. The customs of the court of the Asiatic princeling—the Emir, and his Becks amused them.

The Becks took turns in maintaining the Emir's Court, his women, procured by special agents in Petersburg, Paris, Budapest, his lackeys, his horses and elephants.

The Becks had the right to execute the inhabitants of his province, and the provinces were leaseholds of the Becks.

When Engineer Ananyev wrote the notes about his past, this period of his life was left blank. The time passed gaily and imperceptibly, he writes. But right after this gay and imperceptible time he lived through a decade of war and revolution, and this decade taught him to turn his attention to the dark sides of his past. He mentions the nickname of "delight of the Emir's days" borne by a handsome young courtier, but he also remembers the public

execution of a simple peasant by torture, who took upon himself the guilt of his Bai.¹ The executioner cut the man's throat on the market square, and the body hung on a pole for three days like the carcass of a sheep while the crazed mother crawled round the body of her only son. She had no money to ransom the body, and the corpse was thrown into the garbage dump. So epically simple is Ananyev's conclusion.

The decades of war and revolution taught Ananyev to think of the past. It appeared that he saw not only cavalcades and pretty and daring women. He saw mud huts and dirt huts where the workers who were building the fortress—the Kozlovs, Migunovs, Sokolovs, carpenters, stove-builders, navvies from the provinces of Nizhni-Novgorod, Saratov, Tambov, lay ill with epidemic diseases, malaria, general drunkenness. He tried, somewhat embarrassed, to find justification for himself in the fact that he acted as godfather at their christenings and pleased them by his easy-going, cheerful character...

Further you will see what this easy-going, cheerful character cost the Tadjik peasants....

“Great will be the man who reconstructs the irrigation of the Shirabad Valley.”

Let us see whether the man who started this undertaking was really great, and of what the great deed consisted.

“In 1910,” he writes, “I started on a great personal undertaking, and resigned my position as a ‘Captain.’”

Engineer Ananyev's “great personal undertaking” consisted in promoting a company for the irrigation of seventy thousand hectares of land in the Shirabad Valley.

3

Let us analyse the word “promoting,” and try to understand just why Engineer Ananyev received the half a million roubles in cash and the three million roubles worth of founder's shares.

The reader who does not fully understand what the terms “to put a deal through,” “to finance an enterprise,” meant under the old regime will be surprised by the names, titles, official rank, and social standing of those who participated in the “putting through” and “financing.” He will pay special attention to the names of

¹ Bai—cider in the village.



POVENETZ AGIT-BRIGADE

people of, so to say, prehistoric standards, beginning with Sukhomlinov, War Minister, and ending with Prince Andronnikov, famous for his intimacy with Rasputin. Lower on the hierarchical ladder follow: General Samsonov, commander of the troops of the Turkestan military district, then Kusbbegy, the prime minister of His Highness the Emir of Bokhara, the minister who received fifty thousand roubles before His Highness the Emir of Bokhara and General Adjutant of Nicholas the Second, granted Engineer Ananyev a concession for the term of 99 years, i.e., until the year 2009. Upon the original draft His Highness consented to inscribe "So be it." While the "engineers with connections, of the type of Novosiltzev" were mingling with the elite of social gatherings and in ministerial reception rooms, engineers like Ananyev worried about the organisation of a company for the new undertaking. Here appears the name of the millionaire Konovalov, the future prime minister of the Provisional Government, who will meet with Ananyev again later on under different circumstances. At last some brokers, for the consideration of one hundred thousand roubles of commission fees, arranged to turn the concession over to the Persian Commercial and Industrial Bank, and the commission money was distributed among active privy councillors, among lawyers, department chiefs, secretaries, adjutants, ballet-dancers, procurers, and generals' mistresses.

The complex machinery of bribery, and pressure through people with connections, accomplished the final turn, and the trick was done—the ex-captain in the engineers', Ananyev, a modest engineer in charge of the construction work of the Ternez fortress, became a millionaire, a capitalist, a business man on a large scale.

And then came the final solemn accord.

His Imperial Majesty sanctioned the bylaws of the new company, not without the co-operation of General Samsonov, commander of the troops of the Turkestan Military District.

This happened in 1913. It took almost three years to "incorporate" the Shirabad concession. Then Engineer Ananyev took steps "to receive a similar concession on the Vakhsh" but, he concludes epically, "The Vakhsh construction materialised only under the Soviet Government."

The Shirabad concession had been sanctioned. The second act of the tragi-comedy now began: the solemn departure to the place of work. Again troikas, picnics, outings, "society people," again rivers of champagne. Engineer Kyniev, the builder of the

Mesopotamian irrigation system, was invited as a consultant, and again banquets and picnics, guards of honour, cringing officials of the Emir, corrupted Becks.

“The population was hostile,” remarks Ananyev objectively. But there were the Emir’s guards, and there were the Russian troops guarding the Emir and his Becks. The thing ended with “an uprising of the peasants and workers and the seizure of the lands confiscated from the peasants.” But “the agreement with the Emir worked,” concludes Ananyev laconically.

He came back along the Volga from Tsaritsin to Nizhni-Novgorod. On the steamboat were the artists of the *Chauve Souris*, young women, actors, musicians....

“Time passed gaily and imperceptibly.” However, the reader already understands that he has before him not only a happy-go-lucky story-teller, an epicurean, a ladies’ man, but a real business man, a capitalist with a strong grip, a representative of the class of exploiters and a future enemy of the proletarian revolution.

The next page of Engineer Ananyev’s life is the Persian adventure, a sally into Persia as a scout of Russian capital and the War Department. An expedition into southern Persia directed against the economic influence of Great Britain in that country.

Influential financial circles appraised Ananyev’s ability. They entrusted him with the very delicate mission of cultivating the friendship of the Persian prince Akber-Mirzu, a large-scale landowner in Isfagan. Out of “sympathy to the Russians,” he offered them the lease of his oil-bearing lands.

One hundred roubles a day, all expenses charged to the account of the Persian branch of the Russian State Bank: and Alexander Georgevich Ananyev started for Persia. He travelled like a distinguished person, like a bridegroom in a wedding carriage upholstered in satin. He was followed by a convoy of thirty Persian Cosacks and a valet, “Monsieur Ivan,” an escaped Russian prisoner. In this carriage Ananyev composed, by request of the Eastern division of the War Department, a description of the routes, and a detailed description of the roads leading into southern Persia.

Then the meeting with the prince, an eastern tyrant, and a brief mention of “the struggle of the population against the tyrant” and the population’s retreat to the mountains. Ananyev’s adventures, his trips, his relationship with the Englishmen, who observed the travels of the Russian adventurer suspiciously—all of this would occupy an entire chapter in the account of Ananyev’s career. But he did not spend long on this episode. He returned to Russia. In

passing he mentions the purchase of lands from the tribes, on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, for a song, and his appearance in the new role of a member of the board of directors of the "Corporation for the construction of radio stations and magnetos." He tells at length about the personal life and intimate experiences of an epicurean and man of the world. Sudden pangs of conscience urged him abroad, where his wife lived. He left for Germany on the eve of the war, but managed to get back into Russia in the same year, when with the aid of Sukhomlinov the Russian army, "the grey heroes," "the holy cattle," were pushed against the German machine guns and cannon, but without cartridges and shells.

Ananyev, captain in the engineers, raised an auxiliary brigade of the militia. He served behind the front, in the region of Brest-Litovsk. "Chaos," he remarks.

The February revolution came on, and Alexander Georgevich, who had established himself at the base, in the school for ensigns of the engineers, had the honour of congratulating the Cadets on the bloodless revolution.

4

Here began a new epoch in his career, Alexander Georgevich appears before us as Colonel Ananyev, in episodic roles in the historic comedy of the February revolution.

He appears as commandant of the Tavrichesky Palace. He was entrusted with the mission of guarding the precious lives of the ministers Protopopov and Goremykin, he was elected to the office of chief of the school for ensigns of the engineers.

The Kronstadt sailors, representatives of the revolutionary Soviet Government, arrested Colonel Ananyev. The chief of the defence did not long remain in imprisonment, he succeeded in disappearing. But this arrest is of interest to us, for it is Ananyev's first arrest under the Soviet Government.

Almost thirteen years elapsed between his first and his last arrest. Ananyev's service, the events of his life during these thirteen years continued to reflect the history of our stormy times.

His first arrest, on an October night in 1917, did not, of course, discourage him. Friends and comrades saw him at "the Bear" restaurant in civilian clothes, almost the same night. He considered himself a hero, and was only somewhat vexed by the fact, that during the very night, when he played, as you might say, a historic role as chief of the defence of the Winter Palace—during that very night

when the "Government" yielded to force and announced this on the thirty metre square at the Winter Palace—his friends were having a good time a few steps away at the "Hotel de France "

"It was out of the question now to think of flotations and accumulation of millions," remarks Ananyev with a melancholy air. "Received a loan of two hundred thousand roubles from the bank on the collateral security of my shares," he continues and goes on to mention the bribe of thirty thousand roubles which he had to give to the chairman of the board of directors of the bank. Those were evidently the same Shirabad founder's shares, which were still being quoted on the illicit stock-exchange by the Petersburg speculators.

From this point the description of Alexander Georgevich's life loses its harmony.

There begins a period of wanderings from the north to the south. In spite of the fact that he travelled "under threat of being thrown out of the car," Ananyev arrived at Kiev, celebrated the new year of 1918 there, and passed a few dismal days and nights at the Hotel Francois, or rather in the basement of the hotel, for just then Kiev was being bombarded by the revolutionary troops. Then came an exodus from Kiev by way of Sviatoshino, and a return to Petrograd via Sarno.

Alexander Georgevich returned safely to Petrograd in the spring of 1918. He participated to the extent of his ability in the work of a Soviet institution, "Khleboles." He touches slightly upon the congress in Moscow concerning the problems of the supply of provisions, upon some sprees at Martyanich's, upon his work at the "Glavvod" (Department of Waterways), and upon "the dispute regarding the extent of nationalisation of the mercantile marine." Generally speaking, it is hard to follow the fruitless activity of this formerly energetic man. One statement can be safely made—Alexander Georgevich Ananyev was not fascinated by work in Soviet institutions.

He had nothing to go abroad for. This would have been senseless. The master must return. The Donetz mines, the oil lands, the railways must not be abandoned. The first man later will be he who remained on the job, who saved the property.

Ananyev remained. He was still ready to fight the revolution. He still had strength enough to conduct a secret, even open struggle. Of course he was not going to fight the reds with Denikin or Wrangel. With whom then? There remained a firm, though secret hope in intervention—in help from the outside. This hope brought

BELOMOR

Ananyev again into the ranks of the secret foes of the revolution.

He worked in the Gubleskom (the Provincial Forest Committee). He was apparently legalised, but the Chekists and Bolsheviks have a keen scent. His counter-revolutionary smell can be scented for miles. They searched for him and found him. He was arrested, and accused of "the establishment of an organisation with the aim of bringing discredit to the Soviet Government."

Ananyev was sentenced to compulsory work in procuring supplies of wood fuel. The gangs of the Atamans, Khmara and Likho roamed in the forests. Ananyev defined his attitude towards the Soviet Government as "loyal," "not interested in politics." But he admits: "I knew that under the guise of procuring lumber many engineers and technicians were looking for a chance to get over the border." Many, too many, knew that in a certain city, in a certain Soviet institution, there was a good friend, Ananyev would not disappoint one's expectations. "I was ideologically alien to the Soviet Government. I understood the N.E.P. (New Economic Policy) as a sign of evolution, as the dawn of a democratic republic," continues Ananyev frankly. He served—yes, exactly—served, not worked—on the Board of Resorts of the People's Commissariat for Health; as manager in the sugar trust in Kharkov, but the eye of the Cheka—the G.P.U. was still fixed on him. In 1923 he was under the special observation of the G.P.U., in 1925 he was discharged from work as an anti-Soviet element. The Chekists' sense of scent does not deceive them: Alexander Georgevich Ananyev, whose whole life has passed before our eyes, was really an alien, a harmful element. He dreamt of work with a foreign concession, and at the same time he longed again for Central Asia, where he had found connections, success in his undertakings and millions of roubles.

Thirteen years ago he left Central Asia as a capitalist, a big business-man. And now again he sees Tashkent: but a Tashkent without General Samsonov, without Tashkentians clattering their weapons, without a grand duke in disgrace, banished for stealing, without official colonists, without the Bokhara merchants and without missionaries.

It seemed as if history were repeating itself. He was the chief of the Shirabad survey group. A trip to Termez, old connections, old acquaintances, recollections of rivers of champagne, gay garrison life, cavalcades, hunting parties. At that time it did not enter his mind that his Shirabad concession had doomed the peasants to starvation, and that the agreement with the Emir weighed down the backs of the Shirabad peasants. He came to think of it later, and

at the moment when this thought entered his mind a different Ananyev came into the world and his eyes were opened.

In 1927 it had still been the old Ananyev, the former businessman and the former chief of the defence of the Winter Palace. "The trial of the employees of the Department of Water Economy did not involve me, but it set me thinking," he remarks pensively.

The same thoughts of work in a foreign concession—"on an island in the midst of a Soviet sea."

Moscow again. Ananyev was chief engineer of the Moscow Housing Co-operative. "Suspicious business-men are at the head of the bureau," he remarks. Let us give due credit to his experienced eye. This man has seen quite a number of crooks, quite a number of rogues during his life. Later—we see Ananyev in the post of chief engineer of the Uzbekistan Water Economy Board.

"I concealed an expedient grant of funds, leading to the freezing of capital, created by the working masses," he says frankly. "I covered up the thriftlessness of my colleague, and kept quiet about the Winter Palace and other petty adventures."

Old connections and failings brought him to Riesenkampf, a large-scale hydrotechnical specialist from the clique of anti-Soviet people, the clique of hydrotechnical and railway engineers. They built a grandiose system of irrigation, and by doing so robbed the small irrigation system of water, and deprived the country of cotton.

The Shirabad Valley was a field of battle for Engineer Ananyev. He was not going to occupy himself with irrigation, he wanted to fight the Soviet Government in another battle. The general battle at the Winter Palace had been lost. But he had under-estimated the forces to which he was opposed. The encounter at the Shirabad valley was also lost, and Engineer Ananyev found himself at Belomorstroy.

Chapter VIII

KAGAN THE CHEKIST MANAGER AND RAPPOPORT HIS ASSISTANT

Nine o'clock.

Telephone bells ring in every room of the head office at Bear Hill.

People who have come to report to the Chief are waiting for their turn at the Secretariat.

A courier brings the mail.

Radiograms from Tunguda and Nadvoitz come in. Two more requisitions for carpenters.

Half-an-hour later the head of the Construction passes to his private office. The secretary reports.

"Carpenters? They'll get carpenters all right. Put me through to Povenetz."

"Povenetz? Do you expect the chief of the Construction to get a headache for you? How many men have you? Haven't they got hands? Then, why do you ask for carpenters. There are no carpenters and no prospects of any. Shake the dust out of your brains. Where there's a will, there's a way. There must be bath-houses at every section."

"Put me through to the watershed."

"Komarov? This is Kagan?... What are you playing at: You have five thousand men, and can't select one hundred to put up barracks and bakehouses? You don't expect to build palaces, do you? They don't know how to hold an axe. Teach 'em. Why do you think you were made chief of the section? Look sharp. When I get there, there'll be the devil to pay. The main thing is to keep the people warm and clothed, and to exterminate lice. Yes, lice. For the present, that's the principal thing."

The secretary reports:

"The chief of the Production Department wants to see you."

"What for: I suppose he wants me to add another thousand days to our five hundred. Tell him I'll call him in an hour. And now send me the chief of the Cultural and Educational Department."

On the chest of the chief of the White Sea-Baltic waterway there are two military orders and the Chekist star of honour.

He walks up and down the room. He stops in front of a chart showing the red line of the projected waterway, passing through blue rings. Each ring is a lake. Every thread—a river. The red line is

crossed in many spots.

Locks... Dams... Dykes....

So far all of this exists on paper only.

The head of the Construction walks up to a diagram. At the top there is a large red circle—the head of the Construction. Under it, and connected with it by straight lines, are three smaller green circles—the head of the administrative office, the head of the works, the chief engineer of the Construction. Underneath, connected with the three green circles, there are many small blue circles—departments: financial, accounting and distributing, supply, projecting, production, agriculture, transport, sanitation, mechanisation, communication, administration.

These circles have not as yet begun to rotate at full speed. How many more people are necessary for the Chekist skeleton to be covered with a layer of live, healthy flesh?

Thirty-seven Chekists spread over a front of 227 kilometres, over tens of thousands of people—That is not much.

A young boy in a prisoner's cap.

A Chekist with two military orders.

1909... 1931.

The revolution revised all court sentences in its own way.

In Leningrad, the prisons were broken open and all police offices set on fire.

In Moscow, the prisoners of the Butirk prison were liberated in an organised manner. The Butirk prison was, as the prisoners used to say, a solid prison. The people in the cells had no names, each had a number.

Once a prisoner was taken to the dentist. A stout woman looked at his teeth, wrapped something on a little stick, and put it into the prisoner's mouth. The prisoner felt that there was a piece of paper in his mouth. He closed his teeth tightly and left the dispensary, holding his cheek.

Upon returning to his cell he opened his mouth and took out the note. In the note there was written in pencil:

"There is a revolution in Petersburg."

Everybody in the cell turned cold. They sat on their plank-beds wrapped in blankets.

One of the prisoners was a barber and had the right to go around all the floors in his shackles: to shave the faces of the higher and lower chiefs, and the heads of the prisoners. The barber was sent out to reconnoitre.

He returned sadly and said:

BELOMOR

“It’s bad. There is a crowd at some distance, but there are troops around the prison. The people will not be able to get through.”

They did not know that the troops had mutinied.

They were sitting silently in their cell when the gaoler rushed in suddenly and said:

“Get your things and go to the city.”

The prisoners began to gather their prison property—rags, the protective lining of their shackles, a piece of soap.

They bundled them into their sacks and came out into the corridor.

In the corridor, the gaoler tapped everyone on the back, counting them and for the first time calling them by their names.

Gotz, Tomsky, Nedelshtlin, Dzerzhinsky.

There were Social Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks in the cell, they argued, but could not come to a common understanding. From the prison gates, they went in different directions.

Kagan had been sent to prison as an anarchist, but upon his liberation followed Dzerzhinsky. He came to the Communist Party through newspaper work, through the regiment of Ataman Grigoriev, in which he fought alongside the Bolsheviks against the anarchists.

In July, 1918 the Kherson Party Committee issued a Communist Party membership book to the Bolshevik Kagan.

Work in the Red Army, beginning as a political Commissar of a battalion and ending as the political Commissar of the Ninth Army Inspection.

Then Kagan became the director of the Party School in Kuban. Soon after that he was appointed chief of the Special Department of the Ninth Army. Then he became assistant chief of the G.P.U. troops. Three years of work in the frontier guard. Then Kagan was entrusted with the organisation of the Administration of the G.P.U. camps.

“Povenetz is on the wire.”

They speak from Povenetz for a long while. Kagan patiently asks them once more:

“How many?”

He hangs up the receiver. The conversation is ended.

“Get Uspensky here. He is sleeping in my room.”

The errand boy runs swiftly along a deep ditch, his feet stick in the mud. He pays no attention to plank footways, there is no time, the chief wants Uspensky in a hurry.

A tall, stooping young man, in the uniform of the G.P.U., with a pouting almost childish mouth, comes in and walks up to Kagan's desk.

"Oh! sit down."

Uspensky looks round the room, screwing up his eyes. He is waiting for Kagan to finish his conversation. Kagan has finished at last.

"Yes, we did not finish our talk yesterday. They just rang me up from Povenetz. The latest scandal. Tchalov evidently doesn't understand the problems facing him. Instead of obeying the orders given, he starts a scandal with the engineers. You see, they claim that they are not camp prisoners, but engineers."

The telephone rings.

"Here's an interesting document." Kagan hands Uspensky a sheet of paper:

"Everything is topsy-turvy at the Povenetz camp just as before. The campers do not know whom to obey. There is no strict division of labour, and no plan of work. Everyone pulls his own way. Bread-baking has not been regulated yet. They are still bringing in bread from Kem. There are many misunderstandings on this account. The administrative staff has been expanded to incredible proportions. But the main trouble is that it has become thoroughly bureaucratic. How else can one explain the lumber transport department ordering deliveries from points so distant that it is absolutely nonsensical to bring wood from there. There is excellent building lumber right under our noses. Tell this to Frenkel. The construction of barracks is going somewhat better. But all the same the newly-arrived prisoners are abominably housed.

"I consider the intolerable relations between the administration and the organisation of the engineering and technical workers the main obstacle to the development of the construction and the normal functioning of camp life. This must be stopped."

"You've read it? Well! It is all correct. It cannot go on like this. We must get to work in real earnest, and clear the atmosphere there. In this short time the section has been turned into a kind of penal settlement. Incessant scandals and arguments between Tchalov and the engineering and technical workers' association. You will take matters over from Tchalov and start work; discussing all industrial questions in detail with Comrade Rappoport. What's the date?"

"The sixth," prompted someone from the crowd.

"The sixth of November, 1931"—an engineer with a long nose

and despondent face made it more precise. He was still counting the days and the nights of his stay at Camp.

“Very well. Let it be the sixth. Then beginning with the seventh Uspensky enters upon his work at Povenetz. Get the motor ready. I have the order here. I warn you, the men and their comforts are every bit as important as the obligatory fulfilment of the production programme set by the State Political Department (G.P.U.)

“Should you notice any negligence on the part of the section chiefs or responsible workers in their attitude towards the needs of the prisoners, you must report to me immediately, and I shall petition the Central authorities of the G.P.U. to bring those guilty to trial and give them no quarter. I demand the establishment of an exact system of registration of the workers. I demand cultural and educational work for all, so that those participating in this construction realise the significance of the great task which has been entrusted to the G.P.U. by the Party and the Government. A strong, homogeneous organised body is the first requisite for successful work. If you can create such an organised body, the victory will naturally be yours. Well, a happy journey.

“One more thing, Uspensky. The engineers say that they are not prisoners, but engineers. You will explain to them who they are. Treat the engineers carefully. Depend on the old experienced engineers, and promote the young ones. Let the young learn from the old. Promote new people from among the prisoners boldly. Organise courses of study. The share of the work to be done in Povenetz is very great, it is at least 38 per cent. of the entire undertaking. Engineer Budassy will tell you the state of affairs. He is a remarkable man, in his way.”

2

The trains of the Murmansk railway were always famous for arriving late. The distance from Bear Hill to Nadvoitz is not great, but the train was delayed in leaving. There were many women in the train going to visit their people. Everyone talked of the same thing—of the camps.

In one compartment a tall young man in a long grey coat was reading a book by Prishvin very attentively.

“You look at the pillars of foam. They fall into a quiet pool under the shade of a black rock, where they dance on the barely moving surface. But each of these pillars is different and everything changes: nothing is the same this second as it was a second ago,

and one waits for the next—the unknown second.

“Evidently, some forces act on the fall of the water; and at every moment each part is different. The waterfall seems to live some complex eternal life of its own...”

This is a description of the Nadvoitz waterfall. *In the Land of the Unfrightened Birds* is a book on these localities. Uspensky read it attentively. The train was late; there was plenty of time. The Nadvoitz waterfall is destined to disappear; above it there is to be the fourth level.

Uspensky put aside the book and began to look over a blue-print. On the blue-print was the plan of the junction. An explanatory note was attached.

“This level is to be maintained by weir No. 21 on the right bank, and the double rise lock No. 10 on the left bank, with approach canals isolated from the approaches to the weir. The bed of the river Vyg is to be shut off by a deep weir....

“The supporting dams are to be...” read Uspensky on the type-written sheets. He got out a map, on which dams were shown by lines, locks by brackets and weirs by double lines. A broad red line on the map showed the future canal.

The dams were marked with meaningless numbers.

Uspensky wrote in their names, so as to remember them and understand the map better. The longest dam was called Dubrov after the village near which it is located. Uspensky measured the dam. On the map it was no longer than one’s little finger; but in the project its length was set at $3\frac{1}{4}$ kilometres. Over weir No. 21 Uspensky wrote: “Sluice.” Then he marked the map with various crosses and signs—notes for his own use. In the train from Bear Hill to Nadvoitz, he studied the names of his places, and got the numbering of the locks and dams straight. He wanted to know all about his junction. The Nadvoitz junction.

He visualised a rope with a kink in it—a hawser. There was such a hawser with a clumsy kink in it at the pier in Solovetz. The Nadvoitz kink must be straightened better.

“Comrade Uspensky wears his hair long, what we call the proletarian haircut” said the local barber. Uspensky’s hair is a reddish copper colour. Coarse hair, although curly. Uspensky has a jolly laugh, which makes people take to him very quickly. Like many tall people he stoops, and the long army coat makes him seem taller.

Uspensky reached Nadvoitz in the winter. The future camps were marked by roads, trodden paths and felled trees. Here and there stood a few barracks. Uspensky was no novice in camp affairs.

BELOMOR

He knew the depths to which a thief can fall and the furious stubbornness of the village counter-revolutionists. He knew the human material he would have to deal with; but he knew nothing about the construction. Everything was new—and there were no written instructions. Just one directive—a policy of reforming through labour. And Uspensky had had some experience in this field in the Solovetsky Islands where he was one of the chiefs who introduced the new method, never before heard of—the Soviet method of reform—reform through work.

Uspensky was faced with the task of preparing himself to manage the construction. He studied. He would lay out the blue-prints and the different schemes suggested on his table, call the engineers together, and listen for hours to endless debates and discussions. The flow of unknown terms would deafen him. Which of the engineers was right? On whom could he depend? Each of them seemed to be right as he listened to him. It had already been decided what sort of dykes,—their height and at what angle,—were to be built as the banks of the future canal. But perhaps something was wrong?

To-day he had to decide how to attack the rocks, what sort of wheelbarrows to issue for carrying soil during the winter, how to sink a shaft, what roads to use for the tenth lock, how long the caissons were to be, what wood was best, and how to treat it.

The main problem was that of labour forces. Where was he to get navvies? How was he to prepare electricians? Where was he to procure carpenters? Tractor drivers? Smiths? Fitters? There were too few people—too few.... Whom was he to appoint as foreman? The engineers talked lengthily and confusedly. Especially on the characteristics of their colleagues. A telegram from Bear Hill—a new group of prisoners was coming—1,200 of them. Hands were needed, but the barracks weren't finished. The new arrivals would have to rest after their journey. In two or three days they would start work.

By evening his head was humming. The engineers would not vouch for the quality of the prisoners' work; they planned and calculated with a little extra, just in case.... And the "extras" are sometimes all right. But the time allowed was restricted and short. The engineers shrugged their shoulders.

"The canal can be built—why not? But not in this time or with such labour forces."

The dams must not be built with earth during the winter. The frozen soil would thaw in the spring, and cave in. Nor could the course of the river be changed during the winter—the spring floods

would carry away the loosely embedded piles. During the winter one must prepare for the spring and the summer.

During the winter roads were laid, and the ground was cleared, and in particular permanent bath-houses, bakeries, kitchens and dining-rooms were built. A club was put up. It was always crowded with canal soldiers.

3

The nature of the Chekists' work entirely excludes any lack of confidence in their own strength. However, operative Chekists who were sent to the canal spent some hours in putting their ideas in order. The transition from one familiar circle of ideas to another unknown one was too violent. In order to be able to direct engineers it becomes necessary to learn the whims of rivers, the geological genealogy of the ground, the nature of concrete and wood, and the vagaries of the weather.

Upon receiving a new appointment almost every one of them felt a buzzing in his head, as though after a double dose of quinine. One felt an unaccustomed worrying doubt: "Shall I make good? Shall I live up to my name as a Chekist?"

Yakov Rappoport proved in this case to be better prepared than many.

"You are on good terms with mathematics, are you not?" he was asked before leaving.

He answered in a business-like way: "When I was a child I liked puzzling problems. I would keep at them for several days, until I had found the right solution. The good thing about mathematics, it seems to me, is that anyone who knows them cannot easily be fooled. Once I was on the point of taking up mathematics at the university. Even now I often pass my spare time in the study of trigonometry and mechanics."

His interlocutor nodded approvingly. Then he reminded Rappoport of the latter's work during the last few years in the economic department of the G.U.L.A.G. (the head office of the G.P.U. concentration camps), where he had managed the commissariat of that organisation.

"Right, quite right," corroborated Yakov Davidovich, turning slightly, and enumerating where and what he had constructed and with what branches of industry he had come in contact.

"You will now be Kagan's assistant," he was told. "It will be your duty to feed and clothe the people in the camp, to see that they are

BELOMOR

kept clean and supplied with clean linen, to deliver the technical supplies needed by the construction in time, to know how to organise the work and allocate the workers, and to supply the engineers with everything they need from good pencils to warm rooms. The last is especially important, remember. You are in charge of the Belomorstroy rear, but there is no line in our days, dividing the rear from the front. You may go now.”



STREETS GROW IN THE FOREST



REMOVE THE ROCK. MAKE WAY FOR THE SLUICE!

At this time Kagan had not yet arrived at Bear Hill. Rappoport found a vaguely indicated ground plan, a few wheelbarrows, a shortage of tools, irregular supplies, and to top it all, daily arriving groups of campers.

He could not even leave his railway car as there was no office building for the management of the undertaking. No desks, no people to do the writing and figuring. Somewhere near the side of the mountain there should have been a log-house, where the engineers could live and make their drawings. But during the first hours they could not find a sensible man who could search out the engineers and collect them. Collect? Where? There was neither a club nor a red corner there. And how could the engineers make drawings without electric lights, much more without paper, rulers, drawing pins. There was only this uncoupled railway car. For the present this car appeared to be the office of the assistant General Manager and also the place for all future social activities. A large town was to grow up on the lake shore with tens of thousands of workers employed in the canal construction. But now, just outside the car window began an endless forest, night, stones. The lights of the lonely station gleamed in the dark.

Yakov Davidovich Rappoport laid his forehead against the cool window pane. He could hear the drizzling October rain trickling on the glass.

“What shall we start with? What shall we do first in this chaos of the birth of a great undertaking? The Party always teaches us to look for the central fact in a complex of phenomena. In the language of mathematics, this is the key to the solution of the problem. But the nearest Party sectional bureau is twenty-five miles away. Well, it need not necessarily be the sectional bureau. Perhaps we can find someone here, right now.”

One minute later he was already walking towards the lights of the station bumping against stone piles and stumbling into puddles. There in a dark little room he found the bureau of the Party unit, and there were some Party members and young Communists among the switchmen, greasers and guards. There were also some among the detachment of riflemen who accompanied the convoys of prisoners, and among the few Chekists who were sent here earlier on different missions, who were living in roofless and windowless log-cabins. All of them, well-acquainted with local conditions maintained that:

“First of all the campers must be given shelter. A man cannot work when he has no place to sleep or cook his food in.”

Rappoport listened and remembered. "Why this is the very thing the vice-chairman instructed me about before I left Moscow." Then he commissioned a rifleman to find the engineers and call them to his car.

"The people live under the open sky. Why are you building the barracks so slowly?" Rappoport asked the engineers.

What could they answer? Most of them had no clear attitude towards the canal on the whole, would it really be constructed, or had the entire business of the drawings and plans been invented just to occupy their leisure time in camp? Why on earth bother about such a detail as barracks? Nevertheless, the new-comer asks them, and judging by his cool, insistent voice, it is clear that he will not stop asking until he receives some answer. A foolish situation. Something must be said.

"The time limits set are clearly impracticable."

Yakov Davidovich jots down some figures on a piece of paper.

"A barrack can be built in 160 working days. I shall now add up the number of carpenters on hand, and distribute among them all available axes, planes and saws. You see, we have quite enough to put up the required number of barracks within two to three days. What else do you lack?"

"We work by the light of smoky little lamps dating from the Civil War."

"Your squeaky, rickety tables will soon be replaced by wide, firm desks with a set of instruments and an electric lamp on each. What else? It is a desire to work that you lack, isn't it?"

When the engineers got back to their quarters, they spoke of the novice in an unfriendly manner.

"He shows off all his knowledge of the estimates, but in reality he is as rough as the rest of them."

"Did you see, on his desk—The Regulation of Timber Floating, by Lebedev; Tubes and Bridges, by Golov?"

"Oh, well, that's just for show."

A morose, uncommunicative engineer was preparing to lie down on the most distant cot. At the conferences he sat in the darkest corner. He had never told anybody about the crime that brought him to the camp, and he always kept to himself.

He said, as if to himself:

"That is not entirely correct. That is Yakov Rappoport. At the university he was considered the best science student. We used to call him 'the mathematician.'"

"Where did you meet him?"

“At Voronezh.”

“Is there anything between you?”

The engineer turned silently to the wall.

Yes, this was the same Yakov Rappoport about whom Shkuro had issued the following leaflet, on occupying Voronezh.

“Yakov Rappoport, a student of the Imperial Yuryev University, which was evacuated in Voronezh during the World War, has gone over to the Bolsheviks. The student who reports his whereabouts will receive a reward of fifty thousand roubles.”

Some time later the newspaper *Voronezh Telegraph* announced on its front page that “The blood-thirsty vice-chairman of the provincial Cheka, Rappoport, had been caught and hanged.”

The little old woman with whom Yakov Davidovich had lodged, who worshipped her 20-year-old lodger, shed many tears over this announcement, and told her neighbours incessantly that “her late lodger had been a kind-hearted man.”

When Rappoport occupied the city with his regiment and came back to his old lodging place, it cost him much labour to revive the old lady, who had fainted on seeing him, and to get it into her head that many misunderstandings occur in a lifetime.

The engineers did not know how many hours a day the new chief worked. Judging from outward appearances he did not overwork himself. He was always fresh and collected, he spoke calmly, without raising his voice, did not jump from one subject to another in conversation, he put forward new problems in their proper order.

“The barracks are ready. Now we must look after the proper arrangement of them. Isn’t that so?”

He kept his promise and supplied everything necessary for the engineers’ work accurately and in time. They were pleased.

“It seems that it’s not all hot air with the novice.”

He did not run about the workings at breakneck speed, he did not shout, he did not rush people, but he investigated the different departments one after the other, and actually visited every barrack, arousing the admiration of the campers by his appropriate remarks. He demanded that the window and door frames be well puttied, that the door-sills be low enough, that every door have a catch, and that the stoves should not be allowed to smoke. He looked into the bath-houses and enquired whether there were enough tubs and bast washing pads for everyone, and whether the hot water faucets leaked. He would ask a camper to open his chest and show whether he had a spoon and a pot for his food, whether he had received soap

and whether it would last him until the next soap distribution. In the kitchens he kept repeating to the cooks: "The rations received from the quartermaster must reach the campers' stomachs without any loss." He made them weigh the products in his presence before putting them into the kettle, and kept an eye open to see whether the cooked food was divided into equal portions. He was seen everywhere, and his measured, quiet step, his restrained gestures, and even tone in which he made remarks, brought with them order, method, and attention to details.

There were people who asked him:

"What makes you take such an interest in these details, Yakov Davidovich?"

He would answer laconically.

"I am simply executing the orders of the G.P.U. Board of Directors."

Buildings were going up. How was one to be sure that the former manner of doing things just so that the boss wouldn't notice anything wrong, would not awaken again in the old time specialists. Hadn't they fooled even their own colleague, Vershbitzky? He had come to inspect the head of a lock. He had not been able to examine the concrete work personally and had taken their word for it and signed the certificate. Later it turned out that the reinforcement had been set up carelessly and stuck up out of the concrete. Rappoport demanded that certain people be assigned the duty of watching the quality of the work. They pointed out to him the difficulties of such an undertaking.

"These people would have to know how to put up constructions."

"Not necessarily," Rappoport retorted; "it is sufficient to know how not to do it and that is much easier to learn."

He had a series of talks with the people selected for this purpose, and they soon appeared at the workings.

There were soon scores of observers, who saw to it that logs and stumps were not thrown into the body of the earthen dam, that pebbles and sand were not mixed into the concrete in too large proportions, that the piles were driven in to the correct depth.

This man was becoming more and more an inalienable part of the Belomorstroy leadership. He never appeared to be in a hurry to get anywhere, but he always managed to be everywhere in time. He tried to speak only of things he knew, and when it came to an argument he would constantly check himself and defend his point of view to the very end. Nevertheless, even this sober-minded man

was sometimes carried away by enthusiasm. It would seem to him then that he needed no more study to become a full-fledged engineer, and then he would be carried away by his own technical knowledge and sagacity.

Yakov Davidovich has an excellent memory. Awakened in the middle of the night he could tell correctly the number of shovels, picks, and wheelbarrows there were on the construction, what rations had been given out the day before, what was the standard task for work on rock or clay, and what must be sent to this or the other department. Once they tried to fool him, but the attempt ended sadly for the deceivers.

It was the matter of shifting 80 kilometres of the Murmansk railway. At first the Commissariat for Ways and Communications had undertaken to do this work, and had even organised a trust for this purpose—the North-western Railway Construction Trust. A branch of this trust went out to May-Bay—96 people, with one Mayevsky in charge. Mayevsky was a very talkative person, and a great lover of nature, travelling, and black grouse shooting. Time passed. Mayevsky gushed over the Karelian sunsets, roamed around with his gun and made frequent trips to Murmansk.

His subordinates grew fat and wasted their working hours, writing letters to their friends and acquaintances.

Rappoport paid a visit to the trust and went out to see the railway track. It was still there, untouched, in the same old place. An unknown man in the uniform of the Commissariat for Ways and Communications stood on the track investigating the horizon through a theodolite. Another man, evidently his helper, was snoring noisily in the grass nearby.

Rappoport invited Mayevsky to visit him at Medgora. Yakov Davidovich did not like violent scenes and the conversation was conducted in an undertone.

“Tell me, Comrade Mayevsky, what have you accomplished in the matter of shifting the track?”

“With pleasure,” agreed the other readily. “Up to now, we have been busy procuring technical supplies.”

“For instance?”

“For instance we have procured twenty tents.”

“Pardon me, but I remember perfectly that I personally gave you these tents, although you were supposed, according to our agreement, to procure everything for yourselves.”

“That’s true. But I have to recruit labour.”

“But these are my campers.”

“We bought wooden shovels and brooms.”

“How many?”

“Three carloads.”

“Well... One must have, if I may so express it, an exceptional head to transport bundles of twigs and rough boards from central Russia into wooded Karelia. Let us not quarrel. I have a compromise to offer: no trace of you shall be left here. We shall shift the track ourselves. I have made enquiries at Moscow and received orders.”

Mayevsky was about to raise an objection, but Yakov Davidovich looked at him—it was the usual Rappoport look, deep, with a twinkle behind it—and Mayevsky understood and picked up his cap.

“By the way, who is that man with a little tube standing on the track and looking bored?” asked Rappoport.

“Lenzhdiza, a probationer from the Leningrad Railway Institute.”

“Take him along with you.”

“Very well,” answered Mayevsky submissively.

The engineers compared Rappoport with the other Chekists.

“Technology came easy to him, but he has very little feeling. Others also are strict, but they are so cordial, so enthusiastic in their speeches. If Yakov Davidovich would only shout sometimes—but no, not he. It is hard to understand him, he is so cold. Here we are, at an assembly now, if he would step forward and say something...”

Yakov Davidovich Rappoport was looking at one of the delegates. This was the same engineer who had told his neighbours about Rappoport after the first conference in the railway car.

“There is something familiar in that crooked nose, that unsociable look, that manner of sitting with his shoulders up and his head down.”

“Can it be he?” Rappoport wondered. He called over the chief of the division and asked the prisoner’s name. The chief told him.

“Where is he from?”

“From Voronezh.”

“What is he in camp for?”

“He betrayed a Bolshevik underground organisation.”

Rappoport sat there thinking, looking up from time to time at the familiar face of the camper.

“Suppose I were to walk up to him right now, take him by the chin, lift up his head, and say to him: “Why do you hang your head? Do you remember January, 1917 and the students of the Yuryev

University which had been transferred to Voronezh, and the group of Bolsheviks? Rabichev, Ipp, Kurasevich and myself, Rappoport—do you remember? How were we found out? Tell me, who betrayed us?”

The man straightened his back gradually. He lifted his head, raised his hand, asked for permission to speak, and started for the platform. He went up to the platform on a narrow plank that bent under him, he had to balance himself to keep from falling. The man spoke about the shortcomings at the workings, proposed means of overcoming them and told about his rationalisation idea. He spoke boldly and passionately.

Rappoport rose quietly. His eyes still retained the image of a figure balancing on a plank. Yakov Davidovich decided:

“No, it’s best not to remind him. The plank is still too narrow for him, he may fall down again.”

Rappoport walked on his tip-toes to the exit and at the very door said to the chief of the division:

“I am going away. Please watch the man who is speaking now. If he is really sincere, report to me about him within a month.”

Chapter IX

THIEVES, EMBEZZLERS AND BUDASSY

A poster appeared on the glass doors of the office. India ink on the back of a blue-print:

“To-night is a Storm Night.”

“The camp society will give an account of its work.”

This term “Camp Society” had until that moment been entirely unknown in the camp vocabulary.

The camp was certainly a very strange place!

The designing here was done by wreckers. The financial department was run by embezzlers, and the administrative department by people who had been sentenced for offences committed while in office. And now, to top it all, a camp society—Socialist competition among counter-revolutionaries, thieves and murderers. An original idea. The world turned inside out.

The sceptics shrugged their shoulders. The management wanted it. Well, all right, the sceptics were accustomed to obey.

And yet, this announcement brought great anxiety and uneasiness into the quiet flow of camp life.

From early morning the camp was in a bustle; each department hurried and rushed about.

The designing department counted up its folios; the financial department added and multiplied. Prudent assistant bookkeepers stowed pillows and blankets under the tables. There was a sleepless night to come. It was necessary not only to explain the work already completed, but also to present concrete plans for the future. For many, it was a question of their fate—a question of their remaining at Bear Hill, for the staff was to be cut; and many were reluctant to go out to the unorganised branch sections. The branches were so remote. And so people worried and fretted; even though they knew that their work would be examined by their own people—the camp dwellers—the K.V.O. workers.

The outer room of the planning department was crowded and full of smoke. There were few chairs and benches, and the people were crowded round the door.

The grey-haired Vladimir Dmitrievich Jurin spoke briefly, saying that the construction was entering a new phase, and that we must review our forces and begin to work at a new speed.

“You run the risk of sleeping through Socialism. You must get into the country’s Five Year Plan. We appeal to you, as the camp

society," said a second speaker. "The canal is our common cause. Only together, with our combined strength, and with the help of science and creative experience, can we conquer the Karelian rocks."

He urged, and criticised, and demanded pledges. These were given willingly. They were hung on the glass doors of the office, where everyone could read them.

"The designing department undertakes to finish the technical plan before the time set."

"The supply workers undertake to work two hours overtime every day."

The pledges were variegated with figures, promises, and points from the agreement.

Thus, unnoticed, a new life began. The cultural education department undertook to check up these pledges.

And after this storm night came other nights—all of them alike.

People forgot sleep, forgot food, forgot their own existence. A great deal had to be decided in a hurry; it was necessary to secure labour forces for the construction, to provide living quarters, to distribute the forces, show them where to dig basins, to get technical equipment, and—most important of all—to finish the project quickly.

Motor buses going to Povenetz and Vodorazdel, and trains running to the north, carried the first brigades of administration shock-workers out on the job.

2

Engineer Budassy is an incarnation, in the most blatant, obvious and vulgar form of one of the most characteristic traits of semi-Asiatic Russian capitalist swindlers. Yes, precisely, in the most vulgar form. For these same traits, merely raised to a certain height of principle and complicated by tradition, good education, and good taste, were characteristics of a considerable section of the pre-revolutionary Russian engineers. This more complex manifestation had very little resemblance to its rudimentary form. These people took bribes with the appearance and the feelings of men awarded bonuses, for special achievements in the field of technology, as if by Cambridge University.

Engineer Budassy had a sad fate: the very fact of his existence seems to expose this beautifully be-furbished swindling. One of the

basic methods used in teaching biology is the study of individuals whose organism contains, in the simplest and most rudimentary form, all the elements peculiar to the highly-developed representative of the same type. In Engineer Budassy's face we see the Russian engineer of the capitalist era, freed of all his cultural embellishments, of his fine taste and delicate character, of his intricate and complex ideological superstructure—forms which resembled a gothic cathedral, or an Indian pagoda.

What impelled Engineer Budassy to enter the organisation of the wreckers? Of course, fundamentally, all the wreckers had one common aim—to overthrow the Soviet State and bring back capitalism. But then, we can say of some that they professed technocratic views; others—autocratic; and still others—constitutional-democratic. They built on a common foundation, but they built their own more or less original superstructures. But Budassy simply wanted to find his millionaire brother-in-law, who had emigrated. All his social reactions are elementary in the extreme.

Sentenced to five years in a concentration camp, Engineer Budassy found himself at Belomorstroy. He was an excellent foreman and an untiring worker, and soon became manager of his section.

"Clever fellows," he thought dreamily of the Chekists; "terribly clever. It's no easy matter to wind all this ragged rabble about one's finger! Why, they work like horses."

He had not the least doubt that the Chekists had got round the criminals by some trick. But it was not quite clear to him by what method they had managed to succeed in this profitable business. He was inclined to think that the basic method of their so-called educational work lay in making false promises. You must not think that his belief in this low deceit made him contemptuous of the Chekists! On the contrary, it was precisely because of this that he respected them, wondered at them, and above all envied them.

Of course, Engineer Budassy did not believe in Socialism. He was convinced that all this Socialist talk was carried on purely for the sake of appearances.

"And who believes, old chap—who believes," he said to one of his colleagues. "Except, perhaps, some fanatics."

With all his scepticism, he admitted the existence of a certain *real* Socialism. This shrewd contractor, defined *real Socialism* in old-fashioned, touching terms. He supposed it to be something ideal and sentimental, something like a girl's album for verses. And what is there in common between the strict camp regime, the de-lousing of thieves, bandits, and prostitutes—and a girl's album of verses?

And now and then he felt an irresistible desire to let these Chekists know that he, thanks be to God, was no fool either. He wanted to wink at them slyly, as though to say: "You and I—we understand that there is no Socialism here, and even no thought of it."

Engineer Budassy was famous at Belomorstroy for cheating the Karelian Government of 10,000 roubles, for the benefit of the construction. This is the story of this remarkable transaction.

He was commissioned to load some diabase rock which the Karelian Government had bought from Belomorstroy. A ship can take 5,000 cubic metres of diabase in one trip. In order to save the work of weighing and measuring the load for each trip, its amount is determined by this very simple method: When the ship has taken in a load of 5,000 cubic metres of diabase, she naturally rides lower in the water, the water-line is in short at a certain level; this level is marked on her side with a red line. On the next trip there is no longer any necessity of measuring or weighing the shipment: the ship is loaded until she settles into the water up to the line marked on her side.

It was in this method that Engineer Budassy saw his opportunity. He first loaded 2,000 cubic metres on to the ship, and laid over this load a carefully fitted deck of planks. Then he loaded another 3,000 cubic metres. The level of the water was marked by a line on the side. There were no misunderstandings when the load was delivered. Budassy quite coolly unloaded the 3,000 cubic metres that lay on top, and started on the return trip. The consignees, who knew very well how deep a ship should lie for any particular load, had no suspicions, and had no desire to measure the unloaded diabase; for the ship lay in the water at precisely the right level. And now Engineer Budassy had to load not 5,000 cubic metres, but only 3,000, to attain the desired level. He made five trips in this way—always carrying back the same unchanging load of 2,000 cubic metres. In these five trips, he cheated the Karelian Government of 10,000 cubic metres of diabase rock.

Budassy saw nothing criminal in this trick. "If the capitalists competed with one another," he reasoned, "why should not the Socialists do the same? Trade is trade, no matter how wise they are." When he was beset by doubts as to how he would answer for his trick, he told himself: "Nonsense! As long as the world exists, people will cheat one another." And if the worst should happen, he decided that the camp Socialists were, after all, vitally interested in the thing. If anything should happen, they would give him every support.

His clever trick was accidentally discovered by his chief, the Chekist Afanasyev, who happened to be present when the ship was loaded. Or, perhaps, not accidentally! Afanasyev knew Engineer Budassy well enough to suspect the possibility of his committing an action so fantastic under Soviet conditions.

The camp Socialists did not stand up for Engineer Budassy. He received a severe reprimand, after which he conceived an even greater respect for the Chekists. But he still felt a certain perplexity about the whole affair.

Of course, Budassy would have suffered a great deal more severely for his swindling trick, had not the affair been so very funny, and had he not been such an excellent worker.

His attempt to serve his new employer in so charmingly naive a manner became a subject of conversation all over Belomorstroy and made him very popular. Who could think that this elderly man, after his hard experiences, and under the severe conditions of camp life, could perpetrate such a gracious, gratuitous swindle!

There is another side to all this. Paradoxical as such an assertion may sound, we may nevertheless suppose with some degree of certainty that Engineer Budassy's swindle was to a certain degree a proof of his psychological reconstruction: for the first time in his life, he cheated entirely *disinterestedly*. This trick could not bring him even fame, not to speak of money; for he carried the whole thing through with the profoundest secrecy.

At the same time, as we have said, Engineer Budassy was a splendid worker. More than that—he was an eager, passionate, and an enthusiastic worker. For his good work, he was allowed to bring his family to Povenetz. He brought them there, but refused to live there himself—he was afraid it might be detrimental to his work. Now that he is free, the different authorities quarrel over him—they all want Engineer Budassy. He has one defect as a worker. He is a cubist, and likes to make cubes—sometimes even to the detriment of the work. But on the whole we must say that he did his difficult and responsible work on Belomorstroy very well indeed.

It would be wrong to consider him a stupid person and to ascribe all his opinions and actions to stupidity. Subjectively, Budassy is far from stupid. That is not the moral. Budassy was one of those social individuals who contained, in the simplest and most rudimentary form, all the elements peculiar to the highly developed representatives of the same social type. Budassy's methods of reasoning and his former tricky character are without doubt phenomena of a social order. The engineering circles of the capitalist era, in

which Budassy lived and worked, must bear the full responsibility for him.

In 1933 Budassy was freed before his time was up, for his energetic work on the construction. Has he learnt anything from this serious twelve-month school of Socialist labour which he had the good fortune to go through?

The experience of the Belomorstroy work was not in vain. He has rid himself of the bag of tricks which the corrupt society in which he lived and worked almost forced him to carry. But his merits, which were real, grew under the conditions of Socialist labour, so that his work changed and his character with it.

STAGE III
THE CAMP AND ITS INHABITANTS

Chapter X

ROTHENBURG OR THE HISTORY OF THE MAN REFORGED

With some Observation on Morality, the Camp, and on Literature

“The people who interested me at the White Sea Canal,” writes M. Zoshchenko—one of the authors of this book—“were not those who had become law-breakers by chance, or as one of the prisoners put it, by force of ‘utter’ circumstances. I was interested in the folk who had consciously and systematically built up their whole lives around idleness, thieving, fraud, robbery and murder.

“It was these law-breakers and their reformation that drew my attention. I did not want to make any mistakes. I wanted to discern the real, perhaps hidden, feelings and desires and intentions of people like these.

“What did these people think about downright hard, daily work after a life of idleness? What did they think when people talked to them of a new life, of reformation, and of Socialism? And what did they think about their future career in our country, where there are neither property-owners nor rich, and consequently, none of those ‘splendid’ capitalistic conditions that are responsible for the seamy side of life—robbery and murder committed with the desire to acquire some other man’s goods.

“To tell the truth, I was inclined to be sceptical about the reformation question. I imagined that this celebrated successful re-moulding of people simply arose out of a single motive—the desire to appear deserving and obtain an earlier release and better conditions.

“I must admit that on the whole I was greatly mistaken, and that I actually saw this reconstruction of the personality, the pride of the builders and astonishing psychological changes in many of the prisoners.

“Of course, I saw the less admirable sides of the business too. I had a long talk with a professional pickpocket. After describing his ‘reformation’ to me in the most glowing terms, he remarked with a pitiful smile that of course he would have to be watched after his release to see that he did not fall back into his old ways.

“I observed, too, that some of the prisoners displayed unnecessary fussiness before their chiefs, a tendency to curry favour and give vent to superfluous enthusiasm and exclamations of

unbounded admiration for the power that was transforming people and nature 'as if in a fairy-tale.' Behind this lay nothing but the desire of people who were actually insincere, to gain promotion, attract notice, and make a career for themselves. All very human qualities, worthy of study not only within the confines of the camps.

"But these types are not important, either within or without the prison camp, they are only deserving of a remark in passing. As far as I could see, not one man who had really gone through the harsh school of reform remained the same. All of them had, to a greater or lesser extent, been re-moulded.

"If this process of re-moulding turns all the former law-breakers into ideal types—the pen of the satirist will grow rusty from disuse from now on.

"While I was on my trip to the White Sea-Baltic Canal, a gathering of the shock-brigade workers who had built it was organised at one of the camps. It was the most astonishing gathering that I had ever come across. Former bandits, thieves, rowdies and adventurers came out on the platform and reported on their achievements to the meeting.

"In spite of their naivete and illiteracy, there was something poetic and magnificent about these speeches. There was not a single false note, not a single false statement, not a shadow of a desire to dazzle their chief with their transformation.

"I remember a sentence that one of the former bandits repeated several times, not without a touch of pride and self-admiration: 'And now you all take me for your example.'

"No, it cannot be put down (on the whole) to the tricks, and wiliness sometimes resorted to by people for the furthering of their own ends. I did not see anything forced or premeditated in this. It was practically all quite real and solid."

2

"One of these astonishing orators was a man of about forty, with a dark, weather-beaten face. He was tall and strong, going bald. He gave me the impression of being an unusually manly and vigorous person.

"He made a speech about his former life, describing his wanderings abroad and the prisons he had been in, and then spoke of what he had been doing here, what had been done for him, and what he was intending to do in the future.

“I was astonished by one thing he said:

“ ‘Lombroso, the bourgeois professor, has said that we criminals were born criminals. What nonsense. How can people be born criminals? My father was an honest worker—he’s working still. My mother was an honest working-woman. And I’ve repented of what I was, and I’m giving it up for good.’

“This man was formerly a well-known international thief, a swindler and an adventurer. He has now been awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour for his excellent, and even heroic work on the construction of the Canal.

“His name is Abram Isaacovich Rothenburg.

“A few days before his release this man wrote his life-story. It was handed over to me to be edited and put into readable form.

“The tale he had to tell was an unusual one, but the change in his life was more unusual still.

“His story was written rather carelessly, it had many literary faults, there was a great deal of repetition, and it was much too long. Unfortunately, it could not be published as it was. To tamper with a thing like that, the story of a long life, written in the graphic language of the streets, and still retain the naivete and originality of a man from a sphere far removed from literature, is no easy task.

“Take, for instance, a remarkable book like the *Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, written by himself. It is a work that may be regarded as one of the ten finest books in the world, and yet it was written by a man who knew nothing whatever about writing books. Perhaps that is why it is so good. Once when Benvenuto Cellini’s book was given to a certain scholar that he might revise it for the press, the man replied: ‘I must refuse such work. I might only mar a great creation.’ So that marvellous book was printed as it was, with all its naivete and mistakes.

“I am not saying that the same should be done in the case of Rothenburg’s life-story.

“This is rather different. Things are complicated and confused and the reader would find it difficult to follow the course of events. These were dead tissues that needed to be revived with the breath of literature.

“I have tried to do it as the author himself might have done. I have preserved his language, his style, his ignorance of literature, and his own character. It was a delicate task, jeweller’s work, in fact.

“I have had work to do like this before, and I always found that it demanded experience and the ability to put oneself in the author’s place, as an actor might.

BELOMOR

“Here it is then—this strange life-story written by the man himself, but with the lines drawn more firmly, as it were, by me.”

ROTHENBURG'S STORY

“My name is Abram Isaacovich Rothenburg. I was born in Tiflis. I am now forty years of age. My father was a worker, employed by his own brother. This brother was a rich man while my father had nothing at all. He used to address his younger brother respectfully as David Isaacovich.

“My father had five sons and two daughters. I was the eldest of the family. My mother handed me over to a Jewish charitable organisation, where I received free tuition. It was really a respectable sort of school. We had meat pies, boiled milk, buns and sausages for breakfast. At home though, I often found there was nothing to eat.

“My father was a gambler by nature. He would spend the whole day playing dominoes and generally lost everything. My mother had so many small children to look after—life was hard for her, she suffered a good deal.

“My father's brother, that is, my uncle, had not a care in the world. He never knew what it was to want, and his children gorged on grapes and apples every day.

“I felt at the time that fate was unkind to me. I began to steal books from school and sell them. I bought myself sweets with the money, thinking to myself all the while ‘I'll get my own back, anyhow.’ But once I was caught at this dirty work. They sent for my mother and said to her: ‘Your son is always up to mischief. Take him away from our school.’

“After that my father beat me with a stick, but my mother cried, ‘He'll never do it again.’

“So I stopped going to school, and began to go about the bazaars, and saw everything that was to be seen there, how frauds were committed and how stolen goods were sold, and what various things people did so as to get money for their support and to have a better time.

“I was a boy of about fourteen when I first took to the thorny path. At the bazaar I became friendly with a man called Akop. One day he gave me a faked gold watch and a bracelet to sell as stolen goods, and he himself pretended to be bargaining with me. Some greedy fool passed by, saw him bargaining and was glad to buy them from me.

After this success, I was given other business to transact. I did the work given me, but got a mere trifle in payment. ‘Hold your

tongue’—they told me, ‘or we’ll give you a good beating, and if you don’t look out, kill you, maybe.’

“Once I was arrested, but my uncle’s firm was well known and no one could believe that his nephew would do this kind of thing. The Justice of the Peace, Prince Tseretelli, believed it, I think, but he just laughed at me, saying that although I was so little, I was already impudent and daring enough to cheat grown-up people. Then I was released. Soon after that I was arrested for another affair.

“I sold an officer, a colonel, a ‘gold’ watch for forty roubles. ‘If you can get any more like this,’ he said, ‘bring them to me every time.’ When he saw what kind of a watch it was, however, he was very angry and notified the police. Then I was caught and got six weeks in prison.

“My father never came to see me, but my mother did. She was very fond of me, you see, and my being in prison upset her a great deal.

“No sooner was I released than I got caught again, and was sent back to prison for another six weeks. When, after my release, I was arrested for the third time, they sent me up before the district court as an old offender.

“I was sentenced to six months. I thought I must be specially unlucky to have been caught so often, but I was told it was the usual thing.

“I was a bright lad and most people liked me. I was taken on in the prison drug-store to deliver medicine. While I was taking the medicines round the cells, I made the acquaintance of a very interesting and pretty girl. She was in for the same offence as I. She was a thief, and ‘worked’ the shops—a ‘shop-lifter,’ in a word. She fell in love with me at first sight and wrote to me about it. It appeared she was a Cossack girl from the Kuban district, and her name was Maria Kornienko. She was a beauty. She attracted the attention of everyone, they would look at her and think—‘How pretty women are, after all.’

“A love affair began between us, but I had only a month left to serve, while she had four. We arranged that I should wait for her coming out, no matter what happened. I was released at last and went back to my old trade.

“I was very fond of Maria, and tried to earn more than ever before. I would buy her twenty or thirty roubles worth of food and things—I had to take a cart to carry the stuff to the prison. Everybody was surprised to see how much I brought her.

“I dressed very well, and was a good-looking boy, and I was so lavish with gifts to her that without noticing it, she grew very fond of me. She was only terrified that I might fool her and not wait for her release, but I loved her so much that I waited the whole three months.

“At last she was free, she came out, and we lived together as man and wife.

“The war with Germany broke out and I had to hide so as to avoid being conscripted to the army.

“My father—what a queer fellow he was—went against his own flesh and blood and informed the police of my whereabouts. I was caught once but escaped, and went on living with Maria as usual. I had to pay enormous sums of money to people to hide us. Still Maria and I went on with our trade as before.

“It was over one of these ‘deals’ that I got caught the second time, and was sent to Kutais. I ran away again. Maria and I started on our thieving expeditions at once and made a good bit of money. I used to wear a soldier’s coat and everyone thought that the things I sold were stolen. They all bought them, though, and we lived very well. I helped my mother. She never wanted for anything now, nor Maria either.

“Then I got caught—and all over a trifle. I was wearing my soldier’s uniform, and once when I met a sergeant-major, I did not salute him. He gave me such a whack across the jaw that it nearly knocked me off my feet. He arrested me and sent me to the commandant. The cat was properly out of the bag then. They found out all about how I came to be in uniform, and what I was doing. They sent me up to the military court. I was in prison for eleven months before I came up for trial.

“Maria was sorry for me, she remembered how the things I had brought her when she was in prison helped, and she began to do the same for me now. She never beat me at that, though, but still I thought she did very well, and I appreciated it. Her own line was shop-lifting, but she loved me so much that she turned her hand to anything, so as to be able to give me all I wanted.

“Then the trial came on. I was sentenced to eight years’ hard labour. My mother fell down in a dead faint when she heard it, and Maria burst into such terrible sobs that my heart stood still. I was led away into a separate room, and the two ladies were brought in to say good-bye to me, and for some reason or other a priest came in, too, and tried to soothe my mother, telling her not to cry. He gave me some sandwiches ‘to take the sharp edge off my hunger,’

he said, but I would not take them.

“Then Maria, putting all her hopes in her beauty, went up to the cavalry general. Kneeling down before him, she told him who she was, and who I was, and what she wanted him to do. ‘He’ll go to the war,’ she said, ‘and make up for what he’s done. He’ll try to deserve it, I swear, if you’ll only give him another chance.’ The general said: ‘I’m surprised at you. You a Cossack woman, pleading like this for a dirty Jew. Very well, then, I’ll try to do something for him.’ But he did nothing at all. I was put into chains and left to await my bitter fate, and be sent far away from everyone.

“Then all of a sudden there came a turn in the tide of events. Our February Revolution broke out. All at once I heard the prisoners breaking their chains and shouting. We were all let out into the yard. Everyone shouted and threw the chains over the fence. Then I took an axe and smashed my fetters to bits and flung them over the fence too.

“A man in uniform came and said to us: ‘What are you doing here? Why do you stay? Even those who have spent twenty years in the city gaol have left it. You are the only people who are waiting and doing nothing.’ We wanted to go at that, but just then the Chairman of the Executive Committee arrived. ‘Wait a bit,’ he said, ‘I’ve sent a telegram to Kerensky. He’ll let us know by tomorrow what we have to do with you.’

“We called a meeting and gave a pledge to the Provisional Government that we would not follow our old trades any longer if they let us out. Just after that the Chairman of the Executive Committee arrived and said: ‘Here’s a telegram from Kerensky. You’re all set free. You can go. I trust you.’ We said: ‘We’ll do our best now.’

“You can imagine the joyous welcome that was waiting for me when I got home. My mother fainted clean away with joy. I was even afraid she would die. Maria and all our friends came; it was just like a wedding. There were such tender, loving words spoken that day, and the samovar stood on the table. We all sat around it and marvelled at the queer turns life takes.

“No, the February Revolution made no great impression on me. I had not lost my fondness for my profession yet. Of course, I had promised the Provisional Government to cut loose from the old life—but what of that? I had to look out for myself, hadn’t I?

“Once again I began to sell paste for diamonds and brass for gold. I became an expert at the business. I was even surprised myself sometimes, when I thought of the cleverness of my work. I began to collect a good bit of money. I played cards and so on, drank

a lot and denied myself no pleasures. My wife Maria seemed like a drunken woman, she loved me so much that she noticed nothing.

“The Mensheviks were in power in Georgia at that time. My wife was always beautifully dressed, and we lived near the Armenian Bazaar. A National Guard called Vasso fell in love with her. ‘I’ve made up my mind to kill that thief of yours,’ he said to her, ‘and then you will be mine. I’m going to put an end once and for all to your old life.’

“I was sitting in a restaurant once, when Maria came running in and I could see she was frightened out of her wits. She seemed upset and terrified. When I asked her what was the matter, she replied: ‘Come away, love, come quick. Vasso is going to kill you today. He’s looking for you now. He swore to me that he would shoot you.’ I said: ‘Go home then, and I’ll follow you.’

“Vasso came into the restaurant. He was armed with a rifle and a mauser, also a dagger. There was such a nasty look on his face that I shivered to think of my fate. He sat down facing me, laid his revolver on the table and hung his rifle over the back of the chair. Then he said to me: ‘Yesterday we sent some more fellows of your kidney to the devil.’ And then I felt I did not care a hang. I had drunk a good bit, too. I was, as you might say, three sheets in the wind. I struck the table a blow with my fist and shouted: ‘You dirty devils. You’re just hangmen, that’s all you are. You’re too fond of killing folk. You’re the pests of every country, and always were.’ He began to shout at me, then picking up his revolver, he fired at me, but I jumped through the window and down to the street.

“I ran home. Then Maria and me—we gathered a few things together and cleared out. We walked to the third railway station from Tiflis and there we bought tickets for Batoum. Vasso, as I afterwards learned, ran to the railway station and began to shoot at peaceful citizens.

“We got a big business together in Batoum. I bribed an agent called Riza from the Criminal Department, an Armenian called Samson, another—a Greek—and the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Tonenberg. I was also on very good terms with the Chief of the Militia, and used to give him a share of my earnings. I bribed a few of the militiamen on duty in certain districts, too.

“My crimes went unpunished, those fellows were all well paid and curried favour with me. I was never put in prison. I was living at the time with my little brother and sister. The sister is a doctor now. I lived well in those days. There were beautiful carpets and flowers in my room, and I had the best of everything on my table. I

wanted for nothing.

“Then the British decided to give Batoum up to the Georgians. Some friends of mine told me that Vasso was looking for me, that he had smashed up my flat in Tiflis and intended coming to Batoum to make away with me. I went to the headquarters of the British Occupation Forces and took out a passport for myself and Maria. Shortly afterwards, we left for Turkey, for Constantinople.

“But things were much more complicated abroad. I had no money with me only some carpets. My earnings were not so big. One had to find out something about these new people first, what they wanted and what they stood in need of, and then—act.

“My wife, Maria, was a shop-lifter. She helped me out that time with my international business. She went about the shops and stole material. She dressed very well and was very beautiful. People did not like to speak to her about it, even if they noticed anything queer. She was surprisingly lovely—it is difficult to describe her even. What a pretty mouth she had. What eyes. What legs. The Turks would look at her admiringly and say: ‘O-oh.’

“After a while our pals from Kutais and Tiflis came to Constantinople. Once more we resolved to sell imitation stones as diamonds. I said: ‘They’ll think here that we stole them in Russia during the Revolution, and believe that they’re real diamonds.’ We began to make a decent bit of money again.

“I went back to drinking and hanging about the cabarets, played cards and went in for girls from the music-halls. I got fond of this life abroad, it was different to anything I had ever seen before. Maria cried and threatened to leave me if I went on like that, but I took no notice of her. I had gone crazy, it seemed, about this new foreign life.

“We were making good money then. The agents of the Turkish police knew us well, but we paid them decently and they did not touch us. They were in the habit of taking bribes, and they liked money. The Chief of Police found out about this at last, and arrested one of the agents. And the order went out that we must be caught at all costs.

“Two of my pals, Mishka Antoshvili, Pashka Kazansky and myself were soon caught and taken to the Turkish Criminal Investigation Department. We managed to buy ourselves off that time, though. We gave the examining judge jewels and money. But this fellow was a Greek and an awful rogue, terribly greedy for pleasure. We had given the swine plenty of jewels, but that was all too little for him. He wanted us to introduce him to our wives as well.

“Now, Pashka Kazansky’s wife was really pretty—not to mention my own, of course. People had evidently told the examining judge that our wives, especially Maria, were very pretty, and he thought he would like to get to know them.

“‘Diamonds are diamonds,’ he said, ‘that’s taken for granted, of course.’ Then we said: ‘First let us go, then we’ll see, and very likely introduce you to our wives.’ ‘You’ll forget,’ he said. ‘I want you to do it now.’ Then we arranged through one of our friends for him to meet two pretty girls from a cabaret. We paid them well to shut up, and told the Greek they were our wives. And although he had his doubts about them, particularly since he had seen Maria twice, he had such a craving for women, that he was anxious to go off with them at once. It was all the same to him to who they were. He only needed a sop to his vanity, that was why he had asked us to introduce him to our wives.

“After that we were set free. We began to deal in precious stones again. Then an unpleasant thing happened. It was over a little deal with a Turk. We took some real stones from him to look at, and gave him back imitations.

“This fool of a Turk began to shout and scream, and the result was we were arrested and handed over to the court of the Army of Occupation, in the Croker Hotel. And the fool of a Turk came over himself to the hotel, and roused the whole place, even to the highest in command, with his disgusting howls. He kept yelling that we had taken his real stones, and that he had never seen the like of such a trick in his life. He demanded the stones back from us, and of course, we had got rid of them already.

“The judges nearly died of laughing. ‘How could you be such a fool,’ they said, ‘as to hand your stones to these fellows? We can’t understand?’ ‘Why,’ he replied, ‘these cunning devils said they wanted to admire the play of light on the stones, and I was pleased at that and handed them over to them.’ Then the judges laughed so much that some of them nearly fell off their chairs. They were so delighted with the joke that they were going to let us off.

“Unfortunately, it turned out that we were on the police books already. They got very angry when they learned from the documents that I was a professional crook. They shouted and stamped their feet at me. They laughed no more at the Turk, but sentenced each of us to six months’ hard labour and a fine of four hundred lire. Whoever could not pay the fine was to stay another six months in prison.

“Then they started to laugh again, and I thought it must have

been about the hard labour, but it turned out it was something quite different.

“I was sent to a place called Bostanjik, on the Bagdad railway to the prison of the Occupation Army Forces, where I spent over six months.

“I was cut off from the whole world. When I saw Maria for the last time before the trial, she said to me: ‘If you had only listened to me, this would never have happened.’ ‘Will you wait for me?’ I asked her. ‘Very likely,’ she replied, ‘but I don’t know for certain.’ And there I was, over six months in a British prison, and knew nothing of my friends.

“I took it very hard. Speaking and smoking were not allowed, of course. We had separate cells, and the rules were so strict, you would be surprised if I told you. Everything had to be done to orders, like drill. If we did not obey at once, we got a punch (it’s called boxing) on the jaw or in the belly, and were deprived of breakfast or, coffee or jam, or something of that sort.

“As soon as I was brought into the prison, I was given a sheet of paper like a menu, with the rules of the prison on it. The interpreter read them out to me, although I understood English. Then I was given a tin badge with a number on it, and told that now I had no name but only a number—1028, just like a dog. I was put in a solitary cell.

“We were not allowed to sit down until a bell rang. We had to stand. When another bell rang we had to lie down and daren’t stand. And even now I can’t understand what it was all about.

“Food was scant but quite well cooked. There was no buying our own provisions, as we used to do in our prisons at home. Even if you had a million to spend, you could not get anything sent in to you for some reason or other, and this depressed me a great deal. No one seemed to care a hang about me, as far as I could see.

“They were very strict about the work, too. We had to push the roller along the paths, or beat the gravel flat, or break stones. If we did our work badly, a sergeant would come up and give us a good punch. After a while I was given different work. The Englishmen began to like me and made me head of the laundry. There I got into the good graces of the English. I did my work well and they were all surprised to see what beautifully washed linen was returned to them from the laundry. I did not wash the clothes myself, of course, I only managed the business.

“The corporals and the sergeants would give us sandwiches sometimes for washing their clothes well. This brightened up our

BELOMOR

lives a bit.

“Then my old comrades found out where I was and paid the fine for me. I would have had to stay there another four months if they had not paid. At last I was released. I breathed freely once more when I came out of that prison. I was astonished to find the world so good and how I liked everything, and what high hopes I had.

“I decided it would be safer not to show up in Constantinople for a while. I thought I would like to make some money first so as not to come home empty-handed to Maria. I was longing to see her, and wanted to surprise her with something very special this time.

“I cleared out to Bulgaria for a while. That is a pretty difficult place to work in. They know a thing or two themselves there, and they are devilish suspicious of precious stones. Still, I managed to pick up a bit of money one way and another, and hurried back to Constantinople.

“I got home at last. I wanted to see Maria badly. The landlady met me at the door. ‘Your room is locked up,’ she said. My heart stood still. ‘Where’s Maria?’ I asked. ‘I don’t know,’ the woman replied. Then I burst open the room somehow and went in. I saw a letter lying on the table. I picked it up. It was from Maria. ‘I am leaving to-day, love,’ she wrote, ‘on the steamer *Cecilia*. Don’t look for me, it won’t be any use—you won’t find me. I have suffered a great deal through you, and now I’m going away for good. I don’t know where. I will never come back to the old life any more.’

“Then I rushed to the cupboards, and the wardrobe and my suitcases and flung them open. I wanted to know what she had stolen from me. I saw that everything was as it had been, nothing had been touched. This astonished me. Then the thoughts I had had of her startled me, and I shuddered at them.

“I rooted out everything and searched. I could see now she had taken nothing but her own things, mine she had left untouched. She had taken a share of the money and left me some. There was a paper-weight on the wad of notes in the cupboard. She had probably done that to show me that the money had not been left by chance, or forgotten, but that she had left it purposely.

“I could not help thinking, in surprise, how she must have loved me. She was going away for good on a steamer, and yet, right to the last, she thought of me. It touched me to the very depths. Tears came into my eyes. I could only say over and over ‘My Cossack girl—Maria Kornienko.’

“I thought to myself: so that’s the way some women love their

THE HISTORY OF THE MAN REFORGED

men, is it? Another woman would have robbed me of everything, but she must have loved me dearly.

“It was a great loss to me and I suffered a lot over Maria’s leaving me. She had thrown me over. But done it in such a way as I would wish for every man.

“Things like that do happen among thieves.

“All this happened about 1922. I took to drink after that. I became a heavy drinker. I used to visit the cabarets, but nothing seemed to touch me or attract me any more. In the daytime, I went on with my trade and of a night I would drink and listen to the cabaret girls at their singing and dancing. My favourite song at that time was: ‘We parted to-day without needless tears.’ Whenever I entered a restaurant all my pals would sing me this song, and tears would come to my eyes. Even now I cannot hear this song without a queer feeling coming over me.

“I was not a bad-looking fellow at the time. All the women used to look at me and make me offers, but somehow or other I did not take up with anyone.

“There were plenty of different things one could go into here. Big transactions and good business. There were lots of silly affairs, too, you would be surprised if I told you of them. Once I was taken for a Bolshevik. They kicked me and threw me into prison, but I bought my release. I was arrested several times, but got off scot free each time. There were detectives at my heels wherever I went, but I managed to give them all the slip. Once I was caught over a ‘deal’. They actually handcuffed me. I said to the escort: ‘What a fuss about nothing. We’re only robbing the bourgeoisie, after all. Nothing more, we’re emigrants, we’ve got to live somehow, haven’t we? Put yourself in my place.’ At last I persuaded the fellow to take off my handcuffs, and then I ran away.

“I did a lot of business and collected a good bit of money, but I had no interest in collecting big sums any more. I lost it all at the casino one night.

“Then my travels began. Different towns, different people drift through my memory. Months, years went by. It was close on 1925. I travelled about here and there, made money everywhere, and went away again. Detectives were on my track. The whole of the police force was watching me, they were disturbed, keeping their eyes open for something to happen.

“I spent a year in a prison in Sofia. They beat me mercilessly with whips and the butt-ends of their rifles and rubber batons, beat me sometimes till I lost consciousness. I was thrashed for being a

BELOMOR

thief, for being a Jew and for being an international crook, but six months later I was free again.

“I was in Sofia. I went to Greece. I travelled about there. I was arrested and bought my release. I left for Jaffa, and carried on various queer businesses there. Then one fine morning I turned up unexpectedly in Egypt, in the ‘beautiful’ city of Alexandria.

“It was not a beautiful city. It was a filthy place. Although it was in Egypt, I could see nothing Egyptian about it. It was a dusty, stuffy town with nothing particularly interesting about it. The cabarets were not very good either, they were just low-down drinking saloons. But I did big business there. How could it be otherwise? I already spoke eight languages and knew things that none of the people in my circle knew. I was swimming in deep waters now, and every fish wanted to swallow me, but I knew how to manage them, and was always difficult to get at.

“I did not give much thought, though, to what I was doing. My conscience was clear and not to be bought. Life had driven me to this. I did not give any thought to who I was or what, and why things should be like they were. I think of it now—but then I did not. Whoever I met I thought only of what I could steal from them. Universal solidarity had no interest for me in those days.

“I met an old pal of mine in Alexandria one day. ‘I saw your wife in Cairo,’ he told me. ‘She drank to your health. She was with another. Why don’t you go after her if you feel like it? My heart seemed to stop when I heard his words. ‘What’s the matter with you?’ he cried, ‘You’ve turned as white as paper.’ ‘I won’t go to Cairo just yet,’ I said. ‘I’ll go when I calmed down a bit after what you’ve told me. If I was to go to Cairo now, I might do her some harm. I can’t live without her—and maybe she won’t agree to live with me. I am afraid I shall do her some harm, and I don’t want to do that. I’d better go to Greece for a while and then when I’ve calmed down, I’ll go to Cairo.’

“So one fine morning I left for Greece.

“I thought it over on the way to Greece, and decided that it was a good idea to clear out for a while. In about a month’s time, I thought, I will have calmed down properly and then I’ll make for Cairo.

“My nerves were strained to snapping point after all the business I had done. I was boiling with indignation, too, and my heart was troubled. There might have been terrible consequences if I had met Maria then.

“I arrived in Athens. Together with a friend I managed a big

scoop. We robbed a shop during the dinner hour. I drove up in a Ford and in broad daylight; before the eyes of anybody who cared to look at us, we loaded our car with rolls of silk and drove away. We divided the stuff and I left for Piraeus, while my partner remained in Athens.

"I intended to stay in Piraeus a couple of weeks and then go to Cairo, but I left sooner than I expected. Something happened there that altered the whole course of my life. I got in with a regular scoundrel, an absolutely disgusting fellow. He was a Georgian Jew. I had not met such scoundrels for a long time, never met any quite like that, in fact. He was noted for not giving up the money for goods. I thought to myself—'What nonsense, I'd like to see anyone keeping me out of my money.'

"I gave him three rolls of crepe-de-Chine, and to my great surprise, he brought me no money. Then I went in search of him. I was on edge, and irritated. I found him in a restaurant. The swine was sitting there playing dominoes. Just like that. Drinking beer and playing dominoes. He was playing with another scoundrel like himself. They both filled me with disgust. I was bursting with indignation, but I said to him civilly enough: 'I've come for my money. What do you think about that?' 'You'd better not worry yourself about that money,' he said. 'I've decided not to give it you, and don't you come trying to bully me, either. You're the bird the police are after. One sound out of you and they'll know where to find you. Better clear out, else you'll be arrested, and you'll be sorry then you ever came demanding money from me.'

"I was a little drunk at the time and I felt I could not stand such dirt. I picked up the brass hookah and broke his head open with it. He fell, yelling murder. I rushed to the stairs. I could see people running about below. They were running to see what had happened. I went downstairs quite calmly and no one suspected me.

"When I got out into the street, I ran to my hotel. Then I saw that the police had got there before me. They had come for me. They had been informed already that I had to be arrested for nearly killing a man. I did not go into the hotel where my things were, but went back. I went down to the port, intending to board the first boat I saw and clear out. I had my papers with me and a little money. I had no luggage of course, how could I, when I was in such a fix? 'Where is this ship making for?' I asked. 'She's leaving for Jaffa just now,' I was told. I climbed over her stern unnoticed (for it was night-time), and hid behind some packing-cases. Suddenly I heard the siren. The boat was leaving. Then I came out of my hiding-place

and moved about among the other passengers.

“All at once I heard someone speaking Russian. How can that be, I thought? Russian? My heart stood still. Then I saw that it must be a Russian ship I was on. I asked one of the people what ship it was. ‘It is the Soviet boat *Tobolsk*,’ I was told. ‘She is going to Jaffa.’ Then I felt easier in my mind, thinking that I could get off at Jaffa.

“Sure enough, I thought, I will get to Jaffa and go ashore there. We arrived at last. Just as I was preparing to go ashore, I was detained by the police. I showed them my passport, but they would not believe me. ‘You came on a Soviet boat,’ they said ‘so you must be a Soviet citizen. How do we know that you’re not a fraud? You can’t take us in.’

“ ‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

“ ‘It’s no use talking. Better go about your business.’

“ ‘But just put yourself in my position—I can’t go any further on this boat,’ I explained in English. But they only laughed knowingly, and refused to let me land. Then I enquired what the next port of call would be. ‘From Jaffa we’ll go to Odessa,’ they said. So it appeared that I would have to go to the U.S.S.R. whether I liked it or not.

“At that time I knew very little about the Soviet Union and what sort of a country it was. I had never thought about politics. I had just carried on my trade—a usual enough trade in other countries. My conscience never troubled me. So I went to the U.S.S.R.

“I was an experienced thief, an expert indeed. I thought that no matter in what country I was, and wherever there were people, I would be able to live by my trade. From Jaffa we went straight to Odessa. We were going to a country where a social revolution had taken place. I did not know yet what that was, nor why it had come about, but I had been told that people lived very badly there.

“We were approaching Odessa. You can imagine what sort of a mood I was in. I was glad to see my own country again, but I was terrified of the unknown. Then I gave myself up to the captain of the boat and told him who I was. I do not care for beating about the bush. ‘You’ll have to go to Odessa now,’ I was told. ‘We’ll hand you over to the G.P.U. there, and let them find out what sort of a bird you are.’ I had no idea of what the G.P.U. was.

“We arrived at Odessa on the 9th of January, 1926.

“I was handed over to the G.P.U. in Odessa. ‘You may be a spy,’ they said, ‘You come under Point 6 of Article 58.’ Then I told them all about myself, the whole truth, absolutely everything. Then I was taken to Tiflis for identification purposes. The G.P.U. banished me

THE HISTORY OF THE MAN REFORGED

for three years to the Baraba District in Siberia. I was left free to live where I liked within that district. I lived there in the house of a tailor. I nearly married a young Communist girl—I took a great fancy to her, as she did to me.

“After a time I returned to Tiflis and my old trade. Things were not to my liking there, so I left for Batoum, but even in Batoum I had no luck. I began to think that my luck had deserted me for good. Then I saw that it was not a question of luck, but of something quite different. I could find no customers of the old kind, and there was not the same eagerness to buy from me. Something could be earned, of course, for there are always simple trusting fools to be found everywhere.

“Then I left Batoum for Poti. I was arrested over a little deal in Poti and got six months. After that I went back to Tiflis, and worked a whole year without being arrested. Things were slow though, and I got no big jobs to do.

“It was 1929. I was living in Tiflis. There was a lady living there, too, a nice, educated sort of person. She was a whore, but I did not know it, and of course, she did not mention it to me. I met her just as I might have met anyone else. A love affair began between us. No one would dream, to look at her, that she was a whore. As a matter of fact she was the most abominable trash in all Europe. I could not even describe her to you.

“Absolute trash. A whore who had lost all sense of decency and had no conscience. People like her have no place in our Soviet Union and in our future. I knew nothing of all this then. I lived with her and she pretended she loved me. All she wanted was money, nothing else. She kept a fancy man. I did not know anything about that either. I was simple enough to let her hook me.

“She got to know everything about me. She drew me out and I told her all my sins, things I would not have confessed to my own mother.

“Then I got into a reformatory. I was given a year for a little deal of mine. I managed to live quite decently there, though. I could move about freely. I was sent on errands and delivered parcels. I got paid for it, too, so there was really nothing much to complain about.

“Paulina, that was the woman’s name, often came to see me and I would give her money. I never turned her down. At last my mother came to see me. ‘This Paulina of yours is trash,’ she said. ‘There are no words bad enough for her. She’s a prostitute. What do you mean by bringing harlots and such-like into our house?’ And even my pals

said: 'You should be ashamed of yourself. She's been following the trade for years. You must have been blind not to see it.'

"Soon I was set free. They counted up all my working-days in prison, and I was released. I went home and said to the woman: 'I'll give you half my things and all my money—but you must clear out of Tiflis. I don't want to even breathe the same air as you.' She took the money from me and gave it to her fancy man. 'I'm not going away,' she said, 'I'm all right here.' Then I took her by the arm and said: 'Come on, I'll buy you a railway ticket and you'll clear out.' 'All right,' she agreed, 'I'll go, then.'

"We were going into the railway station, when all of a sudden she began to scream: 'Look out, there's a bandit coming. A thief. See him—he's an international crook, he should be shot, that's what he deserves.'

"A crowd gathered round. I said to them: 'There's nothing to see, so clear out, if you please. There's nothing interesting going to happen at all, absolutely nothing. It's just a little quarrel between husband and wife.' But she went on screaming: 'He's a desperate bandit, I tell you. He's done things that would make you shiver to think of. I turn all sick when I see him, I'm just ready to faint. Hold him, all of you, else he'll run away.'

"Then a couple of Chekists came up and arrested us. She told them all about me, all she knew. I was sent to prison, and they let her go.

"The Board of the Georgian G.P.U. sentenced me to three years' hard labour. That was on the 29th of April, 1932.

"So in April, 1932, I was sent by the G.P.U. to work on the canal that was being constructed between the White Sea and the Baltic. I was horrified when I got to the place. It seemed to me that now my life was over, that I was a lost man here, and that I would never see Tiflis again.

"I did not fancy the spot at all. Although it was springtime, the snow lay thick everywhere. The place looked withered and lifeless. I felt so depressed. I could see no way out. The three years before me seemed to me worse than anything else in the world. I was sent to section 7, a small station called Sosnovetz. The camp began there.

"I arrived there feeling as if I was coming to a cemetery. It was raining. The trees were mean, shrivelled little things, and there was not even a blade of grass to be seen. Stones stuck up out of the ground all over, and I thought I would very likely die here on these stones and never live to see anything else.

THE HISTORY OF THE MAN REFORGED

“This is the state of mind I was in when I was sent off to work on the rocks at Sluice No. 15. The rocks had to be broken and blasted, and the work was very hard. The worst of it was I had never worked in my life. I regarded hard labour as a crime and a disgrace.

“The first few days there I only turned out thirty, and even twenty per cent. of what was expected, and the foreman, Bufius, a German said: ‘Fancy a big, strong hulking fellow like you not being able to work. You should be ashamed of yourself.’ I thought that was ridiculous, and told him off. ‘It’s only fools and horses that work,’ I said, ‘and I’m neither the one nor the other, and if you’re so fond of work, come and do it for me. Let’s see what sort of a fool you are. A German, too.’

“He told Triaskov about it. Triaskov was our head foreman. A busy, energetic chap. He tried to talk to me, but I would not listen. I cursed him and told him to clear out.

“So that was how things went on. I hardly did thirty per cent., just enough, in fact to keep me from falling asleep. I was thinking all the time about Greece and my trade and my past. It seemed to me like a fairy-tale now.

“Then the chief, Sapronov, passed by. The foreman rushed out and told him about me. The chief said: ‘That’s queer. Everybody works here. It hardly ever happens that anyone refuses. Our work is very urgent. I’m surprised to hear you refuse. Very likely there’s something you don’t understand!’ So he went on talking to me, but I did not take much interest in what he said.

“‘I’m accustomed to seeing the results of my work,’ I said. ‘I’ve always worked for myself and I could always see whether my living conditions improved or not, but who’s going to get anything out of what I’m doing now—I don’t know. And as for you, you’re just a government official who’s been put in charge here and you say whatever you’ve been ordered to say.’

“He seemed astonished and went away.

“Soon after that our reform instructor, Varlamov, came up and said to me: ‘Go and see Sapronov after work. He wants to speak to you. He’s surprised at you, can’t understand you at all.’ I went to Sapronov. The table was laid for tea, and there were biscuits and caramels and a good brand of cigarettes.

“I smiled to myself as I went in. Aha!—I thought—he takes me for a child, does he? Thinks he’ll win my confidence this way? We sat down, and fell into conversation. We talked a long time. He was interested in my past, and I told him everything. He was awfully surprised at the way I had lived. We drank our tea and ate the

biscuits, and I could see he was a decent sort of chap, the kind one could talk to.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘You’ve been everywhere and you’ve seen what sort of reform they go in for abroad. They clubbed you and punched you in the face. Of course, we aren’t asking you to work in return for behaving decently to you. It’s hard, I know, it’s no paradise here, but then, if it was like paradise everybody would be committing crimes so as to get sent here. We don’t want that. We demand work because we’re working for ourselves, and not for the capitalists. We want our country to develop and be prosperous.’

“He gave me a cigarette, and I went home to the barracks. I wondered all the way home about the new fashion in prisons and hard labour.

“Next day, more out of a sort of liking for that fellow than anything else, I did eighty-seven per cent.

“The day after that Prokhorsky, the head of the department, came by with Saprionov. ‘I can’t understand you at all,’ said Prokhorsky. ‘Why don’t you want to work? We aren’t doing it for anyone except ourselves. We’re working to make our own country a better one, and if things are better here, it’ll be better for you, too. You’re not a counter-revolutionary, are you? If you meet us half-way, we’ll look after you. If you work well, we’ll release you sooner, and we’ll teach you a trade, a better one than your own. You’ll get such splendid qualifications that every door will be open to you when you’re set free.’ That was how he spoke to me. Then he said good-bye and went away.

“Well, I thought to myself, that’s the limit. What are they bothering me for every day. I can’t get rid of them now. Wanting to make a worker out of a thief.

“Three days or so later, the reform instructor, Varlamov, came up to me. ‘Prokhorsky and Saprionov are asking for you again,’ he said. I went off to see them. We had a talk over our tea and biscuits. They started telling me about the new State where there are no capitalists, nor property owners. They drew me a picture, as you might say, of the work to be done and of a life—such as we had never even dreamed of.

“‘It’s interesting,’ I said, ‘to hear that there aren’t going to be any more thieves in your State. That’s very interesting.’ ‘Of course there won’t be any thieves,’ they said. ‘Nobody will have any need to steal, and who’ll they rob? It’s the seamy side of capitalism that produces thieves.’

“We talked a lot about that, and other things as well.

Prokhorsky told me I was wrong, that there was another life before me now, and that thieves would have to learn another trade. That struck me as funny. I thought, well, if it's like that, I really suppose one should work, particularly as I had already felt something was going wrong, away back in Tiflis.

"So I went home and next day I did a hundred-and-forty per cent. of the work expected of me. Anybody who has ever worked on rocks knows what that means. It's the very devil. The day after that I did the same amount. I started in to work. Then I thought about my old life and what I had been. It wasn't that I was sorry for having been a thief. Life had driven me to it. Prokhorsky himself said it was the seamy side of life. Then it turned out it wasn't really my fault. It would be my fault though, if I had the chance of another life and still went on thieving.

"Funny thing, my conscience began to worry me. I wanted to work then, I didn't need any driving or encouragement. Once I reached a hundred and fifty per cent. Everyone in our brigade began to do over a hundred per cent. We were glad when this happened. We went about, feeling really pleased with ourselves, and after that we were able to get anything we wanted at the camp store. I got some good clothes and boots.

"When I saw the decent way I was treated and cared for, I was ready to work my fingers to the bone to please them, and I said to the brigade: 'Let's do our best.' 'Yes, of course, we will,' they all agreed. So we worked like devils and had no time to think of anything. Sometimes Maria Kornienko came into my head and then something would catch at my heart.

"Yes, we certainly worked conscientiously. There was no reason why we should not. We could not do otherwise, after Comrade Firin's order came into force. This order said that all criminals coming under Article 35 of the Code, all social miscreants and women, were to receive the best and most humane treatment. We were not bullied, and not only that, no one dared even to touch us. No one had the right to raise his hand to us.

"If ever Comrade Firin saw that anything was not just as it should be, lord help the official who had failed to carry out his instructions.

"We beat all records. We got up to a hundred-and-fifty per cent. You will hardly believe the way we ran about with those wheelbarrows of rocks. Actually ran with those laden wheelbarrows. We did things that it would be hard to tell about. Every one of us was trying his best, without stopping. We could see it was

important work. It wasn't any of your silly stone-breaking like they had given us to do in the Occupation Forces' prison. We had an aim now, and it goaded us on. We wanted to reach our aim as soon as possible. Besides, our work was noticed and we were properly looked after.

"We started to help the ones that lagged behind. We did social work. I was elected a member of the Production Committee of Three. Our brigade turned out to be the best. We were transferred to work on concrete. They wanted to teach us a trade, and we learnt it. We turned out a hundred-and-eighty mixings. The head-foreman, Martynov, noticed us. Saprnov and Prokhorsky said: "You're doing well. We've come to admire your work."

"One fine morning these two officials, Saprnov and Prokhorsky, came up to me and said: 'Some of the "Article 35" men have refused to work. You ought to go and talk to them. Make them go to work. They're starting a row, those that have not got a reduction of their sentences.'

"I went off. All the Article 35 men were collected in the barrack. There were cut-throats, and thieves—old hands at the game, crooks and swindlers of all kinds. They jeered at me when I came in. 'First you were all out against work and now you're sticking round the bosses. Clear out of here.'

"Then I said: 'Just let me say two words.' Some of them said: "All right, spit it out, but hurry up—we want to sleep."

"They were all lying flat on their backs on their shelves. It didn't look as though there would be any shifting them.

" 'Listen, gentlemen,' I began. 'We've got to look at the social improvements. We're thieves, that's what we are, but it seems there aren't going to be any soon, in this State.' A good many of them burst out laughing and said: 'How're you going to manage that?' Then I got up on one of the sleeping-shelves, and by that time all the men were as curious as anything, and I said: 'We're all living together here like one family. For years and years we carried on one common business together—robbing and thieving. This brought us all close together, as close as a tie of blood, and as for me, I'm not sticking around anyone, but I can see the changes that have come about and it's because of them that I've taken to work, and that's why I've come here now.'

" 'What changes?' they asked. 'Gentlemen,' I said, 'our world, that is, the criminal world, is going to pot. You ought to be able to see that yourselves, and get it into your heads. If there are any greenhorns here, new to the business, let them stick to their hopes,

but people like me—with experience—they understand no end of things and feel like I do. The underworld is going to pot. I won't say as much for other countries, but it looks like this at home, and even if it isn't so just now, it soon will be.'

"Some of them said: 'It certainly does look a bit like it.' Others said: 'Nothing of the kind.' I painted them such a picture of life and work that they simply gasped.

" 'Who shall we steal from,' I said, 'if there are no rich folk and nobody has any property?'

"Then they said: 'Even if there are only poor folk left, and no rich, people will steal just the same. But if they are all pretty well off, and there are no poor then the criminal world really will go to pot.' 'That's very likely what will happen,' I said. 'And so we ought to learn another trade. We're bound to work, and it'll all be put down to our credit soon.' But they wouldn't go out to work that day. They shouted and argued awhile and they went back to sleep. Next day I had another talk with them.

" 'Come on, gentlemen, let's get to work,' I said. 'How do you do it?' they said. The third day I wanted to ask for tea and biscuits to be given us, so that we could have a good talk, but it wasn't necessary, after all.

"They all turned out to work and were quite set to turn over a new leaf.

"Then I was appointed assistant reform-instructor. I organised six working-collectives. We worked splendidly. During the 'Storm Days' one of my collectives turned out two-hundred-and-twenty per cent. of the work set for them. None of the others did less than a hundred and twenty. Practically, all of their sentences have been remitted.

"I am thought a lot about now in the Punishment Isolation Houses. The fellows have begun to respect me. I was entrusted with the feeding of the men in the prison camp. I did a good bit of work among the national minorities. I put an end to free feeding and stealing in the kitchen.

"We used to read the papers. We got together a circle of atheists and began to teach the illiterate how to read and write. I was appointed commissar of Section 5, and head reform-instructor.

"People worked for me like devils, although I never laid a finger on them. At present I am chief of the Punishment Isolation House, and an instructor. At the time of writing this, I have only a few days left to serve. I have been eighteen months in the camp. I am leaving it with a feeling that there is no gloomy past behind me, but only a

bright future.”

“This ends the story of Rothenburg’s life. In the autumn of 1933 he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. It was as a free citizen that he went to the construction work on the new canal—one linking the Volga and Moscow Rivers. He spent a month there, and then asked leave to go to Tiflis. He wanted to see his mother, whom he had left grieving over him.

“I can imagine his feelings when he arrived at his birthplace, and the quiver of pride and ecstasy with which he opened the door and greeted his parents.

“I wish you every success, Comrade Rothenburg, in your new life. May all your hopes be realised.

“You must send this story to Cairo, to Maria Kornienko, the Cossack woman.

“So that is the end of our interesting story. Now we’ll try to scrape the superficial tissues a little, as they say, with the surgeon’s knife.

“A sceptic who was accustomed to have his doubts about human emotions, might feel dubious on three points.

“The first would be—had Rothenburg’s character really undergone a change after all he had passed through, and had he, on coming into contact with the proper system of reform, yielded to its influence and become a different man?

“Or was he simply trying a new ‘line’?

“Or, being by no means a stupid fellow, had he taken everything into consideration and made up his mind that the end of the underworld was approaching and that the best thing for a thief to do was to learn a new trade? If he had come to this conclusion, then the sceptic may say his behaviour was prompted not by normal considerations but by necessity.

“I have placed these three theories in the scales of my professional capacity for understanding people’s motives, and I have come to the conclusion that the change in Rothenburg was due to proper treatment, that he reformed his own character, taking into consideration of course, the changes in the life of to-day in this country. I am as certain of this as I am of myself. If it is not so, then I am but a naive fellow, a dreamer, and a simpleton—things that I have never been accused of in my life.

“I would be prepared to vouch for this man leading a new life now. Perhaps that is saying a little too much; I mean that I would answer for it under our non-capitalistic conditions.

“Once more, I wish Rothenburg every happiness; I would like

THE HISTORY OF THE MAN REFORGED

to tell him in his own words: 'Your criminal underworld is going to pot.'

"I want to live in a country where there are no locks on the doors and where such sad words as thief, robbery and murder will soon be obsolete."

Chapter XI

WOMEN AT BELOMORSTROY

The women prisoners in the "Labour Reform Camp" at Belomorstroy had—the G.P.U. considered—a right to special treatment. But in the rough conditions of camp life they did not always get it, so exhortations were sent out from Bear Hill that the camp society and the camp administration must pay special attention to their needs.

Some of the women's barracks were not warm enough and are badly equipped—this must be put right. There is not enough attention paid to the best use of female labour on the construction—for some of the women prefer outdoor to indoor work and they must not be kept to cooking, waiting at table and washing if they volunteer for work on the canal itself, and if they elect to work at the construction, they must have the same opportunities as the men for acquiring skill. The medical service for women must be improved, and there must be better organisation for teaching them everyday hygiene. There is not enough delicacy in the attitude towards the imprisoned women either on the part of the administration or on that of the men prisoners; instead, there is coarseness and cynicism. There must be more respect for female modesty.

The women must within ten days have better heated barracks, better medical attention, and better food, and those who have volunteered as shock-workers must be given a better supply of industrial goods. They must be brought along culturally too. All the illiterates must attend schools and classes, and besides that the study of public questions of current policy must be organised for them.

"No intermission is to be allowed in this work no matter what happens," says an order from Bear Hill.

It was necessary to carry out propaganda among the imprisoned men, they had to be taught to treat women as their "legal and productive equals" and to forget the old contemptuous attitude that dated back to the past when woman was man's property and slave.

Only so could these women be made fit for a free life, only so could they be prevented from going back to thieving, drunkenness and prostitution. Some of the women had pasts whose recital would make any reformer quake. They were far from being easier material than the men.

Pavlova was one of the women who found their way to

Belomorstroy, and she told her story to one of the authors of this book.

“My father was a shoemaker in Marina Roshcha. When the thieves had luck, they would give me rides on horseback. Such a jolly life pleased me very much. One day when I was in my father’s house I slid down to them by way of the waterpipe, and never went home again.

“When I was nine years old, the thieves began to teach me to work in the trams and the stores. If they were caught, thieves used to get savagely beaten. Some salesmen killed one thief with an iron yardstick. And he’d hardly taken anything—just two reels or so of imported ribbons.

“At first I was afraid of this sort of thing. My hands would even sweat. But I wasn’t afraid of gaol. The gaol was for grown-ups. The young thieves were sent to reformatories. They gave us lessons. The girls sewed shirts, and the boys made tin ikons and wicks for ikon lamps. Their hands were always calloused with this work.

“The people in the reformatories couldn’t control me at all. I was a regular rowdy, and I used the most terrible language. Once I threw a spool at the junior overseer. I missed her face, but they made me kneel on dried peas anyway. The senior overseer passed by, and when she saw that I wasn’t crying, she said:

“ ‘You little good-for-nothing! Why is your face dry? Take off your stockings and kneel on your bare knees.’

“One would think the peas was a very simple punishment, but it was really very clever. You kneel on your knees, but the pain goes all up your thighs.

“They beat me with wet towels, too. But I must have been pretty tough; nothing had any effect on me at all.

“When I ran away from the reformatory, ‘auntie Katya’ picked me up. How many such girls passed through her hands—who can remember? She was very gentle with me, asked me all about myself, gave me nice clothes, and soon sold me to ‘Vitka the handsome’ for a thousand roubles.

“I thought he was a thief, but he was a bandit. He killed people. He never talked to me about his business, but I saw myself that his gang was a very serious one. Then one day he said to me:

“ ‘Get dressed and come along!’

“ ‘Where to, Vitka?’

“ ‘You’ll see.’

“We went... I don’t remember well what happened. I fainted at the sight of Vitka’s bestiality.

BELOMOR

“I came to myself in the yard. He was rubbing my ear with snow. He whispered: ‘You bitch, trying to act like a high-school girl!’ Later I got used to it. I don’t hide my past. I killed people too.

“...I’m not telling you everything. If anyone were to dream my life, that person would wake up in a sweat.

“And so I went through prisons and reformatories and Solovetsky,¹ and landed in Belomorstroy.

“A militiaman brought me so far. Very young, almost a boy. He looked at me and said:

“There’s the road.... Go ahead, comrade—the first camp.’

“I stood there puzzled. There was forest all around. How could it be that there were no guards? Or were the guards hidden in the forest? I walked along the road. I didn’t meet a soul.

“I thought they’d send me to the workings right away.

“But the commandant must have thought I looked too dead. They set me to work as a waitress in the dining-room.

“They treated me well. Didn’t bring up my past. But it was boring —what sort of work do you call it? ‘One sailor’s borscht, two consommés.’ You carry your tray and wish your time was up. If they’d only given one ‘minus six’² at least one can live as one pleases then.

“I didn’t know much about the canal then—or rather I wasn’t interested in it. The locks were the same to me as those old dry peas. And as to phalanxes, and competition, and banners, I thought this way: everyone wants to get out as soon as possible. Some try to escape; others toady to ‘the chief.’ They used to sham religion, and now they make speeches and promises!

“I was overflowing with malice and mischief, though I was beginning to cool down a bit. Sometimes the teacher would say:

“‘Why don’t you ever read the Camp paper, *Reforging*?’ I would laugh at that.

“Don’t try to convert me. Go teach the counter-revolutionaries—they can read. What do I want a paper for? I don’t want to go to the latrine just now.

“Or I’d begin to curse. For no reason at all—just to let off steam. Awful language! People were afraid to talk to me.

“But one day Kovalev came up to me—the man who’s the

¹ Solovetsky—Penal Island in the Far North.

² Minus six—for some crimes people are forbidden to live in the six largest cities.

concrete worker. I'd heard of him long before—that he was in with the management. A brigade leader, or overseer, or something of that sort. I had even seen his picture, with the inscription: 'Re-forged.' This Kovalev came up to me and said:

“Tasia, you crazy thing—why do you fight with the women? Come out and work on the Canal!”

“I answered:

“You've gone in with the management yourself, and now you want to pull others in. You won't get out earlier anyway, Kolya.”

“I thought that would get him. But he only laughed.

“I've heard that a hundred times already. I thought you'd be smarter than that, Tasia.... It's not a question of time. When I finish the Canal, I'll become a technician.”

“A qualified safe-cracker?”

“Drop it, Tasia. You know me.”

“Ah, don't try your propaganda on me!”

“And that was that! He came in again, a couple of times, and kept telling me about the dam. He certainly was persistent. Finally I said:

“How can I go myself, Kolya? There are only men working out there. There'll be dirty stuff again!”

“Has anyone forbidden you to gather a group of women?”

“We gathered a group.

“Some of the counter-revolutionary women said:

“No; it's no good. Pavlova will disgrace the brigade as soon as she opens her mouth.”

“Then I gave my word. I promised to behave like a little girl. Said I'd bite my tongue rather than let out any dirt. So then we went out to the excavations.

“I began working with a wheelbarrow. The slopes were sticky. The barrow dragged at my muscles. Even my fingers got white. The first few days I felt like dropping down and crying. I was so tired. But I held on, I didn't want people to laugh at the women's brigade! The C.R.s were no stronger than me.

“Then I realised that it wasn't strength that was needed. You can load a barrow so that the strongest person will be out of breath in half an hour. If you pile the rock near the handles, you have to carry all the weight. You may get a rupture that way. The nearer the wheel, the better.

“First I began to understand the wheelbarrows; and then I began to understand what was going on around me. You push your barrow up the bank and see the canal lying there in the woods. In

BELOMOR

the daytime it looks like a ditch. And at night it's all lighted up, just like the Tverskaya street in Moscow. Smoke floats above it. Locomotives whistle. An explosion round the corner! Natasha from our barrack is out there, blowing up diabase.... And thousands of people move round on the bottom, up the slope, and in the woods.... Black as black could be! Terrible strength! I never saw such a picture, not even in the movies. And they were all criminals! All wreckers!

“I look weak and thin. You can feel my ribs through my coat. There weren't any strong people in our brigade. But we worked up gradually to one hundred and sixty-five per cent. We got the red banner, and were written about in *Reforging*. I used to laugh at flags before. Rags, that's all. You can't excite a thief with a gold watch. And now I myself stuck our banner into the slope; I myself carried it home from work. Work for the community is like bird lime! You give it a finger, and it pulls you in. When I started working on the barrows I forgot to count the days and lost my calendar.”

Chapter XII

ENGINEER MASLOV'S SELF-DEFENCE

Here is an engineer of the early days of Belomorstroy. He has forgotten nothing so far and learned nothing. The learning is still to come. Just now he was making a sketch project for the fantastic new undertaking of the Bolsheviks—the White Sea-Baltic Canal.

Engineer Maslov, aged forty, a calm, precise, strikingly tidy, self-respecting man. Maslov is a great specialist, a professor, a fosterling of European engineering science. Under the conditions of camp imprisonment he kept, as you might say, a stiff upper lip. But this was not enough for him. He was not content unless everyone around knew about it. That is why he exhibited his identification marks every morning. A clean white collar and a perfect shave. Engineer Maslov made up his mind to be the personification at Belomorstroy, of enforced loyalty in the guise of a clean-shaven gentleman in a threadbare suit and a clean collar. Can there be any objection? This was correctly understood from the very start, and working relations with the G.P.U. men as well as with his comrades were established promptly and painlessly.

The engineering profession of the higher grade does not tolerate rubber stamp personalities. It is a profession of invention. The great creative efforts which the engineer has to spend on the building of such astonishing constructions as power stations, bridges, dams, rolling mills and factories inspire him with excessive confidence in his own mental powers. On account of this excessive self-confidence the engineer accepts the most ordinary bourgeois commonplaces when he attempts to formulate, under capitalism, a conception of the wide world beyond the limits of his desk. In the world of engineering the adherents of the commonplace are dullards, deservedly despised by such an engineer as Maslov. But Engineer Maslov expects to be revered when he applies the same commonplace in the realm of politics. It is immaterial of what the foundation of his commonplace consists. It may, for example, in the case of this European student, consist of the belief that parliamentarianism is the ideal form of state constitution. It may seem to him that this idea can almost be proved mathematically. The people of their free will, by their general vote, elect representatives, who govern and issue laws. Under no circumstances would Engineer Maslov grant, even for a minute, the possibility that the man who creates the industrial and technical landscape in the midst of which all

contemporary humanity lives, may prove to be a complete ignoramus in political matters. A self-confident, conceited and dangerous ignoramus.

It was natural for Engineer Maslov to become entangled in the wreckers' organisations. Apart from causes general to a certain group of engineers, he was brought there by the painful sense of personal and professional inferiority caused by the constant privations of this senseless disorderly and base Soviet State. Defending as a matter of fact, only his own right to create technical construction for capitalism, he took his place in the organisation under the noble aspect of a gentleman who has no right to evade death for his political ideals.

And now—the concentration camp, Belomorstroy. His duty had been fulfilled. His peace of mind restored. The sense of inferiority is gone. Never had Engineer Maslov looked upon himself with so much respect as during this period of his life.

What a splendid human ideal. A brilliant young professor, suffering for his political ideals in the northern wilderness surrounded by criminal riff-raff and prostitutes. Generally speaking there was nothing original about this ideal. Just the thing for the scanty specialised imagination of Engineer Maslov. There were several traditional variants of the same heroic topic at his disposal, and he used them readily in accordance with his moods, the weather or some accidental fancy.

Engineer Maslov worked in the flood gate department. Of course, he had no faith whatsoever in the possibility of creating an immense canal somewhere at the world's end in the absence of practically any machinery, metal or trained workers. But—he was not his own master. He was willing to place at the disposal of these people his knowledge and his brains, but no more. Not a single emotion. Not a single smile. Not a single superfluous word.

“You say that you have no metal. Out of what material will you have me construct the sills and the flood gates for the locks? Surely not out of wood?”

“Yes... out of wood.”

“And do you know that wooden sills and flood gates of locks for deep-sea vessels have never been made by anyone, anywhere in the world, and that science has no formulae for any such construction?”

“Now, after your authoritative testimony, we do know it. Try to work out the formulae. Don't be afraid of a risk. In an enterprise like this, the construction of the largest canal in the world in twenty

months, we shall not be able to proceed without some technical risk, without some innovations. You can test any of your variants by actual trial. Remember the tempo."

What could he do? Engineer Maslov set himself to work. Thank God. He was back at his beloved profession. He had a drawing pen in his hand again. Again there was a sheet of bluish paper before him on which he could work his will. His face immediately lost the expression prescribed by one of his heroic variants and took on a look of significance and intelligence. As a matter of fact, there was a deeply interesting problem before him. The construction of lock gates and flood gates for a powerful lock out of wood—(Karelian pine). And an entirely concrete problem at that. Any number of attempts, if only he solved the problem. And then—an immediate trial, an immediate materialisation. And at the same time there was the incessant demand—speed, speed, speed. In any case he would not be hustled. He was no lumberjack. Nothing can be accomplished, in such work, by hurry. But the Plan, not separate individuals, not the Chekists, not the comrades—the Plan applied an enormous impetus. The Plan of which his work formed an inseparable part. The Plan, the inexorable working Plan, which was gradually becoming the supreme law to which everybody, the chemists, the engineers, the thieves, the Kulaks, and the prostitutes were equally subordinated.

The stimulus of the general plan of construction unexpectedly and against Engineer Maslov's will, evoked a new emotion. His brain, warmed and spurred on by this emotion began to produce a higher quality of work. Now Maslov himself adds more fuel to the blazing fire. Then he forgot his emotions. He is too busy. Five, ten, fifteen variants. Never in his life had he known such a continuous, such a violent feast of creative work. And at what speed. He was already on the threshold of the correct solution. Two—three more variants, and the problem may be considered solved. In any case, it is absolutely clear that the wooden flood gates and lock gates he has designed are in no way inferior to iron ones.

What an astounding result. And it so happened that this discovery which will make him famous in the hydrotechnical world, has been made here, in this place of imprisonment.

It must be stated that externally Engineer Maslov remained just as calm, just as precise, just as collected, and appeared just as much the personification of enforced loyalty as heretofore. But something had changed within him. They say that during this period of his work at Belomorstroy he was much given to a sort of constrained

joking. This was his method of holding his last positions. Mentally fettered by an exorbitant self-esteem, due to caste prejudice, he tried to veil with irony those dark and deep processes of reconstruction of his conscience which were continually surging within him, as he was digging into his work. In the beginning he tried to assure himself that this was a process of vulgarising his complex psychology, compelled to adjust itself to this monstrous Belomorstroy tempo, but the truly furious tension of his entire creative capacity was irreconcilable with this idea. Then he began to speak ironically, grudgingly in complete conformity with his worldly style. He wanted to make light of the whole deeply significant enterprise which was being created here by the G.P.U., he wanted to jeer at Socialist competition, shock brigades, the moulding of people and, finally, at his own participation in this outrageous work.

This was the last refuge of his self-defence. He was afraid that someone, God forbid, might think that he, Engineer Maslov, was taken in by these cunning Soviet tricks, that he seriously recognised the Soviet Government, that he was constructing this canal without any hidden thought or reservations, that he had become convinced of the advantages of the Socialist organisation of labour, or satisfied that a real wide scope for technology and science is possible only under Socialism.

Engineer Maslov was discharged in 1933, before the expiration of his term, but remained at work. He attempted to show, in his usual laconic manner, his indifference for his premature liberation and his own decision, to stay on the job until the canal was completed. After the Canal was completed, Engineer Maslov was rewarded by decree of the All-Union Central Executive Committee with the Order of the Red Banner for his exceptional services in designing diamond-shaped wooden lock gates and flood gates for the locks. He was very much perplexed, and did not dare to jeer at the receipt of the order. It would have been too insincere and in bad taste. It was time to finish this complicated psychological game with himself. After all that game is very tiring and consumes too much mental vigour. And the vigour is needed for work. Engineer Maslov had had ample time to be convinced that it is possible to work under Socialism. And not only to work, but even to write a new chapter in a new science—Socialist hydro-technology.

Such is the road travelled by Engineer Maslov from the O.K.B. to the completion of the Canal.

Klement Mikhailovich Zubrik, a comparatively young engineer, was a man of quite different type. Unlike Maslov his colleague Zubrik came from a proletarian family, worked until the age of 16 as a railway mechanic. In 1900, he received a diploma as an agricultural expert. In 1913 he went over to hydro-technics. After October, 1917, he immediately assumed the pose of a person who had suffered from the revolution. He was thirty-seven years old, but he didn't want to use his memory. In choosing his style of life his origin never seemed of any social value to him, it was simply a hindrance that he had overcome in his youth. Far from being proud of his working-class origin, he prided himself on having lived it down. And now he felt pinched. The essence of it was this: His very greatest efforts had been spent in that period of his life when the so-called "lower classes" were still under a double tyranny—that of the boss, and that of the tsar. Zubrik broke through this double cordon and—as they put it in those days —"rose in the world." From dirt to nobility, from repair work to engineering. This really great effort became the most important fact in his life. On such a firm foundation one can easily build up a consciousness of one's own merit, confident that it will last all one's life even if all other sources of spiritual nourishment should dry up. Ah, this youthful effort! It has an emotional power many times greater than has the so glorified "first love." It is an inexhaustible source of life. It feeds all the further exertions a person has to make in life. But Zubrik had no luck. For lo and behold in October, 1917,—when he was just thirty-seven years old—his youthful efforts suddenly lost all value. They simply ceased to mean anything! One fine day, the entire situation which had given such originality and moral significance to the biography of Engineer Zubrik was changed. There were no more lower classes. Even as early as 1926, an engineer of proletarian origin was not at all a rare phenomenon. Zubrik had formerly been indifferent to the working class, regarding it, as we have said, merely as a barrier which he had cleared successfully in his youth, but now it was a source of constant exasperation to him. The young engineers of the October period seemed to him insolent upstarts and boors, who received almost gratis those benefits for which he, Zubrik, had had to make such great exertions. At that time Zubrik could have offered his hand confidently to his officer colleagues. Despite the considerable difference in their cultural labels, they would have understood each other without many words. Yes, and they could have

gone hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, with no real disagreements, for the rest of their lives or at least, up to the threshold of the inner prison of the G.P.U.

But this was not his only source of suffering. Far from it. Besides the lower classes, the upper classes had also been abolished. Zubrik's efforts lost all their practical value together with their moral significance. The revolution cut at the very root of all his hopes for arranging his life as he wished. The arrangement of his life had always meant to him a penetration into the clique of great engineers who made up the technical General Staff of Russian capitalism. And now, as though in fun, the revolution had given him access to this higher technical world. A young unknown engineer, without a diploma, and moreover of strictly proletarian origin, he was now gladly received into this circle of the greatest hydrological engineers, who later formed the nucleus of the Central Asia group of workers. Engineer Zubrik, perhaps not even understanding this clearly, played a rather comical role, he was the representative of the healthy-minded section of the proletariat, which condemned the October revolution. He was supposed to serve as an example of the fact that in the time of the tsar an ordinary worker could, if he so desired, become an engineer—so that there was really no reason for having a revolution!

Zubrik was drawn into sabotage gradually, without noticing it. Perhaps, in the beginning, he couldn't even say to himself: "I am a wrecker, what I am doing will help to break up the national economy." Conspirators do not always go as far as final conclusions and clear formulations. The engineers did all their scheming in undertones and things left unsaid. They considered it extremely tactless when some young proselyte tried blasphemously to put into words that sacred theoretical foundation which underlay all their activity. They did not allow cynicism. Cynicism is the privilege of leaders. The leaders bore the responsibility for all their sins and evil thoughts. It wasn't because of the fine moral organisation of the engineers who belonged to the sabotaging organization which Zubrik joined. It was simply a matter of cowardice. They prepared protective conceptions for themselves beforehand, in case of discovery, conceptions whose persuasiveness lay not only in the absence of witnesses, who could say that they had heard from their lips sacred passionate words, but also in their own conventional sincerity, which would permit them to repel with almost natural indignation any accusation of conscious sabotage. They had little fear that their definite actions would betray them. Were they not

the greatest hydrologists and hydro-technicians in the country? All their wrecking projects and achievements rested on the most complicated reckonings and calculations. Who would risk setting sail on this bottomless sea of figures, drawings, reports, considerations, objections, and variants, in search of a thing so fine and delicate as sabotage had become in the third year after the Shakhty trial.

This complex psychological state made the transition to sabotage much easier for Zubrik. The transition, strictly speaking, began a great deal earlier, it began in that period of his engineering activity when he first felt that the *proletarian* revolution had carried him, a *proletarian*, into a hostile, social sphere. It was then that he began to develop his habits of sabotage which later became definite, wrecking methods. For a very long time, Zubrik still thought that he was reluctant to share his knowledge with the Soviet Union. Nothing more than that. He was even rather proud of his generosity: although hostile to this government, and sharply opposed to its entire policy, he could not bring himself to sabotage its measures in the fields of amelioration and irrigation. It seemed to Engineer Zubrik that he offered this sacrifice over the head of this disagreeable governing power, directly to the people from whom he had sprung; thus did Zubrik flirt with his proletarian origin.

Engineer Zubrik went through his apprenticeship in sabotage under the immediate direction of the head of the organisation—the great Engineer Riesenkampf, the recognised leader of all the Russian hydrologists and hydro-technicians. This Riesenkampf was the type of leader to whom rank-and-file conspirators gladly entrust their wills and their aspirations. He took a special delight in bringing Engineer Zubrik close to himself: the proximity of this young, capable engineer from the working class made him feel that the better part of the proletariat was against the October revolution—for after all, it is a political tradition to have at least a few working-class endorsements to a bourgeois programme. Zubrik, on the other hand, saw in Riesenkampf the ideal personification of those moral and intellectual traits of which he had always dreamed: strength of will, fine education, knowledge, broad technical views, a wide political orientation, and fame as the first Russian hydrologist. Riesenkampf had taken the young engineer under his protection away back in 1913: it is always useful to have someone about who owes to you his entire success in life and who would go through fire and water for you. And certainly in 1917 Riesenkampf was not going to leave Zubrik to shift for himself: the social layers lay in another order, and this working-class engineer had suddenly

taken on great social significance. Nor was Zubrik himself inclined to cast aside his patron after the revolution. He understood nothing of the revolution and stayed with his patron just as, after the emancipation of the serfs, those who had worked as servants stayed voluntarily with their masters. He shared his patron's ideology fully and completely, and joined with him against the proletarian government. He tried his best to prove to his patron that the revolution had as little to do with him, Zubrik, as it had with Riesenkampf himself.

And thus the working-class Engineer Zubrik found himself in the ranks of the enemies of the working-class a wrecker of Socialist economy. The story of Engineer Zubrik is the classic story of the proletarian who is tempted by bourgeois culture and who makes bourgeois ideology his own, together with the knowledge he receives in the bourgeois school.

Zubrik remembered his working-class origin only in confinement, as one remembers, when in trouble, distant acquaintances whom one has neglected, and who might now be useful. He conceived an idea that his working-class origin might now do him good service, but he immediately rejected the idea. His "patrician" honour, his devotion to a "star," were stronger even than his instinct of self-preservation. At his examination, Zubrik was less talkative than his really "patrician" colleagues of the engineer caste.

Autumn 1932. Engineer Zubrik is at Belomorstroy, Bear Hill. A newly built barrack, smelling of tar and dampness. In some places the floor had not yet been laid, clay and brick lay around everywhere. Stoves were being installed. But in all the corners of this hastily built drawing office of Belomorstroy stood tables—tables—tables. On each table lay paper, ruler, pencil, compasses, and drawing-pens. Your hands froze. You warmed them at the stove, slapped your palms together and got back to work. Speed.

Orders flew down the line:

"Bore the drill-holes faster. Send samples of the soil at once. Give us an exact map of the place, right away."

And there was a lack of qualified workers, to top it all. You had to set a chemist to work on plans for concrete, and a philologist on calculations. Sometimes your head whirled from weariness, and from the unaccustomed speed. The floor sank under your feet. A moment of forgetfulness,—and once more the excessively tall and thin Engineer Zubrik walked from desk to desk, giving directions, correcting the inexperienced helpers, and spurring on the experienced ones. This was a rush job on the technical project. The rush

ends successfully—the project is ready on the appointed date.

But only half the work was done. Now it was time to start the rush on the working project. On the basis of the technical project and the approved constructions, it was necessary to make very exact graphs, drawings and calculations for the separate parts of the construction, drawings that would be clear to an ordinary foreman.

Now the working project is also ready. But no matter how exact and comprehensible this project may be, there will still arise, during the construction, thousands of questions, doubts and misunderstandings. It is necessary to follow each step, to teach, to point out, to correct.

From the camp at which he worked at first Zubrik travelled to Shavan. On the road to Shavan—an island in the River Pechka,—there were rocks, boulders, and a thin, half-burned, half-cleaned forest. On the island itself the forest had not yet been touched. A thick, dense, impassable forest. To the right of the island swept the stormy current of the River Pechka, which takes its water from the Vyg. To the left—a pitiful little stream, tributary to the Pechka, made its way with difficulty through the piled-up boulders. The stormy Pechka was to be cut off by an earthen dam, the left-hand stream by a weir, and the island itself was to be crossed by the canal through a lock. Engineer Zubrik was planning the weir.

A plan is a plan, but one has to go up and down and across the entire island a dozen times to find the best place for the dam. The place indicated on the map was impossible—the soil was suspicious. It was necessary to go down the river just a little below the spot indicated to a place where there was a huge rocky projection on the left side. This projection would make an excellent natural base for the dam. The Shavan weir would be built at that spot.

The Vyg which supplied the Pechka with plentiful, turbulent water, was cut off by a coffer dam and the excavation for the weir was begun in its channel. The boulders were quickly removed, uncovering the diabase rock under them. The diabase concealed an unpleasant surprise. In the very centre, at the deepest point of the basin, there was a flaw in the rock. This was very dangerous from the point of view of the possibility of filtration, i.e., of the penetration of water through the rock after the completion of the dam. In May, 1932, the pouring of cement was begun. The construction of caissons also began at this time. Concrete abutments, 15 metres high and a concrete foundation for the dam grew up with amazing speed. And then the caissons themselves were built.

Finally, the loading of the caissons began. First large stones,

BELOMOR

then rubble, gravel, sand, turf, and then gravel and sand again. Soon the caisson made one unbroken line through the whole body of the dam. Now it was possible to take down the coffer dam and let the waters of the Vyg flow through a concrete pipe.

The next and final stage was the facing of the entire body of the dam with wood. But this facing is not an easy matter, especially the facing of the main part of the dam, at its highest point. It is tedious, minute work, almost like cabinet-making. The summit must be given exactly the shape indicated in the plans, otherwise the powerful stream of falling water would be a continuous threat to the solidity and durability of the whole structure. The carpenters planed, chopped and put the cross-pieces together, working with the minutest exactitude, until finally the dam had a covering that was as smooth as though it had been planed, not through one spot in its entire length could you pass a ruling curve—the most accurate measuring instrument.

For the construction of the Shavan dam, one of the most elegant and technically original dams of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, the All-Union C.E.C. awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour to the former wrecker Engineer Klement Mikhailovich Zubrik.

Engineer Zubrik honestly earned his right to return again to the bosom of the class in which he was born. Engineer Zubrik earned this right by making a second vital exertion at Belomorstroy—the most important exertion of his life. He cast aside all his former views, illusions, and prejudices—all that with which the bourgeoisie had once poisoned this young proletarian, sprung from the very heart of an oppressed class.

STAGE IV
SOME JOIN IN, SOME REFUSE

Chapter XIII

CHANGES OF PROFESSION

At the U.R.O.—the Personnel Department—the line headed “Specialty” on the individual cards of the prisoners was usually blank. The people had to be taught, beginning with the ABC; but there were not enough teachers to go round. Only one teacher could be obtained for every twenty-five illiterates.

Zimin was a carpenter. He selected a smooth board, polished it up and took it to the painting shop.

“Please draw the letters of the alphabet on this board. Make them as large and straight and neat as possible.”

They painted the alphabet for him in the evening. Zimin returned to the barrack very pleased. He gathered the students and said:

“Now I will teach you with my own A B C. We will cut the letters out.”

That was how the first alphabet on separate blocks appeared at the Belomorstroy. Later on, multiplication tables were made in the same way. One carpenter even made a globe and drew the map of the world on it himself. Belomorstroy took up a disproportionately large space on this globe. It cut through all of Europe and part of the ocean. The globe stood on the table. The barrack treated this strange decoration with deference.

When a new issue of the magazine arrived, with the beginnings of new constructions, and the locations of electric power stations in its pages, the campers would put it in a special place, look it over, and read it, separately and collectively, until there would remain only a few torn pages; and only then would they use the paper to roll cigarettes. They were especially interested in pictures of collective farms. Many of the students were Kulaks. Their ages varied from nineteen to fifty years.

When a man lived on his own farm he did not have to learn to read and write.

But here he had to mortice flood gates and wanted to be sure the foreman had marked his work correctly; or he wanted to look at the drawing to see whether the engineer had not made things unnecessarily complicated.

One grizzled scholar, painstakingly drawing the letters of the alphabet, said:

“It will come in handy in my old age to be able to sign my name.

That will be something to remember Belomorstroy by, when I get old. Now I write my own letters home. My son and I are competing to see which of us can write our letters best."

The people who were to construct the Canal, were not as yet skilled in the work. Excavation work was going on over the entire workings. Well-informed people said that they would soon begin to pour concrete and set up caissons; but there were neither concrete workers nor carpenters at hand. There were, of course, both concrete workers and carpenters; but they were lost in the great mass of campers working on the excavation, in the sawmills, at timber floating and in general service. There was quite a commotion at the camps. The brigadiers were gathering the carpenters, one by one, and transferring them to work on the caissons. And in March, 1932, when an order came for 80,000 cubic metres of caissons for the Povenetz locks alone, it became clear that there was a shortage of 800 carpenters. The same was true of concrete workers, fitters, etc. The same was true of every specialty.

Technical courses were organised, and apprenticeship brigades started. At first, the experienced carpenters refused to teach the new apprentices, three or four of whom were attached to every carpenter. They claimed that by spending part of the working day on teaching the novices they lost time, and their output fell. It was necessary to go into prolonged and detailed explanations to make it clear to them what assistance would come from the apprentices. Skobennikov spoke at one of the meetings:

"I don't object: I'll teach 'em. But they won't work for me."

He pointed at his apprentices. "True, they're not of much use. But then, water doesn't flow under a fixed stone. I'll mess about with them for three weeks or so—and if nothing comes of it, I'll throw it up."

Two months later, Skobennikov's brigade, consisting of thirty-three people, who had never before had anything to do with carpentering, was the best in the division, both quantitatively and qualitatively, at constructing caissons.

The concrete workers did not lag behind the carpenters. Korneyev's brigade, composed of pupils of the Technical Trade courses of the first division, was at work.

There was an order to lower the norm for the students of the technical courses to 75 per cent. of the usual norm.

The students took this as an insult and decided:

"We are as good as any of the workers of the Canal army. We will work on a full 100 per cent. norm as minimum."

BELOMOR

Everybody was allocated to some work. A navy became a concrete worker. The concrete was tested at the laboratory. A field laboratory was established. The field laboratory was checked by the laboratory at Bear Hill. And as a result Kovalev, a concrete laboratory worker and a former thief—the man who had reasoned with Pavlova—was attached to one of the most up-to-date laboratories in the world.

The testing and checking had to be done as the work proceeded. New constituents were incorporated in the new materials and new constructions. Collective work was only possible, on the basis of mutual trust.

2

ORDER NO. 1

From the Chief of Construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal and the White Sea-Baltic G.P.U. Camp.

BEAR HILL STATION

March 8, 1932

In order to facilitate the administration of the camp and the management of the Canal construction, a prompt and correct application on a large scale of measures of encouragement and reward (including discharges before the expiration of sentences, restoration of civil rights, etc.) is to be adopted for prisoners who have distinguished themselves on the canal construction, I order:

(1) The chief engineer and the works manager to install in all departments and autonomous parts of the construction special records of "Inventions and rationalisation measures" accepted by the management and introduced into the building of structures or into processes of work.

The following points are to be recorded:

- (a) the nature of the invention or measure;
- (b) the inventor's name, his qualification, the position he holds, and a report on his general efficiency and behaviour;
- (c) the date when the invention or measure was accepted by the management;
- (d) the material results of the invention or measure as manifested in the amount of money saved or in the economy of materials, time, or improvement in quality.

Every entry on this record is to be signed by the direct superior of the person who made the accepted proposition, countersigned by the chief of the division, and confirmed by the chief engineer or

the works manager when they visit the station.

(2) The chief of the White Sea-Baltic Camp to install similar records of “inventions and rationalisation measures” for recording inventions and measures of rationalisation originated by workers.

The chief of the camp is also to provide immediately for a record of genuine shock workers on the construction. So that the work of compiling lists upon the completion of the canal will not delay the announcement of rewards.

This order is to be brought to the attention of the entire camp population. The cultural and educational department and its branches at the different workings are to conduct a campaign for the popularisation of this order.

Chief of the central management office of the G.P.U. camps and chief of the canal construction,

KAGAN.

Every unskilled job in the workings served as a stepping stone to skilled work.

The barracks were still under construction, and trees were still being felled to clear space when the excavation in the valleys was started.

The ground on the southern slope of the watershed proved to be stony; it was indeed paved with boulders.

The people did not know as yet how to handle stone; one man would try unsuccessfully to tackle a job that required two men; or three men would be doing work that only required two.

The methods of work were primitive: the stones were carried in nets and from the nets they were tumbled out into the “Fords.”

A Belomor “Ford” consisted of a heavy truck on four small, solid wooden wheels made out of tree stumps.

Two horses pulled each “Ford.”

Wheelbarrows were used as well as the “Fords.” There was much discussion about the wheelbarrows; they were altered and tested in a thousand different ways.

The wheel of a wheelbarrow was the first mechanism seen at Belomorstroy. These wheels were utilised for trucks and turntables for the trucks; the foremen said that the only thing you couldn’t make out of a barrow wheel was dinner.

A wheel is a simple thing. But many barrows were needed, and there weren’t enough wheels.

Near the Bear Hill Station there were some small railway workshops.

BELOMOR

About eighty prisoners worked there.

There was no foundry. But there were not enough wheels at the construction. A barrow wheel is a simple thing but still a foundry is needed to make it.

The prisoner Sliva, a former Kulak, came to the prisoner Rudenko, manager of the technical base. He proposed that a cupola be built for smelting metal.

It wasn't decided on for a long time. But barrow wheels were badly needed. It was finally decided to try Sliva's proposal.

The first White Sea cupola was called "a cupola of the type of the reign of Peter the Great." It is at present on the Moscow-Volga Canal—not in a museum, but in production. It is a pile of pipes two and one-half metres long, with a diameter of 800 millimetres. Inside, it is lined with fire-brick. This pipe is set on to some stonework, in the lower part of which there are twyers.

Sliva's cupola is something half-way between an old forge and a real cupola.

It did not work badly. It cast barrow wheels.

The holes got deeper. The White Sea "Ford" and the wheelbarrows were no longer enough. It was necessary to have cranes. It was decided to build cranes—derricks—of wood. The pulleys had to be cast. They were ordered from the Olonetz factory. This factory was preferred because it was nearer than the Putilov works in Lenin-grad. The Putilov works sometimes refused White-Sea orders because of their technical unexpectedness. They refused to make wooden bolts for the Matkozhnen dam for instance.

The White-Sea workers tested these bolts later on floodgates, and saw how right construction-engineer Jurin was, and how conservative and therefore wrong the Putilov people had been in denying the practicability of wooden bolts.

Metal castings for derrick-pulleys aroused no doubts, but the Olonetz factory took a long time.

Then the casting was done at the Belomorstroy mechanical base. The cupola gave Belomorstroy 1,500 tons of excellent metal castings.

As has been said, cultural and educational work was also widely developed during the winter. The subjects of this work were mainly the thirty-fivers. The engineering and technical staff did not come to the club at first.

"We don't need re-education."

Uspensky, the tall young G.P.U. man with copper-coloured hair, saw that the instructors who were working with the thirty-

fivers would not be able to cope with the camp intelligentsia. And the intelligentsia, too, seemed to be always showing off. One would go to the river in the dinner-hour and shout the verses of Baudelaire in the translations of Yakubovich-Melchin and Fedor Sologub; another would quote pages from Dostoyevsky, giving himself and his listeners the blues; another would recite from memory as though reading from a book, the most complex calculations or chemical formulae; a fourth would try to speak French even in the workings.

They scoffed at the club. But one after another the engineers were called up by the chief of the division, Dmitri Andreyevitch Uspensky himself,—called up *personally*, and asked to come to the club, without fail. But in the club, you see, Comrade Uspensky would speak in a way which provoked an answer. You answered, got involved in a debate, and volunteered to give a lecture yourself.

And the engineers began to understand mass work. They began to visit not only the club, but even the barracks.

Often you run into the barracks before you've even eaten, to see what they've issued and whether it tastes good. After all, if you don't feed the people right, the amount of work they do will fall. And you feel ashamed when your section lags behind.

Or: "Sometimes you look at the barrack wall newspaper, and there's something in it about you. You know—it's pleasant. I never thought such a trifle could give me any pleasure. It seems it can. And even great pleasure. It is more pleasant to read something sensible in the wall newspaper, than some nonsense in the city newspaper."

And so little by little, they were drawn in; unconsciously you understand. It became a habit. At first the instructors were looked on as superfluous; but later on it turned out that they could even help when a difficulty occurred. They were amazingly sensible fellows. They mastered the technique quickly and were of great help in the workings.

By March, 1932, the basic camp population in the fourth division knew what part of the work it was doing, why this work was being done, and what would happen when the whole construction was finished. And this, of course, could not but show first and foremost, in the work itself. The productivity of labour rose. People worked more eagerly, and in a more comradely spirit.

Chapter XIV

LEDERKIN REFUSES. THE STORY OF HASSAN UMAROV AND WHAT THE KARELIAN PEASANTS THOUGHT

Not everyone worked conscientiously. There were among the prisoners incorrigible idlers who refused to work, and shirked for months. There were malingerers who simulated illness, people who pleaded “rupture” so as not to go to the diggings. There were recusants who agitated against work. And there were wreckers.

Foma Lederkin, 50 years old, born in the village of Stefanidar was “de-kulakised” in the autumn of 1930. He went to stay with his aunt who lived in the same village. He slept in the corridor and bowed to the ground to everyone who came into the house; neighbours, chickens, dogs. He grew a beard. He cast aside all earthly cares, praising God.

In December, 1931, he set fire to the People’s House in Stefanidar. It happened at night. Lederkin broke the frozen window of the People’s House, took off his sheepskin coat, crossed himself, and crawled in through the window. It was dark in the People’s House. Lederkin got on to the stage. Here he walked about amongst the scenery—woods and fields, wooden ploughs, balalaikas and peasant banjos, stowed under canvas by the leader of the musical circle. There, with a prayer he took out a bottle of kerosene and poured it over everything that came to hand, the properties, the floor, and set fire to it. Flames burst out at once.

The People’s House was lighted up. One could see the posters on the plan for wheat sifting, and on the care of cabbages. The trousers and boots from the play on the League of Nations smoked as they burned, the lamp burst; the whole building crackled and flamed. It was a quiet People’s House, smoky and sooty, within its walls were preserved relics of all the skirmishes of the great year. There were cigarette stubs that had been lying there since September; there were scraps of posters that had been put up in February. Over the platform hung trees and bushes—remnants of some July performance. The winter wind had beaten in at the windows. The clatter of feet, rejoicing and protesting had shaken it...

Lederkin climbed out through the window. No one had noticed the fire; the watchman’s rattle sounded regularly. Then a bell sounded, and lights began to shine. Fire. Alarm. The clatter of horses. Movement in the night—a portentous thing in a village.

Lederkin fled. He spent the whole night in the forest. It was

quiet there; the snow fell, and the trees moaned. The night seemed long to Lederkin; he dozed off, and woke up again. When day came the peasants followed his tracks and caught him. He was sentenced to be shot. The All-Union Central Executive Committee commuted this sentence, and gave him ten years in a concentration camp.

In February, 1932, Lederkin arrived at Belomorstroy. He got there with a group of prisoners, in a goods wagon full of wreckers. There were only six, in this army of criminals, who had been sentenced as Kulaks. They were robbed almost before they got into the car; linen, blankets, bread, teapots, sugar—everything was stolen. Lederkin's boots were stolen. He sat in his *portyank* (rags wrapped around his legs in place of stockings) and watched people using his towel, putting on his shirt, pulling on his boots. He watched in silence.

The Kulaks separated themselves from the "rabble," occupied a place under the window, and set up guards. They read prayers, sang psalms and talked over their past life. They spoke of *borsh* and of horses. They recalled their sheep.

They were wrapped in an angry melancholy—a great sadness; it made their souls itch. At night they caught a thirty-fiver as he tried to steal a towel, and began to beat him. They beat him so that none of the others dared to stand up for the thief. They beat him terribly—a terrible peasant beating—as horse-thieves are beaten.

The guards had to rescue the thief by force.

When they reached Nadvoitz, all six refused to work.

"We've done our work—let the bears work now."

"Make other people do the dirty work for you.... You're too swell to work yourselves," they cried.

The next day they were taken out under convoy to fell trees. The day was gloomy, windy and snowy; a snow-storm started; snow fell on their backs, their hats, their saws. A cock crowed far off in the village.

The Kulaks were shown their section, but they refused to work. They threw down their saws and axes, and stood there in the snow. Pines fell, people bustled about. The Kulaks stood motionless. To seem more impressive they tried not to move. In the smoking intervals they rested, then when they had finished smoking, they stood motionless once more.

It grew darker; evening came on; bonfires gleamed yellow. Fire crackled amid the trees; the wind rocked the kettles slung on poles. The brigade leader shouted louder; people sawed and chopped at the trees. They ran past the motionless Kulaks, paying them no

BELOMOR

attention. The day was ending, and the foreman was examining the work.

The Kulaks began to sing psalms and prayers. At the tops of their voices they blessed the day that had passed, thanking the lord for his blessing.

It grew dark; they sang in the darkness. They started quietly and then sang louder and louder.

No one looked at them. Not one member of the brigade blessed the grass and the birds, joining his voice to their hoarse chorus. The day was ending; the brigades worked. Not even psalms surprised them. They had seen all sorts of tricks during their stay in camp. They had heard Nepmen shout "I am a poet" when compelled to blow up rocks. They had seen land-owners fall to the ground and kiss the earth so as not to work. It had all ended in the same thing—labour.

No one looked at the Kulaks. Night drew on, the six Kulaks loudly praised king David. They sang of Jonah, standing amid the Karelian forests. They lauded the belly of the whale. They sang hoarsely of the wisdom of wild animals, of the supreme love of the fishes, of the good-hearted birds, of the blueness of the sky.

Thus the day ended. All six received small rations. They went to the dining-room and looked long at the dinners of the Udarniks. They looked this dinner over slowly and seriously—from the right and from the left, obliquely, directly—scowlingly.

"Ah, to the devil with the birds," said the Kulak Katornov suddenly. "What am I, anyway—a fool? Singing in the frost!"

With a parting look at the dinner, the Kulaks went back to their quarters. There, after some shouting, they decided to stop singing in the forest. Lederkin was against such a decision. It was not so easy to make him give in.

He argued, explained and shouted; but his companions fell away. It seemed ridiculous to sing all alone. Lederkin went to work. He was sent like many other Kulaks to cart stones and earth away from the diggings.

He was given a sleigh and a horse. It was a small, quiet, brown horse, with reddish marks on its sides. A quiet horsey spirit emanated from it—a spirit of peace and warmth. Its teeth were yellow and worn. On seeing Lederkin the horse pushed its nose into his shoulder, breathed in Lederkin's barrack smell and noisily breathed it out again.

"Ah, you old government horse," said Lederkin quietly. He turned around and hit the horse in the teeth with his fist, as hard

as he could. Thus began their long work together in the Canal workings.

2

Hassan Umarov was another of those who worked in the same fourth division as Lederkin. He was an ex-bandit and walked about the workings in a long quilted Tartar coat, with cartridge pockets and in soft Caucasian boots and over-shoes. On his head was a flat skullcap decorated with gold lace. His waist, encircled by a shining belt, was narrow—the wasp-waist of a trick rider, of a dandy. Umarov was grey-haired, a shapely young-looking old man. He had once been a peasant. He started his criminal career in 1913 when at the order of his landlord he committed his first murder. His victim was a leader of the poor peasants—the mountaineer Dalayarov, from Upper Shava—a man with a large family. Disillusioned with murder for pay, at great risk and with small profit, Umarov soon set up for himself.

Of all the forms of armed attack prevalent in mountainous Daghستان, Umarov chose the very lowest; he robbed the poor. The peasants' hen attracted his attention; he would steal a lame stallion with a puffed-up belly. Umarov knew where to seek the treasures of the villagers. A silk kerchief, touched by the hands of five generations, smelling of ginger and onions, would go easily into the huge sack into which he pushed his stolen goods.

"Bring your things outside," Umarov would command a pale trembling old woman, casting a cold glance at the smoky ceiling, the stone floor and the felt sofa on which infants wrapped in canvas were crying.

"Go away, you devil," the woman would beg. "For God's sake, go away!"

During the World War Umarov continued his activity. He stole horses and robbed huts. People would say in the villages: "Talavardov has died"; "They say Osman has lost a piece of neck." White rag bandages and home-made crutches became a common thing in mountain life.

Umarov set fire to huts and cut tethers. At that time he was an old hand at banditry—a master of petty robbing, greedy for any trash—a dancer and a rake.

On his way into the mountains after a successful raid, Umarov would stop at some convenient place and order his men to dismount.

“Dance,” he would shout.

A few bearded men would go into the circle. Umarov would clap time. Then he would dance himself. This was a selfless robber dance without witnesses, in the darkness of night, under the scant light of the stars, among frogs and fallen trees. When he had danced his fill Umarov would command “Mount!”

The October Revolution found Umarov on the road near Khunzak. Hearing some vague rumours, told by some foot-soldier, he turned his horse and went into hiding in the Saltin pass. From that time on he fought against the Soviet power in various ways: with rifle, sabre and dagger.

Imam Gotzinsky, leader of the Whites in Daghestan, who wore a silk turban and the uniform of a tsarist general, made use of Umarov’s services. Fresh forces were needed. Umarov would be ordered to recruit a certain number of new men. A week later he would bring into the division frightened pupils from the parochial schools of upper Nagor, or unfortunate people from the far-off villages. Umarov grew rich. He got himself a pongee coat, went to Petrovskport and bought a handful of tickets in the alleged lottery whilst on a spree in the park. Mosquitoes buzzed, music played, balls were given. But the counter-revolution was crushed.

Umarov had to hide again. His life in hiding lasted almost ten years. He got together a band of twelve and moved with it through the mountains. Sometimes he would live as a peasant for a short time, pretending to be a peaceful citizen. For a few months he worked as timekeeper in the “Dagogna” factory to hide his tracks. The band scattered into the villages. Then he gathered it again. His last raid was made on the sparsely-populated village of Gashan, which is somewhat off the road. The young Communists met Umarov with rifle-fire. Six of his men were killed, the rest surrendered their rifles of their own accord. They were locked up in the “red corner.” Umarov managed to get away. In some mountain barber’s shop he shaved his beard, and replaced his fur hat by a cap.

Wandering from village to village, he tried to get a new band together. He searched for comrades, but had a hard job finding them. Everyone was talking of study; of brigades, of consolidating the kolkhoz. This was in 1930. In a few days Umarov was arrested, 50 kilometres from the sea. When questioned at the G.P.U. in Makhatch-Kala, the capital of the Daghestan republic, he said:

“I was coming here myself. You simply forestalled me.”

He was tried and sentenced to ten years. Then he was sent to the White Sea-Baltic camps.

Such was the past life of Hassan Umarov.

During his first month in Belomorstroy, Umarov was terribly bored. He yawned as he worked, ate his food indifferently, and fell asleep squeamishly. Soon after his arrival, he fell sick with tonsillitis. In the hospital, he would not even open his eyes unless he had to. When they came to paint his throat, he would groan and open his big mouth, with its broken, crooked teeth.

“Faster, my dear,” he would say to the nurse querulously.

When he got well, Umarov came out to the workings. He was thin and taciturn. Nothing in the world interested him. The frosty Belomorstroy day without horses or roast mutton, was hateful to him. He bored rock, thinking of mares; he put in the charge, dreaming of a couch smelling of mutton fat; and carted soil, longing for his late profession.

Three months passed. Once, during a night shift, Umarov met a fellow-countryman and old comrade, Asfendiev. The excavation with its turned-up soil and gauged-out stones was like a battlefield. It was as light as day. Wheelbarrows filled with many-coloured stones creaked down the diggings, along the freezing planks. The borers disembowelled the rock, and blocked up the openings with wooden plugs. Fires roared a short distance away; around them steamed the trampled snow, all mixed with ashes, lit up in patches by the searchlights.

On the wooden barrack dangled paper flowers, hung up for some holiday and since then torn by the storms. Ice-covered diagrams of locks and dams were fastened to the doors of the club.

“And how is your most honourable health?” asked Asfendiev, bowing, according to the rules of bandit courtesy.

“I’m all right,” answered Umarov.

“Really!...”? drawled Asfendiev.

“Well, don’t I look it?” said Umarov with a bow.

They stood still rolling cigarettes. It was the smoking interval—a five-minute spell during the heavy work. Matches were struck. A multitude of fiery spots flamed up in the workings. If one had extinguished the big lights, one could have seen an uneven, dotted line of light amid the low mists, and the features of smokers in warm caps.

Umarov and Asfendiev smoked and talked. They were both in long, black coats, caught in at the waist—slim and straight as candles. Two former Odessa merchants passed in dirty woollen coats. They glanced fearfully at these people from Daghestan.

“They are Caucasian outlaws,” one of them whispered

BELOMOR

anxiously. "They don't care a snap for killing a man. It even gives them pleasure."

After work, Asfendiev and Umarov went into the barrack. They moved their trunks—they had decided to live next to one another, in adjoining cots. Most of the people in the barrack were Caucasians.

Aslambek Burashev, an embezzler from Buinak, a fine, strong man who had for two months been simulating all sorts of ailments, was moaning as usual, rolling his dishonest, hardened eyes:

"I'm burning! I'll croak pretty soon!"

A few people stood at the eastern wall, bowing. They said their prayers four times over, sending God wholesale what was owing him for the day. They went through the procedure with the precise honesty of thieves dividing up their booty.

As he was falling asleep Hassan Umarov suddenly remarked to Asfendiev:

"Our brigade's good for nothing. We're behind everybody at work. Rubbish—that's what it is—not a brigade!"

The national minority division, in which Umarov worked, was really a raw and clumsy working unit, with scant discipline. Many came out late to work. The morning parade of the canal army lasted two hours. These people worked sluggishly like flies. Some cut their boots with knives, so as not to come out on the job. Subtle Kulaks in Astrakhan caps would come up to the campers and grumble: "There is a God. No matter what they tell you, remember—there is a God!" And go away, smiling mysteriously. Someone had had a dream during the night, about the "day of atonement." He told a young Ossetin about it on the way to his work. The teacher was a former inn-keeper from Dushet, the cleverest and most literate of them all. In general, it was a neglected, national minority division, to which little attention was paid, and little care given.

Umarov despised the laggards. He considered his own presence in this division a special punishment—that vengeful, farsightedness of the rulers, which angers and insults people.

Next day Umarov got up early. Three godly ones were praying in the corner, conversing in a hissing whisper with the skies. Umarov put on his boots noisily, glancing angrily at the praying men.

"Don't you think you've pestered him enough?" he called to them, as he left.

"Whom?" asked all three at once.

"God," answered Umarov.

There are as Lederkin well knew many ways of crippling horses. If you load the wagon incorrectly, it will strain the horse's side and gall his neck. Or you can hammer a nail into the collar, so the horse will have no rest. All these ways of sabotage were tried by the Kulaks at Belomorstroy. But all these methods of open revenge involve wounds and ulcers for the horses. Such things are easy to discover.

Lederkin thought out something different. He fought his horse quietly, without any noise. He spoiled this brown and peaceful government property gradually, unhurriedly, giving it no unnecessary wounds.

Lederkin frightened the horse when it was eating. As soon as the brown horse began to chew, Lederkin would shout at it, and wave his arms about. The horse would leave its food. Then, swishing its tail, snorting, and watching Lederkin, it would approach the food again. This horse had a huge faith in human beings. It did not understand Lederkin. It thought that all his actions were part of some new and complex system of protecting and feeding it. It would blink a bit, and start eating again.

Then Lederkin would frighten it once more.

In the woods he thrashed it. He would pull the reins tight and strike it with the whip. The horse would strain forward thinking that speed was required. It was ready to give all the speed it had for the joy and happiness of mankind. But the reins held it back. Its head was jerked up towards the sky. According to the eternal code established for conversation with horses, Lederkin was demanding simultaneously both speed and immobility.

A month passed, Lederkin conceived a great hatred for horses. They seemed to him to be too cheerful. He was irritated by the horses' freedom from care; he wanted them to pine for the past life—for the life when they did not yet belong to the Government. He wanted the horses to be seized with despair; he wanted to hear their mournful neighing. Lederkin disliked his brown horse more than the others. This government horse lived and gambolled as though under capitalism. It fattened and grew a stomach, as in peace-times. It had become reconciled to the new system. It was a traitor. An enemy. And Lederkin beat it so as to hammer out its calm and its placidity. He hammered sadness and melancholy into this horse, morning and evening, in huge doses. The horse began to grow thin. It grew weak and did less and less work. Lederkin's ration was decreased.

Lederkin rides along. Lederkin reads a placard on a tree. In large letters: "DOWN WITH THE WHIP!" And in smaller letters: "The horse does not need it." Lederkin thinks "and do I need the Canal? If they don't beat me with a whip, they do push me with a daily task. I have nothing but a horse in my hands."

In the evenings, in the barrack, Lederkin was lonely. The noise irritated him. The talk of trees, of rocks, of horses, and of rations, made him angry. He was just: he demanded sadness from human beings as well as from horses. He wanted the people to get thin, to complain. He wanted them to sing sad songs. To cough.

At night he would dream of sickness among the prisoners, of the scoundrels among the chiefs, of darkness and confusion. He would wake up happy. Everything would be as usual: day dawning; the barrack snoring loudly; the orderly throwing wood into the stove; the candles flickering. And incensed at the transiency of human dreams, Lederkin would bang his bed angrily with his fist.

And in the morning, the same thing all over again: hitch up your horses, cart sand to the hated dam, look at the Vyg, look at the waterfall beyond Yelov island. He grew weary of it, Lederkin did. He lay in bed and refused to work. And he was put into the "strict discipline section," called RUR by the campers.

4

The section was in an uproar. A command had come—the rock was to be finished by midday. The Canal soldiers of all the divisions were preparing for the attack; they waited impatiently for the word of command. The head of the neighbouring brigade, a former white officer, who had got himself in the management of the camp, came over to the national minority group.

"Black-faced bandits," he said in a joking tone. "The old Turk won't work!" and with a smile, he went over to the innkeeper teacher, with whom he was very friendly.

"To the devil with such heads," muttered Umarov, "The son of a bitch! Donkey! Wolf!"

That day for the first time, Hassan Umarov put his best into his work. He chipped and bored at the rock. His long coat got dirty, and his cap slipped to the back of his head. At the end of the day, much to his own surprise, he had done over one hundred and forty per cent.

The next day he started a row with the foreman, quarrelled with the teacher and went to the Chekists for advice.

“Get going, Umarov. We’ll give the foreman beans,” they told him in the office.

The day after that he began talking with his fellow-countrymen of the Abrek race. He would buttonhole them, look them in the eyes and call a smile to their faces with some joke. Every evening he gathered the people from Daghestan and had loud talks with them. There was shouting and laughter. This was a preliminary review of forces, an examination of people, each of whom knew his past thoroughly, and was beginning to think of the future.

“It’s a long time since I’ve done the peasant act,” said Gildyr, an Abrek. “The peasant act” was his name for everything done by honest toil, without murder and robbery.

In a week Umarov was allowed to collect a brigade from amongst the former mountain bandits—a brigade which later became famous all along the canal. Thus Hassan Umarov became a brigade leader.

It was hard work, breaking up the rock. There weren’t enough tools. At first they worked by hand, but later pneumatic drills, operated by compressed air, arrived. This was a great help to the brigades. But then the points of the drills began to break.

The amount of work done per day began to fall. The brigades fell into low spirits; the former Abreks ceased to answer Umarov’s smile. Should they ask the mechanical base for help? The base was busy. It had had a misfortune. It had made a concrete mixer—made it very quickly, but the concrete mixer refused to work.

The fourth division had its own skilled workers. Savva Dmitriev tried making moulds for the drill points out of pieces of rail. Such points worked quite satisfactorily. The amount of work per day went up. But still the totals were not very encouraging.

Pioneers, Komsomols and Party members thought about the White Sea canal of Karelia. The Karelians were talking about the canal all the time.

In every village, in every factory, the canal had friends,—representatives in the Party nucleus.

At first old Karelia did not trust the canal. She looked at the canal soldiers with hostility and pity. When explosions thundered out near the canal, pity and distrust were replaced by watchfulness.

When the Nadvoitz waterfall became silent, the people in the villages who had been accustomed to live, marry, quarrel and die, to the accompaniment of its sound, were frightened. That night the young Communists went through the village, explaining why the waterfall was silent, what the canal was for, and what Karelia, with

BELOMOR

its forests and factories, had to do with it all.

Next morning, on the initiative of the Party members, all the people of the village came out to the workings—from bearded ancients to children in Pioneer ties. The Party organisation arranged a “subbotnik” to help the canal soldiers.

There is a bitterness in the labour of prisoners. It is hard for them to understand their labour—to understand its place in the labour of the whole country—to understand the meaning of a will foreign to their own.

That is why it was such a great event for the camp—this crowd of free peasants working side by side with them, the prisoners.

The Pioneers loaded wheelbarrows for those in the lagging brigades. Women laughed in the workings. Young craftsmen learned to work with spades. That was a day of great mental satisfaction. The plan was enormously over-fulfilled.

Thus the Canal secured new friends.

Chapter XV

“THE STABLE”

Kovalev’s effort to clean it—Lederkin once more, and The Disappearing Boots

And not everybody worked at that time. It was hard work. It’s hard work to chip rock and turn a drill all day. A man tires of work and then he says, “Let the bears work, for all I care.” And he refuses to work.

And some criminals went straight to RUR, as soon as they arrived. They were used to prison, not to work.

We—the prisoners who had become canal builders—began work on these people who refused to do anything. There was a barrack in RUR which was called “the stable.” There were 750 people there. They sat and shouted, “The old Turk won’t work!” Everyone avoided them, the “old Turks.” There were quarrels and fights there. They would gamble away their rations for a month in advance, and steal from one another to pay their debts. If you didn’t pay, you would be killed, or at least crippled. By the time the barrel of food had passed from the door to the beds, it would be empty. In general, it was a place—as they say—when “at night they dance and sing, and in the morning weep and get up.” This is Kovalev’s account of his attempt to bring the “old Turks” into the picture.

At that time our brigade was working well. And so I went to the “stable.” And there they had already heard the rumour that Nikolai—that’s me—had changed his mind and would force them to work.

I took my blankets and came to the “stable” to sleep. I’d been there in the morning and talked to two of them, Olshansky and Shumansky. They were bandits—hard people to work with; they had even human lives on their consciences. I had nothing to do with them when we were free, for we looked down on them. In general, criminals despise bandits. I told them they ought to go to work. They answered: “We’d rather die.” Then I told them: “We can’t get anywhere from here anyway; and we’re living pretty well. We catch fish in the lake.”

I arranged my bedding and stayed the night. In the morning a guard came to call out those who wanted to work. Only a few went. “Well,” I thought, “It’s going to be a hard job.” I called to Olshansky and Shumansky and said: “You may keep your convictions, but between you and me, I didn’t come here to refuse to work. I came to break up this ‘stable,’ hard as that may be.” They assured me that

that was impossible. I answered them: "You watch. There's going to be a reckoning of work-days for Udarniks." They wouldn't believe me. "We have to live here anyway, until we run away."

I stayed there during the day. I walked round the "stable" looking for the people I needed. But it was as dark as night in there; the people smoked everything they could get—even canvas from their bedding. And I couldn't find the people I wanted.

In the darkness I stepped on someone.

"Why! Do you sleep on the floor?"

And I lighted a match, to have a look.

He bowed down to the ground at my feet and said:

"I don't sleep on the floor. I'm bowing down to you. I, Foma Lederkin, humble myself before you, a thief in the name of the Lord." I stayed there until twelve o'clock, watched them give out the dinner, and what happened then, and left. Later I went to Yurasov, and asked him at least to get comparative quiet in the evening, so they could hear my voice. The barrack you know, is over 200 feet long and 60 wide and has upper and lower berths.

Yurasov said: "Leave the stable in peace. Go and work with the gangs." But I went there again, just the same. I came in the evening, with an armed guard, but we couldn't make them keep quiet. Two people had managed somehow to get out of the "stable" and had stolen a sheepskin coat and some pots and lots of other things from the chief.

The workers of the third division went out that evening with a police dog, and the dog led them to the "stable." The police drove everyone out of doors, in order to search the place. The people came running to me, complaining that they were all kept out in the snow on account of one thief. Then I asked that they should be allowed to go back into the barrack. I promised that the stolen goods would be handed over. It turned out that one of the bandits had lost at cards. That meant either a beating, or theft. He got past the guard and stole the things.

We collected them all, of course, except that the pots were already empty, and the sheepskin coat hidden in the woods. We promised to hand that over in the morning.

After that I chose about 15 or 16 people to go to work. They all said it was no good—they were being punished for nothing. But I told them it wasn't for nothing—that we'd get better rations.

I made an agreement with Varlamov that he should send them to the northern settlement to gather moss. That was the spot where the eighth lock was built later.

I took them without a guard, and Yurasov warned me: “Watch out—they’ll run away.” But I knew they wouldn’t run away.

They were given instructions to gather a cubic metre apiece. But they got together in groups to gather 2-3 cubic metres. I left them and went off for bread—about 5 versts. I got about 15 pounds. When I got back, they had gathered a little pile and were sitting down. I asked them: “What’s the idea?” They told me: “Ah, go to hell, why, the moss grows in water, and we thought it grew in a dry place.”

I told them: “And here I went and got you bread! Talked with the chief about your outfits.” I argued with them, but they didn’t want to work anyway, and told me to take them back. I brought them back and got plenty of hoots and whistles in the barracks.

Then I started work on Olshansky and Shumansky, because they had some authority. We decided to put some of the beds together, fence ourselves off, and put our lot in a bunch. There was nothing else to do. Sometimes you’d talk to a man, and give him tobacco, and he would seem to agree, and next morning he wouldn’t be in the barrack. We cleared 4 or 5 square metres for ourselves and collected about 10 people, of whom we made sure.

I took my people out to work again, but I felt that we couldn’t make our norms. I was dressed all right—leather boots, a hat, gloves, but they were in no state for collecting moss. I stood them up in line, went to the management and said: we had to give them clothes. They told me: “If we give them clothes, they’ll simply gamble them away. You’d better take some barrack with 250 people in it, and choose your people there.” Then I had to think out a way of getting a list together. You couldn’t even get to know people in the “stable.” They deliberately refused to answer their names.

Anyway, Komarovsky, let me get nine sets of “body-warmers,” padded sleeveless coats, trousers, boots and hats. I brought the things into the barrack and laid them out. Everyone looked as if it were a miracle—how did such things get into that barrack? People called out, “Write me down!” “Oh, no,” said I. “I won’t give out boots right away. You have to work a week or two first.”

I didn’t give out the stuff yet. I climbed into an upper bunk, and set up lamps all around me. I wanted to give out the nine sets ostentatiously, to show that some people had worked two days, and they were already given outfits.

Then I began to tell them that anyone who wanted to live decently without stealing or breaking up camp discipline, could get out of that barrack. The chief would give us a place. But first we

would have to work. At first we'd be given less than the regular norm, and later, when we got used to it, we would work like the rest of the prisoners.

After the meeting I gave out the clothes, very ostentatiously. Next morning, the fellows were naked again. They all yelled "someone stole our boots." Only one confessed he'd lost them at cards. They all had, of course. So seven out of the nine disappeared.

The chief told me: "The devil take you and your outfits." But I said the boots were not important. I got a brigade of 50 through that job.

I went out with a guard at first, because 3 people ran away, and I was morally responsible for them. We agreed that if they wanted to go out without a guard they should be responsible for one another.

I got a group of 170 people, but 25 to 40 of them had to be sent back to the stable, because they didn't come out to work—they just wandered around.

I brought the people I'd selected to the bath-house, and got them underwear, outfits and army boots. When we moved to another barrack, the atmosphere changed entirely. They gave us new bedding, and we filled our mattresses with straw. I made some decorations out of paper, and somehow that made the barrack brighter and cosier.

Out of these 170 people, I could really depend on 20, and through them I got to know the mood of the others. These 20 gradually became my staff. I gave them privileges, made them heads of their groups.

In a short time, 30 pairs of boots were missing again. I went to the representative and told him that this was a serious matter. I was responsible for the people—and they went and gambled away their boots.

We called a meeting, and right away I picked out 65 people and proposed that we should put the matter on their records. Half the meeting agreed, but the others protested—they had a feeling that there was trouble coming for them. Our staff won, but we didn't write any paper or records; we simply sent the delinquents back to the "stable" (afterwards we soon took some of them back again). Finally our collective settled down 120 strong.

We named our brigade the "Red Udarnik." This collective won the red banner more than once during the construction of the canal. Olshansky and Shumansky also came into this brigade, and became active. It's hard to understand now how we managed to keep

these people. They were probably stupefied at being trusted—such trust will hold a thief better than any bars. There was the case of one of the camp artists who decided to run away. He got a false document, got together some companions and fixed a date. The time came. But it happened that the club was giving a performance of “Eugene Onegin” and had entrusted the artist with the scenery. And on the day set for the escape the artist collected his friends and said: “Wait till I finish painting the second act. I’m sorry fellows, but it’s interesting work.”

He finished the second act, and was more interested than ever. His companions ran away, but the artist stayed, and tore up his documents.

And Lederkin, Foma Nikolaevitch, stayed in RUR “in the name of the Lord.”

2

But the imprisoned men were not the only people who sometimes refused to take part in the work.

There were quite a few women working at the machines, even in the foundry at the mechanical base. They didn’t start work as soon as they came. Some of them loafed for months; they fought, quarrelled, played with home-made cards, and debated whether to use the king of hearts or the king of clubs in guessing their fates in the heart of the handsome foreman, Soshinsky.

The best fortune-teller in the women’s barrack of the fourth section was the fitter Orlova. Alexandra Mikhailevna Orlova was arrested in Voronezh, on an autumn evening. She was sentenced to three years for theft, and was sent to the White Sea construction.

Orlova got to camp at the time of the evening inspection. She was taken to the women’s barrack. The canal army were coming back from work; the other women wore felt boots, quilted jackets and warm quilted trousers. Orlova was conspicuous among these trousers in her coat from Madame Annette in Voronezh. She stood in the middle of the barrack looking at the plank beds, at the stove, at the kettles; she stuck out her breasts and rolled her hips in the style accepted in Voronezh, at the corner of Sadovaya and Malaya Nikitskaya.

“The Spanish step—

That’s a dance with pep,”

she sang angrily.

The barrack was preparing for the night. Some were already

BELOMOR

asleep. Others lingered, yawned, sang, wrote, talked, sewed. It was warm. The kettle sang on the stove.

Orlova went up to the forewoman who was making up the work lists for the next day. Those who were sick usually told her so in the evening.

"I'm sick," said Orlova. "Write it down, you lawyer. I won't work."

"Why?" asked the forewoman.

"Diarrhoea," said Orlova. "Write it down, student."

The woman wrote a paper and handed it to Orlova.

"Go to the clinic," she said.

Orlova went to the clinic. It was snowing. The wind piled up snowdrifts. Her shoes squeaked. Huge pines whistled and waved, high in the air. Frost. The real Karelian cold.

Orlova got to the clinic. There were quite a lot of people there. A stove was burning. A clock ticked. The usual clinic posters, on childbirth, and on first-aid to drowning people, hung on the walls. Among pictures showing dental diseases, a cross-section of the stomach, and vaccination, sat bandits, embezzlers and thieves. They talked of kidneys, of their livers, of their rations. Each in turn went into the doctor.

Orlova also went in. She saw the usual medical consulting-room. A couch, a white table, a glass shelf with medicines. Orlova was given a thermometer. She put it under her armpit and sat looking about her. The doctor tapped and examined and felt and banded yellow and white and green human skin. He opened abscesses, attended to the sick, and punctured boils. Ten minutes passed and the thermometer —indifferent to human passions, deaf to both sighs and complaints— showed the real temperature of her armpit—97.9°F.

"What's wrong with you?" the doctor asked Orlova.

"Diarrhoea," said Orlova, putting on her coat. "Fever and chills."

"You have no fever," answered the doctor. "Valentina Mikhailovna," he said to the nurse, "give this comrade some bismuth and extract of belladonna."

Orlova said nothing. The nurse brought her the powder.

Then Orlova went up to the doctor's table.

"What are you giving me?" she asked in a low voice.

"Something to stop your diarrhoea," said the doctor, busy with a new patient. "You complain of diarrhoea."

"Keep your damned medicine," answered Orlova. "Eat it

yourself. To the devil with it!”

And hurling the bismuth and belladonna on the floor, she went out.

In the barrack, the forewoman glanced at the doctor’s card and told Orlova:

“You’re all right; you begin work to-morrow.”

“Hold on,” said Orlova.

She came up close to the forewoman.

“And I say I’m sick,” she said loudly.

And she started shouting at the top of her voice, calling the forewoman a hussy and a bookkeeper.

Next morning, complaining of stomach ache, Orlova stayed in bed and didn’t go to work. She lay in an empty barrack. There was nothing to do; her stomach was in perfect order. It was a clear winter’s day. The barrack was desolate. The firewood crackled quietly. Orlova was bored to death. There wasn’t a soul to speak to—either to make friends, or to quarrel with.

The human being as such was lacking. A human being filling a teapot, dressed in a skirt or in trousers, talking, singing, taking off its shoes or boots; Orlova didn’t know what to do with herself.

A teacher came. She told Orlova about the importance of Belomorstroy, of its economic role, and of the work in the camps.

“Well?” said Orlova.

The teacher calmly continued her tale.

She told her all about the riches of Karelia, the privileges given to shock-workers, the small ration given to loafers, and people who refused to work.

“Well?” said Orlova.

The teacher told her about the reckoning of work-days; the reduction of sentences for good work; the rewards to be given on the completion of the Canal; and about the work on the tenth lock.

“I won’t go to work,” said Orlova. “Get out, you pest.”

“The White Sea-Baltic Canal,” continued the teacher, “is the road which...”

“Dry up, you bitch,” said Orlova. “My own kind too, lousy thief, and look how she talks! I spit at the Canal.”

She lay down and stopped up her ears. The teacher spoke for a while, and finally went away. Orlova lay motionless. She was lonely. The human being was missing—the quick, clever crooks. Apostles and righteous people all about. What a bore!

Later on, Orlova went from the lavatory to the neighbouring men’s barrack. This barrack was also empty. The beds hung under

the yellow ceiling, just as in the women's barrack. It was a clear, blue, frosty day. At the smooth board table sat two loafers—the Kulak Frizov, and the wrecker Petrov. This was the third day of their idleness, on the pretext of holes in their felt boots. They had talked of all their relatives, and all the gaols and cities they had seen. Idleness devoured them. The barrack was deserted. Its inhabitants were at work. In the evening it was not much better, for these inhabitants talked of timber, of cross-cut saws, of concrete and of cubic metres. But nobody talked of Petrov or Frizov. Nobody gave them words of council or friendship. In their days of idleness in the barrack Petrov and Frizov had become sick and tired of one another. Now they sat at the table and cursed one another for lack of anything better to do.

“Well, what do you say?” said Petrov.

“Well, and what do you say?” answered Frizov.

“Ah, damn!” said Petrov gloomily.

“Damn yourself,” answered Frizov with equal gloom.

Orlova sat with them for a while. The stove roared, drops of water fell quickly from the tap over the basin.

“Orator! Son of a bitch!” said Petrov, just to say something.

“Orator yourself! Son of a bitch!” answered Frizov.

Orlova sighed. She sat among these huge beds, a tiny woman, in a coat from Madame Annette and a warm camp hat. The day was still. The pines swayed. The daws chattered.

“Maybe I ought to go to work,” thought Orlova. “It's damn boring here.”

“Magpie!” said Petrov to Frizov. “Co-operator! Rascal!”

“Magpie yourself,” answered Frizov. “Co-operator yourself! Rascal!”

Next day Orlova went to work.

3

The men who furnished the small military guard sometimes had a hard time.

“Any comrade who thinks the Belomorstroy was a sort of rest cure is mistaken!” said one of them. “The work was hard.” This is what he had to say about it.

For instance there was the job of looking after those who refused to work. These were the most hopeless of the thirty-fivers. Robber atamans and ruffians. They competed with one another for the honour of having the longest prison record. They got tired of

sitting in the isolation section on small rations, and joined a labour collective; but once at work they tried to escape. The working brigades carried earth or felled trees; and these sat in the bushes or in a ditch, and played cards with their friends. Or they scandalised people, with their foul talk. And if the guard was careless—they were off to the woods and to the cities. Or if they were counter-revolutionaries, they got to the Finnish border. Such people were the enemies of the entire labour collective. The other fellows worked and strained themselves, showed high speed and productivity, and the loafers and escapers lowered this productivity. The riflemen had to keep a sharp eye on them, and in this sort of thing most of the prisoners were on our side. In some agreements on Socialist competition, the prisoners themselves introduced the point: no escapes! The group with the largest number of escapes will be the loser!

We were entrusted with an important job—protecting the equipment. Have you seen the dams and coffer dams on the canal? Some of the dams are bigger than Volkhovstroy. It's quite possible that some evil-minded person might want to blow up a dam. And then all the work would be destroyed. The water would wash away the locks and break other dams. We had a post at every important point. The riflemen kept a sharp lookout. There was one case when a rifleman saw some workers laying concrete, and driving iron clamps into the concrete. And he wondered—were they sabotaging? He couldn't rest until he was convinced that it was all right. We were all anxious about the canal and the dam.

Or, say a group comes out to work. But two of them are missing. Where are they? It turns out that they're under the floor. They have pulled up the floor-boards and gone underground. The military guards have to watch out for that too.

Well, and then there's the work on the roads—to watch and to see who goes where, and what is carried where. And when groups of prisoners travel from place to place. The prisoners themselves ask for a rifleman to guard them; they say it is safer so.

Here are a few cases from our work.

One day two clerks from among the counter-revolutionaries came in and started talking. One kept trying to engage the rifleman in conversation. The rifleman turned to him and the other took an axe from the corner and struck. The rifleman fell. Then the second grabbed his gun and they both ran off.

An alarm was raised. Ambushes were arranged everywhere. We caught up with the murderers. They shot back at us. One of them

BELOMOR

was killed in the fight. He was a Petlura man and a bandit.

Just this winter on one trip two of the prisoners came up and caught hold of the rifleman from behind, disarmed him and carried him kilometres into the woods. Then they made him undress entirely, took aim with the rifle, and commanded: "To the right—run!"

The rifleman ran. The bandits ran in the opposite direction. On their way they killed a woman and a railway watchman. They got a horse and a revolver, and went on towards the station, where they were caught.

Once two loafers from the isolation section asked the rifleman for a light. He gave it to them and all three walked on together. The rifleman was a sturdy fellow, and no fool. He saw that these fellows were trying to put something over on him. One walked alongside him, but the other kept trying to get behind. The rifleman jumped to the side and aimed his rifle at them. The one who had fallen behind bent down and jumped at him, but the rifleman shot him in time.

But there were few such cases. The military guards got along well even with the loafers. The fellows didn't want to work—and that was that! The rifleman would persuade them on the way, and many a group came back to work, instead of going to the isolation section.

There's Orlova for instance. She played the fool at first. And what a fitter she is now! If you marry her, you won't be sorry.

And when there was an alarm, or a rush job, you couldn't hold the fellows back. Once there was a fire in Nadvoitz. The newly made sluice gate was on fire. I was in the military barrack at the time. The people rushed to the lock without a word of command. You couldn't have stopped in the barrack if you'd tried—the crowd would have swept you out.

My most vivid recollection is of the night rush in Nadvoitz,¹ when the coffer dam across the Vyg broke through. The Nadvoitz dam holds the whole lake. How much work it took to cut off the water and set up the coffer dam! But water is strong. It carries away stones that you couldn't lift with a crane. And so, one night the water veered round, got through at the side, and began to flow round the dam.

The rush lasted eighteen hours. People fought the water. What

¹ See chapter XXVIII.

work it was! Carrying stones, up to the waist in cold water. All the prisoners, and the military guard, and the management and the chiefs—every single man. Water collected under the caissons. They are huge wooden crates filled with stones. We threw boards across them, and the chaps ran over the water on these boards, with wheelbarrows, and dumped stones. The water went mad. You threw in stones, and the water washed them away like straw. I ran to the shore. I saw a black boat on a wire hawser dancing on the water as if it were mad. It was terrible.

We went to work at night in the cold water. The current threw us off our feet; and we were carrying stones and pushing wheelbarrows full of soil. And then we went on boards, over the water. Torches were burning, the water looked like gold. But away from the light it was black, and roared like a torrent. We all went to work, prisoners and guards, except the orderly who had to guard our guns. We all worked without resting, without any orders. And we mastered the water. We saved the Nadvoitz junction, and we felt the greatest joy and pride that anyone can feel.

4

The wooden age of Belomorstroy brought forth an age of iron, but sometimes the transition was very difficult, as witness the story of Balabuk and his ox.

In the Ukraine, there was a Kulak, Balabuk. He had grey, long-horned, quiet-stepping oxen. He tired out the labourers who worked on his farm. He didn't overwork his oxen, but he sweated his workers.

When Balabuk was “de-kulakised,” he put up a fierce resistance, and was sent to Belomorstroy. At Belomorstroy he first made wheelbarrows near the mechanical base, and then worked the bellows for the forge at the base, and finally became a fitter. He worked at his machine as well as anyone.

There is a State farm near Bear Hill. Balabuk was an Udarnik, a specially privileged shock-brigader, and had the right to go beyond the limits of the camp. He went for a walk on his free day. He walked. The ploughed fields to his left brought him sad memories. And there was a herd of oxen, and in the herd a grey ox. This ox came up to him, lowed and licked his hands. And Balabuk recognised his ox. He took the ox by the horns, layed his head between the horns and began to cry.

Then he came to Rudenko, a G.P.U. man in command at the

BELOMOR

base, and asked him: "Let me go to the State farm to work! There's an ox of mine there—a fellow-countryman."

Rudenko said: "The ox has worked all his life for the peasant, and the peasant for the ox. They went along like an unoiled wheel. What do you want with all that, when you're a fitter already, a skilled man?"

Balabuk thought it over, and said:

"All right. I'll go and visit the ox on my free days."

And thus the wooden age ended in Belomorstroy and an age of metal began.

Chapter XVI

THE MAN FROM PENTONVILLE

Some of the imprisoned men who took up the work of teaching and persuading their fellow-prisoners worked like artists. For instance, there was Kvasnitzky. Let him tell how he worked:

“Did you ever see a mill on a farm near Odessa? These farm mills are a vile thing. But they have a philosophy of their own. Anyone who wants to grind his grain unhitches and leads his horses on to a wooden wheel. The wheel is inclined at an angle. There is hay in front of the horse. The horse wants to get the food. It goes forward and the wheel turns, and the miller gets his flour.

“I was put into the wheel when I was young, and pushed forward. Now I am getting out of the wheel. I take off my cap to wipe away the sweat, and in the mirror I see grey hair. I say to myself: ‘Almost sixty! You ran a long time, Samuel Davidovich. And what a wheel.’

“Frankly, my life would make a dozen novels, with five hundred pages each. A Rocambole from Odessa. Perhaps you listen to me and think: ‘Ah, well. *Senon e vero e ben trovato.*’

“No? So much the better. My whole life has been spent in lying, and I’d like to be believed in my old age.

“If they tell you Kvasnitzky is a professor, or a doctor of philosophy, don’t believe them. I’ve avoided work as a duke, as a travelling salesman, as a surgeon, as a violinist and as a Roman Catholic monk.

“For thirty years I was just a thief, although my real profession is tanning. I’m a tanner from the town of Smela, near Kiev.

“In 1905 I was only twenty-eight.

“At that awful time there was a pogrom in our town. I was young and healthy and terribly hot-tempered. I didn’t wait to be asked to join the self-defence group! I decided I’d rather get a bullet in my head than a butcher’s knife in my belly. They gave me a Winchester, sixteen cartridges and a safety lock... up and down. We hid in a garret and shot at the rowdies and shopkeepers. I don’t think I killed anyone. It was the first time I’d ever fired a gun, and I was in a great hurry.

“I managed to get into hiding. I was betrayed. A year later I came out of the Odessa prison. They were afraid to employ me in the shops, and they wouldn’t give me work to do at home. They threatened to punish me. This lasted a few months. But one day I met a thief I knew. He took me to a restaurant, gave me a dinner, and said:

BELOMOR

“Samuel. You and I were in the same prison cell, and I can see that you’re no fool. Do you really want to work, Samuel?”

“I didn’t answer. I didn’t want to seek my fortune in other people’s pockets.

“Soon I met him again. He was dressed like a factory owner. He smelled of good wine. While we were eating he looked at his gold watch. My family had eaten nothing but tomatoes for ten days, and our things were all in pawn. We were facing starvation. I took the thief by the arm and said, hardly believing my own voice:

“Well, where is this work of yours?”

“And now I’m fifty-five years old. I’m a former thief. My children are young Communists. They study in universities, and look down on me as a social waster. A sad story, comrades! My children repudiated their father. I should have felt it before. My bad fame followed me everywhere. When I went with my family to a house we didn’t know, the children would ask:

“‘Papa, are you sure they don’t know you here? Papa, you’d better go away.’

“And I would go away, so as not to soil the children’s reputations.

“By the age of thirty I had already become a thief on an international scale. The wheel turned faster and faster under my feet. I fled from Riga to Berlin, from Berlin to Paris, London, Ostend. I roamed through North Africa and hid in Italy. There may still be people who have reasons to remember my travels through Australia, Hungary, Belgium, France and North and South America.

“My memory is still excellent. I speak six languages better than Russian, and I could go through Paris blindfold. Where did I have my permanent home? Look over the lists in Sing-Sing and the Poltava prison, in Rotterdam and Kiev, Moscow and Odessa.

“I left prison only to return again immediately. Pentonville was my first prison abroad. In 1909 I was running away from the police by way of Whitechapel. I changed ’buses four times.

“Then someone took me by the elbow. I turned round and saw a police officer.

“‘What can I do for you?’

“‘Come with me.’

“Half an hour later I was in Pentonville.

“At that time I was somewhat naive! I thought that if the prison was washed with rubber squeegees, it would not smell like the Odessa prison. Pentonville really looked much more intelligent. Cold. Clean. Quiet. Near the door was a bell. Each thief was given

two clean sheets, a yellow neck-kerchief, and slippers.

“But how much this ‘intelligence’ cost us. Imagine! An oak table and seven chairs are screwed to the floor in the middle of the cell. All the prisoners must sit. One is not allowed to get up, or to smoke. Talking is permitted. We sit and talk, two hours, all day....

“At night you may not get up either. If you want to go to the toilet, you must press the bell and wait for permission.

“The dishes are like amber. You are forced to lick them clean. But there was so little food that we licked the dishes without being told.

“In the Odessa prison they simply beat you if you smoked. Here, they beat you and chained you to the wall. They didn’t hang you, of course, but they pulled the chains so your weight rested on your big toes.

“The rest was the usual thing. At the examination they hit me on the head with a rubber club. I was young, and had recently received terrible letters from my family. I couldn’t stand it, and I raised my hand against the gaoler.

“What’s the difference—a fist or a rubber club. But I thought all that over later, in a cell called ‘the hold.’ At the examination I simply yelled and covered my face with my hands.

“The ‘hold’ in Scotland Yard is cleverly made. I think some admiral must have invented it. When they pushed me into the cell, there was a little water on the floor, and not one bench. I guessed immediately that the floor had just been washed, and a puddle had been left. I called out to the gaoler to have the floor wiped. He said: ‘Directly.’ Then he brought a hose and turned it on me with such force that he almost put out my eye. Water collected a couple of feet deep, and I stood there, shivering, for twenty-four hours.

“If Scotland Yard robbed me of three years of health, the Cracow prison and Sing-Sing robbed me of ten.

“In Cracow they caught me in a bank. It was an old agent of the Tkach detective agency who caught me. I still remember him. When the agents demanded 20,000 roubles from me in the prison, before the magistrate, they screwed my arms till the muscles snapped.

“How I worked? That interests only the State police. I soon stopped sending my family money. It’s easier to give fifty roubles out of a hundred than to give a hundred out of a thousand.

“You want to know the end? The last year of the twenty-five? Perhaps the last day? Yesterday the chief called me in. Do you know what we talked of?

BELOMOR

“He shook my hand and said:

“‘You were badly crippled at one time, Kvasnitzky. We’re letting you go, Kvasnitzky. I wish you a hundred years of good work.’

“You mustn’t think it’s a sort of chemistry: the G.P.U. takes a waster, an old thief—Kvasnitzky, for instance—and throws him into the workings. Ein, zwei, drei.... And out comes Kvasnitzky, taking off his hat, and says:

“‘Thank you. Now I understand everything. I’m a changed man.... Give me a passport. I don’t want to live as an outcast any longer.’

“But I haven’t told you the bit between—the bit that got me here.

“Even the revolution couldn’t stop me, so fast was I running on my devilish wheel. I wanted to slip off, to get a firm foothold... some nice clean trade-union card with a good date on it, and spit on everything... but there was a whole rotten gang running with me.

“It was only in the Minsk prison that I realised I was on the wrong road. This game of cat and mouse had to stop some day, after all.

“I looked under my feet, and saw that the wheel had stopped running, and stood horizontally. Why rob, when one can work? Why sneak about at night, when one can walk about in the daylight? Why call oneself Kaplan when one’s name has always been Kvasnitzky?

“In the Minsk prison I became a tanner again. I was trusted. One day the chief handed me three thousand roubles, and told me to buy chrome for the workshop. I went out of the prison, if you can believe me, and never once thought of taking a train and leaving for another city. Not because I didn’t want to trifle with a pitiful three thousand, after my gold and diamonds. No. Because I wasn’t considered a thief. I went out without a guard, and found chrome that was better than the best cobbler in town ever dreamt of!

“You see a stripe on my arm. You are speaking to a teacher in charge of 540 people. There are young thieves, murderers, prostitutes, and bandits in three barracks. Each of them is building the canal, and in each of them I see a reproduction of myself.

“I try to make speeches to the shirkers at meetings, but I speak badly. The words choke me. I begin to choke. It’s easier to talk in the barracks, or in the workings.

“But sometimes it’s best not to talk at all.

“Listen to a case like this:

“The famous December drive was beginning. Fires burnt day

and night. The window glass shook from the explosions, like the windows of a tram. We pasted strips of paper over it. At dawn, bands came up to the barracks, and a festive parade began. But many of the brigades were already gone. They had left for the workings, an hour before the parade, to prepare the place for work. And everyone was in a great hurry—in five months a steamer was to leave Povenetz....

“A malicious shirker, Zbyshko by name, went on to the workings with the rest. At first he dawdled as though he were doing the foreman a favour by working. He was still thinking of the stable and RUR. He felt cold. But such work doesn’t warm one in a frost. The trouble was that the shirker had fallen between two stools. Because he went out to the canal he had lost his standing in RUR, and now he was in his brigade. You know, thieves like attention. There was only one way out: he would have to be a great Udarnik! Zbyshko began to work in earnest. For two months he made his 150 per cent., together with his brigade. He spoke at the assembly, and tore up his medical exemption and threw it amongst the audience.

“Zbyshko was already considered reformed. But one day a terrible event happened. Some Cracow sausage was brought to the workings. Accidentally, our former shirker was not on the list. The swine. A mistake. Zbyshko lost his desire for work, but continued to work. It wasn’t the sausage, it was the fact that he took the pencil to sign for it, and his name wasn’t on the list.

“Then he went to the office to find out what was wrong. A simple story, just a mistake. But his feelings were hurt. He yelled a bit, someone called him a bum, and threatened him with RUR.

“I know what that leads to. The fellow might do one of two things: break all the windows in the barrack and go into RUR, or else work as he’d never worked before. You could push him either way with your little finger. I was once in that miserable state of equilibrium myself.

“For the moment he just cursed a bit, and went to bed. It was unpleasant to look at him. A cigarette burned between his teeth, like a fuse... something had to be done—and quick too.

“Zbyshko fell asleep. I managed to get his picture, and brought it to the artists. They drew in profile a gallery of shock-workers, with our former shirker among them. A fine picture! They were all in new jackets and caps. The background was blue, with a view of the rocks.

“Handsome fellows.

“In the morning, Zbyshko didn’t want to get up. I went over to

him and shook his shoulder, but he turned over and grumbled:

“Go to the devil and take your brigade with you.’

“Somehow I lifted him up, and said to him:

“Rowdy! Go look how you’ve been drawn on the signboard. The whole barrack is laughing at you.’

“He pretended to yawn, but went up to the board and saw himself drawn in a place of honour in the gallery of shock-workers! The rest you can understand! In ten minutes the boy had forgotten the Cracow sausage and was running to work.

“Look at that couple. The tall one is Gavrik. The shorter one ‘Patashon.’ They ran away from Luberetz, no, from the Bolshevo Commune. I found them in RUR. Katzapchik was there with them. Someone once said of him that you needed an explosive to break such a character. He won a razor at cards, and went around cutting the engineers’ tents. A very bad habit! Besides that, Katzapchik used to drink eau-de-cologne!

“I spent a lot of effort on him, but at first I couldn’t find any weak spot. I said to him:

“‘What do you want? You’re a thirty-fiver, but you act like a regular counter-revolutionary. Look Spector was freed before anyone else; Kovalev can leave any day.’

“He laughed in my face, and shouted:

“‘What are you lying for, old man? Tell me something new.’

“So I told him something new. Having been in Sing-Sing came in handy here. I remembered that devilish island, and the workshops where we made bolsters for 6 cents a day. And the soup—five spoonsful to a person. I showed Katzapchik Sing-Sing so that he’d realise what was happening around him.

“When the RUR people went to work, I was with them. They sat down to smoke, cursed the rock for its hardness, and said this wasn’t work, but regular hard-labour.

“Then I remarked to Katzapchik:

“‘How you talk of hard labour.... In Sing-Sing they have this sort of custom: they dress you in a striped mattress-cover and tell you very politely: “Here’s a pile of stones. By sunset it must be at the other end of the yard. You’d better hurry, my boy.” And you run all day. You get yourself a rupture by sunset, and you tell the officer that you’ve finished.... He feels your muscles and laughs: “That’s fine. Now bring the stones back again. Hurry up, my lad.” And it begins all over again.”

“If we go to the bath-house and the thirty-fivers grumble that there’s not enough steam, I go to the furnace-man and fix things

up. In the dressing-room I tell them: 'In Sing-Sing, even the solitary confinement cells have steam. White tile. Glass.... They lock you in and smother you with steam, like a rat.'

"Katzapchik finally came out of RUR. He worked hard, but something was lacking. A capable boy. A dancer. A musician. He gave clever imitations of everyone in the barrack. Once I heard him reading verses. At first I got angry. I thought it was Barkov again. But I came nearer and saw that it was Beranger. I wonder—why did Katzapchik get Beranger, and not Yessenin? Probably because of his gay character. There were all sorts of poems—funny ones and sad ones. Many of the fellows liked them. Especially these:

Paris, farewell. Your treacherous blush

I do not need.

Your art is but a wisp of smoke.

Your women's kindness but deceit.

"You've probably seen Katzapchik in the agit-brigade? How he acts. A terribly capable boy. Thieves are usually capable. A fool gets caught on his first job. That's a fact.

"Now I'm watching a Leningrad bandit. The boy is twenty-one years old. There are sixteen charges against him. He's been working in a camp a week, and every day he works worse.

"Seventy-five, sixty, forty per cent. That leads to RUR. To-day I lifted his mattress to see whether the sheets were clean, and I saw dry bread. It's very clear what he needs dry bread for. Escaped convicts aren't fed with schnitzels at the station restaurants.

"I took the boy to my place, and said:

" 'Listen to me, and don't argue, because you could make ten such thieves as you out of me. You've decided to run for it. Haven't you? You depend more on your legs than on your arms? On a trick than on an honest document? All right then—run. Seek for your fortune in other people's pockets. Leave your finger-prints in the detective offices. Get syphilis in the stews. There's a merry life before you.'

"Then I changed the subject. I showed him newspaper clippings with pictures of Kovalev and other shock-workers. I asked him what he could do. It turned out that the boy can draw. Not well, but enough for a start.

"That night we put a wall-paper together. He drew caricatures of the shirkers, and laughed with pleasure. He didn't want to go to bed. He laughed, that's very important. Another week, and he'll eat up his dry bread without running away."

STAGE V
THE LANDSCAPE BEGINS TO CHANGE

Chapter XVII

APRIL AND EARLY MAY, 1932

On March the first, 1932, work began on the tenth lock. This lock was built entirely on diabase—a very hard rock to bore. The engineering and technical staff of the entire construction was interested in the first attempt at working with this rock. The first three weeks of March went by. The results gladdened the sceptical prophets. “We told you so, and we were right.”

On the twentieth, a very deplorable report came to Bear Hill. Report? Say rather, scandal. Only 30 per cent. of the plan had been fulfilled.

Anxious enquiries sped over the wires. The Bear Hill office was worried. Uspensky, who was on the job, replied laconically that by the first the plan would be fulfilled. It was decided to send out a commission from Bear Hill. April was looming on the horizon.

“Uspensky gets muddled by figures....”

“The specialists lead the chief of the division by the nose....”

“It seems he chose a bad plan. Why be stubborn? It’s time he acknowledged his mistake.”

On April first a report arrived at Bear Hill stating that the plan had been fulfilled and even overfulfilled by one per cent.

The clever ones laughed: “That’s just an April fool joke.”

The incredulous commission went out to the workings all the same. They poked and peered and measured and multiplied. Everything was correct. The plan really had been overfulfilled.

There was exultation in the fourth division.

An assembly of the whole camp was arranged in Nadvoitz. The event was discussed lustily in the barracks in the evenings.

The shock-workers boasted of the calluses on their hands—raised during the first days of this unaccustomed work. The special excavation men were discussing the question of which brigade they would challenge. They dictated to their foreman, who thumbed his home-made notebook painstakingly.

“I’ll write it straight. We promise to do 150 per cent, next month, for May Day—the world proletarian holiday.”

The sapper looked at his comrades: “It’s an awful lot, fellows!”

“Of course it’s a lot! There’s no need to tell us that. But the way I see it, we ought to add another five.”

In the stable, the ostlers groomed the horses. They looked over their sides and withers. They smeared them with salve, cleaned

BELOMOR

their hoofs, and cut their frogs. The brown Udarnik horse was given special treatment. He had been hurt somehow in the pressure of work. A new day would begin to-morrow, a day of new victories. The brown horse shook his mane, and the whole stable looked at him with respect. How many loads? What a pace? This was the very same brown horse with which Lederkin had for so long argued against the Soviet power.

The drivers drank tea until they were bursting, and also boasted.

"I looked at my cart and it was lopsided. I was no fool. I jumped down and propped it up with my shoulders. And you know, how many poods¹ do you think it weighed?"

"Poods! And what the devil was wrong with you anyway? Why did it flop over to the side? You could never put that straight, never in your life, if we hadn't made the roads for you. You came out of the workings as if you were going to a wedding."

In those days, people with different specialities met, and boasted to each other.

A former thief, now one of the special excavation, spoke at a meeting. He couldn't breathe, for the words that crowded in his throat. He beat his chest, and said:

"Take us as an example! Who are we? Robbers! Thieves! Bandits! There are murderers sitting here! And it was us lot that found out the secret of the deep trench. We chipped the upper layers and it did us no good at all. And our results were ridiculous, the size of 500 grams of bread. And then a clever fellow came along and said: 'Why are you crawling around on top? You can't break that rock. You'd better tunnel. Make a trench and blow up the rock from below. It'll break like sugar.' We couldn't believe it. But we saw we weren't getting anywhere. Then Comrade Uspensky came, and he said the same thing. 'Fellows, we've talked it over and decided to make a deep trench and then drive holes for the dynamite. Then the rock will go! All right, we began to dig. We dug for twenty days. We got regular Udarnik rations, but the results were poor. We sometimes thought the work would all be wasted. But you see—it wasn't. I tell you, follow our example! Our collective declares that from now on, until our holiday, we'll do 160 per cent. There!'"

Uspensky said: "Of course, it was no miracle to me. But I can understand how miraculous it would seem to an engineer at the

¹ Pood — 36 lbs.

centre, who received nothing but tables showing terrible figures, that pointed to an inevitable breakdown. The hardest thing perhaps was to get the mass of campers behind us—to make them believe and hope that they would get their bonuses. We had to do a lot of talking and explaining. They believed us. And that's no miracle either, comrades!"

2

The Management of the White Sea-Baltic Camp wrote to the Management of the Murmansk railway, telling them that since there would soon be no more river Vyg they had better consider the question of an alternative source of water for their stations along the line. The local inhabitants were also informed that the river Vyg would soon be no more, and that the villages of Tunguda and Soroka must dig wells. The inhabitants laughed—more sceptical than the railway management. The river had existed from time immemorial, and it would always be here.

The carpenters of Velmanov's brigade drove the last iron clamps into the criss-crossed lumber caissons, quietly without any fuss.

"One, two, ready."

The first caisson started slowly from its place. Pustovoit, the foreman, went here and there, among the workers.

"Push on, best altogether. Put a roller under the right edge. The Canal won't wait for you if you drop this bastard!"

Heavy lumps of diabase rock flew from the rafts and barges into the caisson. The caisson began to sink slowly under their weight, and the workers, stimulated by this first victory, got up on top of the floating caisson and added new layers, until the caisson rested on rock bottom.

A second announcement was sent out. The river Vyg would soon cease to exist.

The inhabitants answered: "All right, we've heard that before.

Dump-carts began moving along the tracks on the new bridge. They stopped at the spaces between the caissons and dumped heavy lumps of blasted diabase into the water.

The Vyg broke into little rivulets against the stones, but it kept on fighting. It made itself a path through the chinks between the rocks.

The soil was a true friend to the hydro-technicians. It filled in the spaces between the stones and created watertight walls across

BELOMOR

the stream.

The Udarniks kept adding more and more cubic metres of soil to the eastern noose around the neck of the Vyg. The Udarniks stamped the soil down with their feet, rammed it down with iron-bound mallets, and drove piles into the river bottom.

But, nevertheless, the river wasn't dead. The Vyg which was about 65 feet across was forced to pour its water through the 14 foot gap between the caissons which still remained unfilled. All the fury of the dying river was directed into this gap.

The builders were sure of their final victory. They did not expect a blow from the rear. But the old Vyg gathered its strength, and swept away the central caisson No. 5, the most important of them all, before the eyes of the dumbfounded foreman Pustovoit.

The strongly reinforced structure broke up with an excruciating noise. Its top which was held up by the bridge supports, was suspended in mid-air. The body of the bridge, a huge and heavy construction, turned obediently over onto the next caisson.

During that day, and the night which followed, the entire camp was on its feet. Andrey Bugayev, and the best Udarniks of the workings threw themselves into the breach. The Vyg was tamed again.

At last the day arrived when the Vyg, cut off by caissons built of logs and filled with rock, could not break through the dam. The river was silent.

The water on the lower side of the dam subsided. The fish which had not time to get away from their accustomed pools were beating their tails on bare stone. The astounded inhabitants were deafened by the unexpected silence. The dying waterfall wept as it trickled its last drops.

The campers carried basketsful of fish to their barracks. The more enterprising set up bonfires and cooked fish soup. Six poods of first-class salmon were salted.

It was an ordinary river bottom, with the usual boulders on it, but a new world emerged from under the water.

It seemed to the peasants in the villages that things had hardly changed at all. A dam had been built—and that was all. They did not yet realise how deeply the canal had invaded their life, their surroundings and their future. They ate without appetite and put off going to bed. They kept listening—perhaps the waterfall would thunder again.

The sceptics predicted that the dam would break. After all is such a thing possible—to cut off a river and dam up a lake, like this? People's ears would ring through habit, and they would raise their

fingers. Everyone would fall silent, and it would become unbearably quiet.

Then, one after another, the people from the village moved towards the dam. It was a northern night, a "white night." Near the dam stood a sentinel. On the dam, a bent shadow looked towards the Vyg. The wind blew through his hair, and threw about the long tails of his coat. The peasants recognised the G.P.U. man—Uspensky. The peasants fell silent, and began to retreat from the dam.

Uspensky turned towards them.

"He's looking. Come on," called a diffident voice.

Uspensky came towards them, jumping along over the caissons from plank to plank.

"Well? Want to have a look? Don't be afraid—we've locked the water up tight." He held out a hand to the first peasant who approached on the gang-plank.

The Vyg was shut off, the water rose.

Chapter XVIII

THE CAMP NEWSPAPER

Those who worked as camp correspondents to the Belomor-stroy newspaper, *Reforging*, poked about everywhere, getting impressions of how the work was going on and chatting with the workers and sometimes interviewing them. Many prisoners besides the regular correspondents wrote for *Reforging*, and tact had to be used in that, as in every other, newspaper office. "Manage so that the correspondent is satisfied even if you do not print his contribution" was one of the slogans of the editorial board. *Reforging* opened a mail box which soon became full of letters from camp correspondents, and the editors soon found that they had to deal with the first commandment for a newspaper that has a large popular circulation and a large quantity of "valued correspondents." That first commandment runs as follows: "Do not put notes in a stereotyped form: as far as possible preserve their language, style and character." The second commandment for such a newspaper is "Every paragraph must give results." This was here particularly important because *Reforging* was not an ordinary Soviet newspaper but the organ of the cultural-educational section of the G.P.U. labour camp. The people who wrote in *Reforging* were not free Soviet citizens, but prisoners in a camp for criminals.

For this reason, these points, always important for mass newspapers, were here specially vital, and to the generally known laws and rules of the Soviet Press were added special rules created by the specific situation.

The camp correspondent was a prisoner. In criticising his chiefs he had to speak against an especially authoritative force. *Reforging* had never to forget this. Nor did it forget. The prisoner's right to criticise had to be specially safeguarded.

In the RUR, there were special rules. The chief of such a section has special powers. Even a head foreman was a great power. But sometimes he had to be criticised.

The paper wrote on one occasion for instance:

"At the third point of the second division, after prolonged efforts by the educational section, 174 campers from RUR gave an average of 130 per cent. of their tasks. *Head foreman Stepanov forgot to order bread for them. Malicious loafers made excellent capital of this.*"

Now this paragraph was written by a camper from the RUR.

One must have either great courage or unconditional faith in one's newspaper, to write of such a thing, and to name erring chiefs!

A man who works at digging out rock. He comes out, piles the broken-up rock in a wheelbarrow. His circle of observation is narrow. He knows half a hundred of his nearest comrades in the labour collective. In his moments of rest, he can see only his mangled section, a small space, mutilated by explosives and pickaxes. *Reforging's* special work was to broaden this necessarily limited vision. The paper showed the entire workings, from Bear Hill to Soroka.

"Over heaps of soil, beneath the white light of the carbide lamps, peers a dreary dawn," writes such a correspondent who is writing "the front line."

"The bushes stand out more clearly, the earth lies in disorder, perspiring, under a grey fog. Fog hangs over the roofs. It is cold outside the windows. On the desks the ink slowly thickens, freezing."

One shrinks into oneself, and smokes hastily. The figures dance about. The foreman is obviously giving way to drowsiness, but will talk when questioned. "You ask about my family," he tells the correspondent in an aloof voice that somehow suits the strange light—partly the lightening sky, partly the glare of the lamps. "What is my family to me? I was tried in 1925. They gave me ten years. My wife thought she'd never see me again, and married someone else. When I got to camp my son was 10 years old. Now he's sixteen. In another year or two he'll look down at his old Dad. What's my family to me, I ask you? Some time I'll get myself another. Hi! I haven't done telling you yet! Where are you rushing to? The bakery? The dining room? The canal? Wait a minute. What is it you want? Material for an article in *Reforging*—of course! Well I can tell you this. I work here all day, like a sinner in hell, and at night I struggle with the allocation of work. And the main thing is that there's no one else I can trust that particular job to. The foreman—can't trust him—he might grab labour forces. Or the office gets mixed up. Yesterday 150 carpenters disappeared. It turned out they've been put on the cubic estimate. And here we had no one to make caissons."

How to distribute the labour forces? Where to put the storm brigades? Where to send the borers?

The war against the Karelian forests and rocks lasts weeks and months.

"What I'd like," says the foreman in a tired voice, "when we finish the canal... would be to sleep... two whole days... on end," and so the correspondent moves on—to the bakery this time.

BELOMOR

Water pours into the wooden vat. From the opposite side, which separates the dough mixer from the furnace room, someone calls:

“How much dough are you making?”

“Ten poods.”

“Add a couple.”

A lump is torn from the sticky mixture. It is weighed, dropped in a tin, and laid on a plank. While the dough is rising, the black-moustached head baker, who looks like a trader in Eastern sweets, answers the correspondent's questions.

“How many people work in the bakery?”

“There are ten of us. We bake in three shifts, and supply the whole camp with bread. Seven of the bakers used to be lumbermen. Now they work as well as the most skilled bakers.”

“Are there any defects in the work? Are rationalising proposals carried out?”

The manager is a Ukrainian. He used to bake fine rye loaves on the Sadovaya Street in Moscow. And now he bakes bread for the eighth division at Belomorstroy. He has been a baker for thirty years.

“About rationalisation. We used to carry wood in from out-of-doors. That took a lot of time. And now we've built wood-boxes near the stoves.

“Defects? Well, you can't have perfection. The stoves smoke a bit. Otherwise they're all right. They're good stoves. And there's plenty of wood. Only the chopping is not regular.”

A load of wood arrives. A tanned baker in dough-stained trousers begins to chop it.

This is Peter Fyodorovich Malyshkov. One of the best shock-workers in the bakery. A forty-niner,¹ with a three-year sentence. Formerly worked in Moscow and Ekaterinoslav.

He tests the heat of the stove with his hand, instead of a thermometer.

The doors bang. A poker that looks like a fire-hook goes in and catches hold of a tin. The tin hurries along the wooden hearth. Rag mittens catch it up and hit it against the bench. A loaf jumps out of the tin.

The bread is carried to the store-room. The empty tins are piled one within the other, and move on to the opening of the dough mixer.

¹ Those guilty of more than one serious offence.

There a swab whirls round wiping and smearing them for the next batch of dough. The work is done by the conveyor system.

The poker is wielded by Victor Osipovich Solovik, a former baker. It will soon be time for the next shift to come out to the excavations.

2

To the right of the bakery is a street of residential barracks and wooden stands covered with canvas. On the doors there are pieces of plywood with inscriptions: Section 2; Section 6.

Beyond the doors—silence and dreams.

“Hello! Hello! This is the radio station of the cultural and educational section... This is the loud-speaker, waking the sleepers.

“Get up! Get up! It’s time to go to work. Attention! The shock-brigade production dropped heavily yesterday.”

The radio newspaper raises an alarm.

The sleepy people look distrustfully at the loud-speaker. There is another failure. An accordion plays over the wireless and the loudspeaker broadcasts the name of the foreman of one of the backward brigades. He asked some campers to steal fifty wheelbarrows from the brigade he was competing with—a brigade with a huge daily production.

“Shame on you, foreman Bulgak!”

And the accordion plays up again.

“They gave it to Bulgak, all right,” smiles a man with a red beard.

“That’s just what he deserves. The camp isn’t a low pub!”

And now a girlish voice sounds from the loud-speaker, reciting the verses of a camp poet—a former forger and thief, a man who had been back in prison again and again.

“I had a pen and a bunch of fine keys,

And I often went to the pen;

But I always looked with envy

At the life of the working men.”

The loud-speaker does not quiet down.

“Shame on the loafers Petrov, Frizov and Sigova.”

The people pass a large sign-board on their way to work. On the board is drawn a dishevelled man with angrily bared teeth; next to him is a bourgeois, with a gold chain across his waistcoat. Under the dishevelled man is an inscription: “Fyodor Zhigalov is a traitor to the workings.”

BELOMOR

In July, 1932, competitions began among the best shock-workers. The shock-workers were rewarded for their high production indices by having their portraits painted in oils. From three to four thousand shock-workers took part in these competitions. Portraits were given to those who made not less than 180 per cent. of the standard daily production.

But the pictures that put their sitters among the gallery of heroes were not the only ones painted. There were also caricatures. Consequently in those days the cultural educational section, of which both *Reforging* and the class teachers were a part, often received letters such as the following:

Dear COMRADE TEACHER,

For five months I cut the morning parade every day, because I had the idea that even horses die from work. No arguments or propaganda did any good. This is my second time in camp, and I didn't want to work. And I thought the canal was a regular nuisance. They shamed me at my section meetings, but after all no one knew about it except one section. And when I saw myself this morning drawn arm-in-arm with a capitalist, and it was written underneath that we both work together with the class enemy, then I understood that I was really a class enemy. And I beg you dear comrades, put me into any collective, and I give my word of honour that I'll work like an Udarnik you'll see. And not only myself, I'll make other people work too, so they won't get into that picture. I'm ashamed that I wanted to stop the construction, and that I'm a class enemy of the Soviet Government. Signed, ZHIGALOV.

Please, please take down the caricature.

The camp-correspondents who wrote of victories and heroism were the best shock-workers and leaders, and the work of a camp correspondent was a responsibility.

Unfortunately, *Reforging* did not keep a regular record of its correspondents. The lists included only those campers who wrote to the paper regularly and often. For this reason, there were only 3,570 registered correspondents. Of course, even 3,570 is quite a large army, but this figure would have to be increased several hundred per cent. to give a real idea of the paper's contact with the masses.

STAGE VI

THE SHORT KARELIAN SUMMER MUST BE MADE
THE MOST OF SOME NEWCOMERS

Chapter XIX

JUNE AND JULY, 1932 YAGODA'S AND FRENKEL'S OPINION OF WORK AND WORKERS

During the early summer of 1932—just a year before, according to the plan, the first steamer was to navigate the canal, Yagoda, one of the chiefs from Bear Hill, inspected the whole line of the excavations, saw the camps, talked to the engineers and the workers.

He was well satisfied with what he saw; the housing conditions were considered satisfactory and the whole scheme working well; but in Karelia the summer is so short that, if the very next return of white nights and fine weather was to see the actual completion of the Canal, it was necessary to remind everybody that there was no time to lose. The utmost use must be made of these all too brief months.

The production indices were high, but during this critical time could not perhaps more workers be freed for the actual work? Yagoda proposed a series of extra inducements for the encouragement of the prisoners: there were to be rewards, not only for quantity, but also for quality. The best foremen and the best shock brigades were, at his suggestion, given higher wages, and above all terms of imprisonment were to be shortened. Meetings were held and the detailed instructions, suggestions and demands that came from Bear Hill were explained to all concerned.

To the slogan "Speed" was added a new slogan: "High quality."

The special characteristics of this period of the work, and the new demands on all the workers were carefully defined. Nothing learnt on the work-grounds was lost. Everything was taken into account. Scores of leading workers were transferred. The Party line was again elucidated to the Chekists.

The slogan for quality embraced all the work: technical plans, the mutual relations of authorities, the character of the men, the distribution of staff, and the recording of achievements.

Gister, chief of the production division, and the chief of the projecting division made a decision: to send inspector brigade leaders out to the construction, and attach them to definite jobs. The engineers went out to the work grounds to follow up the realisation of their projects.

One could hardly say that the arrival of Comrade Frenkel at the Belomor Canal made much of an impression. The rank-and-file workers did not know him, and the engineers had not heard of him except accidentally, so that this news was received as one of the many uninteresting details of administrative life—one more chief, who probably knew nothing of technology, who would give orders and reprimands.

Soon everyone saw him.... Thin, of middle height, with a cane in his hand, he would appear here and there on the workings, go silently up to the work, and stop, putting his feet together and leaning on his cane, he would stand there for hours. He would look down into the diggings, at the boulders, connected by a network of planks, over which ran men with wheelbarrows, who bent over as they turned corners; he would stare at the lumps of earth that shot into the air, at the steam that came from the machines, and the people. Once in a while he would ask a question, turning to the foreman, and then they saw his face, under the peak of his cap—a thin, commanding face, with a capricious mouth and stubborn chin. The eyes of a judge or a prosecutor, the lips of a sceptic and a satirist.

He was like a bird. Surrounded by hustling people, he seemed as though isolated in a terrible solitude, all the more icy that its reason was unknown.

Soon people got to know Frenkel better. At first this was an unpleasant acquaintance. No, he did not shout or curse. He was polite. But from the very first glance everyone under him understood very clearly that he must either accept Frenkel's methods of work or go to war with him.

Frenkel didn't wait for this choice, he himself immediately took the offensive.

He came down on the engineers and foremen with a force which turned out to be irresistible.

He considered that they worked badly—that they put neither their minds nor their hearts into their work. He saw aloofness and lack of interest in the work.

The engineers thought he was a dilettante, and that his fever would soon cool down when he came up against technical questions, of which he was surely ignorant.

...But the engineers were mistaken in their ideas of Frenkel's dilettantism. He knew a great deal, some even thought he knew

everything. The utterly incredible capacity of his memory soon became famous. He knew by heart the standards for a day's work, the number of workers in each section and of each trade, he could tell you in ten minutes exactly what materials and how much material would be needed for any particular bit of the construction. He had an excellent knowledge of timber and of forest work in general, he was a specialist in soil and an excellent rationaliser when it came to making earthworks. He was also an agricultural expert. His varied biography had brought him into contact with dozens of professions, and he had managed to extract and store in his phenomenal memory the most important things in each, so that there seemed to be no question with which he was unacquainted.

One day, for instance, in a train, he got into a conversation with two workers of the trust that manufactures soap, perfumes, and cosmetics. He very soon reduced them to silence, as he displayed an extraordinary knowledge of perfumery, and even turned out to be an expert on the world market and the peculiarities of the olfactory likes and dislikes of the inhabitants of the Malay Islands! When at Belomorstroy he entered into single combat with the engineers, he used his knowledge with deliberate brutality.

He set himself the aim of getting the engineers down from their Olympus, where they felt themselves, crowned with their diplomas, immune not only from criticism, but above all, from real, live work.

He seemed never to sleep. After eighteen hours of intense work—very pale and strenuous—he would call the engineers to night meetings, which they called “night vigils.” At these meetings there would be “cleanings.” Here are some excerpts from the short-hand report of Frenkel's speeches:

“You engineers use your authority to impress people whom you think incompetent, and whom you can mystify with technical terms. But what we demand is, that you use your authority for the work in hand.

“You exaggerate the difficulty of technical problems, but hydro-technicians aren't the only ones who understand quality in concrete. A chemical engineer, or a sugar refiner knows as well as you do what is needed to set up a good dam. You know the importance of fine-grained and coarse-grained sand in a dam, and when it has to be poured, but you make a regular mess of it in practice. Who can explain what happened at Engineer Skvortzov's dam, even though he is a hydro-technician? Why was the foundation badly cleared? You don't say anything? Won't you say something articulate? You say nothing. I can only assume that you have a loose

attitude towards the work, and are indifferent to questions of quality....”

Frenkel's method of winning authority was not such as the pessimists had anticipated. It was not the path of terror, but rather—the iron march of logic. Logic combined with peppery irony. Syllogisms hissing with sarcasm and glowing with feeling. A system where every conclusion was pushed to the very end. Where a belated telegram was transformed into a gridiron on which to roast the telegraph operator, and every piece of wood that got into the embankment became a splinter in the foreman's heart.

But when the battle was won, a strange circumstance was noticed. There were neither dead nor wounded on the field of battle. There were a few cases of wounded self-esteem, and some up-tilted noses were bruised a bit, but no one could remember any evil done to him by Frenkel. And what is even more incredible—on examining the field of action, one saw everywhere an amazing order, a model of organisation: diggings into which one would be ashamed to throw a cigarette butt, locks made as carefully and painstakingly as beautiful furniture, lively, energetic faces, and precise, conscientious, intense labour. Doubt had disappeared, order reigned everywhere. In this one could see Frenkel's work.

3

Beginning as a prisoner, an ordinary lumberman in Solovetz, Frenkel went up the entire ladder of camp life and was given a post with tens of thousands of people under him. An organiser and administrator to the core, a man with a burning thirst for activity, who could always everywhere find something to build—yet he owed all his success to the organisation in which he found himself.

In any corner of the Union where you might be cast by fate—be it the most dark and backward—be it on the shores of the Arctic Ocean or in the tropical swamps of Lenkoran, in the Bolshevo labour commune or in the Simferopol bird-breeding regions—everywhere you will find order, organisation, accuracy and conscientiousness in the work of the G.P.U. The figure of the Chekist is everywhere the same, his very appearance speaks of discipline, of strictness towards himself and towards those around him, of vision, of firmness. The system of the G.P.U. is one in which all muscles are trained, as before a contest—they are trained to fulfil the orders of the Party. The fullest, promptest, most supreme fulfilment of all the directions of the Party and the Government, the strictest

BELOMOR

discipline, method and exactness, the ability to approach everything from the political viewpoint—such are the characteristics of Chekist work.



FRENKEL

When Frenkel got into this organisation he had either to submit to it, or to be damned as an organiser. He chose submission. And here began his re-education as a member of the organisation. It educated him, and we must say, some good hard pushes were needed.

His old habits as a business man and an individualist came into continual conflict with the methods of the G.P.U., where each

person must feel that he is not the centre of the world, but a part of a great and finely working whole. This was hard—very hard. People were attentive and solicitous; everyone saw his desire to work honestly, but at the same time everybody directed and corrected him continually—in most cases gently, but sometimes sternly.

He was obliged to realise that Bonapartism, even in miniature, is absolutely impermissible in such conditions, that the glory won through the accomplishment of any particular task is not merely a personal matter, that solitary work is possible only up to a definite limit—a narrow limit, beyond which one's will belongs to the will of the entire organisation.

For some time Frenkel could not understand, for instance, the role of society in our country. He thought that correct leadership and discipline should be sufficient to make the work go well. But he was soon convinced that this was not so. He began to take an interest in mass cultural work, and his organisational talent immediately assimilated itself in this field and brought it into the general course of the work....

The G.P.U. tore Frenkel away from his past. The G.P.U. gave him a future.

The support of the collective—oneness with the collective—without these, any work is extremely difficult in the Soviet Union. Frenkel realised the importance of this support and oneness. He found them in the G.P.U. system, which adheres to the ideas and decisions of the Communist Party, and sees to it that these decisions are carried out everywhere, and by everyone. He remained on the construction works all winter and rumour credited Frenkel with all that was done. They said he had written a new criminal code.

By this code the thirty-fivers were given, as it were, a full amnesty, and the ten-year terms of the counter-revolutionaries were reduced to five.

They said that the code had already been passed by the Council of Peoples' Commissars, and that its publication was delayed only because Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin was away, and there was nobody to sign it.

Chapter XX

KAGAN'S ORDERS—YURTZEVA WHO WOULD WORK ONLY "ON PRODUCTION"

ORDER

*Of the Chief of the Construction of the White Sea-Baltic Water
Route, Bear Hill No. 28. June 26, 1932*

July and August—the Decisive Months for Our Construction

All participants in the construction must immediately begin preparations for a heroic advance, to fulfil and over-fulfil the plan for these decisive months.

Those responsible should study the situation carefully, learn the plan of operations thoroughly, carefully test the mechanisms, tools and rolling stock.

Examine the horses and get them into good condition.

Examine the sanitation and efficiency of kitchens, bath-houses, and laundries, and all the other links in our apparatus.

Everyone must be ready for the advance, everyone must be mobilised.

The engineers and technicians must issue orders promptly, clearly and decisively.

The mechanics must ensure 100 per cent. obedience from the machines.

The transport workers must ensure 100 per cent. efficiency of the rolling stock, and *cheerful* horses.

The food workers must provide good food.

The sanitary divisions must take care of the disinfection of the buildings, the prompt and thorough washing of clothes, bath-houses, and see that prompt medical aid is at hand when needed.

The cultural-educational staff must carry on their work of explaining the tasks of the decisive months, and must give interesting and popular information through the press.

The canal army workers must give maximum production and high quality during the decisive months.

The fall in productivity hitherto observed in the first week of every month is categorically forbidden.

I *demand* that the high productivity generally achieved in the last ten days of each month be not decreased in the slightest degree at the beginning of the new month.

I set the zero hour for the special effort at the usual hour for beginning work, on July 2.

The decisive months are the crucial ones of our construction, in securing the maximum volume of work.

The decisive months are the crucial ones of our construction in securing the highest quality of production.

Under the slogan of high quality and high productivity we will all begin as one man, on the second of July, an advance for the fulfilment of the programme and plan for the decisive months—*July* and *August*.

KAGAN, Chief of the Construction.

When an important inspector—Saltz—came from outside he was very much impressed and wrote an appreciative letter in which he addressed the builders of Belomorstroy “Comrades.” This letter was read out at meetings and was very popular.

If we are to understand the psychology of Belomorstroy we must realise that new prisoners—both men and women—arrived from time to time, so that during even this decisive summer it was not only the incurables, men like Lederkin, who were rowing against the current.

2

Zinaida Nikolaevna Yurtzeva was one of those who quite late in the tale of Belomorstroy went from the title “prisoner,” the camp term “Canal soldier,” to that of—“comrade.”

At first she felt miserable in the workings.

Karelia, roughened by prehistoric glaciers, with its gleiss-granite, crystal shales, with its sands and its sub-sands, with its clays and its sub-clays—Karelia was not adapted to high, fragile heels, to artificial “sun-tan” silk stockings, to any of the things with which Yurtzeva came to the canal. And to top it all—almost as soon as she arrived—it began to rain.

A rainy summer. Slanting clouds floated over the Dubrov dam, pouring down rain on all the different soils. Yurtzeva was glad. Glad of the clouds, and the wind—in a word, of everything that hindered the work. A malicious joy rose in her breast at the sight of the water pouring stormily from the sky. In such weather, lying on one’s cot, one can recall one’s past. God, what a past. No joke—five pairs of boots—three aliases.

“After my trial,” Yurtzeva relates, “they took fifteen

photographs of me. Through these pictures they found three more names. They gave me article thirty-five and three years in a labour-reform camp. I was sent to the Mariinsky camp, where I didn't go to work, but simply walked about in the yard with the shirkers." From Mariinsky, she was sent to the White Sea-Baltic camp.

And before that? What a long—what a broken life.

"My uncle—my father's brother—adopted me. I called him 'father,' and his wife 'mother.' This mother also died in a few months, this father also was killed. I cried for a long time, but nobody paid any attention to my weeping, and no one wiped away the tears that ran on to the unknown, yellowing grass. I was five years old.

"A step-sister in the neighbouring village took me home as a nursemaid. The new people there laughed terribly because I wore an ugly canvas dress, and torn boots that had belonged to my sister's husband. I got eight roubles as salary, but I only got it the first month. After that I got nothing but beatings from my huge master.

"My older brother took me to his home, but he soon fell ill with tuberculosis and died, leaving me to strangers again."

This time Zinka Yurtzeva was really alone. She led the usual life of an abandoned child. She became one of the "homeless children," importunate and wild as stray boys seldom become. She was not so strong physically as she was agile, and this was her trump card, with which she beat—beat in the full sense of that word, not only the doors and windows of the gaol into which she soon fell, but even the teeth of the gaoler in charge of the women's section.

"All day, from morning to night, I broke the glass and beat the doors. For that, the senior gaolers bound me and put me in the solitary cell, where I did the same thing.

"When we were let out of the cells for our walk, I knocked out some of the gaoler's teeth. For that they gave me thirty days 'solitary.'"

But gradually she quietened down and was sent to an open colony where courses in gardening were given. She was surrounded by quiet, friendly objects: watering-pots, seedlings in boxes, and the hothouses. She was taught about deep autumn ploughing, spring re-ploughing, and the struggle with weeds. Yurtzeva liked the work on the seed-beds; she worked with pleasure. She was told "In the spring you will see peas grow up from this bed." But she did not see it. Before the spring she got drunk, and broke the glass of the hothouses as she had broken the glass in the gaol.

She was punished, and ran away. She ran away three times in succession. She was caught. And here she is on the White Sea Canal.

Amid the noise of the rain, she goes over her past. But what is this? One rainy morning, drowning out the splashing and gurgling of the rain, an accordion sounded out—covered by a rag to keep it from getting wet. The accordion played a splendid march, a sparkling march, raising everyone from their seats. “The will of the Udarnik must be stronger than the rain,” came the voice of an ex-criminal over the radio. “Which is stronger: we, shock-workers, with our flaming enthusiasm, or the cold ‘heavenly powers’ with their little raindrops?”

She lay in bed. But everyone went to work, and how could Yurtzeva stay behind—she who had always been such a good comrade? Even the shirkers in the Mariinsky camp said that Yurtzeva was “a good fellow.” Everyone was lazy and so was she. Everyone broke glass—and so did she. She undoubtedly had the collective feeling—only turned inside out. Now, for the first time, she took her place. The work roared around her.

Somewhat reluctantly, Yurtzeva got out of bed. She put on the boots, the quilted jacket, and the canvas gloves issued her by the manager and went out to the Dubrov dam—one of the largest dams in the world.

She had always liked to amaze her comrades. She had amazed them with all sorts of mischief and filth. But this didn't go here. Here people also amazed one another—but in entirely different ways: by hard, honest work. She took note of this also.

We know that the upper surface of concrete is rough, porous, or wrinkled, depending on various conditions. Yurtzeva's mental state was the same during her first days of work. She was set to work on the foundations. With others, she had to build up the slope of the dam, according to the engineers' directions. The body of the dam had to be clean and strong. One had to be very careful that no moss or wood got inside—anything that would rot—for the two basic requirements of a dam are—firmness and permanence. The slopes of a dam must be good work, with no pitfalls.

But this was not the main thing. The main thing was, that it was “our dam.” Everyone around Yurtzeva said: “our dam,” “our canal.” “What do you mean—ours?” asked Yurtzeva scoffingly.

“Ours—everybody's. And yours too,” she was answered. “Why not? When you are free, you can ride right up to the White Sea, if you please. It's everybody's canal. Under the tsar it was this way: workers built a road, for instance. And when it was built, it was locked up. Only the tsar and his lackeys could travel on it. And for the workers there was a road alongside: ditch after ditch, bump

BELOMOR

after bump. That's how it was."

"Yes, that's how it was," Yurtzeva repeated to herself. "Our dam. Our canal." The first few days she did 80 to 83 per cent. It was hard for her, physically: building a dam isn't like breaking glass. But she wanted to amaze the people around her—it was boring to live without amazing people. Besides, she was beginning to like "our dam." "After a few days, dam-building began to please me," she says. "And I began to do 125 per cent."

Besides working well herself, she had a good effect on others. "I organised a brigade out of the 36 women who were working on the dam. Some of them didn't mind doing only 75 per cent. They became first-class Udarniks, now they make 125 per cent."

At about that time the rain stopped. August came on—the time when the Karelin summer brings out all its deeply hidden tenderness. Berries like bright flames in the turf. The body of the dam gave off warmth, like a human body. At last their clothing dried, and their boots became light. One felt like lying down on the warm shale and dolomite—on the soft "turf pillows."

Yurtzeva sang a song written by a Belomor poet and printed in *Re forging*:

The cool of the woods is fine,
How soft and aromatic the grass!
Yet the shock-brigade
Must preserve its shock spirit:
Forest and summer come again,
But Belomorstroy comes only once.

"And 'our dam' grew. Now there were rumours that the work here would soon be practically finished: and it was decided to transfer my whole brigade to Shavan. We were seen off to the new job by the band playing marches.

"When we got to Shavan, my brigade was broken up and given various jobs of camp service. But we all declared that we would work only on production. After four days, some of the women from my brigade asked the chief of supplies for stockings. He refused them, saying that they would have to earn them. After that they came complaining to me, as leader of the brigade. What was I to do? On the fifth day we all went out to the canal. They set us to work collecting shavings, for which we received stockings. But we continued to protest, and I went to the foreman and said: 'Shavings. Who wants shavings? You give us foundation work, and we'll show you real work.' He smiled a bit, but agreed. And the women scattered among the men and began to work better than the men. And

the chief of the production came up to me—we called him ‘grandad’—and said: ‘Your brigade works very well.’ But I tossed my head in the air. I was proud of my brigade, and didn’t like the way he spoke. Later on we made 150 per cent., and formed the collective ‘Forward to October.’ There were 63 of us, and I was chosen boss of all the big jobs.”

Now the Shavan dam was “our dam” to Yurtzeva. She cast a business-like glance at her collective. She not only worked herself, but was coming to a higher stage: she learnt how to divide work among others.

The scale of her work had changed. In place of a vegetable bed at the horticultural school, she had now the gigantic bed of the dam, which she had to pile up, rake, and water, to make it settle. In place of the enemy weeds against which she had once fought, she now worked side by side with the former wreckers—with other people who were also undergoing great changes.

“We worked on the canal, in the laundry, and in the tailoring shop. I had a lot of work there—a big family. I came to the work on the 24th dam, and the work was going full steam ahead with everybody singing.”

For the first time in her life the stray child Yurtzeva, who began her life by nursing other people’s children, had acquired a real, intimate family.

“The men who worked next to us, from the labour collective ‘Road to Reform,’ were the worst of shirkers. They cursed us, but the women criticised them in their shrill voices, and they didn’t like that. They used all sorts of smutty words, but the women answered that all that was old, and had to be forgotten. ‘When you’re on the job, why not do it! Look at all those lumps in your row!’ And the dam grew, and October approached—October was to bring news of reduced sentences. I was given a remission of eight months, for which I am very thankful. But the main thing was not that. The main thing was that when a camp assembly of shock-workers was organised at Bear Hill I was sent as a women’s delegate.

“There were only three women delegates. I was elected to the presidium, where I listened attentively, and then made a little speech in the name of the women of the 15th fighting point. After that I was called into a separate room, where there were two artists. They drew two pictures of me, and gave me one.”

Perhaps, on receiving her portrait, Yurtzeva thought about the change in her life. The old Yurtzeva, photographed fifteen times by detectives, and the Udarnik Yurtzeva being drawn twice by an

artist. But she was too busy at that moment to think long.

“After the interval, the assembly went on. The question of rewarding medals to the shock-workers came up. I heard my name. A tall chief—his name is Rappoport—fastened a medal to my blouse, and said:

“ ‘Such a tiny young hooligan to earn a medal!’ Everyone laughed, and before I could leave, I was given apples and sweets by the technical workers of the 24th dam.”

The 24th dam was finished. The “tiny young hooligan” is to be seen at various points of the construction. At Lei bay she organised a women’s labour collective called “The Red Star.” “Many shirkers we didn’t know entered this collective, and we had a hard job with them. But we managed. We taught them to work.” And then we meet her at a new place. “This was new work to me, but I got used to it quickly, and besides that I taught the other women to go to the woods to cut trees. We began to compete—Upper bay against Blue bay. We competed to see which would give the highest figures for each Udarnik in sawing wood. It was very interesting.”

Interesting!... Yurtzeva has said a wonderful word—work had become interesting to her. And these new interests covered and obscured her past, which had also, in its way, been “interesting.” How this would have surprised that gaoler whom Yurtzeva’s attentions left toothless for ever.

Yurtzeva says this at the end of her story: “Now I am working as a teacher among the women. It’s very good. But we have women here on the canal who are foremen, technicians, standardisers, topographists, draughtsmen, builders. There are women in the projecting section too. And I’d like to learn some speciality, so as to be able to go on working when I leave here. I’m still very young and capable! I can still be very useful.”

Chapter XXI

PORTRAIT OF FIRIN

Frenkel was one of the new workers who arrived at Belomorstroy during the summer "push." Yurtzeva's portrait must stand as typical of many more who arrived about this time, but the picture of this period will not be complete without the portrait of Firin, a G.P.U. man, who arrived when Yurtzeva had settled down to work.

Firin was already a very important personage when he arrived at the central office at Bear Hill, although—like so many of the heads of the G.P.U.—he was still youngish—thirty-three years old to be exact.

2

He was born in the Vilna region in the family of an unlucky Jewish peasant. His father had taken to the land, after failing in everything else. There is a Jewish saying about such people: "If he set up as a hatter people would be born without heads."

This father of his was known all through the district for his strength and impetuosity. He had been conscripted in his youth, had served in the grenadiers where they had "disciplined" him with birches soaked in salt water. Demobilised, and with a growing family, Firin's father took to cattle dealing.

From Friday to Friday he scoured about through the villages, argued with stubborn, taciturn peasants; he would bargain over each ten kopeks, would go away and come back again; would blaspheme, to squeeze out half a rouble. The profit gained by talking himself hoarse, by swearing, by choice metaphors and by clapping hands together so that his palms swelled, was never sufficient to buy enough bread and herring for his growing family. Then he took up an occupation very unsuitable to a poor Jew: he began to drink.

At first he drank at village fairs, to "wet" a completed bargain. At a rickety inn table they would drink together—the cheated peasant and the Jewish buyer; one paying with the proceeds from his last cow, the other with his tiny, hard-earned profits. When drunk, the Jew would become quarrelsome and truculent. He would come home smelling of manure and vodka, his beard dishevelled, his eyes bloodshot. His wife would shrink into a corner, and the children would crowd around her, watching their father's every movement with burning hatred.

One autumn, after the usual beating, blood gushed from the

mother's throat. That night the eldest daughter, sixteen-year-old Nayda, poisoned herself with strychnine prepared for rats. She died in convulsions. When the family came together to sit shiva¹ for the dead girl, the fourteen-year-old son, the subject of this portrait, was missing. The neighbours had seen the boy run out of the house without a coat. He never came home.

He went to Vitebsk. This unknown town, where he had no friends or relatives, seemed empty and hostile. He wandered about the town, without a kopek in his pocket, with no place to stay, and with a huge appetite, which would be satisfied with a good loaf of bread—but at once, right away. The boy got work now and then, here and there. In 1916 he got steady work in the Danenberg factory, and entered the working-class movement. At the end of the year, he was drafted into the army as his father had been.

At first, the war had reached Vitebsk only in the form of passing columns of marching soldiers, in the shape of human remnants on crutches, a multitude of deserters, and the cloying odour of iodoform. But one day it changed its course, and rose up like a wall, cutting off the road. The new draft awaited its summons in the military commander's courtyard. Through the open window one could see a line of naked young men. With the dexterity of a born carpenter, the brusque sergeant-major led each in turn to the wall and measured him. "Taking measurements for coffins."

Oh no—that's just a joke. But rather a gruesome one?

Before his turn came around, Firin stole quietly from the military commander's courtyard, through the gates, into one side street and then another side street—and ra-a-an.

He couldn't go back to Danenberg's factory: he was a deserter. Nor was it any too safe to remain in Vitebsk.

It was possible in old Russia to live entirely underground. Within the huge and cumbersome State apparatus, like stowaways in the hold of a gigantic steamer, there lived people—scores, hundreds, thousands of people—who had broken once and for all with the law. A society within a society. Deserters, criminals, crooks. The way to normal earnings is cut off. The stomach works as usual. The thieves have an organisation, a collective, mutual responsibility. That makes things easy. Alone, one can't live long.

¹ Sitting shiva—when anyone dies, in religious Jewish families, the nearest relatives—parents, children, husband or wife, sisters and brothers—stay at home for seven days, in stockinged feet, sitting only on the floor, or on low cushions.

So grew, so lived a human being. He had no name. His old name had been lost with his military documents. His new one had not yet been registered anywhere.

But between 1917 and 1932 Semyon Firin's path had not been easy. First he had enlisted in Kerensky's "Democratic" army, but he had soon felt that his place was with the soldiers' committees. He took part in endless congresses, was one of many delegations. He knew that the Bolsheviks were right. The war could not go on. There were all kinds of dangers to be faced by a member of the soldiers' committees. Danger from the Germans, dangers from the White officers. In the winter of 1918 Firin found himself in his own part of the country—leader of a band of landless peasants stiffened by a few German soldiers, who were Communists and who had managed to get across and join them. This was the beginning of a very special kind of work for which Firin showed himself fitted.

Wrangel's army was shut up in the Crimea. Wrangel's army—like other armies—had been collected at random. Wrangel was forced to evacuate the Crimea. There was chaos and disintegration among the White guards after the defeat of Wrangel and the Crimean evacuation. Plans for new interventions and raids, set for the very near future, were being fabricated in the highest circles: in the homes of generals and heroes of the secret service and in the villas of the business men who followed in the rear of the Whites. In the army there were disputes and hunger. The soldiers and Cossack pauper emigrants lingered morosely. Where were they to go? The alternatives for that broken army were not very inviting. Into the Chinese regiments? The Greek army? The African Legions? To be gun-fodder for the sake of beggarly army rations? Breaking stones on Macedonian roads? Begging along the beach in Constantinople? Or perhaps, somehow, to return to their native villages—neither "with their shields nor on them," but simply asking mercy from their fellow peasants?

And so there appeared spontaneous associations for a return to their native land.

At that time one could have met Semyon Firin, Lithuanian-Polish partisan and commissar of the Red German Brigade, at any place where the bewildered, homeless, emigrant paupers had gathered. He explained and agitated, and organised the demobilised enemy reserves against their own leaders, who had brought them into this hopeless adventure.

They say one could have met him in certain other places, where his presence was probably least suspected: in the quarters of

General Wrangel himself, near Belgrade, in the White centre, and on the peninsula of Gallipoli, which sheltered on its burnt sands the white tents of General Kutepov's volunteer corps.

The Black Hundred paper, *Novoye Vretnya* (New Times), raised a hullabaloo over this unwanted emigrant, and set the secret police of five countries on his trail. Racing along his trail, the secret police searched all the back streets of Athens, Saloniki, Belgrade, Zagreb, Ruschuk, Varna, Sofia and Constantinople. Yet the movement among the mass of White emigrant soldiers for a return home grew daily, and gradually affected even groups of White officers. And when the news exploded one day, that a group of White generals had sailed for the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, to ask forgiveness of the working class, an alarm was suddenly raised at headquarters and in the secret service departments of the now leaderless intervention.

On October 29, 1920, the first number of a new *emigre* paper appeared in Sofia. This paper, *Novaya Rossiya* (New Russia) was especially notable for the numerous and unusual sort of letters that it printed. They were, for instance, from Cossack labourers who had been fooled by the generals, and now looked back on their old lives from a far-off foreign land. Among the editors were the Cossack officers Ageyev and Bulatzel, and S. G. Firin. In its very first issue, the paper opened an attack on the White guards. Groups of soldiers, Cossacks and officers—sympathisers and enemies—filed through the editorial offices, threatening notes and warnings poured in. An observant visitor, scanning the editorial desk, might have noticed on it the butt of a suggestive Mauser carelessly covered with galley-proofs.

In the third number, on the front page, the paper printed the obituary of one of its editors, the Cossack Colonel Ageyev. It reported that he had been killed at his desk after a short skirmish with a group of raiding White guards in Caucasian coats, led by staff officers. The uninvited guests disappeared as swiftly as they had appeared. But not swiftly enough to prevent the recognition of their gun-man's striking face.

This gun-man was General Pokrovsky himself—he who had set up gallows all over the Caucasus—a talented adventurer, and a rival of Wrangel's. He was at that time preparing for a raid on the Soviet Black Sea coast, and the activity of the new paper, which snatched hundreds of fighters from his ranks at so important a moment, caused him much righteous indignation. After his successful raid, General Pokrovsky prudently left the city, deciding to leave

Bulgaria for a time.

This prudence was far from superfluous: the Cossacks squared accounts very quickly. He was killed three days later, by three revolver shots, in the little town of Kystendil, in the Macedonian mountains, bordering on Yugoslavia. Killed before he realised even one of his beautiful plans—in the prime of life, and at the zenith of his adventurous career.

The murder of one of its editors hindered neither the further development of the paper nor the growth of its popularity. This popularity, like the paper itself, was of a very special character: it expressed itself in a sharp decline in the number of subscribers and readers! The readers and subscribers returned *en masse* to their Soviet homeland. Thousands of White soldiers and Cossacks boarded steamers in the Balkan ports. The steamers brought them to Odessa and Novorossisk. It was a mass invasion all right—but not the kind projected by General Pokrovsky!

The generals were left, without armies or chamberlains, to grow old in their “splendid isolation.”

On the day when the last large party sailed, Semyon Firin vanished from Bulgaria—“Departing,” as the Bulgarian secret police reported, “for paths unknown.”

But it may be that the Bulgarian police knew rather more than they told. For Semyon Firin was heard of in a Far Eastern prison: a terrible prison where there was torture, starvation and disease.

How the condemned prisoner in cell No. 12 escaped has not been described, but we do know that in 1930 Semyon Firin was again in Moscow and occupying a very important post in the G.P.U.

In June, 1932, we catch sight of Firin again. Yagoda is speaking to Semyon Firin, Assistant Chief of the Labour Reform Camps, who is to leave for Belomorstroy to-day with a group of Chekists.

“We’re sending you and a group of Chekists to the camp at once,” says Yagoda, “not only to help increase the production but also, and above all, to organise educational work.

“You must remember that there are no incurable criminals. In many camps we come up against a stubborn refusal of whole groups of prisoners to go through a Soviet remoulding; in these cases it is not only the campers who are to blame, but first and foremost, it is the fault of the Chekists in charge of the camp!”

“But Comrade Yagoda,” answers Firin, “the Party wants us to transform these camps into huge construction collectives. You must realise that a certain minimum of technical knowledge is required for the administration of such camps. I have never before

BELOMOR

had anything to do with construction, and it will take some time for me to learn.”

“Don’t repeat the mistake of many of our Chekists, who think they are put at the head of some construction, that they have to take the place of the engineering heads. Your job is not to manage the construction technically, but to organise all the forces necessary for the construction, not to replace the engineers, but to direct them and to create such conditions that the presence of the engineering staff will secure the most skilful and enterprising technical leadership. Trust nobody. Learn to test the correctness of various technical systems by practice. That is all that is demanded of you. The canal is being built on the initiative of Comrade Stalin—every Chekist must remember this always. We shall carry out the task set us by the Party.”

What Semyon Firin did when he got on to the construction, how he co-operated with that odd, and, at first sight, unpleasant fellow Frenkel, is indissolubly bound up with the history of the progress of the canal itself.

STAGE VII

DECEMBER DISILLUSIONMENT WITH PROGRESS
AND QUALITY OF WORK

Chapter XXII

FIRIN COMES TO INVESTIGATE

The summer push had brought results. The work really showed progress. In every division, in every brigade, there were prisoners who had got medals and remissions of sentence—engineers, foremen, women-brigade leaders like Yurtzeva, everyone had shared in the sense of a good job well rewarded.

Then the weather began to grow cold and the nights long again. It was October. The congratulatory speeches had all been made. Now it was time for another spell of hard work.

But what was this? In November the standard of work began to drop off. In December things were even worse! The “norms,” the standard set, had been lowered to meet the worsened weather conditions, but even these lower demands were not being met. Yagoda sent an urgent telegram to Rappoport at Bear Hill:

“Though the daily norms demanded per person for December are much lower than in November, they are not being fulfilled. Daily figures indicate a danger of the failure of the December plan, considerably worse than the November one. Your main obligation is to re-establish labour discipline in camp, on the July level. Put an end to loafing and restore complete order in camp. I hold you personally responsible for clearing up the question of what work remains to be done, and, on the basis of this, making a daily plan for the completion. Figures to reach Moscow by January 1.”

YAGODA.

Semyon Firin, and a number of other helpers from Moscow, were sent up by Yagoda to help to set the pace.

A rumour circulated through the workings in December that a new group of Gulag¹ workers had arrived. Nobody knew the names of the new arrivals. The engineers just called them “the Gulag tribe.” Some said the Gulag tribe had come to renew and strengthen the management of the camp. Others affirmed that they knew for certain that on the initiative of Yagoda himself, there was to be an inspection of all the work that had been done, and that the new arrivals must be regarded as a commission of inspection from the centre.

Many thirty-fivers in the barracks agreed that the “hounds” had come to speed up the construction.

¹ Gulag—the Board of Control of all G.P.U. Labour Camps.

However, a week passed, and then a month, and there seemed to be no changes in sight.

2

During the first few days after the appearance of Semyon Firin as assistant manager of Gulag in the workings, his every step or word or smile was watched with strained expectation. This new arrival walked about, looked things over, asked questions, talked with the prisoners and looked into the barracks, the clinic, the kitchen, the latrines, the isolation section. It was hard to tell from his face whether or not he liked what he saw. Even when he saw the badly heated barracks of the women and of the national minorities—barracks whose sanitary condition was beneath all criticism (as the chiefs themselves realised)—he expressed no dissatisfaction.

Only once did Semyon Firin show any interest in those first weeks: he came into the clinic, and saw a dumb-show conversation between the doctor and an Uzbek patient, who was trying in vain to express his ailment in eloquent gestures. Firin asked:

“Do you understand what hurts him?”

The doctor with scientific solemnity, raised a thermometer instead of his finger.

“They’re stupid people! They can’t express themselves in a human language, but we guess at it. With a certain amount of experience if a doctor has good eyes, he can tell by the external appearance.”

Firin went about alone, and with that solitary bitter-tongued fellow, Frenkel. One could learn a great deal from Frenkel. He was an adept at such things as settling the quarrels that arose among the canal soldiers,—when one accused another of stealing, and the foreman vacillated and pretended not to see, for instance. Manager Frenkel knew all the idlers’ tricks by heart, and could discover at a glance if there were huge stumps under the piles of stones, put there to increase the volume of rock. Firin investigated section after section, looking into all the details of every-day construction.

Days passed by, and still the expected blow did not come. Somewhere in the workings some sort of commissions measured the unfinished work. The engineers were nervous. Now and then some engineer, meeting Firin in the workings would work up enough courage to turn the conversation to the bad state of the construction. Firin would listen attentively, and sometimes ask questions, but he himself would say nothing. The engineer would go as he had come, unable to answer the main question: did Firin

realise the situation or did he not?

People said, with crooked smiles, that this assistant-manager of Gulag was much more talkative with the criminal rabble—especially with the women. In the short time Semyon Firin had been in camp he had gone through all the women's barracks, nor would he allow a single woman to pass him without asking her how she got on in the camp.

In the barracks, the laundries, and the kitchens, he questioned the women lengthily and in detail about their past and about what had brought them to the camp.

The answers were amazingly alike.

"My parents died from carbon monoxide when I was three years old," said Podgorskaya.

"At the age of seven I was left fatherless," said Kaledina.

"I don't remember my father, I was always an orphan." (Melnikova).

"My father died. I had to go to work when I was very young" (Chevchenko).

These orphans and half-orphans had worked for hire from their childhood, lived with strangers, drugged and slaved, nursed other people's children, worked in other people's fields, other people's gardens. In the course of such lives they lost all taste for labour, for it gave them neither joy nor profit.

Other people's children grew and waxed strong under their care. The firm hearts of other people's cabbages developed through their efforts. A fine fire crackled in the stove, but the master's stove is to the drudge like the northern sun: it gives light, but not heat.

After this cold childhood such orphans, chilled to the bone, wandered through life, straying, stumbling, falling. We meet them in detective offices, in homes for juvenile delinquents, in reformatory colonies and at compulsory labour.

Semyon Firin searched out the barracks where there were many members of the national minorities, and conducted strange conversations:

"Hello!"

"Hello!"

"You're from Fergan?"

"From Fergan."

"I've been in your country. How is your work?"

"We work, chief."

"Do you work well?"

"We work well, chief."

“No, you work badly.”

“We work badly, chief.”

“And where are you from?”

“We don’t understand Russian.”

It was dark and dirty in the national minority barracks. On the beds sat Uzbeks, Bashkirs, Tadzhiks, Yakuts—the most backward people on the construction, branded as idlers in the camp paper *Reforging*.

The work went on. The workings were studied once more, for reports to Moscow.

One could often see Chekists in the sixth division, in the office of Kirsanov.

One day Semyon Firin called the engineer Kirsanov to his office. “According to your reports,” he said, turning over a bundle of papers, “it seems that the work in your section is practically finished. I have looked over the work. Do you really think the water can be let in?”

“I reported, as you were pleased to note, that the work is only practically finished,” said Kirsanov. “Of course anyone can see that before we let in the water we must do a great deal of supplementary work.”

“On the basis of your report, and with your consent, a large section of your qualified labour forces were transferred from your section, as unnecessary, and sent to the Moscow-Volga canal. You have sent away your best tents and instruments. With what forces do you intend to finish this supplementary work?”

“Allow me to dispose of the labour forces in my section! The work will be finished in time. I answer for that.”

“If I am not mistaken, citizen Kirsanov, you were freed for good work at the November holidays before your sentence had expired. Is that correct?”

“Quite correct,” answered Kirsanov, paling a bit.

A foreman who was present during this conversation told the engineers, that evening, that while Firin said nothing definite, and was extremely polite, yet it was clear, from his tone, that he suggested that there had been “tufta” (exaggerated, boasting reports of the amount of work done). His question about Kirsanov’s early liberation must be regarded as a transparent hint at the possibility of a review of the reductions in sentence granted to the engineers at the November celebrations. There were rumours that an order had already been given for a scientific investigation of all the unfinished work.

BELOMOR



IN CHANGING NATURE. MAN CHANGES HIMSELF

Everyone was worried. Public opinion turned against the engineer. The devil take Kirsanov, after all! Everyone disliked Kirsanov for his coarseness, his self-confidence, his stupid stubbornness in his work, and his emphatic manner of ignoring the opinions of younger, but not less experienced engineer colleagues. He was a quarrelsome person, of dictatorial manners and morbid pride; he treated the engineers under him like pawns, put there to execute his commands without dispute. Behind his back, they called him “engineer-do-nothing.” No one in his heart of hearts, would have had any objection of the management had struck at Kirsanov and broken down his unseemly pride. For a blow at Kirsanov meant a blow at the custom of calling unfinished things finished—a custom which in Belomorstroy bore the disgraceful name of “Tufta.” All the engineers had reason for anxiety.

But more was needed than to expose boastfulness and inefficiency lurking behind the engineers’ desks. Yagoda, writing to Firin and Frenkel, emphasised the fact that if the land was to be ready by May 1st—and it must be ready—many diverse measures must be combined. For example, wherever possible work should be done all through the twenty-four hours, in three shifts. Then a more complete type of organisation must be instituted—divisions and brigades must be stabilised, and the Chekists and engineers must put themselves into “battle order.” The psychological and physical welfare of the workers must never be lost sight of. Foremen must be given “power in proportion to their responsibility.” “Senior brigade leaders, regardless of their sentences,” must be given special pay, special uniforms, special living conditions. All the workers must be provided with hot food at the place where they are working; those whose work is connected with the rationing or has anything to do with the welfare of the prisoners, must be repeatedly reminded that all who steal or cheat in the distribution of food will be punished; all workers must be reminded that the tools and machines with which they work must not be lost and misused. Then there are suggestions as to freeing various categories of workers for the actual construction and, finally, Yagoda asks Firin and Frenkel to announce to “the entire population of the camp” that all who fulfil and over-fulfil their tasks in these decisive months will receive reductions in sentence, “even to the extent of complete liberation.”

to the speaker's rostrum of the shock-workers' conference at the watershed, the engineers present knew beforehand that he would speak on a burning question—on "tufta."

Firin spoke for twenty minutes, but out of his whole speech one thing was remembered and brought back to the barracks by everyone in the hall.

"We must understand clearly that the boaster, the exaggerator, the man who practises 'tufta,' is a class enemy, who is trying to break down the successful progress of our construction and strike a blow in the back of the completion of Belomorstroy. We shall deal with the enemy in Chekist fashion decisively, and with no leniency. The shock-workers, and the camp as a whole, must help us in this..."

The thirty-fivers of the watershed section answered Firin's speech by organising a brigade committee of three for the struggle against tufta, and by sending their best shock-workers to check the bad sections. The old antagonism, between the criminals who regarded themselves, not without pride, as the "proletarian elements" in the camps, and the various "non-proletarian elements," the counter-revolutionaries, who got to camp under article 58,—this antagonism flared up with new, spontaneous force soon after the shock-workers' conference.

In the tense period just before November, and in the relaxation after November, there had been spurts of healthy resistance to tufta in various sections.

These spurts had come from below. But sometimes they had been stopped by a conciliatory attitude from above; this attitude of demobilising even the best brigades.

These spurts were finally organised into a militant mass movement of the lower camp society against tufta by the slogan: "The man who practices tufta is a class enemy,"—a slogan which drew no line between the active and the passive tufta, and demanded that the foe be sought even under the neutral mask of the conciliator. The name "Tuftach" became equivalent to the name counter-revolutionary, a name disgraceful to any self-respecting thirty-fiver. Before this accusing lower society of campers, the response to the summons of the assistant director of Gulag, the engineers, imprisoned and free alike, were once more in the position of accused men.

On January 15, in response to a report sent to Moscow on the condition of the construction and the malicious deceit of the experts, there arrived a telegraphic order from Comrade Yagoda, assistant-commander of the G.P.U., demanding the arrest of

Engineer Kirsanov. The telegram reached Bear Hill at 10 p.m. At 11 p.m. the entire engineering personnel knew of the arrest of Kirsanov and of the appointment of Firin as commander of the White Sea-Baltic camp, the news arrived almost simultaneously with a telephonogram calling on the leading engineers to report to Bear Hill at twelve o'clock midnight.

When they came, Firin read them Yagoda's telegram. His comments were short. Certain engineers at Belomorstroy had deceived the Soviet Government—had betrayed the trust of the chiefs of the construction, who had petitioned for decreases in sentence for these engineers before the G.P.U. board—had deceived the G.P.U. board, which had set them free on the basis of false figures before the expiration of their sentences. This proved not only that they had not fully realised their crimes against the Soviet State, but also that, in abusing the generosity of the working class, they had added to their offences by a new and serious crime. Many of the engineers felt that they were not active participants in a grandiose construction, but merely accidental lookers on.

Comrade Yagoda had noted a systematic gap between plans, statistical guides, and contradictory figures.

As a result of such work on the part of a section of the engineering and technical personnel, the construction was in danger. Not only was the canal not ready for spring navigation; in addition to that, the approaching spring floods threatened to destroy the constructions put up with so much toil. The blame for this situation lay on the Belomorstroy engineers.

By order of Comrade Yagoda, assistant-commander of the G.P.U., all reductions of sentences granted by the board to engineers, detected in malicious deception of the management were annulled....

After Firin's speech, the first to speak was Engineer Vershitzky. In a firm, but anxious voice he declared that all the accusations levelled at a part of the Belomorstroy engineers were absolutely correct. The criminal irresponsibility and laxity which had replaced the pre-November enthusiasm proved that this enthusiasm had been false on the part of several engineers, who were influenced by mercenary calculations of the approaching reductions in sentences. The sharp decline in discipline after the announcement of the reductions was an even better proof of this.

"However, all is not yet lost, and under the circumstances we can still restore the former glory of Belomorstroy. This depends mainly on us, the specialists."

“I can find no word of justification,” declared Engineer Mariengof. “People sentenced to long terms for most serious crimes—people who had absolutely no chances of speedy liberation—were given enormous reductions in November and given the best of conditions with only a moral responsibility. This exceptionally broad, correctly-conceived, generous measure of the G.P.U. board has been so abused by the action of many of the engineers that it is impossible to draw conclusions other than those drawn by Comrade Yagoda.... What is tufta? Let us call things by their names. It is not only direct robbery, theft, and crime—it is also politics. The very fact that tufta has become so widespread testifies to the terrible extent of our corruption. From the point of view of elementary professional honesty, tufta is the limit of degeneration for an engineer. It would be senseless now to make declarations and announcements; for there is no reason to believe in our declarations. I consider that we cannot leave this meeting without a feeling of burning shame, and draw practical conclusions for ourselves in our work. The correct diagnoses and methods of cure presented here will secure a correct discrimination between those who are on the right path and those who are not... .”

Engineers Khrustalev and Poletaev spoke along the same lines.

At 4 a.m. Firin stood up for a final word:

“Many engineers try to give tufta a theoretical basis. A senseless occupation. To search out objective reasons for tufta means to palliate this crime. Tufta is robbery and theft, but it is at the same time destruction of Socialist property, which comes under several articles in the criminal code.

“Tufta is an attempt of the class enemy not only to break down the construction of Belomorstroy, but also to break down the entire labour-reform policy of the G.P.U. camps.

“The management of the White Sea-Baltic camps gives ten days to the engineers detected in tufta and in acquiescing in it; I advise them to put things right. After these ten days we shall draw conclusions. We are accustomed to fulfil the commands of the Board unconditionally, like Chekists. I should like the number of people affected by Comrade Yagoda’s order—the people whose sentences will be revised—to be as small as possible. That would suit us as well as it would suit you! ...”

Chapter XXIII

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN SPRING COMES?

The rocky elevations of Karelia are extremely deceitful. The rock is hidden under swamps and marshes. During the summer, one can't get up the rivers except by portages. Hummocks, moss, impassable forests. And it is from this turf-covered rock that the rivers flow, to the north and to the south. This is the rock that we have to cut through. Now in this matter of the falling off of work, this desperate matter of being behind the schedule, some sections of the land were worse than others. It seemed, for instance, that not everyone at Canal No. 165 understood that we had to cut through quickly—very quickly—that because of the pressure of spring floods we must get through in a hundred days. The work on Canal No. 165 moves along with no understanding of the value of these hundred days. People are lazy at Canal No. 165; they yawn; the picks hardly move; the spades seem made to lean on; the engineers think more about the levels than about the rock.

And there was 200 per cent. more rock than had been anticipated. But that wasn't the real trouble. The real trouble was that no one made any noise about it. No one shouted that huge diggings must be made. A sky of the colour of tobacco smoke hung quietly over the quietly dreaming beginnings of Canal No. 165.

Meanwhile, time went on and presently the hydro-meteorologists were at their figures; the hydro-meteorologists said that spring was coming on.

"Ah, we've seen plenty of spring seasons before," yawned Canal No. 165.

"Yes, plenty," said the hydro-meteorologists anxiously; "but this will be a very special spring. Lake Vadlo and the whole system of lakes are rising. The floods this year will be very early and very violent. The water will rise far beyond the old limit."

"Let it rise," answered Canal No. 165 unconcernedly.

"The coming spring will be a tricky one," the hydro-meteorologists grumbled. "There will be a huge accumulation of water."

The situation became threatening. It was clear not only to the management but even to many of the workers that Canal No. 165 would not be finished in time for these spring floods. The water would wash away the works. Well! since it would wash them away anyway.... In a word, some put their hands in their pockets, spat over their shoulders, looked up at the strange sky, and thought it

was about time to go back to the barracks; others rested their heads on their hands and stood in dull despair at their desks, covered with “useless diagrams.”

Still others saw the problem of class struggle lying behind the problem of the spring. These others proved that negligence and falsehood are manoeuvres of the enemy. These others exposed boasting, “tufta,” and aroused the indignation of the masses against those whose negligence made them no better than wreckers.

These others said: “Yes, we agree; watershed, Canal No. 165, is a detail; but let us start from this detail, comrades.

“The water will rise in the spring. Where from? Why from the south, of course. Splendid. Let’s move our best brigades from the north. We shall take them from Nadovitz, from Tunguda, from Sosnovetz. Collect at this spot all the ‘best pushers’, the most efficient people on the construction, bring them here immediately, and then clear the watershed of idlers and loafers. Expose them mercilessly, shame them, laugh at them; show them how splendidly you can get along without them; let them weep in shame on the threshold of one construction.” In order that this should be understood and put into effect, it was decided to call the Seventh Camp Conference of Shock-workers at the watershed section.

Of the seven gigantic steps of the Povenchansk ladder, six are on the eve of completion. The most important dams have already been covered with concrete. Almost all the rivers have been dammed. Billions of cubic metres of water have collected in the new reservoirs ready to feed the locks. A few more efforts, one would think, and the canal would be finished. Delegates from all sections came to the shock-workers’ conference. Before their departure their chiefs warned them: “It’s too early to sound the dismissal; things are in bad shape at the watershed.”

These parting words did not make much impression—victory seemed so very near.

2

The train that took the shock-workers to the camp conference looked festive in its garlands of pine and its red streamers. The engine was a good one; it took the gradients at a run, and swaggered noisily down slopes. Outside, the frozen snow sparkled in the sun as it lay on the pines and boulders. It was hot and noisy inside. The shock-workers exchanged reminiscences, plans for the future, and free cigarettes; they showed one another laudatory comments in

Reforging and certificates that they had won.

They arrived towards evening. Crowding around the hastily built speaker's stand, the second division met its guests with a flourish. Torches flared. Hoar-frost melted from the fringes of the banners and the air became murky. In the silence that ensued, the frozen steps of the stand could be heard scrunching under the heavy footsteps of Bolshakov. He spoke, as usual, without much heat, welcoming the newcomers and saying that the second division would be glad of their help. But his speech did not make the failure in the section seem worse than other failures that had already been put right. Everyone was in a hurry to go to the warm club-house to report on successes. They got into columns and started off. The second division got acquainted with the newcomers, outshouting the music.

"How do you like our Bolshakov?"

"Not bad; he speaks thoughtfully."

"One has to think here. We're in such a fix we don't know what to do."

"It's not so dreadful. We've seen worse."

But when they get to the club, the newcomers were alarmed at last. Every metre of the wooden walls shouted of trouble. A poster showed a camper shouting, his hands to his mouth as a megaphone:

"The water is rising."

Diagrams showed the falling productivity. The wall newspapers were full of alarm. The conduct of the presidium was not reassuring. They were bent over a big map. Bolshakov—usually so calm, even apathetic—was worried: he was explaining something in a low voice, and kept wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

Finally, a bell sounded. The floor shook from a sudden uproar outside. The shock brigades of the second division were greeting their guests by blasting some rock.

The speaker said:

"We were so busy, thinking of last summer's successes that we got slack. We never worked so disgracefully as at the end of this year. Look at this." He took a long pointer and moved it along a diagram.

The blue curve—not even a curve, but a perpendicular line that dropped down abruptly.

The pointer moved to another poster.

"See how the black lines rise. That is the water...."

Again explosions. The speaker waited until it was quiet, and

then uttered the most awful sentence of all:

“The water has reached the brim. It may throw us into Onega, destroy the Povenchanka locks, wash away our banners, the favourable mentions we have had from headquarters, our glory—everything that we have achieved....”

Many hung their heads and hid their hands in their pockets, shivering as though from cold. Of what good were the reports they had prepared on their successes? Who would listen to them, when at any moment the efforts of so many sleepless nights might be destroyed and scattered. They looked hopefully at the presidium.

Uspensky, the tall copper-haired young G.P.U. man, rose from behind the table. His usual taciturnity, his everyday restraint and economy of motion, seemed to accumulate thunder for his voice and for his vehement gestures on such decisive occasion as this.

“Shock-workers,” he called, “the Karelian central executive committee and the Party committee have sent us a banner. It will go to those who work best at the watershed. We have done many wonders. Legends will be told about us, and songs will be sung.” He paused for an instant, and then shouted to listeners who had already begun to respond: “Let us transform this winter January into a victorious June! Remember how we fought last June! The water was threatening the Murmansk road. So we moved the road 80 kilometres. Then the water rushed into the Karelian forest. We cut down the forest and made the logs into rafts. The water advanced on villages. We moved the villages to where the ground was higher and built the peasants new schools and hospitals and clubs. We retreated before the water in full order, and this retreat was a victory. Can it be that now we will turn tail and run? Let us gather all our forces for the attack and finish the watershed.”

Someone breathed hard in the first row:

A bench was moved.

“Let me speak,” shouted Kovalev, a concrete worker.

He ran to the stage, pulling off his cap and stuffing it into his pocket.

For a time he could not speak; he tried convulsively to swallow the lump in his throat.

“Chiefs! Uspensky! Bolshakov! I will save my dam or go to the bottom of it.”

He was pushed away by Topchiev, from the eighth division.

“I work on the northern dam, at the boundary between labour and capital. I see the ships of capital coming to us for lumber at the Soroka roadstead. Their agents stand on the bridge and laugh. ‘Run

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN SPRING COMES?

away,' they tell us. But their sailors and stokers look at us and say: 'You mustn't run away.'"

Topchiev gives place to Minaev, from the "Red workers" labour collective.

"We shall send our best shock-workers to help at the watershed. Let all the other brigades do the same—choose the best, and send them!"

The central staff of competition and shock work formulated the inspiring call:

"To all division chiefs, technical workers, and canal soldiers."

"We announce a labour assault. The best workers are to be sent into the breach. Each section is to send a special picked phalanx of 750 to the watershed. We shall attack the watershed with shock tactics. The assault begins January 7. It will be directed by a special staff."

3

The next step was to divide up the work. The watershed was broken up into sections, each a hundred metres long. Each phalanx of specially picked workers was given a definite section to work. The phalanx which finished its section soonest and best would be awarded the banner of the Central Executive Committee of the Karelian Republic.

The year before—in the spring of 1932, the work on the watershed had been begun, but then for some reason it had never gone ahead. Piles of earth lay about the workings. The narrow-gauge railway line had even been broken up, and the sleepers scattered. But now the work was carried on day and night.

A winter evening: the day shift had finished its work. They were coming back along roads and paths that ran among high, silky white snow. Groups of shock-workers collected near the club of the workers who specialised in rock-drilling. Over their heads hung the glitter of freezing steam. Bands played a march. Everywhere one could see columns of shock-workers moving towards the club. The band played louder. The columns marched with torches, they carried spades and picks on their shoulders. In the van red banners.

"The water must be given a free path through the Canal, to join the waters of Lake Vyg."

Everywhere slogans. On the logs leading to the construction, on the rocks that were to be blasted out of the way, on a water-pipe supported by icy posts, between the telegraph posts, on the walls

BELOMOR

of the barracks. Everywhere the slogans shouted—as they shouted near the club, at the assembly of shock-workers gathered to greet the approaching columns—

“Prepare for an assault!” “Call on others to join!” “Let us free ourselves from disgrace, let us build life anew so as to be worthy of our country; let us strike so hard and straight that the whole planet will gasp.”

Chapter XXIV

“MAKE THE SOUP FIRST-CLASS AND FEED UP THE HORSES”

This new plan, this concentration of everyone who could possibly be spared from other sections upon the part of the canal which was behind schedule, presented some practical problems. For instance it meant that in a few days the watershed section must make room for about three thousand people, give them living quarters, food and tools, and assign them to sections. The work of providing for the newcomers was entrusted to a committee made up of Uspensky, Afanasyev and an engineer. Afanasyev left the care of the locks in his section to his assistant and turned to the watershed section. As was his custom, he arrived unexpectedly. No one ever saw him arrive anywhere. He appeared suddenly in the very middle of everything that was going on in the place to which he had hurried—he was simply there as though he had sprung up from the earth.

He was a thick-set man, mobile to the point of impetuosity; he wore a short yellow leather jacket with a black collar; he was like a big peg-top spun by a strong hand, ready to spin and rush round endlessly. He began his preliminary survey the moment he arrived. Though he had not slept for two nights he scurried about among the handful of workers on the half-abandoned canal, turning about on his heels, squinting and examining the features of the place where he was to compete with the other divisions. It was an odd sight! Scraping his bristly cheekbone in dissatisfaction, he lifted a stone, weighed it in his hand, and even seemed to sniff at it. He ran farther, hailed a passing worker, whose blouse he began to unbutton.

“Let’s see your shirt. Long since you’ve been to the baths? Aha, how do they wash? Well, or badly?”

These are not accidental questions. Afanasyev had a system: wash a prisoner, clothe him, feed him, and then demand that he work. He stopped on the run, and stamped the earth with his heel.

“I don’t like this road, my boys. I’ve an idea the horses dislike it too; it caves in; it’s full of holes. What about it? Can’t something be done? Think it over.”

People who know him closely say that even in sleep his restless brain is always inventing something. The economical Budassy—the man who played the great diabase trick—is indignant. “Why doesn’t Afanasyev demand payment for all his rationalising

suggestions? The bloody treasury would go broke if he did.”

Then Afanasyev was seen in the stables, in the kitchen, in the laundry, in the club. He seemed as much at home as if he were in his own division.

There was to be a meeting of the committee of three who had been entrusted with the work of getting the section ready for the influx of workers. Afanasyev arrived at the meeting on the dot, with his opinion fully formed.

He dropped into a chair and leaned his chest against the table.

“Uspensky, have you ever seen people jump over themselves? No? Neither have I. This division won’t be able to provide the people who are coming to help them, with spades, or food, or horses. We’ll have to think of something.”

The engineer watched him, and saw him blink and pass his palm over his face. Rather like a cat washing itself. “He’s not over 35,” thought the engineer; “he wears his hair long, like a provincial actor, and pretends to be nervous.” But on looking closer he saw that Afanasyev’s eyes were bloodshot, and his eyelids very swollen. There could be no doubt that affectation was entirely out of the question: the man was simply always fighting against a permanent sleepiness.

“What do you suggest?” asked the engineer.

“I suggest that the shock brigade phalanxes who are coming should bring their own drills and spades; I personally will bring a kitchen and a shoe-repair shop.”

“That’s individualism!” said the engineer, shocked.

“Uspensky and I think differently.”

A moment later Afanasyev was in the car driving at breakneck speed towards Bear Hill. His headlights showed snatches of the road, flashed past little bridges, past boulders like huge stone skulls, past ridges of rock and the dim silhouettes of pines. All this rose up before him, seeming shapeless through his drooping lashes, flashed by, and was lost in the night.

“I’m so sleepy—so sleepy... .”

But once out of the car Afanasyev ran cheerfully into Frenkel’s office, settling his belt, and his displaced holster.

“We will bring people, but they may go hungry and empty-handed. Time will be lost, and the plan of assault will be bungled....” Frenkel stopped him with a look.

“Grigory Davidovich,” he said to Afanasyev, “you’ve become long-winded! Bring all your staff with you, and tell the other shock brigade phalanxes who are being drafted on to their section not to

depend on the services of the second division.”

Early in the morning Afanasyev was back at his own section inspecting the locks. Then back to his office.

His efficient foreman, Shershakov, came in.

“Shershakov, how many good work certificates has our division received?”

“Eight, comrade commander.”

“We’re going to fight at the watershed for the banner which is being awarded by the Karelian Republic. Remember my rule: in the first ten days, don’t bother about figures: make the soup first-class and feed the horses, in the next few days—begin to push, in the last ten—the banner will be ours.”

Other foremen came into the office: Lagsda, a ruddy, fair-haired, robust Lett, and Koshelev, brisk and dark. They were both quiet in Afanasyev’s presence; their voices sounded out on the workings. They had two things in common: a superhuman persistence, and a firm conviction that: “If our chief demands a thing, that thing is possible, he doesn’t demand the impossible.”

“I hear your brother is well again, Lagsda. And Koshelev has received another letter from home. That’s fine, you’ll work with easier minds. Get ready to transfer to the watershed section!”

Lagsda nodded assent. So did Koshelev.

Afanasyev’s talk with Makievsky, the manager of supplies, was not quite so easy. Makievsky was a tidy Pole, in pince-nez, with a careful parting in the left side; he was thoughtful and efficient, but he was always liable, out of pure vanity, to add some amendment to any order given him—an amendment which might spoil everything.

“Makievsky,” began Afanasyev, “our sections at the watershed are empty and bare. Within 22 hours we must have barracks, a kitchen, and a club for 250 people. You’ll get your labour forces there.”

“I understand,” answered the manager of supplies, politely. “But usually—even in such special cases—24 hours’ notice is given.”

“Yes—usually. But this is an assault. It is now 8 p.m. At 6 p.m. tomorrow the storm-workers’ phalanx will arrive. That leaves 22 hours.” Soon after this Afanasyev hurried through the barracks. He knew every camper by face and by name, he knew where each came from, and why he had been sentenced.

Grigory Davidovich Afanasyev sat down on the edge of a bed and watched a shock-worker busy packing his things.

“I suppose you’ve forgotten needle and thread? You need a

nurse, really. How can you work without buttons? Glaskov, have you taken extra leg wrappings? Take them—it's important to keep your feet dry."

The camp was full of noise. In the workshops, hammers beat upon anvils: wheelbarrows were being repaired, and loosened tyres patched. In the stables, every horseshoe was examined. The most literate painted numbers on the tally sticks; instructors packed up equipment for the club red corner. The shoemakers flourished wax-ends, and the cooks rattled their dishes. The bath-house smoked like a steamer: the campers all wanted a good wash before their journey.

On his way to the laundry, Afanasyev was stopped by one of the prisoners called Usachev, a man of unusual strength who was built like a bear. Usachev could work for twenty-four hours on end, moving boulders that would generally be four men's work to shift, but then, for no reason at all, he would go on the rampage, he would steal, quarrel with the teachers, and finally break the windows in RUR—the special detention barracks. At such moments Afanasyev would pacify him with one look, and the big fellow would cower in shame. Now he stood with hanging head, poking at the snow with the toe of his boot.

"Chief, you know you see right through me..."

"Don't beg, Usachev. I've told you I won't take you. You might break up my phalanx."

"All the good fellows are going away. I may get nervous if I'm left here with the counter-revolutionaries. I'm asking for the last time—won't you trust me?"

"The last?"

"I'll move mountains."

"Get ready, Usachev."

Things began to happen at the watershed. Engineers, foremen, and overseers hurried there from all the other sections of the canal—from Shizhna to Povenetz. The best brigades and record-breakers were sent from forest sections, dams, docks, dykes. They travelled in trains and carts, those who had not far to go came on foot. They walked all night, straight from their meetings. Shavan and Nadvoitz selected 700 people. They brought their gear. The powerful proboscis of the derricks could be seen on the station platforms.

One after another, the shock-workers' phalanxes arrived, noisily occupying the little town and settling in their barracks within fifteen or twenty minutes. Those who were left temporarily without

“MAKE THE SOUP FIRST-CLASS”

a place to sleep promptly and silently set about hollowing out mud huts and pitching tents. Piles of wood suddenly appeared near the buildings, and a smell of hot food came from the kitchen. In no time the salesmen had set out their goods in the canteen booths. Seventy people went straight from the train to the shock-workers' club, which was not yet glassed in, and began the first lesson of the courses on rock drilling. Posts appeared at the barracks, and on them were hung the red and black boards and indices of production. The cultural workers nailed gaily coloured wall newspapers to the doors without stopping to throw their knapsacks from their shoulders. Thus did the phalanxes come to the watershed from all the other divisions and depots.

Shock-workers tumbled out of the train at Masselge, and walked along a path winding through the snowdrifts. They stopped at the edge of a gigantic ditch. So this was the second division! On both sides were hills, rocks, and narrow gorges. Evening was coming on. The first to arrive occupied well-equipped, heated tents of double canvas, with windows and iron stoves. But more phalanxes kept coming and coming. There were no more tents, they spread canvas on the snow. Soon there was no more canvas.



AMONG THE HORSES THERE WERE SHOCK WORKERS ALSO



THE POVENETZ BRIGADE SINGING "CHESTUSHKAS" (VILLAGE RONDO)
ABOUT CARING FOR THEIR HORSES

But more phalanxes kept coming.

The "seveners"—that is, the phalanx from the seventh division—built bonfires in the snow, and the Udarniks slept between the fires and the snowdrifts, that first night.

Next morning *Reforging* wrote:

"The second division must get to work immediately. The phalanxes must be provided with warm, well-equipped living quarters without unnecessary delay."

"The cream of Belomorstroy is gathered at the watershed," wrote *Reforging*. "Record breakers and shock-workers! the White Sea-Baltic camp is watching you!"

The carpenters, navvies, and sawyers took possession of a small hill near the canal. Bonfires blazed. The foresters tore up tree stumps with a crashing noise. Pits yawned to receive posts. In a few hours, a regular little town had been laid out on the hillock. People sat on the lower branches of the felled trees wielding axes. Steel saws snorted through the wood.

Chapter XXV

THE MASS ATTACK ON THE WATERSHED SECTION

January 7 was the first day of the assault on the watershed. The short days were terribly cold. Snow-storms blew over the divide. There was plenty of everything in that country: plenty of rock, of water, of forests, plenty of everything but comfort....

A black flood of people swept out from the camp to the assault on the canal. Banners floated over their heads. Slogans were shouted; the band played on the run, so as to keep in the van. The people carried spades on their shoulders, boards for the gangways and long levers for raising boulders. The first blows of the picks rang out. The rubble flew out from the excavations. Pumps clanked as they sucked up the water. People crawled along the precipices setting up the derricks.

Uspensky's phalanx was given a very watery section, there weren't enough pumps. Icy water streamed from the newly cleft rock which steamed in the frost. They tried to bail the water out with pails, but it flowed too fast. They didn't know what to do. Klibyshev waved his cap at his brigade, and stepped silently from the stone into the water. It poured into the wide tops of his boots. Kramov, Petrov and the whole brigade followed him. Water splattered up as the picks swung down, it fell on heated faces that prevented it from freezing.

The chairman of the storm staff came up, and told them: "You ought to wait for the pumps, boys. There are forty degrees of frost." Kramov straightened up, looked the chairman up and down and pointed to the phalanx's barrack.

"Go over there and read!"

A long streamer was stretched along the cornice of the barrack, on the streamer was Uspensky's slogan at the seventh conference:

"Let's make this wintry January into a hot, victorious June."

The canal was swarming with workers as far as one's eye could see.

The second division people who had worked at the watershed all the time, woke up. A few record-makers—Kruglyak, Grigoriev, and others surrounded Bolshakov.

"Are we going to let other people come in and win the banner in our own section? We'll win it ourselves."

They led out their phalanx, and by midday it was clear that the norms would be left far behind.

“To be considered an Udarnik,” said the central staff on competition and shock work, “one must fulfil not less than 110 per cent. of his norm.” But men cannot work properly if they are living in dirty barracks, if they are verminous, or badly fed; so that shock brigade work has to be done by the people behind the line as well as by those actually drilling rock or wielding a shovel.

The staff, too, is on the job—here, there, and everywhere. It attacks lice and conducts a sanitation week in all the divisions. It sees to it that water and wood for the baths are provided punctually. It compels the workers to wash themselves punctually. The laundresses wash and iron tirelessly. The mending shops are right at hand in the bath-houses. While the workers are bathing, their clothes are mended on the spot, with no delay. Some brigades spend too much time playing cards. The staff deprives them of the right to an accounting of their work days. It compels the campers to think of the work, of their picks, their spades, and their horses. The campers discuss their own work and that of their brigade leaders.

Yes, the workers say the time has come when one must reveal oneself! Amazing people, these Bolsheviki! They poke their noses everywhere, they have gone over every inch of the watershed. “They poke their sticks into the clay and stand for hours,” says one engineer, “watching the wagons so as to think up some way of improving their movement.” They study tirelessly, but while learning, they teach others. If an Udarnik would like to learn hydro-technology, he can get it right on the workings. There are courses and study circles for him. A group has been formed in the production and cultural section of the White Sea-Baltic camp, to organise correspondence courses. It prints a series of pamphlets in question and answer form for navvies, of not more than 8-12 pages each, written in simple and clear language. This sort of thing does not delay the work; it speeds it on.

Everywhere one looks there is washing and scraping and cleaning of people, machines and buildings. The torpor of Canal No. 165 has been stirred and an ocean of ideas is rising and storming all around it. The ideas may be good or bad, bold or stupid, long or short—who can tell at once? The main thing is that the people have stopped loafing and have begun to work.

The corner has been turned and still the Bolsheviki do not rest content with what they have done.

On the first day of the assault, neither the people nor the rocks of the watershed had any rest. The instant the roar of an explosion ceased, and the stones stopped whistling down, loaded wheelbarrows would fly once more over the gangways, hand-drills would sound out and the pneumatic drills would begin their hurried rattle.

The squads in charge of rock blasting went along the path around the lake to the magazine for new supplies of dynamite, caps and fuses. Down in the excavations people chipped the rock. Frost-silvered clods were rolled to the top, increasing the height of the bank. The derricks let down their buckets and hoisted them up full of stone. Most of the wheelbarrow men worked without overcoats and in unbuttoned jackets. Huge green pumpkins of diabase rock were brought to the surface in open trucks. Empty trucks rolled down again along parallel boards.

After every blow of the hammer the borers turned their drills, from time to time they took them out and cleaned out the holes with steel rods. The finished holes were stopped up with pine plugs. There were more and ever more of them—so many wooden plugs that the walls of the diggings gradually acquired a wooden bristle.

The borers drilled feverishly at the rock. A fine white dust filled the air.

A whistle sounded, and the blasting squad appeared once more.

They walked as though on parade. In their hands were pails full of paper rolls of dynamite. Necklaces of Bickford fuses were wound around their necks. At the ends of the fuses glittered copper caps containing fulminate of mercury.

The blasting squad took out the wooden plugs and filled the holes with the charges. Then they took the fuses from their necks, fitted the caps to the cartridges, and pasted up the holes with a plaster made of flour and tar. To make the maroons as conspicuous as possible, they wound the ends of the fuses round the plugs in a pig-tail knot.

The excavations were left completely and entirely to the special blasting squads at such moments. Signallers with red flags stood at the surface. The air was full of tense, exhausting expectation. All movement within a radius of 200 metres was stopped. Trucks, wagons and workers gathered at the boundary post, in obedience to the fire law.

BELOMOR

Finally, all the maroons were loaded. There was a sharp whistle and each sapper lighted his ignition fuse, and with it lighted his first maroon, streams of fire spurted from the ignition fuses. The second maroon began to smoke, the third... the fourth...

The men of the blasting squads ran from maroon to maroon, their backs bent and their heads, almost touching the ground, the rock was covered with sprays of fire. The fifth maroon began to smoke... the sixth... the seventh....

At the surface, the chief of the blasting squads counted. He stood with the hot control fuse in his hand, whistling quietly as he counted the seconds. Suddenly, down below, the rock groaned, spoiling all calculations, a yellow-blue smoke came up and there was a whistle of flying stones, shouts, people running. A short pause =... another explosion... and another, and still another. The sky seems to be supported by moving columns of smoke. The stones are like birds. The little death-bearing fragments sing through the air with clear, child-like voices.

“Who’s missing?”

“Are Surkov and Kiskin alive?”

“Kolya Sedov?”

“Here I am.”

“Grishin?”

“There he is.”

“So everyone is safe.”

“But where’s Tuchkov? Where’s Sashka?”

For a moment there was silence. Then the crowd rushed to the lock.

Tuchkov lay there, his arms flung out wide and his face broken by the stones.

The crowd roared angrily.

Someone took off his coat and covered the dead man.

“The maroon exploded too soon.”

“Who’s to blame?”

“It was an accident,” answered the chief of the blasting squads, an old miner, quietly but distinctly. He had been the first to go down into the excavation. But the onlookers were angry.

“And where were your eyes?”

“You were put at the head of the work, and now you must answer for it.”

The air grew hot.

“Tear the old bastard into bits.”

The chief of the section came in and stopped near the gangway.

THE MASS ATTACK ON THE WATERSHED SECTION

They shouted at him: "Tuchkov is killed...! wounded... what sort of work do you call that?"

"It's not easy work," said the chief, distinctly. "It's hard even for real men. Tuchkov was a real man.... But you....?"

The chief looked around.

"You too are real... you seem to be real... and yet you attack an old man. What do you want with him? Why vent your anger on him?"

The chief turned to look at Tuchkov. He raised his head sharply.

"We've been entrusted with a difficult and honourable task. And every one of us must justify the trust of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government. The working class is testing us. If you're with the working class—change the courses of rivers, drain swamps, move rocks, stand close to dynamite."

Then, after a pause:

"Carry Tuchkov to the surface and lay him on the edge of the diggings. We will bury him after work."

Tuchkov was buried with full honours at midnight. A grave was dug on the mountain, under the pines. There was music. The blasting squad workers marched in front. They carried poles on which were set burning Bickford fuses. Where the coffin was lowered, eighty maroons were let off in the diggings. The earth shook! Thick columns of stone flew up to the sky.

3

All next day snow kept falling and falling. People slept badly in their barracks, and kept looking out through the windows: it snowed all night and next day, and for days and nights it snowed and snowed!

"Will it ever stop, damn it?"

"It's a long time yet to the change of shifts."

A foreman came in. Pulled on a sheepskin jacket, wound a scarf carefully around his hoarse throat, and hurried to the workings. Everything was levelled and heaped up with snow. Extra digging and extra work again, that wouldn't matter so much, though—but think how much water there will be in the spring. He looked angrily up at a sky the colour of soapsuds.

Morning. A meeting. "Don't conceal the laggards," shouted the brigade leaders. "The first division phalanx did 128 per cent. working on soil. The third division did 130 per cent., though it had weak

horses and broken picks.” “We’d have done more,” someone shouted from the third division, “if it hadn’t been for Markaryan, the chief of transport!”

In general, the phalanxes complained that they were given bad horses. They were all sick. The picks were broken.

Fifty people had had to stop work in order to repair the steam navvies. They were short of horses—103 horses had not been delivered at all.... There were not enough reins or harness and the stables weren’t ready. The horses spent the night under the open sky. A snowstorm was raging. The stablemen went about slapping their hands and cursing, popping in and out of their tent and having to keep a sharp eye on their charges because “shock-workers” from other phalanxes came nosing round leading their worst horses, trying to replace them with better ones. Men from other phalanxes also took wheels from the wagons when they got a chance. Shouts and noise and marvellous cursing! “Down with the grabbers,” shouted the stablemen; they swore to expose all those who tried to work dishonestly.

The second phalanx, which worked next to the eighth, did only 109 per cent. on February 14. Of course, they felt bad about it. And they did so little simply because there was not enough rolling-stock to carry the rock away. One man in the phalanx, the record breaker Popov, did 300 per cent., every day. He strutted around puffing at his pipe, but he was sorry for his unsuccessful phalanx. On the quiet this Popov gave them advice as to how to increase their percentage. Night fell. Popov led his comrades to their neighbours’ territory. The neighbours were eating, secure in their victory. The record setter uncoupled a car and pushed it hastily with his shoulder. The car rolled away. A wind blew under the car, and snow flew along the rails. A second car, and then a third rolled down the slope. “Stop,” shouted the shock-workers of the eighth phalanx. “They’ve stolen our cars, the devils.” Uproar. A short meeting. Once more the grabbers are condemned— these stupid people, who don’t understand the right way to work. And the shock-workers of the second phalanx, including Popov himself, promised that they would be irreproachable record-setters in the future. We shall see!

In general, there was much that was worth seeing!

The liquidation of illiteracy is spreading? True enough, but the shock-workers of the fourth division complained of the vulgar language used at the club. The wall newspapers still sang vulgar songs. The string orchestras amused themselves with public-house ditties. “We understand, Moscow wasn’t built in a day, but still...,” said the

THE MASS ATTACK ON THE WATERSHED SECTION

shock-workers of the fourth division, which was working on rock. They had found their section in the most chaotic condition. They had immediately set to work to clear away the dirt and rubbish. They built a large production meter in front of the barracks, to show what had been done and what was left to be done. And then they formed an agitation brigade which worked as well as agitating. There was a wall newspaper, and a production bulletin board.

Every evening the brigade discussed the plan for the next day's work.

Take a look at the weekly menu worked out by the record breakers and the chief-of-supplies of the eighth division—the division whose cars were stolen. The menu is decorated at the top with a picture of the construction, and at the bottom are some sort of lilac flowers and the slogan: "Eat, and build as well as you eat!"

Dinner

Cabbage soup—1.2 litres a head.

Kasha with meat—300 grams.

Fish cutlets with sauce—75 grams.

Rolls stuffed with cabbage—100 grams.

"We went to work singing," says Bisse, chairman of the prisoners' commune in Leningrad. "We sang as we marched, like soldiers in very high spirits. We had to drill by hand so that we ate into the rock rather slowly. But we wanted to get the earth out of the trenches as quickly as possible. We loaded it hastily on the derricks, pushed wheelbarrows up and down the planks, and threw it into the boiling rapids of the Vyg. There was a continuous line of wheelbarrows and many banners near them.

"As far as sounds are concerned, the terrific noise of the workings reminded me of a huge factory, where one can't hear the sounds made by individuals, but one feels that this is collective creation. Explosions thundered noisily almost all the time. And the sound of axes on wood, the ringing of hammers on shining steel, and the loud whistle of the electric motors, sucking water out of the wooden shutes echoed everywhere. Piles of sand thrown down from above by the spadeful fell with a dull sound. Horses' hoofs clattered along the bottom of the excavation. There was noise everywhere."

There were some who lagged badly. For instance the storm phalanx of the fourth division—a division which had been awarded the Order of the Red Banner. At first it was even deprived of its

honour —the right to come out to the parade with a red banner. The presidium of the storm staff announced that this prohibition would be removed as soon as the phalanx began making 100 per cent. of its norm. The phalanx lagged shamefully; it did only 68.2 per cent. The phalanx itself discussed the matter, held meetings, studied, waxed indignant. But there was little improvement. Then the second phalanx—the one that had stolen the wagons—which was doing an average of 128 per cent., took the fourth in tow. Fifteen record breakers from the second came to the fourth, singing and whistling, and fifteen men from the fourth went quietly and modestly to the second to learn. They worked angrily, frowning all the time; everyone laughed at them. And suddenly, on the third day, they thrust a printed sheet under the nose of the second division:

“The stormers of the fourth division are digging a narrow ditch, full of surface water.

“The water is icy. The stormers shiver and freeze.

“Kramer and Petrov work knee-deep in a stream of water. Twenty degrees of frost.

“When the vice-chairman of the staff told them to leave, the shock-workers answered:

“ ‘We’ve chosen the slogan: turn February into a victorious June, and we must finish.’

“No, brothers, our fourth division will show you yet. And what do they print about you? That you stole cars, and that Udarnik Atyasov still makes 200 per cent.”

“Well, then, try and catch up with the first division,” the second phalanx might have answered. The first division may be proud of its phalanx. The first phalanx reports on February 23, that its plan has been fulfilled. And adds, importantly, that it will finish its section by March. They ask permission to have the Red Banner of the Karelian Republic and the District Committee of the Party, which they have won by persistent labour, for the first division, so as to lead all the canal soldiers to the assault under this honourable award for the successful completion of the entire Povenchansk ladder.

They would like to know just where this banner is? More, they want to take the banner to the Povenchansk ladder after the assault—i.e., to keep the banner all through the 100 days of the assault. “We’ll see about that,” said the phalanxes. “We’ll still compete for it. We have good workers too.”

Chapter XXVI

QUICKSANDS, AND A CHANGE IN THE LOOK OF THE SNOW.
THIRTY THOUSAND WORKERS

No more snow fell, but instead wine-yellow sunsets, and dry, icy air. A splendid winter.

Don't be foolish. Don't believe Karelian nature. She is dreadful.

Spring delays and delays—and then her warm eyes peep through the birches. She closes her eyes, and unending snow again comes down, and the lake suddenly swells, just as our trenches fill up unexpectedly with the quicksands. Yes, quicksands. You find an unnecessary rock, and get ready to destroy it, and—who would expect it?—a quicksand. The falterers grumble discontentedly.

And they say there are no objective reasons for falling behind the production schedule!

You blow up a ditch “to a definite depth,” and go to sleep. And next morning, when you come out from the barracks, there's no hole there—it's full of sand that bubbles like well-leavened dough. This grey-brown sandy mush moves and creeps endlessly and silently and has a very bad effect on the nerves of the canal soldiers.

Rock, quicksands, snow.

Perhaps there are too many “objective reasons”? Perhaps it is presumptuous of Nature to make all these obstacles? Mankind may get angry and teach you a lesson, Nature!

All the best leaders were sent to the watershed. The most responsible administrators, technicians and cultural workers took the night shifts. Of course, this does not mean that they slept during the day.

Contests, contests, contests. For the best machines, the best derricks, the pride and love of the canal soldiers, the best loading of railway wagons.

There are two kinds of rock—broken rock, and solid rock. The broken rock was crushed by the glaciers, and lies there as though threshed, ready to be loaded. The solid rock is simply solid rock. A fine pedestal for a monument?

The blasting squads don't worry about preserving this pedestal. They're sick and tired of it. It sticks up everywhere. It hides deceitfully under marshes, swamps and hummocks. It hides under pines, and under sandy hills. You think you see a snowdrift, but it's really a rock. The sappers blow it up ruthlessly, without fuss. The blasting squads carry on the assault. They don't run away from the showers

of stones after an explosion, but simply duck, smoking, perhaps, as they go.

They burn and tear at the rock, but there's just as much of it as ever. Courses for blasting squads are organised.

The surface of the snow is becoming watery and transparent. At noon the road is covered with slush. At night the frost comes down again and freezes the puddles; a wet sheet comes streaming down. But the night is short, it soon hurries off to the north, towards Tunguda.

The water of the watershed slowly and quietly lifts its heavy coating of ice; it ripples near the banks, rubs against the pine roots, moves up to the trunks, passes over hillocks, shallows, boulders, grows brown and muddy. The builders stand gloomily on the bank talking nervously. "That damned lake!" they grumble. "Canal No. 165 is still quite raw and wet, but all the same it seems we'll have to let the water from Lake Vadlo and Lake Matko through its unfinished channel, or everything will be washed away."

And so a temporary outlet for the water was blown up at the entrance to Lake Vadlo.

There were huge excavations everywhere. There was no room anywhere to unload the blasted rock. Heaps of stones lay along the edges of the canal, near the rails for the handcarts.

The wooden frames of the derricks are so near the edge that they seem on the point of falling in.

And everywhere one hears the blowing and singing of brass bands and shock-brigades. In the second fighting section the band is made up entirely of thirty-five shock-workers. The bands hurry to every spot where there is danger of lagging. The work goes faster as soon as the bank appears.

The first and eighth phalanxes, led by bands, have raised their production to 150 and 160 per cent. on rock. A number of brigades and labour collectives compete for the right to be accompanied to and from work by a band.

The agitation workers "like all the others, make 200 per cent." and besides this give performances in their sections, make trips to other sections, and pick out loafers and shirkers.

The main staff of the construction collected the malicious idlers in the club and held a comradely discussion with them. Next day all the idlers went to work. The agitation brigade broke up into sections and worked alongside the former idlers and loafers. That evening at the concert, the idlers and loafers who had overfulfilled their norms were given seats of honour in the first row.

Another agitation brigade reports:

“We make our own musical settings; Vasska the burglar conducts the band and Pavluchka, the ‘second storey’ thief, writes the material—poems, marches and oratorios. Our stuff goes over well!

“It’s well-knit material, heavy and monolithic. It has strength, martial power, and great enthusiasm.

“We have a whole book of poems, marches, slogans, and songs. In these songs we don’t try to recall the past, but to stir ourselves up to new battle and new life.

“In this volume of poems, written by the collective, there are descriptions of all the hard struggles we have had in the workings, at the dams, and at the locks; and answers to the commander’s orders about reforging people.”

2

Let us walk along the canal some morning, before the pearly shine of the snow has disappeared, leaving the brown earth naked—walk slowly, looking intently at the people, the phalanxes and the banners. Wooden derricks creak along both sides of the canal. The newly made excavations glitter in the sun. Below, people blast and bore the rock.

We walk along the edge of Canal No. 165 for about an hour and a half. Everywhere derricks and hammers and drills. Gangways are laid across the canal. A canal soldier pushes a wheelbarrow along a plank. Another helps him with a hook. It’s very crowded here. Just think: about thirty thousand workers along a distance of less than four miles, and every one of them wants to do as much as possible, as fast as possible—every one of them is in a hurry, and some fall out of time. It’s a complex science—to arrange the boards and planks in the best way, with the least number of turns. That’s why the engineer with the waxy-yellow face said—do you remember that?—“Our chief pokes his stick into the earth, leans on it, and stands for hours watching the wheelbarrows.”

Small locomotives run along the bottom of the canal. They are covered from top to bottom with slogans. Sometimes they pull a brass band with them on a tender, sometimes they carry a sacking banner¹ to some brigade. The walls of the canal stretch up perpendicularly before the engines, the rock is not removed in layers here; a chasm appears, all at once.

¹ This is a sign of disgrace.

BELOMOR

The brigade leaders watch carefully to see that nobody smokes—though they themselves want terribly to smoke. But that can't be allowed, or else one and then another would light up—two minutes to a cigarette—40 minutes a day. And if you were to multiply 40 by 30,000! They have their tobacco in the barracks. If it becomes unbearable, they chew a piece of wood.

Breakfast. The food is brought straight to the workings. The shock-workers are fed first. As they eat, they enquire as to how much each brigade has done, and why things went well with some and badly with others.

At about six o'clock the canal is emptied.

People run swiftly along the bottom of the canal. They bend down close to the earth. They straighten up and run farther.

Then there are explosions—one after the other. So many explosions that the people in the camp outposts nearby have to stop pumping. Electric wires break.

Stones fly to the sky, and fall back with a dull thud.

All the windows are covered with shutters to protect them from the flying fragments of stone.

The explosions continue until dark and sometimes even after dark. Then it becomes harder than ever to understand how the blasting squads control the explosions when they work in the dark.

The entire canal is divided into a series of sections. All the sections shake and rattle, dust and dirt hang over them, stones flash through the dust, and an oily smoke goes up.

The canal roars thus for about two hours, and then the night shift goes on.

The canal is illuminated all night. Searchlights. Here and there orange bonfires. People warm numb hands hurriedly and go back to work.

They curse the blasting squads, though the latter rush along the bottom of the canal like acrobats. Why do the explosions go so slowly? Couldn't they get hold of some special explosive for the harder rocks? "There is no such explosive," answer the sappers. When the explosions are over, the sappers remain near the wheelbarrows. Some of them work 48 hours without a stop, with no sleep; when they finally go to the barracks their heads are humming and their hands seem still to be pushing the barrows. The foremen and engineers protest, and urge them to leave the workings. They refuse.

"Faster, faster!" shriek the bands.

"Faster, faster," sing the agitation brigades.

THIRTY THOUSAND WORKERS

The riflemen guarding the rocks and machines lay aside their rifles and go to work together with the shock-workers. They throw off their army coats, unbutton their collars, and start pushing wheelbarrows. Soon the sentries work out their production indices and make a high norm.

A March sun at noon—a splendid sun. Rejoice, southerners!

Strange! These people who dream of the sun and its warmth meet it with anger, even with curses, especially when it steals up at noon and makes puddles everywhere.

“What a weak creature. Can’t it let us finish? Where does it think it’s going? What does it think it’s doing here, anyway?”

If one were to measure and consider and judge, it would be clear that many of these people have begun to love not only their work—not only the fact that their hands have hardened and are able to hold axes and tools, but also to love this lock bottom. They got into it slowly—slowly and awkwardly, but then they squared it off, and surrounded it with planks. And now they look around and sigh: “Why, but—but I built this for the whole country—for the whole world—for all the best in humanity.” See how such a man struts along the bottom of the lock—how freely his hands move. And his voice too is somehow different—he has never heard it so since his childhood. He whistles as he walks, delighted with his job. A roomy lock they’ve made—very spacious. He climbs out of the lock and strolls farther along the edge of the construction. He sees the dam. It lies before him, resting its elbow on the shores of the lake as some wonderful, magnificent beauty might rest her chin on her hand and think lazy little thoughts. In a little while she will drop her head on her pillow and fall fast, fast asleep, but now she is thinking of someone—of some hero—a builder, a thinker, an Udar-nik. Her cheeks are burning, she has sloping shoulders.

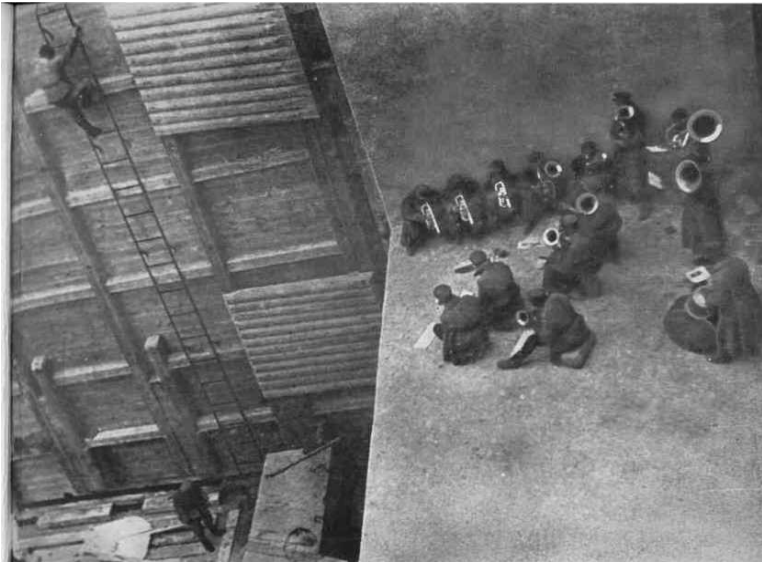
“We’ve made a dam,” he thinks; “we’ve made it splendidly. We shall leave fine monuments behind us.” And suddenly he rubs his eyes and sees the entire canal, as it is and as it will be, from sea to sea, and all of it was built by him—by Levitanus, Podlepinsky, Kramer and Yakub, by Khasanov and Volkov and Bagdassarov and Kirpichenko. There are tens of thousands of these names. And not only built, but loved and sung of and caressed, to the last stone, bit of wood....

BELOMOR

The weather in March was very bad: now snow, now frost, now rain, and now a mixture of all three. One's feet stuck in the mud, one's boots grew heavy, one's clothing was soaked through, and in the evening wet clothes were covered with an icy crust. Perhaps that was just imagination, but anyway, it became harder to work. Nature gives a horrible answer to the orders that demand a speeding-up of the work.

People answered differently to the renewed demands.

All the shock-workers, and many entire phalanxes, stayed at work two hours extra every day. The women left their indoor work and came out to the workings, from laundries, kitchens, typewriters and from offices....



WORKING TO THE STRAINS OF MUSIC



COMPETITION BETWEEN THE WOMEN'S
AND THE NATIONAL MINORITIES BRIGADES

The brigade of women shock-workers that left Bear Hill for the second fighting section on March 19 was met with some mistrust by certain workers in the section. Inspector Zaryvaev tried to prove that the women's brigade was incapable of any sort of shock-work.

On March 20, the first day of its work—rock work, on section No. 12—the brigade did 200 per cent.

On March 21, it did 210 per cent.

A brigade of Uzbeks, which worked on the same section, lagged behind all the time, doing 80-90 per cent. The women took this brigade in tow. They promised to raise the Uzbeks' production to shock-work figures.

They succeeded....

4

A telephone rang in the office at Bear Hill.

"Hello. Bear Hill. Hello! The Watershed speaking. We shall open the water-gates at 8 p.m. to-day."

A snorting open Ford rushed towards the workings at full speed.

In the car sat a man with the face of a Roman Catholic priest.

This man was Constantin Andreyvich Vershbitzky, acting chief engineer.

The air was broken and shattered by explosions.

It ripped like rotten cloth. They were blasting rock at Canal No. 165.

BELOMOR

Constantin Andreyvich climbed on to the dam.

Bonfires blazed below him. The wagons screeched. Pneumatic drills clattered. Hammers rang. All these sounds merged into a dull, unbearable din. They were hurrying to let the water through.

Voices sounded in front of the dam.

They hurriedly knocked off planks and opened the sluice. The water poured through the gaps and crawled slowly towards the Canal. The electric light went out, and voices fell silent. The section in front of the dam and behind it emptied.

Only a few people stood with lanterns on the gangways. The light from the lanterns fell on the tarred sluice-gates of the dam. The gates glistened as though polished.

In front lay the mined sluice. It was silent and deserted.

And suddenly there was a dull underground explosion that shook the dam.

The people on the gangways clung to the railings in fright.

A black column of fragments of stone, planks and dirt was thrown up over the sluice.

Stones whistled through the air.

A black wave, a metre and a half in height, rushed roaring towards the dam; before it had reached the dam it turned suddenly, washed the sluice-gates with foam-tipped crests, and quieted down.

A calm, mirror of water covered the spot where the rapids had been.

The levels in the section up to the former sluice and the section from the rapids to the dam are now the same. The Poiret dam took the whole force of the water. The water of Lake Vadlo poured through Canal No. 165.

This happened at exactly 8.30 p.m., April 23, 1933....

STAGE VIII
THE FINAL EFFORT

Chapter XXVII

SPRING COMES TO KARELIA

The workers at Belomorstroy did not only get their news from *Reforging*. There were other newspapers in the clubs, and these papers were full of news of plans fulfilled and of new constructions.

The canal was part of a gigantic whole. In the Spring of 1933 the map was alive.

"The Chelyabinsk tractor plant is on the eve of starting production," write the newspapers.

"Uralmash, the factory of future factories, is almost finished."

"Blast-furnace No. 2, Magnitogorsk, has produced its first pig-iron."

"The first aluminium has been produced at Zaporozhye."

"At Kuznetsk the open-hearth furnace is being assembled."

"The motor factory in Gorky produces 75 machines a day."

"Stalingrad turns out 100 tractors a day."

And at Belomorstroy there is the Spring weather to consider, for Spring is going to test the canal. A stormy Spring is coming! The ice is breaking; the earth is getting warm. In other places, too, steamers will make new voyages. They are preparing to sail from the Kiev pier through the rapids of the Dnepr for the first time in history.

Stalin's report on the results of the first Five-Year Plan has already resounded throughout the world. It is being studied at Belomorstroy; just as it is studied all over the country by tens of millions of workers. They speak of Stalin's report in the lumber camps, in the forest, and in the barracks of the excavation workers. The Chekists never tire of explaining Stalin's report because it answers all the questions of the waverers; with invincible force the news it brings quickens and deepens the reforging of thousands of prisoners. The will of the Bolsheviks conquered in the camp, because the Bolsheviks had conquered decisively for ever in the country. The Chekists were victorious because they were true followers of Lenin and Stalin.

The Five-Year Plan is successful. New cities in former deserts, new people, and a new science....

2

Spring came on at the Tunguda section of the canal, near the mouth of the river Vyg. It settled down on all the woods and paths.

It also bent its broad, beaming countenance over the sixth fighting section.

There was something seriously wrong, nothing less than a huge breach in the work of the sixth fighting section, at Canal No. 172. Our whole canal, all our labour and all our care were threatened in this breach.

The shock-workers of the sixth fighting section undertook twice to eliminate entirely the lagging of the brigades. But they did not fulfil their solemn vows and promises. More than that—the number of lagging brigades increased.

“We didn’t ask for the job, did we?”

The leader winked to his fellow-idlers, who laughed loud and challengingly.

“It’s a healthy district, this,” said the loafer Solovyev, who not only refused to work himself, but had organised a whole group of adherents. “We don’t complain of that—it’s a fine locality. But we don’t intend to work.”

They listened to their leader in delight, and guffawed approvingly. A devil of a lad!

The teacher exhorted them in vain. They only laughed.

“A breach, what of it? Expect us to cry about it?”

And there was not enough labour force at Tunguda. Not enough shock-workers. Too many idlers. *Reforging* sent a special staff of reporters and editors to Tunguda, to issue a special storm bulletin.

There were ten days left when the assault was planned. To fulfil the March plan, the daily norm would have to be doubled. There was a great deal of solid rock and earth at lock No. 18.

Next day was to be the first day of the assault; next morning, before the parade, there must be copies of the assaults Bulletin in every barrack.

In the morning people in grey coats went to lock No. 13, at the mouth of the Vyg. The teacher gave each of them a leaflet—the first bulletin issued by the travelling editorial board. Everyone had a leaflet, everyone had a plan. Every canal soldier now knew how much he was obliged to do if the plan was to be fulfilled.

Two people watched along the ridge of the canal, looking towards lock No. 13.

One of them, a man with a pointed beard, wearing a scarf wound round his neck, laughed and joked. This was Livanov, the builder of the famous Shavan lock. When Shavan was completed, he was commissioned to finish the Tunguda section. Kirsanov’s

BELOMOR

woeful heritage fell to his lot.

And yet he joked and smiled like his companion—Frenkel's inspector Engineer Verkhovsky, whom Frenkel had sent to help him.

The work began to develop. But everything did not go well at once. In one place a man began to curse. Verkhovsky went up to him. The man was cursing furiously, because his wheelbarrow had slipped from the gangway at a turn. The wheel was entirely covered with snow. Why were the planks laid out so badly? Whose fault was it? The brigadier's of course. It was his job to go to the workings before the parade—and he lay in bed and slept till after nine. It was his job to inspect everything and put things in order before work, but he preferred to scratch himself and yawn.

In another place, loaded handcars were standing. They could not be driven right on to the staging. This held up the front cars. Why the delay?

Ivanov's weak brigade had been placed in the van. What was the sense of that? If it's weak, put it at the rear and don't hold up all the rest. A foreman pointed out a group of canal soldiers who were busy at the bottom of the excavation.

Shapovalov's brigade. They used to be a good-for-nothing bunch. Then—on parade—they were handed the canvas banner of shame. Everyone laughed at them, "canvas eagles," they called them.... They had to do something about it. Well, for the last five days they've been working like mad. "They want to exchange their canvas banner for a red one. We'll have to give them a hand."

The correspondent from the canal paper *Reforging* noted all this down.

The Bulletin came out twice a day. The editors worked tirelessly. Besides the Bulletin, it printed slogans and four-line epigrammatic verses. At every step the canal soldiers heard the voice of their paper—a cheerful, familiar voice.

People should work well.

But when do people work best?

When they are absorbed in their work, when they are healthy, clean, and even their clothes are clean!

Chapter XXVIII

THE RIVER VYG BREAKS OUT

The story of the night on which the Vyg broke its bounds was told by various members of the women's shock-brigade.

Canal No. 182 was a very short canal between lock No. 13 and the Vyg. The lock and canal No. 182 were built on dry ground. The construction was separated from the stormy Vyg only by a temporary earth dam.

One spring night, one of the women's brigades, Maslova's it was, was preparing to go to sleep, after doing 150 per cent. in the laundry, and another 150 per cent. on the canal.

Natalya Krivoruchko had been excused from work by the doctor that day. She lay placidly in bed.

"We've eliminated lice entirely," she told one of the "new" women—a village woman. "We're allowed visits.¹ The chief told us: 'Everyone is looking at you; everyone expects miracles.' Well, we showed what we could do! And so we are honoured and respected. If I'm sick, the doctor excuses me from work, and gives me treatment. And nobody can force me to get up and go out in the frost when I'm sick, for the order says we are 'to be well cared for.'"

"And do they feed you as they should?" asked the newcomer, greedily.

"Of course. For everything extra we do, we get extra food. Of course."

At that moment a loud alarm broke the silence of the night. People ran past the windows, all in the same direction.

"The temporary dam!" The water!... The dam....

The women's barrack shook. Maslova, the brigade leader, jumped up first, got dressed, and tied her shawl across her chest. She opened the door, shouting: "Hurry up! You can understand, this is serious!..." The door opened again. The night swallowed Natalya Krivoruchko immediately and a black wind carried her away.

"Where are you going? I thought you were sick!" cried the newcomer. But Natalya Krivoruchko was no longer in the barrack.

That night the level of Vyg rose suddenly. The menacing black water broke through the temporary earthen dam and began to pour into the diggings. Beyond the earthen dam at the edges of the diggings lay canal No. 182—unfinished and not at all ready to receive

¹ Visitors had been forbidden on account of the lice in the barracks.

water.

The hollow was filled; the wind drove the water higher and higher—over the edges. At first the people working at the bottom of the canal were stricken with panic. They dropped their wheelbarrows, spades, hats, mittens. They slid and fell in the dirt as they hurried up the sides. Icy spikes blew into their faces. The light of the electric lamps whirled wildly about in the water.

The water followed on the heels of the workers.

“Where are you going?” shouted Natalya Krivoruchko. “What are you scared of? Scared of the water? Just wait a minute.... We laundresses will show you what we can do, in just a minute!...”

And she was the first to start the human conveyer belt.

All night she filled bags with earth and passed them to her neighbour, who passed them on farther towards the dam, which had to be defended at all costs.

Towards the end, when there weren’t enough bags, she tore off her shawl—it was a large shawl, warm as a blanket—a present from Moscow—filled it with earth and threw it into the greedy jaws of the water. “There—choke yourself on it!”

And then the people around her laughed—so pleased were they with Natalya Krivoruchko. People said: “The water’s afraid of the laundresses—they feed it with soap.”

They worked until morning. In the morning the water stopped. Canal No. 182 was saved.

Only then did Natalya Krivoruchko return to the barrack. She was shivering without her shawl. She was covered with clay up to the knees. She had caught cold, and her red nose stood out sharply on her weather-beaten face. Her hair clung to her wet cheeks.

“My... how you worked,” the newcomer greeted her flatteringly: “It was awful to see how you worked, and you sick... I suppose you’ll get fine rations for that; why, I’m sure you’ll get a regular king’s rations.”

“Rations? You little fool...” answered Natalya Krivoruchko, blowing her nose, and laughing and crying both at once. “I didn’t do it for rations.”

Pavlova, whose pleasure used to be stealing and breaking glass and whose story is told in Chapter XI, tells more about what happened that night.

“The water quickly filled the diggings, and began to get near the top. A thousand people rushed immediately to meet the river with bags and stones.

“It was like a battle. On one side the Vyg, and on the other the

thieves. Neither would give in. We raised the top, but the river climbed higher. We threw bags down its throat but it showed its tongue through the cracks.

“It got so bad that some of us took hands and held back the water with our chests, while others raised the top.

“I was there too; I worked so hard I didn’t even feel the cold. The night passed. It began to get light. We were still holding back the Vyg; the crowd kept growing.

“We didn’t really come to ourselves till we were in the barrack. The stove was burning, but the tea kettle was empty. The women of our brigade stood round the stove. They were all wet and steaming. They all shouted at the tops of their voices, recalling what had happened.”

2

On May 3, a new Socialist agreement came in to the central staff; an agreement between the 6th and the 7th fighting sections. In this agreement they promised to stop all lagging by May 10.

“By May 10? We shall see.”

But neither May 5 nor May 6 brought any noticeable changes.

There were conferences in Tunguda: of the thirty-five shock-workers of the sixth section, and of the engineers and technicians. Everyone talked of the same thing: the shameful and awful breach in the work. They spoke strongly, bitterly, and to the point. The weak brigadiers were severely censured.

A phalanx of rock drillers—two brigades of them—came from the first fighting section—the holders of the red banner, to the help of the rock-workers of the sixth section. In April this phalanx had been awarded a certificate and the red banner of the staff for its high indices of production.

The phalanx of drillers, led by Buslaev and Borovik, carried out its promises like a good fighting unit. It averaged 178 per cent.

The situation in Tunguda improved. The reports showed a decrease from 76 to 26 in the number of backward brigades, and the productivity even of the backward brigades increased from 62 to 76 per cent. A few active workers and record setters were allocated to each of them. But what sort of showing is 76 per cent.? Can that be called a decisive struggle against lagging? No; all was not well in Tunguda.

May 11 was a day of words.

On May 17, the labour collective “Conqueror” worked so well

BELOMOR

that each group of five loaded a hand-car in 4 minutes. Fifteen hand-cars an hour—three to each man.

Perhaps Tunguda would pull through.

On May 15, another lot of special shock-brigade workers came and helped.

For 37 hours they worked in the dirt, up to the waist in water, piling earth, metre on metre, in the huge breach of the dam.

On May 17, at 6 a.m., the gap was closed.

Twelve hundred and seventy cubic metres of earth were put into the breach in the dam. This made 425 per cent. of the norm for each member of that shock-brigade, “besides the dirt and water that poured on to our bodies.”

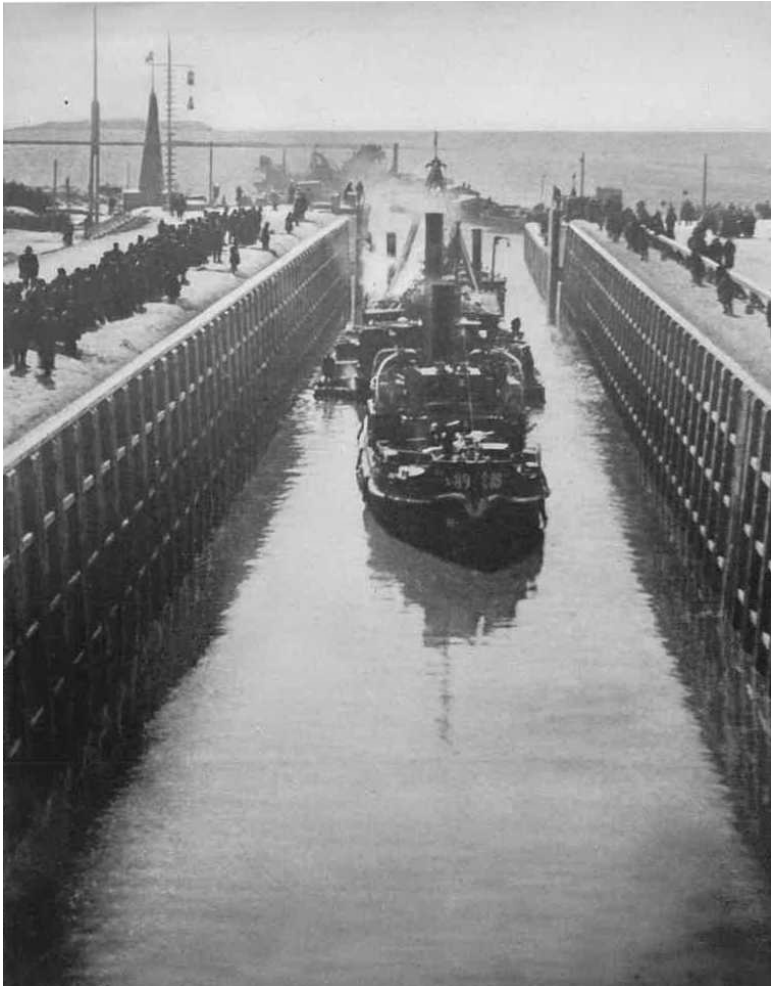
The same story could be told of other sections. At some points brigades belonging to one of the national minorities were the heroes. Shir-Akhmedov led the natzmen¹ at Point No. 3, for example; *Reforging* reported on his work.

“The task was not an easy one, but Shir-Akhmedov coped with it splendidly. The powerful phalanx he organised out of the separate natzmen brigades and labour collectives worked at storm tempo. The natzmen shock-workers that he led set fine examples of labour heroism. During an emergency the entire phalanx worked for 32 hours on end, and during the emergency at the northern lock the natzmen heroes worked over 50 hours without a stop, and stayed at work until the task entrusted to them was finished. When all the basic work was finished, the phalanx began to work with the same enthusiasm on the final details.”

¹ National Minorities.

STAGE IX

SUCCESS: THE FIRST STEAMERS GO THROUGH



THE FIRST STEAMERS ON THE CANAL

Chapter XXIX

“LET US PLANT THE BANKS WITH PINES”

The great work was accomplished. The hands of thieves, bandits and counter-revolutionaries had opened out a new way, not only for the ships but for themselves.

And now what about those “final details” at which—so *Reforging* reported—Shir-Akhmedov worked as keenly as he had worked at the heavy urgent work of excavating and of blasting rock.

“I’ll never forget,” said one canal soldier, a former thief, “how Comrade Rusanov, the assistant foreman, called me over and said: ‘Let’s plant the banks of the lock with pines, Levitanus! The chiefs will be coming soon, to ride down our canal on a steamer.’ I have no words to express the joy with which I began to dig holes to plant the pines in. I did this work with the same feeling with which I would give my child food that made him grow and develop.”

The sides of the locks and dams were laid with turf, and on the level of the sluice-gates grass was planted all along the canal; bushes were planted round the houses for the technical workers. Fifteen hundred metres of young pine trees along the locks of the first section; 500 metres at the Matkozhnensky dam; these were the permanent adornments. Now to express the festive mood of work accomplished.

Huge, many-coloured shining stars; masts, obelisks, tribunes, rhombic shields, wooden arches, monuments; a 48-metre portrait of Stalin at the concrete dam of the sixth fighting section.

The canal was decorated.

“Not only strength, but beauty,” demanded the builders.

An art commission was formed by the management of the White Sea-Baltic camp. “Decorate the canal,” it said. It searched for artists, decorators, and actors—to decorate not only in colours, but also in words. Five artists worked in the art workshop of the seventh fighting division: Korobka, Borodavtchenko, Vassiliev, Bykov and Perra. They were all former thieves—capable lads. During the final push that got the work finished, workshops had independently organised competitions among the shock-workers on the canal for the best production averages. The winners received, as prizes from the workshop artists, portraits of themselves. Fifteen hundred portraits were awarded. Those who received the portraits raised their production sharply. Now the artists and workshop personnel were decorating their section, and putting things in order.

Kirghiz from the desert steppes or from beyond Lake Balkhash, Kalmyck, Jew, Tartar, or Siberians, whose nationality it is impossible to tell, it is so mixed and intermingled; peasants from Ryazan, Astrakhan, Ural, Penzensk, Altai or Saratov, Tambov, Chernigov—each one will now tell his children smiling:

“With pickaxes, my dears—rough-hewn at that, we dug it, so that all America and Europe gasped and took off its hat!”

“Daddy,” asks the little boy, “is it very deep?”

The father answers at once:

“Rafts ride down it, and ships with foreign flags, and all sorts of rubbish, but nobody can find the bottom. I guess it’s over half a mile to the bottom; and you can’t even reckon the width, for it keeps getting wider.”

“And could a whale swim through it?”

“A whale could swim through, and a pike, too, sonny.”

“And could our house swim through?”

“Our house too.”

The son falls into silence. He is “imagining” as all children do. The canal rises before him, blue as blue; thousands of axes flash; songs thunder in the air; music is everywhere—music that one cannot understand. And ships move gaily along, one after the other, dipping their sails—red and white and blue and yellow. His father stands in the stern and gives orders; but now the little boy comes up and says: “Let me steer the ship.” And he blows the whistle and turns the wheel, and everyone honours him.

Years will pass. The boy will grow and learn. He will go for a pleasure trip along the canal. The Karelian lakes will rise up before him, and the locks and the dams. There will be hotels there and electric stations, factories and farms; and the barracks where once the wonderful builders lived will seem miraculous to him.

Chapter XXX

STALIN GOES THROUGH ON THE LITTLE BLUNT-NOSED STEAMER

There is a big pier at Voznesenye on Lake Onega. Near the pier lies the little town of Voznesenye, a wooden Russian Venice. The town, which still has wooden cranes that date from the time of Peter the Great, is completely cut up by canals. It is washed by Lake Onega; the river Svir runs into it; and the ancient, neglected Onega canal runs through it. The inhabitants walk along the pavements; dim lamps light the streets, and snub-nosed little steamers bustle down them. Voznesenye is the permanent abode of the steamer *Anokhin*. She is registered there. Every other day, the *Anokhin* makes a trip between Voznesenye and Bear Hill.

One summer day, the townspeople noticed that the *Anokhin* was not at the pier. The tubby little lake steamer was missing for several days.

“Where on earth is our *Anokhin*?” asked the townspeople.

2

During the days of its absence, the *Anokhin* steamed through the White Sea Canal. The new canal had no fleet of its own as yet and Voznesenye had come to its aid. During those days Stalin, Voroshilov, and Kirov stood on the decks of the *Anokhin*. With them stood Comrade Yagoda and several Chekists.

The *Anokhin* steamed towards Tunguda. It anchored at lock No. 12. Little waves ruffled the lake. The banks and the dams were covered with flowers and slogans. The machines of the electric station could be heard. A sentinel in a crimson and blue cap walked along the grey concrete of the lock. It was the time of the “white nights” when there is no darkness in Karelia.

People were more crowded than usual on the steamer. One could hear exclamations and lively talk; these, too, were not quite the same as usual.

One after the other, Khrustalev, Frenkel and Borisov would come up to the upper deck.

Stalin leaned lightly against the rail. Nearby were Voroshilov and Kirov.

“Permit me to introduce the technical managers of Belomorstroy,” said Yagoda, turning to Stalin.

“I’m very pleased to meet them,” answered Stalin.

Bending heavily and dragging his feet, which made him sway to the side, Khrustalev stared at the rail. But Stalin's right hand already lay in his, Khrustalev's hand. Khrustalev pressed this hand. Then he moved away, stooping and stepping backwards; he could not take his eyes off Stalin's smiling face; Frenkel and Borisov came up, and said something; Khrustalev looked and looked. "Three o'clock in the morning—time for Stalin to be sleeping. He's tired already... ." It pleased him to think of the welfare of the man who did so much for the Soviet Union.

Yagoda was beckoning. Khrustalev looked around to make sure it was meant for him, and moved uncertainly nearer to the assistant chief.

Yagoda joked and laughed; suddenly he bowed and stretched out his hand saying:

"I congratulate you on your decoration."

"Wh-a-at " Khrustalev began, confusedly. Then, controlling his agitation with difficulty, he answered:

"I thank you from my heart, comrade assistant chief."

And once more he was seized with a strong, joyful, unusual agitation.

The steamer entered the lock, rocking slightly.

Canal No. 181. People ran up from the second camp point, waving their hats and shouting something. The blood-red banners of the shock-brigades spread and waved. Somewhere far away a band played a march, loud and belated.

The canal is still amazed at the whistle and smoke of the steamers; crowds run to meet every ship.

They rejoiced in the steamer's rails, the navigation bridge, the sailors, and the captain with his big binoculars; they noticed and remarked gaily on the entire make-up of the ship—things that they would never have noticed before! This ship was so clean and tidy—such a clean and tidy life! Wonderful! And suddenly they saw something amazing. Amazing, but very simple. They saw what they had been expecting—what was supposed to happen at that time and place. They saw Stalin. This man personified the world to them—the new world they had just entered; a wide and wonderful world....

And now the *Anokhin* was already raising waves as it passed down canal No. 182 and the so recently impassable River Vyg.

On deck, wicker armchairs. Three members of the Politburo—Stalin, Voroshilov and Kirov—are talking. They joke, laugh, smoke. The deck rolls slightly; the waves rise behind....

Stalin holds a pencil.

Before him lies a map of the region.

Deserted shores. Remote villages. Virgin soil, covered with boulders. Primeval forests. Too much forest as a matter of fact; it covers the best soil. And swamps. The swamps are always crawling about, running into people's dwelling-places, swallowing roads, making life dull and slovenly.

Tillage must be increased. The swamps must be drained.

The Karelian Republic is right; it is tired of being called "difficult and swampy"; it wants to be called "gay and fruitful."

The Karelian Republic wants to enter the stage of classless society as a republic of factories and mills. And the Karelian Republic will enter classless society by changing its own nature.

Factories, factories, factories, factories. The energy of the forests, of the swamps, and of the waterfalls linked up by Belomorstroy must be harnessed to provide power for factories.

Karelia must have its own fleet. This fleet of the Karelian Soviet Socialist Republic will grow up in the White Sea Canal.

That is what the three members of the Politburo talked of on the deck of the *Anokhin*.

They walked about the deck, smoking, joking, and talking. Yagoda came out to them.

The idea of the White Sea-Baltic Combinat¹ started that day.

And later, when the little *Anokhin* reached the roadsteads of the port of Soroka, near the White Sea, Voroshilov, People's Commissar of Land and Sea Forces, will review a parade of ships. These ships have suddenly appeared at the roadsteads, emerging from the openings of the canal. And the foreign ships at the roadsteads will look long and wonderingly at this Soviet flotilla; they talk for a long time of the enterprise of the Bolsheviks—of the fact that the Bolsheviks now have no need to sail round Scandinavia to get from the Baltic to the White Sea—of the fact that there are strange things going on in the world....

These "strange things" combine and grow. They appear now in one form, now in another. And at the moment they appear in the White Sea-Baltic Combinat, which is to transform a backward country into an advanced country, a land of classless society—thus completing and perfecting the national development of Karelia.

"In 1934," says the Plan, "we shall begin work on several gigantic

¹ Term used for the new groups of kindred industries being built throughout the U.S.S.R.

BELOMOR

constructions, greater than any we have planned before. The White Sea-Baltic Canal is now being transformed into a combinat; during the first year of its exploitation, we shall spend 96,000,000 roubles on it—a sum almost as great as the cost of the entire canal.”

And so the idea which dated back to the sixteenth century, of a White Sea-Baltic Canal which should open up Karelia, at last became a reality. Peter the Great had passed that way: he, too, had seen how desirable such a canal would be. In the nineteenth century an author who had studied the possibilities had written:

“The world will glorify for ever the name of the man who builds this great construction.”

The tsarist government had managed without eternal glory.

Comrade Rappoport spread out on the floor a huge map of the North, with a red line showing the course of the White Sea-Baltic Canal. All this had occurred many times to explorers and engineers at some camp fire somewhere on the shores of the Vyg, under the screams of the migrating wild geese. This was the path from the Polar Seas to the Baltic, conceived so long ago and only now accomplished under Socialism, in a new and broader way.

Chapter XXXI

MEN AND WOMEN—WITH A SPECIAL ACCOUNT OF THE LITTLE MAN WITH TIRED EYES

But great as this achievement was, a second purpose lay behind the great undertaking. This was the reforging of the men and women whose names, in the words of the nineteenth century author, “the world would glorify for ever.” Success was to be measured in human terms as well as in terms of engineering. The Government of the U.S.S.R. decided that:

On the completion of the construction of the canal, 12,484 people should be freed from further subjection to measures of social defence; as people who were entirely reformed, and had become useful builders of Socialism.

“The duration of the subjection to measures of social defence was reduced for 59,516 people, sentenced to various terms, who were active workers on the construction.”

Kovalev, Levitanus, Kvasnitzky—free. Zubrik, Ananyev, Yyasemsky transferred from the canal. Yankovsky is nowhere to be seen; Yurtzeva is leaving; Shir-Akhmedov will soon leave!

Everybody was leaving the camp, and for the 12,000 who were freed entirely there must be no delay. Berman had long ago notified the railways:

“Small capacity of Murmansk railroad and necessity of taking liberated workers away from the camp on completion of construction in shortest possible time, make me request you to make the following preparations: First, send to stations Sosnovetz, Tunguda, Nadovitz, Shavan, Patrol No. 14, and Bear Hill, all fast passenger trains on hand without exception, with as many cars as possible; second, send out extra passenger trains daily between Kem and Leningrad, and see that all train stops *en route* have sufficient reservations for the Belomor Canal Camp; third, instruct our transport departments expedite preschedule departure, give unoccupied places in trains freed Belomorstroy shock-workers; fourth, instruct Murmansk railway administration provide passengers water and medical attention at stations.

BERMAN, Chief of Gulag, G.P.U.”

Reforging, the camp newspaper, echoed the same idea. Berman sent them a telegram too:

“...No bureaucracy or red tape is to be permitted in announcing

BELOMOR

liberation and reduction in sentences, and in giving the canal soldiers the care and attention they have earned.

This telegram is to be printed in *Reforging* and announced by radio in all sections, dormitories, and barracks.

M. BERMAN, Chief of the Head Office of the G.P.U. camps.”

There was also much material to be moved. The houses were being pulled down and carried away to Dmitrov. The club moved. The staff moved. The dining-room moved. The cottages went off by rail. Thousands of canal soldiers were given free tickets. They filled almost all the cars in passenger trains, mail trains, express trains.

2

This “demobilisation” was not done at haphazard.

A qualifications committee was organised under the cultural department of the sixth fighting section. The committee included engineers Umnyakov and Ilyin, and cultural inspector Yepifanov.

This commission tested the qualifications of all the freed campers and gave them certificates.

Thousands of people received liberation documents.

“Blank is freed before the expiration of his sentence; has the right to live in any and all the cities of the U.S.S.R.!” That means that a person has acquired a new fatherland, a new country—a splendid country, with many towns and villages, seas and rivers—a country where everything is decided by labour. A new life—a real life—is beginning.

There was a constant crowd at the recruiting station, where the freed campers were recruited for various constructions.

For the camp, in a little over a year, had become a factory of professions—especially in the construction trades.

People had become concrete workers, drillers, carpenters.

There was a great demand for such labour forces. The country needed construction workers.

The liberated campers were provided with work before they left the camp.

Many were recruited for Electrostal and Krivoy Rog.

“We remember when we—600 of us—were recruited for the construction of greater Electrostal; we were sent off with a brass band and revolutionary songs. Special cars were filled with liberated campers, on their way to work in organised fashion on the new Socialist constructions. On July 20, we started for the construction

of Electrostal—cheerful, lively, and confident of new successes.”

This is taken from a letter sent to Comrade Stalin by a group of the Belomorstroy people.

They are already turning to Stalin: they know that it was he who put the Socialist construction of Belomorstroy into the Plan, and that it is through the working out of his idea that they, former wreckers and criminals, have become equal workers in a free and happy country—the happiest country in the world. And in turning to Stalin they finally start out on their new path.

Soklakov, who went to Krivoy Rog, says:

“We were recruited very simply: You’re going? Sign your name. We went to Krivoy Rog, because of the climate.

“We handed in applications asking to be kept at Belomorstroy as free workers: we didn’t want to part with the canal into which we had put so much labour.”

A rumour was circulated that people were being recruited for a new construction—the Moscow-Volga Canal. Next day many workers signed on for it.

“All our people will be there,” said one man to the crowd round him.

“Will Comrade Kagan be there?”

“He will.”

“Or, for instance, Comrade Afanasyev—will he be there?”

“Of course.”

“And where will Comrade Ivanov be, I ask you?”

“There, again.”

“Let’s go, fellows. We want to keep to our own people.”

And one man in the corner of the barrack was already speaking of how he would live in the new place—how he intended to put his bed near the window without fail, for he loved light, and hated to live in darkness.

Money was distributed for the trip. Information was given as to whom to report to on arrival.

Special headquarters were arranged in the cities for recruiting the campers for work.

3

All sorts of things happened during the liberation period.

One little man with tired eyes was terribly afraid that someone might find out about his stay in the camp. He was an engineer, sentenced for sabotage—one of those who were sentenced under

article 58 of the criminal code. He didn't just live; he lived by an elaborate plan, all marked out beforehand. The first and most important point in this plan was the desire to keep his stay in camp unknown, no matter what the cost. He had a family in Moscow. His children did not know that their father had been condemned for sabotage. His wife kept the secret; she explained the disappearance of the head of the family from Moscow by saying he was away on a Government mission.

Long ago, when still a student, he lived in a cheap apartment in a squeaky little wooden house, next door to a woman with three children. Her husband was in gaol for theft. The woman concealed the shameful circumstance from the children, and they did not cease to respect their father. When he came home from prison he quietly and confidently took his place at table. And the engineer with the tired eyes now wanted to take his place at table in the same way.

"I'll work as I ought, I'll work well," he told the Chekists in the camp; "but you must give me your word of honour that nobody will ever find out about my stay here. It's very disgraceful to come back from prison. And I have children."

Every new person who came to the camp seemed familiar to him. He looked searchingly at every camper. He was lucky: no one found out his secret.

One evening, when Karelia, cold, vast, rainy, was on the verge of falling into the past, he was told:

"Unforeseen circumstances have come up, my dear Nikolai Alexeevitch—circumstances that give away your secret."

"But you promised that no one would know of my stay in camp."

"Yes, but what can one do ..."

The Chekist walked up and down the room. He was groping for the right words. Or rather, not the words, but the order of the words.

"To-morrow the whole country will learn from the newspapers that you have been here. To-morrow the whole country will congratulate you. You are to be freed before your sentence is up, and to receive a decoration! You can go home with an easy mind. Don't worry. Your children will respect you. More than that—I think that few fathers will be so respected by their children. I congratulate you. Forgive us for breaking our word. It couldn't be helped."

He spoke for a long time, but the man with the tired eyes did not listen. He was busy with his own thoughts—of how his family

would meet him. He knew now that it would meet him happily. And for the first time in his life, he thought of how the country would meet him. He was elated, for he knew that the country would greet him. Bear Hill station. A clock gleams under the pointed roof.

The platform is crowded. There are many faded banners, edged with gilt tinsel. Music. Crowded cars crawl past the station, full of liberated campers on their way to the Moscow canal.

People wave to them with handkerchiefs and hats. People in army coats with red tabs raise their hands to their caps.

"I leave this evening," said Kvasnitzky to a journalist, who happened to be at the station. "Take a look at my ticket. Is it punched right? Day after to-morrow I'll be talking with my kids. They won't dare not to recognise me. The chief has promised me a job and a passport."

A hundred and forty members of the G.P.U. prison commune were going to Tomsk. They stood with their trunks and bedding, with their old fighting banner which had accompanied the commune all through the construction, waving over the places of work—in Nadvoitz and Sosnovetz, at lake Vyg and at the fourth fighting section, at the storm of the quicksand, at parades and in emergencies.

The old banner, made by the church thief Povarovsky, was decorated not with militant slogans, but with figures, percentages, and graphs, faded and soaked by rain and snow, and, like a real fighting banner, it had been burnt in many spots by the sparks from dynamite explosions.

Semyon Firin made a simple parting speech, and the members of the commune, decorated with Udarnik emblems and red bassards, took their places in the train.

They were touched by the playing of the band, the respect of their comrades, Firin's care for them—the care of a sincere and experienced man. An accordion appeared. An agile, tattooed young fellow in an orange shirt began dancing on the wooden roof of the water tower near the hydrant.

Everyone laughed: "What a fine dancing floor!"

The second bell rang. Those who remained exchanged addresses with those who left and promised to write of the future life and work of the commune, and of how it kept its banners.

"Comrade Malyshkov! Write to *Reforging!* Don't lose touch with us!"

"Seryozhka, stop smoking in the car!"

Trains left one after another.

BELOMOR

The builders of the canal had become valuable to the country—workers well trained and organised for Socialist labour.

The country invited them to continue their work, on the new constructions of the second Five-Year Plan.

Chapter XXXII

“THEY SLAUGHTERED MY BULL AND STOLE MY HORSES”

Behind every one of these thousands of men and women who gave to Karelia and to the U.S.S.R. the completed canal—work of their hands—lay some long personal history, sometimes tragic, sometimes comic. Maxim Gorky, when (as the reader will also see in Chapter XXXIV) he came into close personal contact with what had been going on at Belomorstroy, told very briefly two such histories, setting down the words of two Kulaks:

“The first one,” says Gorky, “was typical of that property-obsessed class. Here is what he says about how he came to his senses.”

“I lived in the times when one’s masters beat one both in punishment and for amusement, to show their strength. In 1902 the governor flogged five people in our village, and I was one of the five. In 1906 I got it too, and lay in gaol for four months besides. Then the Duma came: ‘Let people live as they please—I’ll live as I can!’ In the civil war I had a farm and three yoke of oxen—two mine, and one my brother’s. He went with the partisans and was killed. I had some horses and there were three Austrian prisoners working for me who spoke Russian. The Whites came. They slaughtered my bull and stole my horses. The Reds came. They stole nothing but grain—I had a lot of grain. Then the Whites came again, and after them the German invasion. Those Germans broke up my farm, so I almost hung myself. The war stopped, and I got to work: in four years I was pretty well off. I was an inspector in the village soviet, and I did plenty of social work, co-operative and such. Then the collective farms began. In ’29 I was regarded as an enemy of the Soviet Government. They arrested me. At the investigation they were quite polite and they called me ‘citizen’ all the time. I didn’t care. I thought that was simply to make it go smoothly. One young fellow poked me in the neck. The chief gave him three days under arrest. Maybe he didn’t really go to gaol—maybe it was just done for appearances. ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘hit me all you please, but don’t touch my property.’ Under the tsar they never touched your property. Yes! And so I got caught for protecting my property. Well, now I work as well as anyone, I got two premiums, and they promise to shorten my sentence for teaching the fellows carpentry. I’m good at teaching.”

“There are,” says Gorky, “songs of rebirth, at times very much resembling comical anecdotes: a round ruddy little man tells us gaily:

“At home, my stomach hurt me. I must have overeaten or something. My intestines got fat. Whatever I ate, it all came back. For a year and a half I ate nothing but milk and kasha, and even then it cut as though I had eaten glass. I was as touchy as could be. No one could live with me—I’d go out of my mind, that’s all. Out of malice, I made a little trouble, beat up a village correspondent, and he went and informed on me—said I’d persuaded a young fellow to set fire to the hay on the collective farm. The hay was burned all right, but the one they said I bribed didn’t do it. It was someone else. I don’t know who. Well, they suspected me and I got sentenced for it. Then came prison and camp, and then they sent me to the canal. And I was simply dying, my belly hurt me so! But at the camp I began to eat—and eat! And I got better and better. And I got better and better, and then I was all well! Then I began to work to suit my health. I like work. And then I noticed that in camp they would teach you anything you wanted to learn. Of course, the chiefs demand work, but they explain the meaning of everything. I began to study. I could read and write more or less. But it was hard work for me to read a paper, and I’d only understand five words out of ten—and I’d understand them wrong. But now I read without stumbling—as though they’d given me a new set of eyes. I’m beginning to understand life. When I was young, I went with Makhno for a while. They said there too that life must be reorganised in a different way. They talked plenty, but all they did was rob and drink. Here the chiefs are different. They’re dressed as officers, but they live here like monks: you never see them drunk, and they don’t hang around the girls. And the girls and women here—oh, my lord! make me strong against this temptation! Ye-es. Here they insist on something else—strict and efficient—they know what’s what! Such things go on that it’s not hard to forget oneself.”

After Maxim Gorky’s two Kulaks have had their say let us listen to Engineer Ananyev, former commander of the defenders of the Winter Palace:

“My management was evidently of value, for my sentence was cut by half in March 1933, and finally, on the completion of the construction, that is on May Day, I was set free and honoured with the Belomorstroy Builders decoration.”

Belomorstroy’s builders were drawing their conclusions.

Engineer Ananyev saw unusual things, which not one of the most humane thinkers of Europe had ever conceived. What is more, he understood them.

He saw a former monk, and cult leader, the archmandrite

“THEY SLAUGHTERED MY BULL AND STOLE MY HORSES”

Rezchikov. The former monk had learned English and wanted to enter one of the technical universities; the 45-year-old student was already “gnawing at the granite of technical knowledge.”

“Go to it, father!” Ananyev said at parting.

Pavlova, the ex-thief and prison breaker, also was freed for her shock work. “But I refused freedom with all my might. I wanted to ride up in a steamer to the place where I first pushed a wheelbarrow.... Now I have a decoration. And my plans are entirely different. I’m going to learn surgery. I’m thirty years old, but I want so terribly much to study.”

Another former thief, Povarovsky, says:

“We’ve shown in practice that if an honest worker is entirely devoted to Socialist construction he can double the value of his life. Why did we show real wonders of heroism on the labour front? Because we shook large unused forces out of our sleepy minds, put them into use, and made every day give us three or four days. If the normal period of life were only 35 years one could easily live 140 years.”

“I dug the first ground with my collective,” says Levitanus, yet another former thief. “And now I’m finishing the canal. None of us had any idea, you know, that the canal would come out such a beauty!”

2

It is all quite natural that those who leave the camp do not try to forget the time of their “imprisonment”; or the efficient feeling of vigorous life experienced in the struggle for the canal.

When they think of their future work, they want to preserve their collective Belomorstroy entity, they want to be given separate sections of the work, where they can show how canal soldiers trained by the G.P.U. can work. In many cases whole brigades go together to the new constructions. In other cases people who worked in different phalanxes and labour collectives on the canal get together on the way and form new brigades of concrete workers, navvies and carpenters.

All this is of course quite different from the old “classic” experience of the prisoner.

A prisoner released from a bourgeois prison can hardly believe he is free at first. Freedom intoxicates him; the sun makes him squint; the fresh air takes his legs from under him. The prisoner is timid. He walks along the shady side of the street. He hardly dares

cross to the sunny side of life. Or—depending on his temperament—he may rush away at full speed, doubling through side-streets as though still hiding his tracks; all he wants is to get as far as possible from that accursed place, lest they change their minds and try to get him back. Or in some circumstances he may be met by relatives, who storm him with exclamations as they carry him off. It's like a dream. One must pinch oneself. No, no—don't pinch! You might wake up! Or, if the prisoner is freed by a revolution, he will be carried on the shoulders of the crowd, he will have no time to think, he will rejoice at the fulfilment of his hopes and shout "hurrah!" for the revolution.

In all cases, the departure from prison is a frontier, a sharp dividing line, a leap with no backward glances. The years in prison are a piece cut roughly out of one's individual life—a dark and empty gap. After prison, life must be continued from the point where it was broken off, five-ten years before. After prison the thief goes back to thieving; the pauper to poverty; the rebel to rebellion against the hateful system.

But how does the Belomorstroy camper feel, when he is freed before his sentence has expired?

Before going to camp, the thief spent a nomadic life—on wheels, on trams and trains, sneaking through dark yards and alleys; in flight; drinking in dens and saloons whose very existence is transitory. The Kulak, swept from his property by the flood of collectivisation, shot at village Communists, set fire to kolkhoz threshing barns, and was finally vanquished, the ground falling from under his feet. The plans of the wreckers were exposed by the Chekists. In those days, if a man had daring, he used it for house-breaking; if he had a genial temper, he wasted it in drinking; clever fingers found their way into other people's pockets; persistence expressed itself by damaging tractors and machines; imagination went into the planning of artful obstacles in the path of Socialism; organisational talent welded together disorganisers; labour power was wasted in fruitless labour; experience and knowledge were stored up unused; eloquence was spent in empty phrases; the love of art knew only the jazz band and the fox-trot, and poetic natures poured themselves out in vulgar, sentimental songs.

The canal between the two seas was a complicated affair, and demanded very diverse abilities. There abilities were directed into the right channel; boldness blew up diabase; persistence struggled against quicksands; clever hands made the joints of dams and locks; inventive genius made it possible to use brick instead of concrete;

“THEY SLAUGHTERED MY BULL AND STOLE MY HORSES”

experience and knowledge were put at the disposal of the G.P.U.; organisational talent made fine brigade leaders; eloquence was useful in the cultural departments and at shock-workers' conferences; and geniality of temper spread all along the canal, from Onega to the White Sea.

People learned in the camps to plan their own lives for many years ahead. The freedom of movement which so stuns one on leaving a bourgeois prison does not affect them. They had it even while building the canal. But they do feel another sort of freedom. They have been set free from guilt, from “police records,” from the prostitutes' “yellow ticket,” from a bad reputation. And besides that, they feel pride, for every one of them leaves, if not with the Order of the Red Banner, then with the Udarnik emblem, and with a name honoured all over the U.S.S.R.—the name of a builder of the “White Sea-Baltic Water Route.”

The Murmansk locomotives whistle. Smoke blows in the wind.

It smells of home, of family, of work, of travel. But to tell the truth, the canal soldier is a little sad at leaving the rocks and waters of Karelia. He has cut a canal through the rock and united the waters, putting in a huge amount of work. He has been inspired here, has earned his Udarnik emblem, and felt world-wide fame. He has been reborn here.

And for a long time, no matter where the canal soldier may be—in Voronezh, at Vakhsha, in Kuzbas, or Lok-Batan—he will often feel lonely for the White Sea waters, the dynamite explosions, the noise of falling pines, and the hoarse voice of Uspensky.

STAGE X
SUMMING UP

Chapter XXXIII

THE PLACE IS CHANGED, BUT NOT THE MEN OR THE WORK

A conference was being held. August 25, 1933, was a dark day, with clouds, rain and a cold wind. But this was not the Karelin north wind—not the Karelin Autumn. There are no familiar lakes and rocks about. No steep slopes, no boulders or rocks.

And yet something about the place seems familiar. Are we at Nadvoitz? No, it doesn't look like it. Or in the forests near the Vyg? No; it's not the same.

And yet there is a wide excavation, in which canal soldiers are working. Earth is being dug. And endless vista—the route of the canal. The hanging jaws of a steam navy.

But where are the locks, the reservoirs, the dams, whose opening we saw with our own eyes? Everything here looks as though the canal were only just beginning.

Canal soldiers come back to camp with their banner. The gates of the camp open. A rifleman of the armed guard stands on a watchtower. A red star hangs over the gates. Everywhere barracks, people, the usual bustle. We don't exactly understand what is going on.

Familiar people come out to meet the canal soldiers.

These are Belomorstroy Udarniks. They all walk together.

They nod and smile like old acquaintances at a familiar, spacious two-storey wooden house.

It is our old chalet—the central club of Belomorstroy. Has it been moved to some new scene?

If you go up to the house you can read the names and nick-names of the members of the agitation brigades cut into the wood.

Then are we at Bear Hill again?

We go into the club where the conference is being held following the Udarniks. On the walls are hung the fighting banners of Belomorstroy, stained by rain and wind during three-day assaults and emergency nights.

The big hall is full.

The meeting might seem ordinary and everyday; but yet there is an elated feeling such as occurs only at great historical events. There are many sorts of people here; their differences stand out sharply. There are Chekists and there are former prisoners. They meet to-day as equals.

The joyfully excited Yankovskaya and the efficient Shir-Akhmedov, one of the natzmen, gesticulate at the centre of one

BELOMOR

group. Another group surrounds the decisive Volkov and the self-confident Rothenburg. The cosmopolitan vocabulary of this former speculator has been enriched with entirely new words and ideas.

Bashful, ironical Zubrik is talking with Nekrasov, who still has the air of an ex-minister. Vyasemsky sits on a bench near the wall. Groups of people move, gather, scatter.

Some are animated and nervous; others silent and calm.

Two people meet.

"Hail, hero of the Povenetz steps!" shouts one, banteringly yet respectfully.

"Hail, dauntless brigadier!" returns the other, in the same tone.

Two huge chiefs of collectives, in leather coats and strong boots, greet each other with respect. They knew how to respect a rival in production from whose wall they had only yesterday wrested a banner, setting it up with whistles and jeers on their own.

Formerly they had also respected each other as ringleaders.

There are people in the room from famous collectives: "Success of the Five-Year Plan," "Red Canal," "Stormers," "Uspensky" and "For Free Labour." Uspensky is in the hall, surrounded by the natzmen whom he once led to storm Nadvoitz.

Afanasyev, Firin and Kagan are in the hall.

On the side benches sit Soviet authors.

A motor drives up to the club, and Maxim Gorky steps out; he is met at the entrance, surrounded and led into the club. Passers-by stop and look after him.

In the hall there is an atmosphere of expectation and impatience. Now it is possible to observe the people collected here.

A strange, familiar mixture of human types. The racial population of the camp is very strange to an unaccustomed eye.

The events of 1930-33 have changed more than just the external appearance of the people of the Soviet Union. Many occupational types have died out and disappeared; many new ones have appeared. For instance the type of the "Five-Year Plan engineer" who can be recognised a mile away. He is efficient, simple, lively. He is already well dressed, but clothes are not the most important thing to him. He is quiet, and confident in his work.

The camps changed the "internal content" of the prisoners. But they, so to speak, preserved their exteriors. Here is an engineer with the refined exterior of a worker in a Nep concession; then a former Kulak, massive and red-faced. There are no such people in the villages now. We no longer draw such types in our posters.

A superficial physiognomist would characterise them swiftly: a

THE PLACE IS CHANGED, BUT NOT THE MEN OR THE WORK

criminal type; an intellectual; a typical Kulak. But we look attentively for the impress of their biographies, which has eaten into their skin and muscles, we can distinguish something new and different—something characteristic of the Belomorstroy people.

The biographies of these people have been revised, cleaned, supplemented.

People walk about in the hall and the club rooms, looking at the photographs and portraits on the walls. The photographs are of these same people.

A rock worker from the “Red Canal” collective, and a concrete worker from the “Success of the Five-Year Plan” group look with respect at their own portraits. The portraits show huge, heroic, sharply lighted faces, in proud foreshortening. The rock worker and the concrete worker wink meaningly at one another. Self-respect is a new, unusual thing to them; but they pretend it doesn’t mean anything.

Finally, the orchestra arrives. It plays a flourish, and everyone gathers in the main hall, where pencils and pads of paper lie on the chairs so that one can take notes if one wishes. The people take their places without disorder. They got used to meetings and conferences in camp. And now for the solution of the puzzle about the scene, which is new and not new.

Through the windows of the club one can see the streets and houses of old Dmitrov, a distant forest, and the round buildings of a monastery which has no crosses, and whose walls are covered with huge portraits of our leaders. This locality is strange to us; it is not Bear Hill—not the White Sea-Baltic Canal.

We are at the Moscow Canal—the construction about which there was so much talk during the last month at Belomorstroy.

The success of Belomorstroy has made it possible to continue the work of building a unified water system. The realisation of Stalin’s plan is going forward. Water will flow into Moscow; sea-going ships will pass by the Kremlin. Kagan has been appointed chief of the construction. Hundreds of liberated engineers and canal soldiers are also here.

Experience has almost made the Chekists engineers, and has taught the engineers the Chekists’ style of work.

Chapter XXXIV

THE LAST CONFERENCE

At 7 p.m. the conference is opened by our old friend Kagan, chief of the construction.

“Comrades, canal soldiers!” Kagan begins. “Udarniks! Belomorstroy workers! To-day we open the last conference, devoted to the White Sea-Baltic Canal. But at this last conference it would not be out of place to look back for a moment to our first conference, when we came to Karelia to build a new water route—a watery highway uniting two seas.”

Applause for Kagan’s words broke out here; and then just as it was about to quiet down, it broke out again with unusual force: Gorky entered the hall.

Some stood up to see him better. People shouted to them: “Sit down! We can’t see!” Gorky walked quickly to his seat, bending down so as not to block the view of the stage. The applause increased, and became an ovation.

Many had tears in their eyes. Each reckoned up once more the results of his life. Each tested himself once more with pitiless strength and sincerity. They applauded Gorky with a special tenderness as their wise teacher in life.

Kagan hurried on to the next part of his speech. The seas he says have been united. A new, complex construction occupies his thoughts. The time when he had just reached the Belomorstroy camp, when he said to himself in the woods, “I seem to be sentimental”—the time when he invented the word “canal soldiers”—that time is long past.

All that is over. Now things are different. Now the task is not to twist the swift waters of the Karelian rivers into one strand, slow their current, and subjugate them to the human will. Now, on the contrary, it is necessary to speed up the slow and sluggish Moscow river, to stimulate it with the living waters of the Volga, and to wash the Soviet capital with this new river. This is not an easy task.

“But we shall fulfil this task,” says Kagan.

“Comrade Yagoda, our main—our daily leader in the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal—a man whose strength of will and profound belief have helped many of us out of difficulties—a man who could always find the needed link in that huge job, and point out the defects which stood in the way of the necessary speed, Comrade Yagoda has asked me to deliver to the Belomorstroy

Udarniks his greetings and his hope that they will work no worse than at Belomorstroy—and even better.”

The hall burst into applause. The opening speech was over. The conference proper had begun.

The members of the presidium—those, that is, whose places were on the platform—took their seats. They were somewhat embarrassed at the idea of going up to the stage—they were deafened by the music, and blinded by the projectors for the moving picture cameras. Yankovskaya came from her seat, confused and flushed, but with an independent air, and went up the plank to the stage. She sat down next to Comrade G. E. Prokofiev, assistant chief of G.P.U. The rest of the presidium came up, followed by the Moscow authors who had come out to the conference.

2

The next to speak was another old friend, Comrade Firin. The atmosphere was as before, one of strained attention. Firin went right into his speech with no preliminary remarks. He began with the past, summing up the work at Belomorstroy, and ended with the future—with what had now to be done on the Moscow-Volga Canal.

Not one word was lost in the tense silence of the hall. As before, the movie men bustled round near the stage. The speaker's face would now stand out sharp and blue in the beams of the projectors, now be plunged into semi-darkness.

Firin spoke of the barbarity to which capitalist society is returning. In Germany, books are burned in the city squares. The Western prisons are overflowing, but crime grows nevertheless!

“And what are we doing?” he continued: “What happened at Belomorstroy? Tens of thousands of prisoners were handed over to a handful of Chekists. There were 37 of us. And we were to reform these prisoners. The Soviet Government had not lost hope for a single one of these people. When we sentenced them, we did not consider them—either the political or the criminal law-breakers—to be hopeless material for the coming classless State. We reformed these people by means of the country's most honourable weapon—by means of labour. By means of labour in our great Socialist country. The Party has taught us and will teach us always, no matter where we may work. It was Comrade Stalin's idea and order that we build the canal with the labour of prisoners, thus reformatting them into honest workers.”

BELOMOR

At this moment a note came from the hall to Firin.

“Comrade Firin,” it said: “Please tell us about the librarian Seymyonova. She used to be a teacher, and she taught over a hundred illiterate thieves to read and write. She has an order for that, and she’s a fine shock-worker, even if she isn’t a toiler.”

Would thieves and bandits have been interested in the fate of a teacher—before Belomorstroy?

“You know, fellows,” Firin told the former criminals, “there are almost no sons of landowners or manufacturers among you. Almost all of you are children of town and village poverty, and therefore near to us. If we punished you, and segregated you from society, it was only because you lived on society as parasites.

“We help you to forget the past; we give you trades—train you as fitters, concrete workers, and navvies. We bring you back as full and equal members of our family of equal citizens. And thus we open to you the way to personal happiness.”

The hall listened attentively. Not one word was lost. This evening was the last, the final break in the life of every person there.

“But we worked with others besides those whom we considered people who had lost their way, but who were socially close to us. We tried to re-educate our class enemy as well. We did a great deal of work with them.

“Very many of them thought things over for the first time in camp, and re-lived their lives from the very beginning; they made fundamental re-adjustments of values, and realised the greatness of the tasks set by the Communist revolution. And now the Soviet workers must receive them well, in a friendly fashion, with no reservations or doubts....”

Firin’s last words caused a lively movement in the hall; they were repeated throughout the audience.

“Yes, yes! Receive them as workers, as members of our family,” shouted a woman in a red kerchief.

She jumped up and waved her pad of paper in the air. Everyone applauded. Everyone was excited—faces red, eyes sparkling. What a scene for our cameramen to take! But they had left their cameras and were also applauding Firin’s last words.

3

Shir-Akhmedov of the natzmen spoke next.

The new speaker was met with applause: the audience knew him well.

“The same Shir-Akhmedov—just look,” said a Chekist to his neighbour.

Everyone knew the name of Shir-Akhmedov. He was now manager of the cultural-educational section of one of the divisions of the Moscow-Volga construction. He spoke Russian fast and heatedly, but pronounced his vowels too hard, and muddled the endings of words. He began to study Russian in Tashkent, but only got hold of the language during the work on the canal in Karelia. Shir-Akhmedov is from Uzbekistan, with the ways of a townsman: black hair, a high forehead, a swarthy pallor, a little bump on his nose. He was the militant orator of Belomorstroy, speaking by day and by night, in frost and in thaw, during the persistent Winter work and during the Spring storms.

He spoke now in short sentences; he did not know the device of subordinate clauses.

“I organised a shock-workers’ phalanx in the sixth fighting section of the White Sea-Baltic Canal. There were 450 of them. They were natzmen. They took part in four famous emergency jobs with me. We did real shock work on canal No. 282 and lock No. 13. We declared an *emergency*. The management refused permission. We insisted. Finally we got permission at 2 a.m. At 4 a.m. we started work. One canal was littered up at lock No. 13. Fragments of rock had to be carried out. We worked 38 hours without a stop. That happened four times.”

The speaker was interrupted. He was applauded by people who knew what it means to work thirty-eight hours without a stop.

“We natzmen have learned to love Belomorstroy. It’s our own. It’s our labour. Long live the Party that built the canal!”

This last, Shir-Akhmedov’s only subordinate clause, was the most important part of his speech. The orchestra could not drown out the thunder of applause. Then Yankovskaya, a Belomorstroy woman shock-worker, spoke.

She came out in a poppy-red sweater; she was pale; about her mouth was a network of young wrinkles, such as come from frequent weeping. The reason was simple: she was only twenty-four, but she had gone through fire and hell. The hall applauded her as soon as she appeared, and she was so confused that she also applauded. The cameras were immediately trained on her.

And that was fine.

It is fine that our film preserves a living image of this woman, who said to herself when she reached the canal: “They won’t break me so soon.” But no one had tried to break her. On the contrary:

they had straightened her out and made her fit for real life. And she realised this especially clearly now.

While she was speaking a note came up to the presidium: "We declare that Yankovskaya worked with us like a regular record-breaker." The chairman smiled and nodded into the hall. And the hall nodded back in corroboration.

4

After Yankovskaya came Ovchinnikov, chairman of the G.P.U. Labour Commune No. 1 at Bolshevo. He spoke in the name of two thousand former thieves and lawbreakers. The people in the hall understood this, and listened to Ovchinnikov with the closest attention.

"Whatever anyone may say to me, a former thief with three sentences—a future engineer, now working in a factory as a mechanic—to me, a Communist, I know that the G.P.U. not only punishes, but also saves. We have dozens of people in our labour commune to-day who will be engineers a year from now. Fifty of us—former incorrigible thieves—are Communists. Some of us are directors of factories."

Ovchinnikov spoke excitedly, but very clearly and firmly. His intonation was unlike that of the Belomorstroy people. The latter still had a great deal of wordy enthusiasm. This man was already moulded—permanently formed. He personified the future of his audience, and spoke to them as to younger people.

"This is the last Belomorstroy conference; but it will not be long before the final conference, when we all sum up results together. We shall reach a stage when we have no lawbreakers in the Soviet Union. We shall live to see a conference when the G.P.U. will announce: 'There are no more criminals!'"

The speaker's excitement infected the entire audience.

"We'll have no more criminals!" shouted Yurtzeva.

"None at all!" shouted Levitanus.

The meeting was next addressed by the only woman engineer of Belomorstroy. She had been awarded the Order of the Banner of Labour.

Each speaker spoke in his own way.

The woman engineer spoke in a different manner and in a different form. But she spoke on the same great theme, the theme that bound her to her audience.

Kobyлина was excited. She tried to speak clearly—there were

few calm speeches that day—and with a dry, strictly business-like expression. This cost her obvious effort.

“She’s straining herself,” said someone on the left.

“Pride and swagger.”

“Once when we were working at night she fell into the diggings and we pulled her out. She acted just as stiffly then too, as though it didn’t matter to her.”

“She’s young; she’s one of us.” They began to listen:

“I came to Belomorstroy, tired, worn out, angry. I shut myself up like a clam. I expected the worst. The first thing that surprised me was the attitude of the Belomorstroy management. ‘You’re an engineer,’ they told me. ‘That’s splendid. We use engineers!’ I hadn’t expected that at all. Soon the magnitude of the construction took hold of me. I began to think only of and for the canal.

“We built it well. But why did we build well? Because we were one united family—engineers and workers; because the workers knew just what it was that they were building.

“I worked on one of the sections of Belomorstroy. It was a very small part of the construction. But I had more happiness there than ever before in all my life.

“There were difficult moments, such as the time when the temporary dam at Lake Vyg was washed away. But we kept our heads and repaired it. There’s nothing that can’t be repaired when you work with enthusiasm. And that’s precisely how we worked. We knew no difference between day and night. We had no regard for time. There was one task before us—to build a faultless canal. Every worker understood this and worked for it. I took care that the workers lived well, had good food and clothing. Their willingness was very important to me. There lay the guarantee of our success.”

The conference continued. All sorts of people spoke. The stage was brightly lighted. And before the stage lay the dark silent, over-filled hall. It breathed quietly; whispered now and then; laughed at times, and other times fell into contemplation.

We may continue the list of speakers. There was Nekrasov, former minister of Kerensky’s Provisional Government. He was plump and polite, and quite loquacious—a real parliamentarian. But he too was excited. He said:

“I remember how few people there were when we began the canal who believed we should succeed. Some of my fellow-engineers said, in the decisive period of the construction: ‘Yes, the canal seems to be coming on. But it needs a miracle. Such miracles seldom happen.’ This was not an accidental remark. We did not know then

that these miracles are repeated very often in Soviet constructions. That the name of this 'miracle' was: 'the enthusiasm of the workers.'

"I remember our competition with another projecting division. I remember how my projecting division lagged behind, and then the first victories of the general plan—completed before the time set, if only by a few hours. That was an unexampled feat for us, then.

"We began to understand that our engineering 'wisdom', without inspiration and creation, was miserably scant.

"We began to understand that it is not enough to have only workers, that it is not enough to feel that one is a contractor or a contractor's representative, as many engineers did before the revolution. One must be an organiser of the masses.

"On our way to camp most of us thought that our normal lives were ended. You could often hear sayings such as this: 'My life is over; now I merely exist. There's no way out. There's nothing left to do but to exist somehow until I die.'

"Our Chekist leaders had a slogan which affected us greatly; the slogan was: 'Approach people in the right way.'

"We ourselves learned later how to struggle with people for themselves; and we also used this method of struggle. But first we had to go through it ourselves. We learned that there is no such thing as hopelessness; that before us, as before all others lay an open road to full and equal participation in Socialist construction.

"I think with great gratitude of the new thing that entered my soul—the consciousness that we could redeem ourselves—that we could become full and equal participants in Socialist construction.

"Now we have the right to exclaim, to the builders of the canal, to the managers of the canal, and above all to the head of all the Socialist construction of the Union—to Comrade Stalin, the leader of the Communist Party—"Three cheers for Belomorstroy!"

Then came Mineev, famous for the assault on canal No. 193. He and his collective had received a red banner there. Now he stood before us.

Mineev pointed to one of the banners fastened to the walls of the hall. All heads turned to look at a stained and spotted banner—the historical emblem of the first reforing; they looked with pride or with envy: why isn't it ours?

Shock-worker Orlov came up to the speakers' rostrum.

"Orlov, tell them about our assault!" shouted someone from the hall.

"We went up to the chief," said Orlov, "and told him: 'Comrade chief! You can call out a guard or not, just as you please; but anyhow

we're going down to the bottom of the canal to-day, and we're not coming up until it's all cleared up to the very last bit of rock.' The chief told us there had been no orders and the thing would have to be discussed. But he might as well have talked to the wall. We went down and worked until I hung a sign asking people to wipe their feet before entering the canal, so as not to smear our red marks. I made that sign myself. We stayed at work for 57 hours at a stretch, and the management worked with us. They blasted the rock together with us, and didn't leave until their work was done. Everyone forgot what he had been. We were all one family."

Then came Khrunina—a sturdy, energetic girl. She had been arrested together with her father, but for different reasons.

"We started for the workings in March this year. We were to check up on production. We were all office workers, and knew nothing about production, and when we got to the work-grounds we lost our heads. We were deafened and dazed by the clanging of the hammers, the lights, the crowds of people. We were confused, just as I am confused now, speaking at this conference, because I've never made a speech before, and I don't know how to speak. Please forgive me for that. My father died on the canal; when he died he had already thrown off much of his past and had become an entirely different person.

"When I came to Belomorstroy and saw the human attitude towards me, so attentive and tactful, especially when I started work on the canal itself—I realised what a great mistake I had made when I was still almost a child. I understood that I must rehabilitate myself as quickly as possible—no matter how nor by what efforts, through how much work; that I must get back as soon as possible.

"Belomorstroy brought me back again to the family of workers. I was freed before my sentence expired, when our canal was finished ahead of time.... My father didn't live to see it, but he would be happy to know now that I shall be a fully valued participator in the Socialist construction of our country.

"When we got to the sixth section, the locomotives made twelve to thirteen trips in each shift. We were told to get this figure raised, it must be as high as possible, no matter what happened. That was our job. We used all sorts of methods; we not only had competitions in every unit, but actually involved every single person in competition; we organised competitions among the sections; we managed to get the workers' food improved, brought them hot dinners and so on, and held a number of meetings in the barracks on the question of clothing and general welfare. And as the result

BELOMOR

of all this, we got record figures—nineteen trips of the locomotive drivers in each shift. That was the record for Belomorstroy. Later we had other figures. That's what we achieved.”

The Belomorstroy shock-worker and poet, Kremkov, spoke. Kremkov read his poem “Chekist.”

His reading was energetic, even violent. He waved his arms, and poured it down on the audience. This was the Belomorstroy school of declamation. Thus did the stormy poets of Belomorstroy read their verses amid the trunks and heaps of granite in the forests, surrounded by the most attentive of audiences. Poetry was much honoured at Belomorstroy....

Engineer Ananyev, already known to the reader, speaks:

“Many years ago I wore on my breast an academic order with the tsarist arms. Now you see on my breast the red order of a shock-worker on the Belomorstroy construction. I must assure you, comrades, that not one of us engineers would exchange this order for any of the stars or marks of distinction of the capitalist bourgeois world.”

Chapter XXXV

MAXIM GORKY SUMS UP

Stalin called authors "the engineers of the soul." What did Maxim Gorky, the greatest living author who uses the Russian language, think of this side of the engineering work that had been done at Belomorstroy?

Before chronicling the speech he made to the canal workers it is worth while to see what this great, this deeply experienced analyst and chronicler of human nature had to say about the changes that had so deeply affected the lives of the men and women to whom he was speaking. For he has devoted a great deal of thought to the changes that have been made, and has, in a long and careful essay, evaluated and analysed what took place at Belomorstroy.

"To the list of great leaders," writes Gorky, "to the list of those who have brought honour and glory, valour and heroism to our country, we must now add the creators of the White Sea-Baltic Water Route. The building of this canal is one of the most brilliant victories of human energy over the bitterness and wildness of nature. But it is more than that: it is also a splendidly successful attempt at the transformation of thousands of former enemies of Soviet society. These men and women are now qualified helpers of the working class. The victory over nature accomplished by thousands of heterogeneous individuals of almost a hundred different races is amazing. More amazing is the victory that these individuals have gained over themselves. They have come out from the anarchy to which they had been reduced by the brutal circumstances of capitalist society. This labour reform policy of the G.P.U., this policy of education by teaching the truths of Socialism, and teaching the truths of Socialism through socially useful labour, has been splendidly justified. Its value had been shown before. There were—there are—many G.P.U. colonies and self-supporting communes, but the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal was the first attempt at reforging on such a large scale. The dictatorship of the proletariat has once more earned the right to declare

'I do not fight to kill as does the bourgeoisie: I fight to resurrect toiling humanity to a new life. I kill only when it is not possible to eradicate the ancient habit of feeding on human flesh and blood.'

"The 'diseased' and 'dangerous' people themselves tell of their cure, but they still cannot tell the story of much that they have lived through, for the simple technical reason that they have not as yet

words in which they can formulate the varied and complex processes that constitute the reforging of their feelings, their minds, and their habits.

“They all say, as one, that the first and most important push along the road to reform was given them by the straightforward human attitude taken towards them by the organisers of the work, the representatives of the G.P.U.—who are the bodyguard of the proletariat. These men of the G.P.U. are people of iron discipline, endowed with the self-command and the unselfishness which can come only as the result of wide and generally hard experience and of the special knowledge that is the result of prolonged association with ‘socially dangerous’ people—with conscious and unconscious enemies of the proletariat.

2

“What else, besides a human attitude in their gaolers, did the ‘canal soldiers’ find in their work on Belomorstroy which they cannot as yet explain?

“They were shown that they—little people that they were, accustomed to being robbed in their dens—that they, when organised collectively, when united in battle against the stony obstinacy of Nature, could conquer her resistance. They found that they could become the changers of the world. The romanticism always to be found in the outcast children of society—no matter who they may be in calling and ‘estate’—is a disease caused by insult and humiliation. What happens if, for some reason or other, the social order of the ‘sensible’ bourgeois casts off one of its units and thus sets him face to face with his ego? When that happens one must have a great reserve of self-respect to keep from degenerating to a state of semi-idiocy; and one must be able to think, if one is to discover the single common reason for all the insult, humiliation and injustice which are so shamefully frequent under capitalism. But the bourgeois himself cannot develop human self-respect: for even though all bourgeois are ‘masters,’ yet, in a class society everyone is inevitably somebody’s servant. Capitalist society does not teach one to think; it teaches instead belief in a creed which it contradicts continually in all its daily actions. If a person who has been thrown back on his ego and pushed in upon himself is of more or less strong character, he very soon begins to feel that he is not only an excluded, but that he is also an exceptional person—a hero. ‘Here am I, and there is the world which has no place for me; hence, the

world is my enemy!' This simple tune is the *motif* underlying all the naive and clamorous music of the apologists and poets of an anarchistic state of society.

"This, of course, is romanticism of a high order—'first class.' In most cases, matters are much simpler: some people believe that it is more profitable to be a thief than to be a lackey: others become 'enemies of society' because bourgeois life is boring and grey. They see the painful antithesis—the mindlessness of the rich and the dwarfed and stunted intelligence of the poor. To critical and sensitive minds the antithesis is painful and offensive, and so in some people the natural romanticism of youth is changed into the evil and anarchic romanticism of desperation. It becomes a sort of banditry, 'if my life is worth a kopek, why should yours be worth two?'

"As often as not the rich man is more insignificant than the poor: and always, despite his idiotic bustle after profits, he is obviously a parasite. In general, the reasons for the production of 'socially dangerous people' in bourgeois society are so diverse and—often—so petty, that one can't explain or even list them all. The romanticism of gangsters and of 'law-breakers' is visible in their intercourse with one another (it is, for instance, very clearly reflected in their songs).

"To begin with—when he is first included in an atmosphere of great, useful work, involving himself and others—the anarchic law-breaker sees nothing. He does not see how his animosity towards human beings is being directed into the struggle against rock, swamp and river. But very soon he begins to feel that he is useful! That means a recognition that he is now also more important than before. Man has developed throughout his mammalian history; he is human in as far as he is a worker, so when he is put into conditions which allow free development of his various abilities, it is natural for him to begin unconsciously to accept his real calling. The success of his own labour begins in its turn to change the conditions of his life, and the new conditions arouse in him new demands.

3

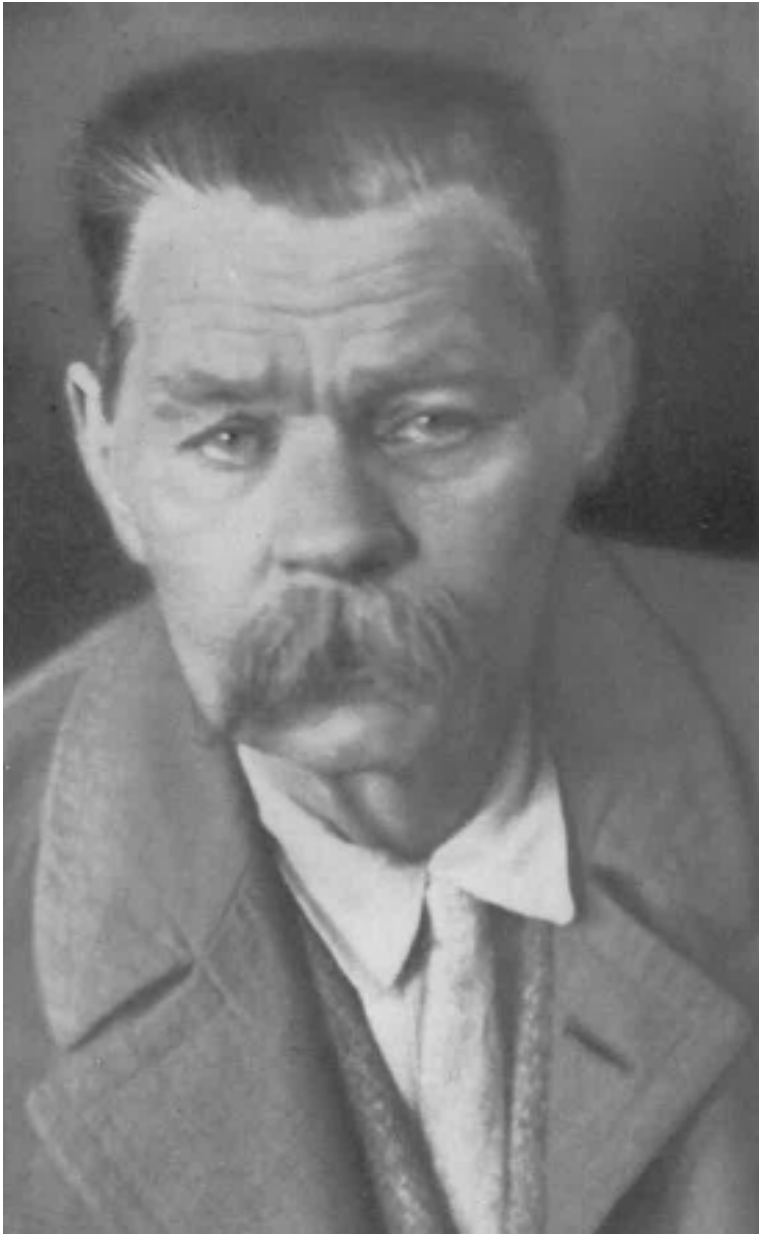
"What else did the 'socially dangerous' people see at the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Waterway? The great majority of the prisoners were illiterate or semi-illiterate when they came to work at Belomorstroy. When they got there they saw that no one was keeping from them the rich opportunities that education gives

to a man—‘You want to study?—Study then.’—More.—‘You must study. Your work demands it.’ These prisoners had been born and had spent their lives in a society where education was in the hands of the masters, and the masters had the right to set a limit to the mental growth of children of the workers and peasants. In bourgeois society knowledge itself, knowledge that creates life and lightens human labour, is never much valued. Knowledge and research are chiefly valued as a way of making profit, often predatory profit. The shop keepers (who in capitalist society control all life) are very eager for increases in the number of purchasers, but they are not very anxious for knowledge to create among them critics of their vulgar and poverty-stricken life.

“On the White Sea Canal there were two sorts of educational forces at work: in the first place semi-illiterate people learnt from people of their own class, people who were close enough to them to understand them. This sort of teaching gave astonishing results. On the other hand, those pupils to whom education was something quite new saw educated and extremely gifted old and middle-aged engineers working side by side with them. They saw these educated people—former masters, former enemies—transformed into the most energetic fellow labourers, working with all their strength like ‘Udarniks’—and working for conscience not for fear. Hundreds of socially ‘diseased’ and ‘dangerous’ people joined shock-brigades and became ‘canal soldiers’ with a conscious personal interest in the success of the work.

4

“There were quite a number of village Kulaks at Belomorstroy. Many of these did good work. In the beginning they began to take a hand because of their proud consciousness of their importance in the world: they were ‘the masters,’ and they must show these thieves how a ‘real’ person can work. But soon this sort of pride gave way to something else, which was hardly clear to the Kulaks themselves. A Kulak would come to the manager and tell him, in a business-like way: ‘I was arrested for hiding grain and advising my neighbours to do the same. When I was questioned, after being arrested, I denied the charge. Now I admit it. I did hide grain!’ And he would tell in detail how much grain he had hidden and where, and how much, and where his fellow-villagers had hidden theirs.



MAXIM GORKY

“On the whole Kulaks were the hardest to educate. At the time of their arrest in their resistance to the lawful demands of the Government many of them had gone to terrible extremes. One of them, who had hidden over seven tons of grain, allowed his wife and two of his children to die of hunger and almost died himself. But even in these half-animals, the idolators of private property, the truth of collective labour at last undermined a zoological individualism.

“There are hundreds of stories which show that even some of the most set and conservative small proprietors working on the White Sea-Baltic Water Route were at last able to ‘forget themselves’ and understand the ‘State importance’ of the work, its economic usefulness, and its significance in defence against external enemies—though they were brought to this understanding, as their stories show, through the psychology of the ‘master.’

5

“On the other hand, their instinctive opponents, the thieves and other violators of the ‘sacred law of property’ began to understand the importance of work, because it opened to them every path to the improvement and development of their own abilities, made them into skilled workers, and restored to them the rights of citizens of the Soviet Union.

“The thieves understood more than the ‘masters,’ they understood that they were taking part in the work of creating a society which would assure people the right to mental growth. And so, as the result of twenty months of work, the country has a few thousand new skilled builders who have gone through a hard but formative experience, and have been cured of the creeping infection of petit bourgeois society—a disease from which millions of people are suffering, a disease which can be for ever destroyed only by taking part in some heroic enterprise.”

6

When Gorky mounted the speakers’ rostrum and saw before him the men and women whose struggles and whose victories he could perhaps understand and appreciate better than anyone else, he at first spoke very slowly and thoughtfully. He weighed his words, made long pauses, and gesticulated awkwardly, as though talking to himself. There was unusual silence in the hall.

“I am happy and touched,” he said, “by what has been said here, and what I know—I have been watching the G.P.U. reform people

since 1928—all this cannot but excite me. You have done a great thing—a very great thing.

“In the old times bandits and merchants—and merchants are also bandits—sang a song:

In our youth we killed and robbed a-plenty.

In our old age, we must save our souls.

“And they saved their souls—they gave money to monasteries and built churches, and sometimes even hospitals.

“You are not old, you are young people. You haven’t killed or robbed so very much: any capitalist robs more than all of you taken together! And you have given the country the White Sea-Baltic Canal, which is of great economic importance and strengthens the country’s defences, and, reforged yourselves through labour; you have given the country splendid, trained workers, who will be of use on other constructions.

“But besides all this, you have raised the spirits of a good hundred writers—have both shown them yourselves and what you have done. This will be of great importance. Many writers who are still undecided, and who still do not understand many things in our construction, have received something through learning about your canal, something which will have a great effect on their work. Now there will appear in literature a spirit which will move it forward and bring it to the level of your great deeds.

“You are now building the Moscow-Volga Canal, and many other constructions which will change the face and the geography of our country, and which will enrich it from day to day.

“Our writers must tell about all this. For facts appear first, and are then followed by their artistic reflections. And there are plenty of facts.

“I am a very happy person, for I have lived to the time when I can speak of such things and feel that I am speaking the truth.

“When you are my age, there will be no class enemies; the only enemy against whom your energy will be directed will be Nature—and you will be her master. You are going forward to that time, and there’s nothing more to say; but before that time you will have to destroy capitalism.

“I congratulate you on what you have become. I congratulate the G.P.U. workers on their splendid work. I congratulate our wise Party and its leader—the man of steel, Comrade Stalin!”

Music and shouts of greetings filled the room. Conclusions had been drawn; the most important thing had been said, what, one might think, could the other speakers say?

BELOMOR

But there were many more speakers. Kagan of the G.P.U. spoke last.

“Belomorstroy Canal soldiers! This conference will be a historical one, for the very last camp conference is not far off. The time when reform camps will no longer be needed—when everybody will be included in the current of the building of Socialism, and when the boundary to be crossed will be not from camp to work, but from Socialism to Communism—that year, that month, that day is not far off. We are approaching it under the leadership of our great Party—the Party of Lenin and Stalin.”

“Ah, you devils—you don’t know yourselves what great things you’ve done,” said Gorky, as he went to the back of the stage. The Chekists smiled. They were concerned over their new tasks.

They were thinking of the Moscow-Volga Canal.

THE END