







# OUT STEPPES THE DON

(The Diary of a visit to the USSR  
by an Asian Professor)

BY  
C. C. de SILVA



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by an Asian Professor)

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TO MY WIFE  
IRENE MAY

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## FOREWORD

J. L. C. RODRIGO, C.M.G., M.A. (Oxon.)

*Professor Emeritus, University of Ceylon.*

IN this fast moving narrative, Professor C. C. de Silva, Head of the Department of Paediatrics, University of Ceylon, describes his recent tour of the U.S.S.R. among Educational and Health Ministries, Children's and Maternity Hospitals, Laboratories and Research Centres buzzing with the activities of purposeful and untiring toilers. This was for the Professor more than a busman's holiday. He tempers his scientific bias and medical zeal with visits to the Bolshoi and other ballets which he so much enjoys and church services as soul-stirring and bringing "all heaven before his eyes" as those in the supposedly more Christian parts of the world. He studies with longing care the architecture in old and new Moscow and Leningrad as well as in "Silken Samarkand", the multitude of impressive exhibits in the museum galleries and above all the mannerisms of the people he met, natives as well as tourists—Americans as usual in a tearing hurry and aimless visitors who descend in swarms upon this new Utopia. As a devoted teacher he found time also to meet the Russian speaking Ceylon students at Lumumba University, engaged in technological and medical studies and eager to compare notes with a distinguished countrymen of theirs, still a student but more eager than themselves.

His stay was brief but in that period he covered a fairly vast area going to some of the principal cities in the U.S.S.R. He was many times disappointed but that did not ruffle him. He only registers surprise that these set-backs should happen in a country, generally supposed to be up-to-date and well-organised. The lifts and telephones were as erratic and undependable as many of the agents who arranged his appointments. Punctuality was as little observed as in Ceylon. The food too often was unappetising and many of the hotels primitive. All these and more he records in the interests of accuracy, a corrective to many of the ideas popularly held regarding the U.S.S.R. They sometimes seem commonplace facts but they add to the faithfulness of the picture of the country that he gives.

Dr. de Silva had many advantages denied to the ordinary tourists. He was a guest whom the Soviet Academy of Science honoured with an invitation to visit the centres of study and research in the special fields of paediatrics, medicine and science education. This enabled him to meet many distinguished workers in these fields in the country-pioneers as well as persons who by a



long record of research and publications had established reputations. The greater number of them were women but that in no way diminished the ardour of the discussions he carried on with these Minervas on the problems they had in common with us in Ceylon. They showed him their work, gave him facts, opened up new lines of thought and sometimes in reply to his searching questions, they gave him figures. Too often, their vague figures sought to claim Soviet superiority over the rest of mankind but Professor de Silva is himself no mean statistician and carries in his head figures more reliable than some others do in their files. Those thrust before him he was able to set against figures relating to our own country which showed that in certain respects this little land of Ceylon did not fall far below the achievements of the mighty Russians. All along Dr. de Silva's aim is to utilise this visit for the work he and his colleagues are engaged on in Ceylon. The U.S.S.R. is popularising the study of science and spreading its gospel among her peoples. How is this achieved? He learns the answers, the possibilities open to us through the Press, University calendars, and discussions with eminent men and women. He will now endeavour to adapt these methods to our country. He is well fitted to do this as a former General President of the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science and still a power in its deliberations. The last Prime Minister had been won over to the cause of the scientists. In her address to the Association a few years ago she assured the government's support for the furtherance of scientific research in Ceylon. The Russians have also by this timely visit been apprised of the necessity of doing more research and teaching of Tropical Medicine. Britain, U.S.A. and many European and Asian countries all have first rate Research and teaching Institutes of Tropical Diseases. "Why not U.S.S.R.?" he kept urging and his plea for a more vigorous programme may possibly have fallen on receptive ears.

This book is thus most welcome. Hundreds of Ceylon men and women in battalions and not single spies go abroad every year. They go on scholarships, on study tours, on conferences, on leadership grants, on official and unofficial missions but on their return they have little to say of the men and women they have met or of the centres and the institutes they have visited. Dr. de Silva has laid aside the reticence and drawn material from his observations as carefully set down in his diaries. The topics he discusses are of both general and specialised interest and what he writes would therefore concern readers of both classes of writing. He is a Paediatrician, a University teacher, a lover of Art, Music and Books; he owns a library of wide-ranging interests but above all he is a lover of his fellow-men. His motives for writing this book, which he mentions in his Preface, are also worthy of commenda-



tion. Thus he is eminently equipped to give us an interesting and educative book. It will appeal to his medical and scientific colleagues as well as to laymen.

Professor C. C. de Silva by this effort now joins the band of medical immortals with literary leanings in Ceylon, happily increasing in number, like Dr. Lucian de Zilwa, Dr. R. L. Spittel, Dr. S. C. Paul and Dr. Andreas Nell. Dr. de Silva has built up a reputation as a forceful and forthright speaker. To that reputation he now adds by showing himself in this his first long "lay" publication, a vivid writer who fills a book primarily on science and medicine with fascinating and valuable details of the lives of ordinary men and women in that great country—the Soviet Union.

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## PREFACE

IT had long been my wish to visit the U.S.S.R., a country over which controversy still continues. I wanted to learn the truth for myself but I was denied the opportunity till 1963.

A cultural exchange agreement between the Soviet Union and Ceylon was signed a few years ago. Scientists and artists, historians and philosophers as well as priests and politicians of one country were thus enabled to visit the other. Till the end of my stay in U.S.S.R. I was unaware that medical men had been excluded from this agreement. In U.S.S.R. medicine is not one of the activities of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Like engineering, it is considered a technological subject and is under the purview of an Academy of Medical Sciences established in 1946. This Academy has no branches like those of the Academy of Science in each republic. There is only the Central Academy in Moscow, but peripherally it is represented by the Ministry of Health in each republic. This dichotomy was a handicap to me in many ways: I fell between two stools. I was the first guest of the Academy of Science to visit the Soviet Union from my country, and it was unfortunate that a medical man and not a scientist "pure" should have been the pioneer. How this occurred may be of interest to the reader.

The invitation for Ceylon to send two scientists to visit the U.S.S.R. for one month as guests of the Soviet Academy of Science came from the central government of the Soviet Union to the Ceylon Ministry of External Affairs who sent it on to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The Hon. Minister forwarded this invitation to the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science (C.A.A.S.) and requested it to make two nominations. When this matter was discussed in Council, a "pure" biochemist from the Medical Research Institute and myself were the only volunteers. The snag was that the invitees had to meet their own travel costs from Colombo to Tashkent and back again. The Soviet Academy undertook all their expenses within the Soviet Union. The cost of this journey to Tashkent and back was slightly over Rs. 2,000/- (£144). Very few of the members of the C.A.A.S. would or could bear this damage themselves and the C.A.A.S. was certainly not able to do so either.

Our two names were forwarded to the Minister of Cultural Affairs who in turn had to submit them to the Hon. Prime Minister for her official permission. No one is allowed to leave Ceylon on any mission or accept an invitation to attend any conference with-



out her sanction. After a short delay her approval was obtained. My difficulty was that I had to be back in Ceylon by the second week of July; a W.H.O. Professor of Social Paediatrics was arriving here early that month on the invitation of our government in order to advise me regarding a teaching programme of Social Paediatrics. I therefore informed the Soviet Embassy that I must leave Ceylon in the first week of June. We eventually heard on Saturday, the first of June, that the Academy would be pleased to welcome us early in that month. I accordingly made my air reservations and other plans.

Two days before I was due to leave Colombo, my biochemist co-traveller had to cancel his trip owing to compelling family reasons. Hence I became an illegitimate lone wolf with rather dubious credentials to be the guest of a body as illustrious as the Soviet Academy of Science! There are advantages and disadvantages in being a sole guest. One can express one's own wishes on what to see or do, where to go etc. without any fear that one may be treading on any fellow traveller's corns. The disadvantages are that the Academy, especially the local branch as at Tashkent, may not be willing to accommodate the wishes of one lone individual as it would be if two or three made the same request.

My journey took me from Tashkent and Samarkand, to Moscow, Kiev and Leningrad. In the final week I paid a flying visit to London to see my son and his family but I had to return to Moscow in order to catch the most convenient plane back home! In every place I endeavoured not only to study some of the scientific and technological advances but also the cultural and everyday life of the Soviet citizen.

I must make it plain at this point that I am not a communist. If anything, I was more of an anti-communist before this journey, due to my previous wide travels in Western Europe, my education and many friends in the United Kingdom, my three visits and contacts in U.S.A. and finally my earlier and fairly intimate association with the Moral Rearmament Movement.

In spite of all this as a medical scientist, (I dare not call myself a scientist without this qualification) it had always been my unfulfilled desire to visit and to judge for myself the achievements and aims of this new civilization which is the most interesting and most significant development of our times. My tour has not converted me to communism but I have shed my anti-communism. I do not believe that the communist at heart is any more evil or wicked or sin-stained than the petit or grand bourgeois of the West or of the East! *I believe there is as much goodness of heart, pursuit of beauty and search for truth among the peoples of the Soviet Union as in any other country in the world.*



Have I been brain-washed? If I have, I may reply that it is the same kind of brain washing as I have undergone in U.S.A. or Canada, in U.K. or Australia. It was as cultured and as civilised a procedure as in any of these countries. I believe that I am in a better position to make comparisons between these countries than many people because of my previous travels and the numerous friends I have made in many lands.

I am now in my sixtieth year! I have had wide experience of many countries and many peoples. I believe I can distinguish truth from falsehood, sincerity from hypocrisy, and genuine gold from spurious gilt. It is not easy to bluff me as I have had a long experience with hundreds of medical students and they do sharpen one's wits.

My visit lasted only one month. Does that debar me from forming a sound judgement? Of course, one persons's interpretations of any event or events may be wide of the mark but if one is sufficiently curious and inquisitive, if one persists in asking intelligent, though sometimes seemingly impertinent and personal questions, if one keeps one's weather eye open all the time and observes the deportment, the expressions of people, what they do, what they buy and what they sell, if one is careful to check important bits of information culled from one source with another, if one trains oneself to discard the unimportant, and to gather the important, then I believe that anyone with average intelligence can make observations and draw fairly reliable conclusions. If, further, he has a love of humanity he can make some contribution to mutual tolerance and forbearance, to a dissemination of trust and to the elimination of distrust between peoples and nations and thereby advance the cause of peace in our time. My facts are correct but my comments and interpretations though subject to human error are made in all sincerity. I have no axe to grind. I am no politician and I have no political ambitions. You may doubt my perspicacity but you have no right to doubt my sincerity or my veracity.

Another criticism that I have had to contend with is that mine was a "guided" tour, meaning thereby, I believe, that the Academy would have shown me only the things that they wanted me to see and not what I wished to see. This is not quite correct. There were a few things that I wished to see but I could not. Some of these were due to my own fault in making my request too late. In a few others I suspected with good reason that I was deliberately prevented from seeing them. I shall detail these in the course of my story but by and large I can say that most of the things that I wanted to see and most of the people whom I wished to meet, I did see and meet. Many people have asked me whether I was



allowed to wander about freely without an interpreter or guide. I was at perfect liberty to do so. Many a time I took a walk through a park or down a public street and bought stationery, stamps or picture post cards at the wayside booths. I even attended the theatre and ballet all by myself without a guide though at most performances the Academy paid for my guide as well as for myself. One does not wish to wander out alone too much owing to the language difficulties, but there is no let or hindrance to one's movements. I had no suspicion that I was being followed. I did not think my letters had been opened though there was sometimes a great delay in transit; once or twice friends in Ceylon complained that my letters had been tempered with. There might therefore be some censorship of letters, as one of my medical friends who visited the U.S.S.R. in 1962 was quite sure that there was. Though at the time of writing this it is six months since I returned home, I have still not had any replies to some important letters that I wrote months ago to three Soviet friends!

I found, of course, no criticism of the government or of the political leaders but the press particularly "Krokodil" lampooned scientists, industrialists, school-teachers, etc. in cartoons.

Finally, you will perhaps ask why I have written this book. There are several reasons. I kept a very full diary of my journey through the Soviet Union jotting down each morning the doings, the talk and the sights of the previous day. I believe that these impressions and conclusions, carefully edited and vetted, would interest a wider public than that of my immediate family and of my few intimate friends. Some of the newspapers in Ceylon had been willing to publish a series of articles about my visit, but I desired that whatever I decided to make public should be of a less ephemeral nature than that afforded by the centre page of a newspaper.

Lastly, I hope that those who read my words may be stimulated to make an early visit to the Soviet Union. I have visited about forty countries in the world, but undoubtedly the U.S.S.R. is the most fascinating of them all. It is my earnest hope that in some way or other this book may be a means, small and insignificant no doubt, but still a means, for the peoples of socialist and non-socialist countries to shed their prejudices and suspicions, and to visit one another's countries; thus they will learn that human nature is much the same everywhere and that the bulk of the people in all countries long for peace and hate war and disruption.

## CHAPTER 1

### Journey to Tashkent

ONE of the curses of modern civilization is the multiplicity of forms one has to fill and the regulations one has to observe before one attempts even such a simple thing as leaving one's country for a period however short.

What with surrendering a rice ration book, applying for and obtaining foreign exchange, buying a ticket etc. it proved a nightmare to a person like me. However, thanks to the intelligent young men at the exchange control office, I was able to get Rs. 10/- a day or Rs. 310/- for a month's stay plus £15 extra, which gave me about Rs. 17/- a day as pocket money!\* I had no idea when I left Ceylon that this would be the only money I would have with me throughout my stay in U.S.S.R. According to the cultural agreement between our two countries, transport and hotel charges are only met by the respective host countries, but no cash is given to the guest! I understood that the agreements with some other countries, particularly between India and the Soviet Union, were different and Indian and Soviet guests were each given cash in the host country in addition to their expenses! Rs. 17/- amounted to a little over three roubles (£1. 4s.)\* at the present rate of exchange so there was not very much one could buy with it. In Tashkent I had also to pay for my ballet and theatre tickets though at the other places these were all provided free by the Academy.

I was specially pleased to see Mr. Bydakov from the Soviet Embassy at the Colombo Airport to bid me farewell. He was there to "orientate" me and to give me last minute instructions for my arrival in Tashkent.

Bydakov saw the paper-back I was reading "Conversations with Stalin" by Djilas, a Yugoslav communist and remarked "Oh, things are quite different now from what they were in Stalin's time". I said I was well aware of that. I finished the book before I got to Delhi. It was the story of the evolution of the author from being a dedicated and devoted admirer of the Soviet type of communism back to sanity and Tito's brand of the same! Stalin though deemed a tyrant was a very successful one and that is all that matters in the modern world—success, success and yet again, success. The world has no patience nor sympathy with failures, however worthy and admirable their characters. They are crucified alive but the monstrous successes sometimes, as in the case of Stalin, meet with the same fate after death: but does that matter?

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\* (£1 = 2½ roubles 1 rouble = Rs. 5 or approximately 1 U.S.A. Dollar)



Bydakov was a natty Russian with a crew-cut and pleasant smile, shrewd but sincere and friendly. I liked him and though a Muscovite he said that Leningrad was one of the most beautiful cities in the world. After seeing both cities, I can endorse this statement as quite unbiased.

Before I left Colombo I had telegraphed my American friends, the Greenes to reserve me a room at a hotel in Delhi; I arrived there just past midnight.

At Delhi I was swindled twice in a couple of hours. I wanted a travelling alarm clock as I had forgotten to pack one. Susie's (my hostess) chauffeur took me first to an expensive shop where the cheapest was Rs. 60/- (£4. 6s.). I could not afford this sum, so he took me next to one of those tiny booths sited at one end of a verandah. The owner showed me a cheap Japanese one for Rs. 35/- which after a perfunctory test and some bargaining I bought for Rs. 30/-. That night I found one could not set it at all as the bell would ring as soon as one moved the switch, whatever the hour registered on the dial. Later I learnt that the man refused to take it back so I had to collect it at Delhi on my return and bring it home. It is still not working in spite of a couple of trips to a repairer.

I took a Russian woman doctor to lunch at an expensive looking, air-conditioned orchestrated restaurant in Connaught Circus. She had a "Tandoori" chicken which she ate with her fingers much to my astonishment but I was doing likewise a couple of days later in U.S.S.R. where everyone else did the same. I have seen Americans also use their fingers in their posh faculty clubs and restaurants but I could not imagine the inhibited British doing it even in the privacy of their own bedrooms!

The lunch cost me over Rs. 25/- (nearly £2) which was much more than I could afford but it was worth it because Dr. S. was such a delightful companion and but for her I would never have got to Tashkent when I did. The unkindest cut was when the waiter diddled me for Rs. 2/- change, a fraud I did not discover till I had left the restaurant!

To be absolutely fair to Delhi Wallahs, I must add a strange experience that I had on my return to Delhi from Moscow. I had to take a dilapidated old taxi from Susie's home, 6 miles out, to Connaught Circus. It was driven by a villainous looking Sikh complete with beard and turban. When I got to my destination he had no change for a Rs. 10/- note. The meter read Rs. 6/75 which I thought excessive as I had done this journey for about Rs. 4/- odd before. However, I changed my note and handed him Rs. 7/-. Guess my surprise when he returned Rs. 2/- and



said that his meter read wrong! I wonder how many taxi drivers in Colombo or, for that matter, anywhere else in the world would do the same! Delhi looked much more decent and clean after that.

I visited two hospitals in Delhi that morning, the first was the Holy Family Hospital, run by the nuns, for paying patients—modern, well-equipped, adequately staffed and spotlessly clean. My purpose was to see an old American friend, Philip who had been near death's door because his case had been mishandled at Hyderabad. Fortunately he had been flown to Delhi in the nick of time and operated on by an American surgeon for Crohn's Disease or regional ileitis which achieved notoriety when President Eisenhower was operated on for the same condition a few years earlier.

It was a terrifying contrast going from this modern American type of hospital to the Kalavati Saran Children's Hospital which was a shambles. This was a teaching hospital and I had an appointment to see Professor Sheila Singh Paul, the Professor of Paediatrics there. At the Out Patient's Department, where I first enquired for her, a staff nurse would not even look at me but went on dressing a child and pointed in one direction with her finger and said rudely "go there". This I meekly did. We found ourselves at a gate but the gate keeper did not seem to know Professor Paul's name nor her whereabouts. Fortunately, a medical student came riding his mobike which I stopped. He gave me fairly explicit directions and even offered to accompany me. I refused this generous offer but I wished I had not!

After several more minutes of wandering about we eventually found the building. Here were two girls in a tiny receptionist's office: one was telephoning and the other looking beautiful but otherwise disengaged. I asked this charmer where Professor Paul might be. She stretched out her hand vaguely and pointed to the left. I went in the direction indicated and found myself in a dark corridor flanked by several doors on either side. At the further end of the corridor I found a nurse who asked me to try the last door on the right. I did and found myself in a woman's toilet! The door next to this was an office but it was empty of humans. I went back to the charmer in the receptionist's office. "Can't you find her for me?" "I don't know" was her only helpful reply, "I don't work here".

I could not restrain myself any further. "I have come 1,500 miles from Ceylon to see your Professor and I have an appointment with her and this is the receptionist's office and all you say is, "I don't know, I don't work here". She then suggested that



I ask the doorman. He pointed to the empty office; I told him it was vacant. Then he pointed in the opposite direction. Fortunately another man came up and he took us in the signalled direction. Here at last we met a Sister with an average intelligence quotient who had been informed by Sheila of my visit. She took me back to the empty office and gave me a seat and in five minutes Sheila herself appeared. She is an old friend of mine, a very pleasant personality; a *rara avis*, a Christian Sikh. She is extremely intelligent but owing to her glamorous looks possibly, few take her intellect seriously. With her one prefers to discuss circuses rather than cirrhosis. My main purpose in making this visit was to meet Dr. S-g, whom I have already mentioned. I had met this arresting personality four months earlier at the All-India Paediatric Conference in Hyderabad where we had a violent argument about the interpretation of blood films in leukaemias of children. We disagreed completely but none the less we have developed a mutual regard and respect for each other.

I had to get permission from her boss, Professor M. in order to take S-g out to lunch. We first went to her flat which was in the hospital campus. She was given a car and a chauffeur. She had a three-roomed, dreadfully depressing flat, sparsely furnished. She had had to share this apartment with another Russian woman doctor who had gone home quite recently, so at the moment she was all alone except for a mongrel who was most friendly in spite of being locked up inside all the time S-g was in hospital. She fed him on about one whole pound of raw meat before we left for lunch.

S-g was in her forties, and was just developing crows' feet, and had been widowed in the war. She had a lovely pale, slightly yellowish complexion. Her hair was a dark Titian shade, probably artificial and she wore it a la Bouffon. Like most Russians she had some gold teeth. Her eyes were her most attractive feature and these wrinkled up in a most fetching manner when she smiled. She must have been very beautiful twenty years ago. She told me at lunch that the men and women in Russia were not half as attractive as the Delhi natives and that I would not be at all impressed with the good looks of the Russian females! She seems to be attracted to the dark handsomeness of the Delhi Wallah.

She was fed up with Delhi however and she had exceeded her term of service by three months and was thoroughly homesick for Moscow where she had a widowed mother, a married sister and her family. She thought Delhi was like a village sans T.V., sans opera, ballet, etc. She spoke longingly of her garden and home and gave me a letter to her mother with her telephone number. I never could get in touch with her however as her niece fetched my letter and promised to contact me later but she never did. Was she afraid or was she uninterested?



I asked S-g whether the Soviet Government did not object to foreigners being invited informally to the homes of the locals. She evaded a direct reply but asked me to telephone her mother through my interpreter and go there with him as none of her family knew any English.

S-g invited me to a party that evening but I could not go because I had already promised Susie my hostess that I would go with her to some American friends who had been in Ceylon earlier! We got a taxi at the Post office and I directed the driver to take us to S-g's flat first. As she got down she said, "It is better this way, to say good-bye here", and ran away from me as fast as her two little feet could carry her. I was left staring into space!

That evening we talked a lot about Ceylon. Mrs. Lawrence an American sounded very sincere and nostalgic when she remarked, "We miss Ceylon, it is difficult to take a personal interest in anyone here at all, but in Ceylon we shared the troubles and joys of so many Ceylonese". I thought it wonderful to hear any foreigner saying that she missed Ceylon, especially in these times, and said so aloud. Susie butted in, "Oh, but anyone who has been in Ceylon for any length of time feels the same". It is so refreshing to hear these sentiments in these denigrating days. Soon after 11 p.m. I retired as I had my packing to do and I had to be up at 4 a.m. My newly purchased alarm clock let me down but Susie woke me herself at 4 a.m.; I was ready by 4.30 a.m. My hostess drove me to the airport herself as she did not wish to disturb her chauffeur so early as he had had a long and trying day. However, I think the chauffeur was disappointed as he wanted to see me off himself for very personal reasons! I was glad she did because I was not allowed to take any Indian money out at all though the official document, that I had been given in Madras, said that I could take out Rs. 75/-. These regulations were changed almost as frequently as in Ceylon and even the official hand-outs given to all incoming tourists could not keep pace with them.

When we arrived at the airport at 4.50 a.m. I was informed that Mr. Smirnov, the local head of Aeroflot was already on the plane but had had a word with the man at the desk about me and he assured me that I was almost certain to get my seat. In front of me in the queue were six or seven persons—Indonesians, Russians, etc. who had all had firm bookings, but only yesterday I had been told at the City office of Air India International that no firm bookings were possible for this particular flight from Delhi. They spoke of some agreement with Aeroflot that only empty seats could be allotted and these only after the arrival of the plane from Djakarta. The ways of Air India are inscrutable! However, I was allotted the very last economy class seat available, the 11th, leaving only two first class seats vacant. In spite of the classless society, Aero-



not still runs two classes! Later on I found the same on the long distance trains in U.S.S.R.; not having acquired any experience on short distance surface travel, I could not say whether there were any class distinctions or not on these trains.

I bade Susie goodbye just as the dawn was breaking. It was already beginning to hot up and I was feeling it as I had a warm sports jacket on as well as my heavy overcoat.

The plane was an IL 18 and was very comfortable. I was quite happy spending the 3½ hours from Delhi to Tashkent writing my diary from the time I left Colombo right up that moment. We were off at 6.10 a.m. and at 7 a.m. we were flying over the Himalayas. A splendid sight it was with the sun glistening on the snow-capped mountains. In the few glimpses I could get from my inside seat I noticed that some of the mountains were clear of snow at the peak but had plenty of it lower down on the shoulders. I supposed this was due to the effects of direct sunlight melting the snow on the top but on the shoulders it was protected from the direct rays by crags, ravines and boulders.

At 8 a.m. we were flying over a desert, I was told that this was a part of Sinkiang, belonging to China. In another hour we were over the Pamirs, the highest mountains of U.S.S.R. I had my first taste of Russian caviare at breakfast on the plane. What an improvement on the horrid, saltish Danish and Canadian stuff that is so liberally served at some parties at home. This was almost saltless, much larger, juicier and altogether much tastier.

The two hostesses on this plane were most unattractive; one thin and scraggy with an oval face and rather mousy-coloured hair; the other Amazonian in proportions with a pudding face and blondish in colouring. I remembered S-g's remarks about the unattractiveness of the Russian female!

We arrived in Tashkent sharp to time. For minutes before as we were losing height we approached a lovely vale studded with farms thick with green growth, low hills and a soil that looked extremely fertile. This first prospect of the Soviet land was very pleasing. I only hope that man is not as vile as he is painted by some Western writers!

It took more than twenty minutes after our arrival for us to alight. Five minutes after our arrival, a man and a woman in white smocks and caps entered the plane and having greeted everyone, marched to the front. I asked my neighbour who they were. "Health Officers", they said. The woman returned to our cabin with another female similarly attired and gave each passenger a cheap thermometer which we were asked to place in our axillae. I thought anyone who wanted to cheat, could do so easily as the

doctor did not know whether one placed it outside or inside one's clothes but I was mistaken! One of the women passengers was ordered to put the thermometer back as apparently it had registered too low a temperature. We had next to produce our health certificates. These were religiously and carefully "read" by one of them. I met these two girls later in the waiting room at Tashkent and tried to get them to talk but they professed to know no English. I wondered how they had read my health certificate and known that it was in order! They could possibly understand written but not spoken English! One of them resembled a cat more than any human being I have encountered. She had full-rounded cheeks with high maxillae, a pointed chin and sunken, grey-green eyes with an untidy mop of hair sticking out from under her cap. One could hang her up quite safely on a clothes line!

I was asked to go into the waiting hall which was on the second floor (American style). It was the most opulent looking waiting room I have ever seen in any airport and I must have seen nearly a hundred, including the most palatial one at Beirut. It was about seventy feet in length and had three magnificent chandeliers hanging from the ceiling at regularly spaced intervals as well as several wall-bracket lamps, equally handsome. A strip carpet adorned each side of the parquet floor and a number of very modern and not so modern chairs and tables. A souvenir shelf was at one end, flanked by two tables behind which sat two girls who represented the bank and insurance agency, respectively; at the other end of the room was an enormous screen which on closer examination proved to be an advertisement for Aeroflot, the one and only air company operating in U.S.S.R. As this was an international airport there was probably need for such an advertisement.

As soon as I had relieved myself of my hand luggage, coat and hat, I told the insurance girl that I had expected someone from the Uzbek Academy of Sciences to meet me here. She requested me to sit down or to go and have a free breakfast in the adjoining restaurant. I said I did not need to eat again as I had already helped myself to everything so generously provided by Aeroflot on the plane. It was lucky I had refused because insurance had thought I was in transit and free breakfasts were provided only for such! In a couple of minutes she returned and informed me that the Academy wanted me to wait the arrival of their repre-



## CHAPTER 2

### Tashkent

I was the first off the plane. I had to hand my passport over to a uniformed official at the door of the plane before I was allowed to land. The airport building was a very large two-storied structure with Ionic columns. It seemed to be a very busy airport, used at present both as a military and civil landing place. As soon as I entered the building an official asked me in faultless English whether I was a tourist or a guest and if so of which organisation. When I mentioned the fact that I was a guest of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, there was a marked change of manner. I was addressed as if I were a demi-god and guided most courteously to the next room; this was the baggage examination room with two customs men within. No passengers' baggage nor passengers had yet arrived. I was asked for my baggage ticket which was immediately stamped and handed back to me though my suit case was nowhere in sight.

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As soon as I had relieved myself of my hand luggage, coat and hat, I told the Intourist girl that I had expected someone from the Uzbek Academy of Sciences to meet me here. She requested me to sit down or to go and have a free breakfast in the adjoining restaurant. I said I did not need to eat again as I had already helped myself to everything so generously provided by Aeroflot on the plane. It was lucky I had refused because Intourist had thought I was in transit and free breakfasts were provided only for such! In a couple of minutes she returned and informed me that the Academy wanted me to await the arrival of their repre-



sentative in a quarter-of-an-hour. Actually no one arrived for one and a half hours and that only after a second telephone message. I was later informed by the Academy guide that two telegrams, one from Delhi despatched by me on the previous evening and the other from the Moscow Academy of Science had only reached the local Academy just a few minutes before the plane arrived. I found this rather difficult to believe at that time, but after a month in U.S.S.R. I learned that it was possible for anything to happen to your mails and telegrams!

As I had nothing to do I studied the other passengers around me and wrote my journal up to the last minute. Opposite me was a fat Mongolian lady. Later I learnt that she was the wife of the Cambodian Minister to Delhi. I remembered the couple at the Delhi Airport. She was carrying a bouquet of flowers done up in cellophane. She wore a short frock and a Queen Elizabeth II hat, only a circle of white covering the back of her head. She looked very plain, dull, *passé* and self-satisfied. Her husband was equally filled with the good things of life but looked quite empty of any ideas. I approached them within a reasonable distance several times but as they looked so forbidding and uninteresting I did not try to start a conversation with them. The room was full on my arrival but after half an hour the passengers had all left for their various destinations.

After "my" plane left for Moscow, only the Cambodian couple and I were left in the room for sometime. An Australian couple walked in and I tried to speak to the man but apparently he thought I was a con-man or something as bad and was very curt; so I gave up the struggle.

After a weary wait of one and a half hours, the Uzbek Academy of Science at last materialised in a swarthy, good-looking man of about 35 years with wavy, black hair, a few gold teeth, of medium height, but his most precious possession, as far as I was concerned, was an adequate knowledge of English. The Bank and Intourist girls were just about to depart as Ivanov walked in. He took my baggage ticket but left me to struggle down with my heavy camera case plus my fully-loaded brief case which contained all my lecture slides,—about five boxes of them,—and my papers and books plus my hat and coat. As the temperature must have been about 85°F I could not possibly wear my heavy gaberdine coat. Ivanov walked gaily ahead and I had to manage as best as I could. I felt like a middle-Eastern peasant woman faithfully following her husband!

The first local I saw besides my guide was a character straight out of the Bible or a perfect impersonation of Shylock, lean, cadaverous with a goatee beard and flowing garments of blue and



black with Uzbek embroidered black and white skull cap that was generally used by a large proportion of the local men who still professed to be Moslems.

A large seven-seater Zim car was waiting to take me to town. We passed a very modern railway station and a not so up-to-date bus terminal. We arrived at our destination, Tashkent Hotel in about 10 minutes. This was a very imposing, orientalised building, several stories high with a roof-top cafe and fronted by a large public square and gardens. At the end of the square opposite to the Hotel was an impressive looking opera house, about which I shall write much more later on.

The square was full of people, though it was nearly mid-day; the fountains were playing and the roses were in bloom. The younger women were colourfully dressed in light cottons as it was a very hot day. They were certainly as well dressed as any similar crowd in a provincial city of the same size in England such as Manchester or Liverpool. Many of the older women were however either dowdily clad in dark sombre-coloured western clothes or very picturesque in their flowing gowns of vari-coloured linear and rectangular patterned silk or cotton. These dresses reached as far down as the ankles and had a yoke at the shoulders. They looked rather like the old-fashioned night dresses worn by the older generation of westernised women in Ceylon. The women as well as the men were shod in open sandals. I was told that in the winter all of them wore shoes.

I was glad to see that most of the men wore their hair long in front; a few of them had shaven heads or the horrid American crew cuts! Many had on vari-coloured bush shirts with dark coloured pants but a few of them wore the richly hand-embroidered Ukrainian shirts.

The hotel manager was a most charming host, Leonid by name. He was tall and thin with a pleasant smile which wrinkled up his eyes, always a sign of sincerity.

Ivanov had asked me whether this was the first time I had been in a communist country. When I said yes, he wanted to know whether I was a communist. I said, no. I later felt that if I had been dishonest enough to assume this mantle, then my reception, at any rate, in Tashkent at his hands might have been much warmer!

I remarked that I found to my surprise that the women were quite smartly clad. Ivanov asked me why I was surprised at that. All the western papers and books that I had read about the U.S.S.R. had mentioned the fact that the women were very dowdy in appearance. He remarked "Oh, that is just American propa-



ganda". I was shown my room after about half an hour's wait in the office. It was on the third floor. This enormous hotel with about 3-400 rooms had only two passenger lifts and one for goods only. I learnt for the first time that in this advanced country, one is expected to take the lift only to ascend, never to descend even though one may have to go down six or eight flights of stairs! It is one way the Russians keep their weight down in spite of the enormous quantities of food and drink they swallow!

I was given a double room. It was small though well-furnished with a writing table plus another round table and a couple of chairs, a very modern double wardrobe with shelves and hanging cupboards. There was also a small radio set, which decanted Uzbek music or talk most of the time.

The bath was very short and deep but as there was also a shower this did not worry me much. It gladdened my heart to see pink toilet paper as I had been repeatedly warned in Ceylon and India to carry my own supply! If Tashkent in Central Asia could furnish such coloured toilet paper, then my happiness was assured while I travelled throughout the U.S.S.R.! Though the appointments, amenities, etc. were up to American standards, yet there was an appearance of *deshabille* about the rooms. On trying to analyse what gave me this impression, I found that the bed room carpet was the worse for wear, the bathroom floor was not tiled properly and had untidy patched-up spots of cement especially round the throne. The enamel of the bath itself was cracked and old looking in parts. This hotel could not be more than five or six years old and yet it gave this impression of a dowager lady past her best years!

There was some confusion as to where I could have my lunch. Ivanov told me that he had ordered it to be sent up to my room but the lady at the registration desk of the hotel had asked me to go to the hotel restaurant. When I reported these instructions back to Ivanov, he said "Wait, I will see a Canadian biologist and his wife off and then I will come for you". I waited over half-an-hour for him and as it was getting on to 2 p.m. I went down and met him at the main entrance to the hotel. I told him firmly but politely that I could not wait any longer as I was famishing and wanted to sleep after lunch. He then deigned to show me into the restaurant. This was an enormous room holding about 5-600 people at a time; it had a stage with orchestral instruments on it. There were some flowers, rather wilted at some tables, and for the first time I saw the Intourist flag on two or three of the tables. These were always reserved for foreigners. The waitresses were all without exception fat, flabby and flat-faced, with huge billiard table legs and voluminous "fannies" and the routine mouthful of gold teeth. Not one turned the scales at less



than 200 lb.! They were all dressed in fancy-striped, black and white cotton frocks with lace fringed caps on their heads and sandals or slippers on their feet with short socks reaching about 3" above their ankles, a most ungainly sight!

The waitress who served me had a very unpleasant frown as much as to say "what a damned nuisance you are". She did not understand a word of English. The menus were however printed in Russian, Uzbek and English. Each of them went into several pages. They were more or less standard throughout the country. One thought at first that there would be a great variety of dishes but one was soon disillusioned: only an insignificant proportion of the dishes printed was available on any single day!

I had my first taste of the standard of service in hotel restaurants throughout U.S.S.R. *It is undoubtedly the worst of any of the many countries that I have visited.* If one is lucky one gets a two-course meal in one hour; usually it takes one and a half hours. If one is unlucky one has to wait two hours! This is one of the paradoxes of this mysterious country which is supreme in space science but yet is most backward in fulfilling the more urgent needs of the common man and woman!

Dr. C, my Academy sponsor in Moscow remarked later. "The Academy of Science can do really big things remarkably well but it flounders over small matters like arranging a programme or sending a car".

There is a story current in U.S.S.R. An official went to a house and asked the little girl who answered the bell where her father was. "Oh, Papa is up in a sputnik on space travel and will be back home at 3 p.m. today".

"May I see your mother then?" asked the man.

"I am sorry, you can't. She has gone to market to buy some beef but God only knows when she will return!"

At supper I sat at the same table and was served by another waitress who, though pleasanter in manner was most nonchalant about her duties. She noticed that I had finished my first course but continued chatting with another waitress without making any attempt to clear my plate or to ask me for further orders. Right through the country this was the attitude of waiters and waitresses. "You just wait till I choose to serve you. If you don't like it, you are always free to go elsewhere". That would not do much good. History would only repeat itself. As far as intourist travellers and guests were concerned only certain hotels and restaurants were open to them unless they paid cash for their



meals. Intourist travellers must pay in coupons which they have purchased abroad and guests, like myself, don't pay at all! The quality of the food here was excellent though after a few days one got tired of the lack of variety in the diet. Some dishes like Kabob or Plov (=pilau) were only available either at lunch or at dinner but never at both meals.

Butter and bread were plentiful but fish was very scarce and one seldom got it at breakfast. It was all river fish like sturgeon. Fruit and vegetables were difficult to obtain. The only fruit available in June were white cherries and oranges. For my first meal I ordered salmon expecting fresh boiled salmon but was served with smoked salmon. Salmon was never served except in this form throughout U.S.S.R. I also had a salad of cucumber, tomato and chopped onion leaves with lots of mayonnaise on top and a bottle of sweet unfermented grape juice which needed to be diluted with mineral water in order to suit my less saccharine taste. I finished with an enormous helping of white cherries, the first I had ever tasted in my life. I prefer the red or the black; the white are smaller and less sweet.

Most of the guests were shabbily dressed unless they wore Uzbek clothing. These women wore the loose kind of smock already described. Many of them were made of the same material—a bright, rainbow-coloured design running vertically down, forming geometrical patterns of lines, triangles and rectangles. They were very Mongolian looking unless they had Russian blood which many of them did have. Some of the women wore their long hair loose in pigtail fashion and hanging down over their shoulders in front. Few had their hair cut; all of these wore European clothes. It was exceptional too to see a woman with lipstick though many had painted nails. One must remember that this generation of young women was probably the first that had been completely emancipated since puberty. Their mothers were in purdah and wore long veils, almost completely covering their faces and heads and a large part of their bodies till the revolution. Many of the elderly women now walking about freely were in this condition in their youth.

The older men had short china silk coats; Jodhpur-like trousers and Russian boots with the flat-topped, round, embroidered, black and white skull caps which they kept on throughout the meal. This cap undoubtedly corresponded to the red fez worn by the Moslems of India and Ceylon which is not seen very frequently now-a-days except at weddings and funerals.

I never saw a barefoot child or adult throughout my stay except in public parks when they were about to go swimming. I also never saw anyone with his feet wrapped up in cloth bandages as



was so common among peasants of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and even during World War II. There is a current American quip "Of course U.S.S.R. has advanced tremendously. Before the glorious revolution no one had any shoes at all, now they have one each!"

Soon after 4 p.m. while I was dead to the world in my room, there was a loud knock on my door and there was Ivanov with another chubby, overgrown baby-face type of man, short, stodgy, baldish and looking ridiculously like Mr. Khrushchev. He was introduced as my guide from the local Ministry of Health. It was a curious arrangement because he knew not a word of English! Though I did not say anything, I did not think much of their efficiency! "Dr. Khrushchev" I immediately liked. He looked like a very benign stock-broker, brimful of humour and of the good things of life as well as of good will to all men. He had on one of those striking hand-embroidered Ukrainian shirts. He got chatty immediately and wanted me to relate all my past history, where I hailed from, why I was in U.S.S.R., etc. He also took me by surprise when he asked me what my religion was. When I admitted that I was a Christian, he remarked "very good". This so intrigued me that I returned the compliment. He said he was a Moslem and asked whether we had any in our country. When I informed him that there were over 700,000 of them in Ceylon, he seemed very pleasantly surprised and asked whether they were Arabs. I told him that the majority were Indians who had been converted by the Moghul emperors, whose dynasty I learnt later originated from Uzbekistan or Turkestan as it then was. There were however a few Arab Moslems in Ceylon. The original Moslems were from Arabia and landed in Ceylon in the fourteenth century. There are pockets of pure Arabs still left in the South and in the East of Ceylon. He next asked me when I had graduated as a doctor. I asked him the counter question.

"1933", he said.

"Oh, then you're just a baby", (because my year of graduation had been 1928). When this had been interpreted to him, he had a hearty laugh. I learnt later that he was the father of ten bonny children. One of them was a final year medical student. Dr. K. too had his mouth full of gold teeth. One cannot get away from these ostentatious bank vaults! He was rather unsure of himself. He had been in the Health Service for nearly thirty years and yet he was lacking in self-confidence and as I learnt later, quite ineffective, though he was very charming and trying hard to do his poor best. He gave me the impression at this first interview that he had been ordered into this position of being an unwilling guide to someone whose language he did not understand and whose way of life was quite extraordinary to him! I got the idea that he



wished to God someone else had got this assignment and not he, but at the end of my eight days in Tashkent we became good friends and embraced each other like good Russians when we said farewell! He was also the only person throughout all this vast country who ever honoured me by inviting me to a meal at his own home and gave me the pleasure and privilege of meeting his wife and family, but more of this later.

Ivanov remarked that I must be very tired after my long journey and that it would be a good thing if I slept the rest of the day and the whole of tomorrow which was a Sunday. I said that that would be quite unnecessary as I should be refreshed by tomorrow's dawn and I certainly had no intention of being cooped up in my bedroom with only meal-time escape for over 36 hours. He then suggested that I hired a guide for tomorrow.

"What is the cost?"

"Five roubles" (£2).

I said this was impossible with the money I had. "Dr. Khrushchev" wanted to be with his family and in any case he would have been quite useless to me without an interpreter, so I very gallantly insisted that he was on no account to leave his family on Sunday on my account! After a great deal of argument and hesitation Ivanov at last offered to act as my guide on Sunday. I was now beginning to get the horrid feeling that the money I had brought with me from Ceylon would be all I would have with me throughout U.S.S.R. As I have said earlier it is our own Government and not the Soviet Government that is to blame for this sad state of affairs. However, I must not forget to count my blessings and the very fact that I was here at all was due to the gesture of our own Minister of Cultural Affairs who asked the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science to nominate two of its members for this visit. I told both my friends that I would appreciate visits to Samarkand and Bokhara if these could be arranged by the local Academy. They were silent and non-committal.

The whole impression after this hour's talk with my hosts was that the Uzbek Academy of Science was a rather broken reed with no experience of entertaining foreign guests. They were still immature and *gauche*. I got out of my room about 6 p.m. in order to buy some notepaper and envelopes. These I did miss in the hotel bedrooms. It was only in the very old-fashioned one at Samarkand of the several hotels which I inhabited in U.S.S.R. that I had these necessities supplied free in my bedroom.

On the corridor outside my room, a man in a hat, a rather uncommon article here as elsewhere now, stopped me and asked me in English whether I was from Ceylon. He was a journalist



and wished to ask me a few questions—my name, the post I held, the purpose of my visit, etc. Having given him all these tit-bits in a few minutes while seated on a window-sill, I told him that he could also help me by taking me to a stationery shop, where I could buy some airmail paper and envelopes. He directed me to the post-office which was on the ground floor of the hotel. Six small sheets of paper with a similar number of stamped envelopes cost me 1 rouble and 5 kopeks which was equivalent to approximately Rs. 6.25. No airgraphs were available as in other countries so each letter cost me 16 kopeks in stamps which was nearly double the airgraph rate, but about the same as the airmail letter rate prevalent in other countries.

After collecting my stationery I went out for a walk. The main square was crammed with crowds—Uzbeks, Russians and a goodly mixture of the two streams. The contrast between the 'pure' white Russian and the 'pure' coloured Uzbek was obvious but there were several betwixts and betweeners who were difficult to place. Some of the Uzbeks were even darker than myself and I am more *cafe* than *lait*. Most of them did stare at me but in a friendly way, not in the unpleasant manner one met in the Southern States of U.S.A. It was a look more of curiosity than of resentment, mixed with interest and disappointment that the barrier of language prevented more intimacy. One with a camera seeing my Leica shouted "Photographer". I shook my head. I could not surmise whether he wanted to photograph me or wanted me to photograph him! Walking on I had a surprise. Just past a factory gate which was closed, it being a Saturday afternoon, there was a man pissing on the side of the public road on which trams and other wheeled traffic were heavy. I would have thought that this was a terribly anti-social act in a communist country and the criminal deserving a prison sentence but no one took any notice though a few pedestrians were about. (More of this later in Moscow). This kind of behaviour was reminiscent of Ceylon and India where such happenings were taken for granted but one did not expect the same in a country as progressive and advanced as U.S.S.R.

A few shops and hair-dressing saloons were open. Window shopping revealed that most of the material was poor in quality and much worse than I saw later in Moscow and Leningrad. Tashkent seemed to be like a poor relation getting crumbs from the rich man's table. Anything was good enough for these Asiatics!

There were numerous wayside booths run by middle-aged and elderly women selling tea and fruit drinks. Each of these cost 5-6 kopeks (25-30 cents). Each tumbler used was placed over a suction washing and drying machine. This cleaned it efficiently



in a few seconds. After having satisfied myself that the whole procedure reached my standards of asepsis, I ventured to have a fruit drink. I did not know what it was but it tasted like apple or grape juice, rather dilute but very satiating on a hot sultry afternoon. I wondered whether this fruit drink business was also state owned or entirely private enterprise. Some said this and some said that and I therefore believed it was the latter, the existence of which the Soviets were rather ashamed to admit! There were also numerous giant slot machines emitting varitinted fruit drinks. Each had a coloured label in front depicting the flavour.

The hotel restaurant which was open to the public was nearly empty when I entered it at 8.40 p.m. but an hour later when I finished my meal it was chock-a-block.

Two young Indian students noticed me and graciously came to my table to greet me. As I was alone, I invited them to join me and took my seat. Either they did not understand me or surrendered any interest that they initially had in me when they learnt that I was not an Indian; or they just chose to ignore my invitation because the next thing I knew was that they were scurrying back to their own table. Their only excuse was that they had a Russian friend, probably an interpreter with them.

Some of the tables had foreign flags on them. One was the German red, black and gold and many locals were shooed off the table by the waitress but when some Red army officers appeared, the flag was removed discreetly and they were allowed to occupy the table! *The army did seem to be a very privileged class!*

I also observed that the cashier at the desk who was also the maitre d'hotel had a bevy of waitresses seated around her and chatting like mynahs till things got really busy. This sort of camaraderie was the accepted norm, quite unlike in Western Europe where the maitre d'hotel would not be seen in friendly conversation with any of his minions for fear of losing caste!

The orchestra started functioning at 9 a.m. and the first piece was "The Blue Danube". The rest of the programme was all Russian. The music was good but too loud and nothing to write home about.

I had a glass of local dry, white wine with my meal. It was terrible. The caviare was not as good as on the plane, smaller-grained and more salty. As the waitress did not understand any English and fruit was not specified on the voluminous menu, I was forced to draw an apple in order to indicate my immediate need. The waitress returned with a plateful of white cherries.



It was not due to my lack of artistic skill but a line had been drawn against my apple to show that it was out of stock.

On leaving the restaurant the door leading to the main entrance of the hotel was locked so I had to get out of a side door and walk across the open paved path in front. I was glad I did so as the fountains in the main square were all illuminated with multi-coloured lights which were switched on and off at frequent intervals. It was a fascinating sight. Hundreds of people were still walking about and seated round the fountain or on the benches scattered about. Though it was nearly 10 p.m. I also saw many toddlers of two and three years old still out with their parents. This was another thing that amazed me as a paediatrician. These children should have been in bed hours ago. When I asked one of my female interpreters why they did this, she had no answer to give me. The next day she told me she had repeated my observation to her mother who had remarked that I was quite right but could not give any further enlightenment. It was particularly noticeable to me as I found most of their methods of child care so advanced and progressive that I wondered why they were so remiss about these late hours for young toddlers.

I also saw a moving electric news reel on top of one of the tall buildings flanking the hotel—just as in Piccadilly or Times Square. This was a surprise in Tashkent which was the capital of what had been a very primitive and backward Asiatic republic only a little over a generation ago. It will take us a few decades more before we have a similar innovation in Colombo!

At the end of my first day in Tashkent the impression created in me was of a people, by no manner of means curbed, frustrated and harassed by a cruel police state. I have seen much more frustration and resentment in the faces of our own people in S. Asia and in those of the affluent countries of the world. These people appeared to be active, industrious, happy and proud, intensely so, of their country and its achievements. There was not a single malnourished child or adult that I have seen so far and on recapitulation, I might add that outside hospitals I never saw one individual throughout the country who was under-par physically except in the most advanced age groups. That was a considerable achievement for a country where the majority of the inhabitants were on a near-starvation level less than half a century ago.

Tashkent must have been much more primitive than Colombo was in the early years of the twentieth century. In one generation a modern city has risen phoenix-wise with splendid buildings, hotels, opera house, theatres, gardens and parks (of culture and amusement), tree-lined boulevards, hospitals, schools, Pioneer



Palaces, sanatoria, modern industrial plants, and a very busy airport and television, etc. What a conquest of poverty and ignorance, superstition and priestcraft! The cost, who knows—not only in money but in human lives and happiness. Some of us might still care about these refinements. Does the end justify the means? One is tempted to doubt Nehru's dictum that a happy ending never justified unjust means! Doesn't it sometimes? Are the happiness and absence of sorrow of the present generation always more important than the prosperity and absence of frustration of the future?

I looked at many of the youth in fancy bush shirts and Marlon Brando hair-dos with shabby footwear and drain-pipe dark pants who were patronising the hotel restaurant. This seemed to be the Hotel Ritz of Tashkent and its prices must have been well above the others because it was the only one open to foreigners and wherever these creatures were found the prices were stepped up. It was an easy way of earning foreign exchange. I have evidence for this which I shall relate later.

These young men were either students or workers in plants. All those whom I observed looked happy and relaxed while eating. There was not that atmosphere of tension, rush and worry that one felt in any American or British restaurant patronised by the same class of person.

## SECOND DAY:

I was attempting to analyse further what it was that gave this run-down appearance to this recently built modern hotel. The main entrance was ornate with the blue-green tiles, so characteristic of Uzbek decoration, with the hammer and sickle and the dove of peace motifs on the ceiling over the threshold but the floor was dirty and unpolished. The coir matting at the entrance lobby was worn out and needed replacing. The staircase carpet too looked old and *deshabille*. One reason for this was that everyone emptied any unused and unwanted water on the carpet. Whether they thought that this was a good way of keeping the dust down or that water, as in the human being, was the finest way of refreshing tired cells and fibres, I hadn't the faintest idea! Though these things did not add up to much they simply did not exist in any American hotel of the same standard but I have been much worse things in France, Italy, U.K. and even in Sweden!

There was a dearth of reading and writing rooms though the lobbies on each landing, where the supervisor of each floor had her desk, served as lounges. Here the T.V. operated. The only other place where one could relax and talk to other clients was in the hotel office.

An empty restaurant was displayed to view at 9 a.m. A Japanese Professor from a private university of Tokyo soon joined me. His English was very inadequate. He was a Professor of History and specialised on Central Asia. I asked him whether he was a guest but he was a tourist going round at his own expense. He was moving on to Samarkand and Bokhara later on in the day. These places would naturally be of much more interest to him than Tashkent.

A group of three Africans occupied the adjoining table. Their conversation in their tribal language was frequently interlarded with English phrases and words. How reminiscent it all was of similar conversations that we Ceylonese and Indian students used to have in London thirty years ago. Certainly this "pickled" language is more the exception than the rule among the upper crust of the educated elite of Ceylon in the last six or seven years. One is beginning to feel ashamed of one's inadequacy of a vocabulary in one's mother tongue. That is the first step to learning wisdom!

The waitress knew a smattering of English, but I could not express my orders in words which she could comprehend; so I had to revert again to my poor skill in drawing. This time it was a melon. She immediately informed me that it was out of season and would not be available till July or August. As no other fruit was available I ordered some toast, butter and jam, coffee and tried my luck with a fish dish. I was served with a very generous helping of fried river fish and a mountain of boiled dark-red rice together with thick slices of cucumber. The quantity of rice was quite beyond my gastronomic capabilities and I had with regret to leave a large quantity behind, though it was quite tasty and rather different from our own pink country rice. The toast consisted of horrid, uncrispy doorsteps. I did not eat the jam which looked like black currant. This was the only kind of jam available throughout the eight days I was at this hotel.

After breakfast I bought a copy of "Moscow News" in English. It was a weekly and gave me a great deal of information with regard to children in U.S.S.R. whom the Red Dean of Canterbury had once called the only privileged class in this country. I have already mentioned another.

I walked out to the main square. Very few people were about, though it was a lovely sunny Sunday morning. I sat on a bench and read my paper.

"Moscow News" contained a great deal of factual data regarding the industrial and socio-economic progress of the country in addition to rather crude propaganda against the Western powers. In the centre page the following data were given under **FACTS AND FIGURES**:—



(1) "Under Soviet power the child mortality rate has dropped to just under 12% of the pre-revolution figure.

In the first place I think this refers to the infant and not the child mortality rate; i.e. a child under one year of age. I say this because again and again I had asked for mortality figures of children aged 1-5 years and the reply was that they were so low that it was not worth-while keeping them; but they are also very low in Western countries but yet they have been kept.

In Ceylon during the corresponding period, the infant mortality rate had dropped to 20% of the pre-1917 figure, and that during a period of colonialism and imperialism for the greater part and of parliamentary democracy during the shorter more recent period. We have not however paid for these advances with blood and tears as the Soviets had to do both during the revolution and the Stalin regime.

(2) "Before the Revolution expectation of life was 33 years. Today the figure is nearly 70 years". In Ceylon we have had an equally spectacular rate of progress without an iota of communism. Our expectation of life today is 66 years and was less than 40 in 1917.

(3) "There are 18,000 women's and children's consultation centres in our country as against a total of 9 before the revolution"! That would make approximately one centre per 11,000 persons. We have exactly the same ratio in Ceylon today, but I must admit that the Soviet centres are much more efficiently and effectively run and organised than ours, and always supervised and controlled by fully trained doctors and nurses. This is what we would like to do too but cannot owing to shortage of trained personnel.

(4) "In our towns and villages there are 226,000 gynaecological and obstetric beds as against 7,500 before the revolution". This would make one such bed per 1,000 population. We could almost compete with those figures. We have today 5,782 maternity and gynaecological beds or one bed for 1,600 of the total population which is not so bad considering our respective levels of economic development.

(5) "Altogether 5,600,000 children attend nurseries and nursery schools. In addition about 3 million children go to seasonal nurseries and children's play centres in the summer", that is about 30% of the total children at risk are covered. In Ceylon less than 20% of such children are cared for in creches, milk feeding and child welfare centres.

(6) "Nearly 3½ million mothers with big families receive state grants". In Ceylon mothers with triplets and women workers on registered estates receive special grants though many poor infants especially in towns are given free milk and fish liver oil.

(7) "There were 197,600 general secondary schools at the beginning of the 1962-63 school year and the total number of pupils in primary 7-and 8-year and secondary schools was 38,500,000. That is practically everyone of school-going age is covered.

In Ceylon in spite of a population explosion, we have reduced the non-school-going population by nearly 50% since independence in 1948 and all education from the kindergarten through the university is free.

(8) "There are 2,000 children's music, dancing and art schools".

We are hopelessly backward in this in Ceylon but most of these cultural activities are undertaken by some of the bigger and better schools in towns.

(9) "In 1962 there were 3,229 Houses and Palaces of Young Pioneers, 803 young technicians' and nature-lovers' holiday centres, 1,965 Children's Sports Centres, 1,965 Children's Sports Schools, and 174 Children's Parks".

We have two in my country though I have seen a few more in India.

(10) "About 50 children's magazines and other periodicals with a total print of over 46 million copies, and 24 Young Pioneer newspapers with a total print of over 8 million copies are published in the U.S.S.R. The annual total print of children's books runs to more than 167,000,000 copies in 52 national languages of the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and 18 foreign languages".

Our language in Ceylon only got official status since 1956. In British times all education was in English and all government, legal, university and mercantile correspondence was in that language. In spite of this we have made some progress in the publication of children's books in Sinhala and Tamil though we cannot match the phenomenal figures of the U.S.S.R.—four books per child per year! I should think that this is a world record.

(11) "There are over 100 professional theatres for Children and Young People". We have none in Ceylon and as far as I am aware, India has none either.

(12) "Nearly 10 million children and teenagers spend their summer holidays in Young Pioneer and school camps, children's sanatoria and holiday centres or go out to the countryside with nursery schools, nurseries and children's homes". These healthy recreative activities are yet to see the light of day in S. Asia except for a very, very small number run by a few voluntary organisations.



These facts and figures show that as far as the vital statistics go, Ceylon has no need to hide her face in shame in comparison with those of U.S.S.R. but we have great leeway to make with regard to extra-curricular activities like art, music and holiday camps. These should be organised on a much larger and grander scale than they are at present, but one must remember Plutarch's words. "*The real destroyer of the liberties of any people is he who spreads among them bounties, donations and largesse*". One sees this in the free hospital services provided in Ceylon. All consultations, examinations and drugs are free for everybody. As a result drugs are taken by people who do not need them and sold outside to druggists; some are thrown away; the same child may be brought three times in one day for the treatment of the same condition by different doctors in the same hospital because the parent is not satisfied with the treatment! How can anyone run efficient medical and hospital services with a population as indisciplined as that, who waste the limited resources of a poor country so thoughtlessly?

My reading of "The Moscow News" over, I awaited Ivanov. He arrived soon after 11 a.m. and we set out sight seeing. I suggested that we ventured forth by tram but he had already ordered a taxi without my permission as some of the sights were not on the tram routes (rather inconveniently) but why we could not walk part of the way was never explained to me. I had no option but to accept Ivanov's advice and to hope and pray that the taxi fare would not scrape the bottom of my slender purse but I impressed on him how very thin my resources were. I had only 5-6 roubles in Soviet currency and being a Sunday I could not get any more change during the day. I was going to allow myself a current expenditure of 2 roubles a day in order to save a rouble a day for purchase of gifts and souvenirs at the end of my stay in U.S.S.R.

The taxi ride actually cost me 3R. 19k. that was equivalent to approximately 30s. which was very expensive when compared to rates in U.S.A., and even in U.K. This was the only time (except once each at Moscow and Leningrad) that I ever had to pay for any transport throughout my stay. At every other place the Academy always placed a huge Zim or Chaika or sometimes a more moderately sized vehicle in keeping with my position to take me wherever I wanted to at any time of the day or night. They were most generous and liberal about their transport services. This was another bit of evidence that the Tashkent Academy has not yet reached years of discretion and were not aware how guests expected or needed to be treated!

However, I saw quite a bit of the city and the old town as it was called; the public buildings were impressive for a provincial capital, the roads were very wide, clean and lined by poplars,



elms and oaks, etc. Ivanov showed me a madrasseh, a Moslem school, which was being rebuilt and converted into a museum.

"Are there any religious schools left in Tashkent?" I asked.

"Yes, there is one" was the reply to my surprise. Even in a communist country there seemed to be a more liberal and flexible policy with regard to private schools than in Ceylon where those thirsting for power were all for taking over the few private schools that are left in order to make all Ceylonese conform to one uniform standard. Where this would lead to was too dreadful to imagine. If anyone criticised these policies he was at once labelled a reactionary, anti-national, or imperialist stooge, etc. We are essentially a nation of fatalists and like Micawber we live in hope that something better is going to turn up soon!

Ivanov told me that though his mother, who was only 47 years old, went to the mosque and said her daily prayers, neither he nor any of her other children did likewise. His father was dead. He was a well-educated person but had a definite inferiority complex which he tried to compensate for by an unpleasant aggressive manner at times. He knew four languages—Arabic, Uzbek, Russian and English and was a full-time employee of the Uzbek Academy of Science as a linguist—what we would call an interpreter.

His conversation was rather dull and he was neither as intellectual nor as cultured as my Academy guides in Leningrad or Moscow.

Noticing a rather cheap-looking pair of sandals on his feet, I asked him very discreetly how much they cost.

"10 roubles" he said (that was Rs.50). My pair of good English leather shoes cost the same. Seeing some of the passers-by wearing those embroidered Ukrainian shirts I asked him the cost of one 20R (Rs.100). He was wrong however because I bought one at the end of my stay for 8R. in Moscow but it was in rather coarse cotton though it had a lovely red and black hand-embroidered border with long sleeves.

I asked Ivanov where he lived. It was in a three-roomed apartment—two bedrooms, one sitting room plus kitchen, etc. The rent was only 12R. a month (just under Rs.60) and this included gas and electricity. If you paid separately for the latter, the rent was only 4½R. (less than Rs.22) a month! These rates were fantastically low. All houses in all cities were owned by the State or municipality. In Leningrad I was informed that a new law had been or was about to be passed whereby one could own one's own flat in a huge block.

Ivanov took me for a drive in order to show me a new housing estate which contained an enormous number of multi-storied



blocks of new apartments. He said about 100,000 families live on this one estate, but that must have been an exaggeration because the whole population of Tashkent was only one million.

I asked him what the cost of a T.V. set was; it was between 200-400R. (Rs. 1-2000). One could also buy these T.V. sets on easy terms. One had to state one's place of employment and salary. The instalment to be paid monthly depended on the latter. Ivanov also informed me that tax was collected on your T.V. only for the first two years after purchase; after that there was no tax; that was interesting. This was done in order to keep the demand down, otherwise people would sell their second hand sets every few years and buy new ones as is done in U.S.A. Apparently the demand was more than the supply at present. It would be interesting to know what would happen regarding tax in a few years' time when production would be more than adequate to meet the demand. I did not see much of the Soviet T.V. programmes except for a few football matches but the flickering and unevenness of the images were much worse than on American or British sets. They have not reached Western standards yet but they soon will.

We visited one of their *Parks of Culture and Amusement*. It was a very large one and was the best I saw in the whole of U.S.S.R. though I did not visit many later on.

Everyone had to pay for entrance; there was a very large artificial lake in this park on which many sailing and rowing boats were to be seen on this bright and sunny Sunday. I took note of the flowers, some very good tube roses and not so good roses and several varieties of marigolds and hollyhocks; a few daisies and salvias, and some canna plants not yet in bloom.

We passed a wood and I recognised an oak which in Russian was called *DUB*, also beech, birch, plane and elm trees. Enormous crowds of people were all going for a swim in the lake or for a sun-bathe on its beaches; there were two of these, one for adults and another for children. Some boys were also fishing on the lake. We passed a children's railway which took one round the park, several open-air theatres, dance floors, ice cream booths, book and magazine stalls, shooting galleries, hoop la, etc. The people looked superlatively healthy and the children especially so. It made me so happy to see them so strong and lovely, and yet so sad that the children in my own country were so often thin and weeny, weak and ill because they had not sufficient to eat of the right kind of food. So often this was due not so much to poverty as to ignorance. Changing one's food habits is as difficult as changing one's religion but as many people are now changing the latter in my country, I have great hope that they will change the former too!



## HISTORICAL MUSEUM IN TASHKENT

I took some snaps of the children on the beaches, etc. and we eventually left for a museum which displayed the history of Uzbekistan from prehistoric times to the twentieth century. It was very instructive and educative. I had a special guide who said his say in Uzbek which was then translated into English by Ivanov. Three things stood out in this museum.

The influence of Alexander, of Tamerlane and of his grandson Ulubeg in the history of Uzbekistan. Many remains of Greek sculpture and pottery in the museum dug out of the local soil were on display. Tamerlane's influence was centred mainly in Samarkand and I shall have a lot to say about him in connection with that city.

Ulubeg built the first great observatory in Asia in Samarkand but was executed on the orders of his own son who was incited to parricide by religious fanatics who objected to Ulubeg's scientific attitude. Some so-called civilised countries even in the twentieth century, if they do not execute their scientists still persecute them silently, by neglect, by indifference, by lack of rewards and by ridicule. What Samarkand did in rather a barbarous fashion in the fourteenth century, we in Ceylon seem to be doing in a less vindictive and in a more civilised manner, perhaps, in the twentieth.

A European engraving of the fourteenth century showed Ulubeg seated next to the President, among a group of the world's leading astronomers. He must have been a really great man. What a ghastly end to be murdered by his own son!

I also learnt for the first time that Avicenna, whom every book on the History of Medicine has called the Father of Arabian medicine, was not an Arab at all but was born near Bokhara to Uzbek parents and educated there. The Jews, however, also claimed him to belong to the chosen race and the Persians to theirs. Avicenna probably learnt a lot of his medicine from the Hindus and Chinese and it is admitted that he did have a great influence on Hippocrates and hence on European medicine.

We left the museum at about 1.15 p.m. and tried to get to a bookshop in Karl Marx Street which was the main shopping centre of the town. I was anxious to buy a book in English as I had no reading matter with me at all. As we approached the shop we saw a closing sign being strung across the entrance. Ivanov, however, insisted on entering the shop. The girl stationed at the door to prevent just such a gate-crashing shouted at him; he replied in louder tones. An elderly woman came to the girl's rescue but Ivanov became as gentle as a lamb to my great surprise, won her heart and she let us in. Apparently, Ivanov had said



that I was a distinguished guest of the Academy or some such tale. I asked for paperbacks of Pushkin, Gorky, etc. There were none except for a few books on communist propaganda which I was not interested in. I noticed one title "Nikita's Childhood" in a hard cloth cover. It was all about Khrushchev's childhood and youth. It was too expensive for me, so I bought a collection of excerpts from short stories called "Uzbekistan Speaks" in a paper back for 40 kopeks. I noticed that Ivanov bought several children's books in English for his kids. Their ages were 4½ years, 2 years and 3 months respectively. I asked him how could they understand them?

"Oh, they will enjoy the pictures and I will explain the text to them".

I still did not see the point of his buying these English books when there were plenty of Russian books just as good and as attractive. Apparently buying English books was a status symbol and they were all snatched up in shops before a sputnik could go round the world!

A very thin exercise book with much fewer pages that we get at home cost me 7 kopeks (35 cts).

Ivanov joined me at lunch. The waitress who served me at breakfast complained that I had not paid my bill. I told her that I was a guest of the Academy and Ivanov confirmed my statement. She accepted this with good grace. An Iraqi medical student shared our table. I learnt that he had been in Tashkent for three years, the first year was spent in learning Russian. I asked him why he came to U.S.S.R. when there was a medical school in Baghdad. He said it was difficult to enter. I got suspicious and later it came out that he was probably a communist and owing to his political activities he had to flee the country. When I asked him the direct question whether he was a communist he was silent; apparently he was not sure of my credentials. He still got money from his country—about 100 roubles a month—by various underground means. He lived in a students' Hostel in Tashkent. I could not ask him how much he had to pay for this. He was in his third year and was following a course in Paediatrics. He was very interested to learn that I was a Professor of Paediatrics. The Dean of Paediatrics in his medical Institute was Professor Rahim Eagamberoievich, but try as I did several times, I was not *allowed* to meet him. Why? I never knew. Dr. "Khrushchev" had not heard of him but promised to find out and never did. I reminded him several times but all to no effect.

## A ROOF CAFE

I tried to get to the roof cafe for supper. Ivanov had told me that I could buy my food on tick there too if I mentioned to the girl in charge that I was an Academy guest. As this cafe was on the sixth floor I attempted to get the lift. There was no response. I had to mount wearily the four floors between me and the roof. At the end I found a door bolted and barred. My loud knocks had not the slightest effect so I dismounted all the way down to the ground floor and asked one of the picturesquely clad Uzbek bell boys whether the lift was working to the cafe. With the help of various signs they indicated that I must take another lift further down the corridor. There was quite a queue in front of it. When the rather rickety old lift came down some youths very generously allowed me to crash the queue. I have met such kindness time and again. It is a courtesy extended to all foreigners, which one does not always find in Western countries. One sees it in the East, however, but that is due to the sense of inferiority bred in us by our erstwhile rulers who made us feel that any white man has the right to crash a queue when he finds a lot of "natives" only in front! This attitude is now fast disappearing but unfortunately a worse evil is taking its place, an unnecessary show of discourtesy and arrogance shown to the white man. It is too adolescent an attitude; let's hope we will grow up soon and emulate the Russians at least in this respect.

The two best tables in the roof cafe by the balustrade and right opposite the main fountain and the opera house were reserved for Intourist guests.

A handsome, though rather unkempt and unshaven waiter attended me. He knew very little English. The beef steak I ordered turned out to be a Hamburger, which I loathe, with a fried egg on top which is not good for me, with mountains of boiled potatoes, tomatoes and the round Uzbek loaf of bread, hard and tasteless. It is as big as an entree plate, circular in shape, flat in the middle and rounded at the periphery. I had a bottle of white wine with it, which was an improvement on last night's but it was still too light for my taste.

In the middle of my meal who should appear but the Australian couple who had snubbed me at the airport the previous day. The man very politely asked me whether they could sit with me. I agreed readily as I had no one else to talk to; they probably felt the same.

We talked of cabbages and kings, of communists and capitalists, of Australia, Ceylon and U.S.S.R. They were tourists. He was a cloth merchant from Melbourne with a rasping Australian accent



which you could cut with a knife. They were on a tour of Europe and Scandinavia, but were surprisingly not going to U.K. as they had done the full English and Scottish round six years ago. A rather unusual attitude for a digger!

They were off to Samarakand in the morning for three days. They had tried to change their plane and get to Bokhara but their request had been refused by Intourist. This had been a constant complaint by many foreign tourists. Intourist seems to be as fond of saying NYET as Mr. Molotov was at the U.N.O.! It is very bad for tourism. Every tourist likes to change his plans as he learns more about a country which he is visiting and half the fun of travel is to change one's plans and do something quite unforeseen and unexpected. If one cannot do this, one may as well stay at home. It is time Intourist grew up and got less rigid.

The view from the roof was magnificent as one looked down from a great height on the main square, crowded with people and right opposite one was the impressive Opera House. Soon after dark the fountains lit up as on the previous day and it was a glittering spectacle. No wonder that each evening the roof cafe was crowded with everybody who could find a seat there. No native of U.S.S.R. was allowed to occupy the Intourist tables. Several times people sat down but they were asked to vacate them by the waiters or waitresses in spite of my having expressed my willingness (by signs) to their sharing my table. The Australians were bitter about the service in the hotel. There was no service in the bedroom when you wanted it; as for the restaurant, the least said, the latest served!

I left in a hurry but told the supervisor to debit my bill to the Academy. Apparently my waiter knew nothing about this because I heard later that he thought that I had decamped without paying my bill!

It was so inconvenient having to explain each time to people who did not understand English that I was a guest and that the Academy was paying for me. Why the latter did not give me a card stating these facts in Russian was, I suppose, due to a lack of imagination. It would save their guests a lot of embarrassment if the Academy did this.

At the end of my second day I had noticed that there were very few petting couples about on the streets. Was this due to the law, the mores or the lack of pretty girls? It could not be the law because in Leningrad and Kiev there were quite a few couples holding hands and walking about the streets. There were certainly much fewer good-lookers in Tashkent than further north but I thought that this lack of public petting must have been due to their Islamic back-ground. As I mentioned earlier these girls'



mothers and grandmothers were probably all in strict purdah till 1917. I saw one beautiful girl, very well-dressed and well made-up holding hands and walking out with her beau in the morning. She must have been an actress or a ballerina, but I saw very few such couples about; the absence of courting pairs in the parks and gardens was conspicuous. The sexes seemed for the most part to gang-up separately. I presumed that Islam had still not got out of their blood!

I saw an interesting trio at meal time. A middle-aged, fat man in a bush shirt with two older pure Uzbek women. They were dressed in long flowing gowns of a brightly coloured flowered material reaching half way down their legs. Underneath the gowns they wore loose pyjamas of the same pattern; over the gowns they wore sober-coloured waistcoats. Their heads were covered with loosely tied and pinned white scarves. One was shod in Russian boots and the other in slippers. For jewellery they had cheap silver crescent-moon-shaped earrings with necklaces of the same material.

### THE THIRD DAY:

When I went down to breakfast at 8 a.m. not a soul was present in the restaurant nor were the tables laid and ready. I walked out again and went to the post-office. I studied the enormous plaster wall map of U.S.S.R. in the Aeroflot office in the hotel. It gave me an idea to learn the Cyrillic alphabet by copying down in my notebook the equivalents of the Roman letters for the names of the main cities of U.S.S.R. which I could identify like МОСКВА, ЛЕНИНГРАД, Ташкент, etc. I saw my friend, Leonid, the manager in the distance and asked him where I could have breakfast on credit as the restaurant was not yet open. He accompanied me to the cafe adjoining the office which was open to the public and was always full of Uzbeks, Kazakhs and others. He spoke to one of the female supervisors who asked me to sit down at a table and went and brought forth a huge bulk of a man weighing about 300 lbs.! He spoke in Russian to Leonid who informed me that the hotel restaurant was now open. I was lucky this time as the waitress spoke English but the fare was very limited, excepting eggs; there was no fish or fruit. They had some frankfurters which were served with white rice and the ubiquitous cucumber. No mustard was available for the sausages. It reminded me of Bishop Lash of Bombay who once remarked at his breakfast table that his only excuse for eating sausages was the pleasure it gave him to help himself to liberal spoonfuls of mustard! I feel like that too—eating sausage without mustard is like petting a woman without a bosom!



Leonid came and sat with me for a short time at breakfast. He was the friendliest Russian I had met so far; he was thin and angular and could be a Uzbek; his face was oval and he smiled with his eyes; his hair was always untidy and kept falling over his forehead; he was always dressed in an open shirt and light-coloured pants with sandals on his feet. As far as I could remember he was the first man I met who had not a single gold tooth in his head! I was grateful for this. We took to each other at once. He asked me whether I had any Ceylon coins. I told him that it was illegal to take any out of my country but I had heaps of Ceylon stamps. He was very interested. I offered him first choice of what I had brought with me.

I got Leonid to teach me the rest of the Cyrillic alphabet after breakfast. The bank girl also became very interested and joined us. I took all my foreign currency notes out, which did not in toto amount to more than £2 at the most but she only cashed the 10s sterling note. She would not take an Australian note of the same value. She promised to let me know later whether it was legal tender but was definite that she could not cash any Malayan, Indian, Pakistan or Thai notes but she was willing to take Ceylon currency notes if I had any; unfortunately I had none. The girl had a printed list of all the currencies that could be exchanged, with their rates in front of her. I was surprised that the Australian was not there but the Ceylon was. The Indian was, but recently the Government of India had requested the Soviet banks not to negotiate its notes. Ceylon had not yet followed suit, though export of all our currency was strictly prohibited.

I gave my large envelope containing all the stamps to Leonid and asked him not to take all but to spare some for others in Moscow and Leningrad. About three others, after asking my permission, also took some. I had stamps from many countries ranging from Guatemala, Kuwait, the Cayman Islands and Cambodia. They all disappeared before you could say sputnik and I was left with only the Indian, British and Ceylon stamps.

"Dr. Khrushchev" was half-an-hour late for his appointment with me; I had to kick my heels about in the office waiting for him.

I missed the sight of pictures on the walls of the rooms. It was strange how an obvious thing like that did not strike me at once till I had time to sit and stare; even my bedroom was bare of pictures.

I had an Ektachrome film in my Leica but I was informed that it was very unlikely that I would get it developed till I got to London. The office staff was also not sure whether I could buy a 35 mm. Soviet colour film. As a matter of fact Leonid presented me with one the next day but that is an interesting story which must wait till I get to Moscow.

While I was waiting for Dr. K. two American widows, sisters, met another American dowager with a young effeminate looking youth in his early twenties and the usual talk that was invariable among Yankees in a foreign land arose. "Where do you come from?"

"How strange, that's where my girl friend lives", said the youth.

"Oh, I have a grand-daughter there, may be its she?", chimes in one of the females.

After further questions and answers they decided that that could not be. I thought I saw a flash of great relief in the youngster's eyes! Then there was an interminable tale how in far away Thailand the merry widow had come across an American woman with a sister in her home town.

"Would she look her up on her return?", and don't believe it but she lived just round the corner from her house. These Yanks are so naive especially these elderly females who have all killed off their husbands and are now rampaging round the world in their expensive furs, cheap costume jewellery and chicken brains!

I was told in U.S.A. that 80% of the world's gold was in that country and 80% of that was in the hands of women! No wonder U.S.A. was a matriarchy!

On the "Queen Mary" crossing from London to New York I once heard a choice conversation. A middle-class middle-aged couple from the mid-West had just finished the Grand Tour of Europe. For half-an-hour over cakes and tea, all they could expatiate on were the respective plumbing wonders of Paris and Florence, Sienna and Rome. One of the officers of the "Queen Mary" gently pulled their legs.

"I wonder why you ever come to Europe. You have everything that we have in Europe only on a much bigger and more modern scale?"

"Yes, indeed you are quite right. I think we Americans are very foolish to suffer the intolerance of poor plumbing in order to squint at some old ruin which should have been crushed to smithereens ages ago in order to make room for a skyscraper!" I don't remember the exact words. It was eight years ago but I have never forgotten the delightful naivete with which she reacted to the officer's sarcasm! And in Leningrad—but that must wait for my friend the hotelier from Las Vegas!

One American widow was very impressed that I had brought so many stamps all the way for the Russians. I said that I had heard that if you wanted to touch a Russian heart, you had to give him stamps or tea.



"Oh I wish I knew. I have a stack that high (pointing to the ceiling) at home! "How she was going to cart that around the world would create a major traffic problem for the air fleets of the world!

Dr. K. materialised at 11 a.m.—one hour late. There was no word of apology. These people are usually late and they take it for granted. Though born and bred in the unhurrying Orient there is nothing that annoys me more than being kept waiting for appointments. I was always taught at school and college that it was very bad manners to do so and showed a lack of consideration for the other person. The Russians, like most of my countrymen, are very lax about this.

We drove to a Medical Institute which in English means a medical school and hospital. I was asked to wait in the car till Dr. K. arranged it all. I gathered that the Head of the Institute had not been informed about my visit up that moment. Strange were the ways of the Uzbek!

#### THE FIRST PAEDIATRIC INSTITUTE IN TASHKENT (see also p. 190)

Dr. K. came back and mumbled something to Ivanov who was also accompanying me as my interpreter. We then drove through the main gates and through a large wooded campus which was full of wandering students, for the most part segregated according to sex and found ourselves at the paediatric clinic, the head of which was Professor Lydia Alexandrava. She was a short and badly hunched middle-aged woman with greying red-brown hair, very austere done up in the fashion of most Russian women of that vintage. She had an engaging smile which she displayed at infrequent intervals. Unfortunately she possessed a few gold teeth. She did not know any English and I thought she showed some signs of nervousness and lack of confidence in meeting me. It was probably due partly to her lack of experience in meeting foreigners and partly to the strangeness of her guest! She was however quite intelligent and alert, soft spoken with no manifest signs of irritation or annoyance at Ivanov's poor interpretation. The latter was quite out of his depth with the medical lingo but he had the good grace to admit this. Some of the terms were transliterations of the Latin and Greek names but the pronunciation of these being so different in Russian, it was extremely difficult to follow. I was introduced to her whole staff; there were not more than two men to about fifteen women! one or two of them knew a few words of English. I asked them whether they had not learnt it in school. Some said "yes" but that they had forgotten most of it through lack of practice. I was asked to introduce myself to the group, to say who I was, where I came



from, what was the purpose of my visit, etc. I then asked them the questions to which I wanted answers, particularly details about the training of medical students and post-graduates, about common diseases of infants and children and vital statistics relating to them. None of the last mentioned were given me. I was told that I must get this information at the Ministry of Health. As a matter of fact I did do so on the last day of my stay when I met the Minister. My immediate reaction was that no one outside the Ministry was ever permitted to give any information regarding vital statistics to foreigners. Before I had finished my questions, the Professor asked me to tell them more about my work and I said that would be difficult unless they asked me specific questions which I would do my best to answer.

She tried to tell me that it was more difficult to become a Professor in U.S.S.R. than in Ceylon. This was not very complimentary, though she had no intention, I am sure, of being rude. However, I was not taking that lying down so I told her and the group that it was equally difficult in Ceylon to get a professorial appointment as in their great country. I think I convinced them of that by my evidence.

I was sorry I could not discuss the language issue owing to lack of time but I gathered later that a student could opt for doing his course either in Uzbek or in Russian and more and more were opting for the latter. *All medical students however must study one foreign language as well*, so they were trilingual. English, I gathered was the most popular foreign language here. They are interested to know about our children's ailments. It was difficult to make them understand what protein-calorie malnutrition meant. One woman was familiar with the term, Kwashiorkor (Protein deficiency disease which meant, in the Ga language in W. Africa, the disease which the first child got when the second child was born; in other words a disease of deprivation due to the breast milk fading out and no other protein-containing food being given to the elder child).

I told them that I had slides on these diseases and some others like anaemia and I was prepared to lecture on any of them. They would think about it and let me know but they never did!

One fact mentioned at this conference amazed me. Prior to 1917 there was not a single Uzbek doctor. There were a few Russians sent from Leningrad or Moscow. Today Uzbekistan possessed 9,500 fully trained (six year course) doctors for a population of 10 million. In 1917 Ceylon had nearly 500 doctors. Today we have 2,600 for the same size of population! The difference in the rate of progress was staggering. It makes one think. Was this due to the system of government or to the sense of devotion and dedication to their country or the very hard work which



every Russian was expected to do and does? I believed it was due to all these factors. A change of the system of government was not sufficient without a change in the hearts, minds and spirit of the people. A nation must be disciplined, free from superstition, shibboleths and slogans. The people must realise that it was only by their own bootstraps that they could eventually better themselves. Unless a nation disciplined itself, it could never progress in this modern, technological world of science.

## A BONE AND JOINT TUBERCULOSIS SANATORIUM FOR CHILDREN

I had my first acquaintance with Maria, an Armenian woman, who was a first-rate interpreter at this conference. She was a teacher of English and much more efficient and skilled than Ivanov.

After lunch we went to a sanatorium for children's bone and joint tuberculosis. This was situated in the country 10-15 miles out of Tashkent. It was a lovely large campus full of trees, flowers and fruit. The extent of the grounds was 500 hectares which is over 1,000 acres. Ash, birch, beech, oak, poplar, elm, apricot, pear, apple, peach and plum trees, etc. were present in abundance on this estate. The patients were allowed to pluck and eat any of the fruit. Freedom indeed is a relative term; what is free in a totalitarian regime is controlled in a democratic one and vice versa. *We may well ask, not what is truth but what is freedom and not wait for an answer.*

Most of the children were in open wooden pavilions with no walls, only intermittent pillars. They had rolled-up canvas tats which were let down in case of inclement weather. A pavilion to house about thirty or forty patients cost only £1,000 to build which was extremely cheap; but this was the type of building we needed in Ceylon, not the high cost steel, brick and mortar structures. After a preliminary talk at which the Director, Dr. Yusupova presided and told me all about the staffing and organisation, we did a tour of the whole sanatorium. The patients did not pay anything at all and it cost the state half-a-million roubles a year (Rs.2,000,000).

There were 350 workers including 26 doctors, only 5 of whom were men; 87 nurses for 325 beds (1 to 4 which was pretty good) and 46 teachers for the children. These last were full-time and paid by the State, i.e., one teacher for every seven pupils! Some of the teachers were for special subjects like handicraft, carpentry, music, art, etc.

Two Research Institutes in Tashkent used these patients for their research projects. The patients had five meals a day and plenty of fresh air, winter and summer.

The average length of stay for each patient was one and a half years. They had 60-70 new patients each year and they came not only from Uzbekistan but from surrounding republics like Kazakhstan, Turkomenia, Kirghizia and Tadzhikistan.

However, an even larger sanatorium for bone and joint tuberculosis which treated both adults and children was sited at Samarkand. I was amazed at the large numbers of patients suffering from this distressing disease in this region, but more of this later.

The handicrafts done by the child patients were of high quality. The embroidery especially was superb, so was the wood carving created by boys up to the age of 15 years. Some heads of famous men sculptured in plasticine, were very life-like; a radio-set, an electric fan and knife grinder all made by the patients and many paintings and drawings were all of a very high order. Wherever I went the standard of child art has impressed me greatly. When ever I tried to guess the age of the artist, I invariably placed it about two years too high. These people have a tremendous flair for the graphic arts besides their well-known genius for music and dancing. It was a pity however that since the revolution their freedom of expression has not been, shall I say, allowed a free rein. This might be denied but it was quite obvious to anyone who made even a superficial tour of their superb art galleries.

In one pavilion the children were having their music lesson when I arrived. They sang me on request an Indonesian song, the nearest they could get to Ceylon! Some of the children had their beds right out in the open. Some of them had their own small radio sets, not transistors. There was also T.V. inside the pavilion.

When we returned to the Director's room she invited me to a cup of tea. In addition to their rather insipid Georgian tea a sumptuous array of fruit, peaches, apples and red cherries, besides buns, cheese and butter were on the table. I had all three varieties of fruit and two cups of tea. All the rest then started a guessing game regarding my age. The Director asked me the direct question. When I asked her to guess she countered with

"If you guess mine first, then I will guess yours!"

"But, madam, it is never done to guess a woman's age; besides if I were wrong, I stand in serious danger of physical violence!"

They all laughed. The Director was too shy to guess mine so her deputy said "Fifty"! Then the chief retorted "No he cannot be more than forty-eight!" When I remarked that I was in my sixtieth year they refused to believe it till I had to show them the date of my birth entered on my passport.

"In my country", I said "a man is as young as he feels and a woman is as old as she looks!"



They were amused at this rather trite expression. I added that my heart was still young. That tickled them no end! I believed they thought I was making improper suggestions!

When I returned to the hotel I was told that my programme at Tashkent had been settled by the Uzbek Academy of Science—this without any reference to me and my request for a visit to Bokhara had been refused peremptorily without any reasons given. In the Soviet Embassy in Ceylon I had been assured that I would be permitted to go anywhere in U.S.S.R., even to the Crimea if I wanted to!

No provision had been made in the local programme for seeing anyone in the Ministry of Education or for a visit to a collective farm. Eventually after repeated requests I was allowed both. I was to spend a whole afternoon at the Orientological Institute. I refused to do this as I was not interested in this nor had I the faintest knowledge of Oriental Scholarship or Research!

I had been booked to leave for Moscow on Saturday, the 15th. I requested a visit to a collective farm on that day and postponement of my reservation till the following day. This was allowed, much to my surprise.

I was so tired when I got back that I went to sleep at 7.45 p.m. Hot jazz was being played just below my window so I did not get much rest as the music was hardly a lullaby! At 8.30 p.m. the doors started banging all over, a terrific storm had arisen and the rain came pelting down in a few minutes. This was most unusual for this time of year, I gathered; all the rain falls in winter time. As sleep was impossible I had a shower and went to dinner about 9.30 p.m. The restaurant was packed. I could not get a seat anywhere. All the Intourist seats had been usurped by locals. I asked permission at two tables where there were single empty seats whether I could have one, but they were reserved; one was occupied soon after but the other was not. However, I sat on an empty side-table near the entrance until a friendly supervisor who knew English and me came along. She immediately went to the table at which I usually sat, where two dark-skinned shaven-head Uzbeks with embroidered caps and Ukrainian shirts were partaking of light drinks, and made them vacate their seats. They resented this very much but got up in slow motion and departed. I apologised to them with a pleasant smile. Obviously they did not understand what I was saying. One of them gave me such an evil stare that if looks could kill I would have been dead, buried and stinking in the fraction of a second. However, having got some satisfaction by staring at me he went out without a word, to my great relief. By this time the episode had created a minor sensation in the restaurant and I was the target of all eyes. The



worst of it was that most of the din of chatter was silenced and I therefore felt most embarrassed. Sympathies were rather divided but a rule had been broken and that not by me. Two other seats at my table were occupied by a very good-looking light-complexioned Syrian engineering student and his baby-faced attractive girl friend with striking brown eyes, raven hair and a most fetching smile. She was, however, too phocine for my taste and I would imagine that in a few years more she would, given the chance, graduate to be like one of the 200-lb. waitresses at this hotel!

The Syrian was very friendly and was on my side. He spoke Russian as well as English and was a on state scholarship to follow a course in electrical engineering. He lodged in a students' hostel, the cost of which was defrayed by the Syrian Government. The Soviet students, he told me, all received free lodging and paid only for their food and laundry of heavy stuff like blankets, towels and sheets which they could not handle themselves. This was later confirmed by Ceylon students at Lumumba University at Moscow. The Syrian offered me some "*Beshtie*", a dry white Georgian wine. It was the best I had tasted to-date so I ordered a bottle myself and shared it with the two of them. Only red caviare was available. Though it was considered bad form to prefer this to black, it did taste better than some of the cheaper grades of the latter. The best of the latter was of course beyond compare. The entrecote was dreadful. These Uzbeks, like most Soviets, overcooked their steaks and the meat was tough and tasteless like buffalo meat at home. It was served with the inevitable fried egg on top.

I noticed that most the natives consumed either PLOV (which was the same as our PILAU—fried rice with nuts, raisins and chunks of mutton) or a very similar dish, also served in a deep bowl like an old-fashioned pudding bowl, which contained sphagetti instead of rice.

#### THE FOURTH DAY:

I reserved a seat for this evening's ballet at the Opera House and went for a walk as I had ninety minutes to spare for my next appointment. I came to a public garden; they were all of a type; the outer rim was wooded thickly with poplars, oaks, elms, beeches and birches and in the centre was a circular flower garden, usually roses. I saw here as elsewhere two old women bent at right angles sweeping the paths with short "ekel-like" brooms. I thought it a primitive and back-breaking procedure, but the park was scrupulously clean, with not a leaf, not a scrap of paper, not a cigarette butt on the walks. The only danger was walking into muddy pools both in the parks and on the pavements in the main streets. One got one's shoes and the trouser bottoms hopelessly



dirty if one accidentally did that. I happened to once and had to wash my pants and shoes in the bath before I got them fit to wear. The garden had cafes and two or three book, paper and magazine stalls scattered about; there was also a large hall for concerts and dances. I found some magazines in English like 'International Affairs' and 'New Times'; as the latter was cheaper I bought one. They were both political blurbs filled with rather crude and vituperative abuse of the West and praise only reserved for communist achievement and ideology.

I spent the rest of the time window shopping. There was a plenitude of goods but a deficiency in quality as I mentioned earlier.

A ready-made two piece men's suit of fairly good material cost 70R. (Rs.350/-) and a very cheap, probably second hand suit, 16R. (Rs.80/-).

A pair of grey flannels cost the same. The quality was certainly not as good as a DAKS.

A fancy woollen sports jacket cost 20R. (Rs. 100/-) and a pair of men's black shoes 25R. (Rs. 125/-). These latter were much more expensive than those of similar quality in U.S.A. or U.K., Holland or Italy.

A winter overcoat was priced at 94R. (Rs. 470/-), much more than the suit mentioned above.

A light rain coat could be bought however for 21R (Rs. 105/-).

Ladies' shoes ranged from 14R. to 50R. (Rs. 70 - 250) and children's from 16s. to £2 and babies from 6s. to £1. 3s.

A child's summer cotton frock cost Rs. 34/-, which was very reasonable when compared to London prices.

Ladies' handbags of pretty poor quality varied from Rs. 16/- to 30/-.

I also noted the prices of various miscellaneous articles as follows:—

Rifles ranged from Rs. 110/-

A Rucksack—Rs. 32/-

Cameras from Rs. 53-320 (this was modelled like a Leica and called DPYR).

A Bokhara carpet—Rs. 33/-

A small alarm clock—Rs. 25/-

A large fancy table clock—Rs. 35/-

An electric iron—Rs. 42/-

A small radio set (not a transistor)—Rs. 27/-

A medium-sized radio set—Rs. 265-320/-

A colour film (Soviet) with 36 exposures cost Rs. 5/-

**Food:**

Very small green apples, looked good only for cooking, Rs. 1/65 p. lb.  
 Cheese from Rs. 4/- 7/- per lb.  
 Chocolates Rs. 7/- 14/- p. lb. 1 smaller bar of chocolates, Rs. 3/-  
 Butter Rs. 8/- per lb.  
 Margarine Rs. 3/- per lb.  
 Sausages Rs. 5/- per lb.  
 Jam 8s. for a small bottle containing approximately 1 lb.  
 Fish Rs. 2/50 per lb.  
 Milk 40 cts. per small tin, which was by no means cheap.

The cost of meat I could not ascertain because the price was not marked.

**AT THE OPERA IN TASHKENT**

The Opera House was rather Persian in design and in interior decoration. A close affinity existed between Uzbek and Iranian art and architecture. The foyers were decorated with delicately coloured frescoes, magnified versions of Persian miniatures. The walls were all in white and gold, embossed in intricate and lace-like designs. The central dome was richly decorated in brown, white and gold. The chandeliers were, as everywhere, imposing and impressive.

The orchestra were all dressed in shirt sleeves, except for the conductor who was in the full regalia of white tie and tails with a soft collar. Right through the U.S.S.R. this seemed to be the mode of dress for all conductors of orchestras.

The audience were all in open shirts and I was conspicuous as the only male with a tie. It was a broiling hot day again and the house was half empty. I had the centre seat in the second row of the stalls for which I had to pay about 13s., which was neither cheap nor dear if one considered that Tashkent corresponded to a place like Cardiff or Manchester. I wondered how many provincials in U.K. would show the same level of appreciation of ballet as these Uzbeks did! Just before the orchestra started to play the overture, a bevy of female teenagers romped in and planted themselves on some of the empty seats in the front two rows of the stalls. I observed that they all cheered and clapped furiously, so I suspected that they were cheer leaders who had been given free seats for this purpose. They were chatting away like a flock of parakeets but observed dead silence and the enthralled, almost hypnotised, expression that all good Soviet citizens observed as soon as the performance commenced.

The first ballet was Chopiniana which I was destined to see twice more in Moscow and Leningrad! The male star was rather mediocre but the ballerina was super; the corps-de-ballet



was very well-trained as in all the performances I have seen throughout the U.S.S.R. Their movements were characteristically fairy-like, so light and feathery like bits of gossamer floating in the air.

No one munched sandwiches or chocolates and there was no rustling of papers, no coughing, no clearing of throats throughout the performance.

The second part of the performance was not so good. It consisted of a series of short dances following one on top of the other—solos, duets, trios and quartets.

One male star with long hair which he kept in place with hair-clips missed his hold twice in one dance and his partner had narrow shaves from being seriously injured. The audience gasped audibly and then tittered and the conductor looked round and sneered! the dancer's only excuse was that he had appeared in several earlier items and must have been near exhaustion as it was a very hot day.

The lighting was by no means first-rate but one could not, I suppose, expect any better in any provincial city in Western Europe.

We went to a Maternity District Hospital in the morning. This corresponded to a Municipal Maternity Home in Colombo (see page 197).

At lunch Ivanov joined me and dropped a bomb that I had to pay for my expenses—travel, hotel, etc. to Samarkand and back. No provision had been made for it on my programme and all previous guests of the Academy had done the trip at their own expense. If that were so, the trip was definitely off as I could not afford it. I also told Ivanov that I had been informed by the Soviet Embassy in Ceylon that I was free to go anywhere in U.S.S.R. free of cost. All I could do by way of compromise was to promise to pay the cost after my return to Ceylon to the Soviet Embassy in Colombo but I was certainly not going to pay it out of the meagre foreign exchange I had brought with me. Ivanov promised to contact the higher echelons of the Uzbek Academy and let me know the next day. I did not like Ivanov's way of putting this across to me at the last minute. He also tried to keep me away from the Academy Officials. I have not gone there once nor seen anybody there in spite of requesting to do so. This reluctance to allow me contact with the President and the Secretary made me suspicious. Ivanov who was a minor noise at the Academy tried to ride the high horse with me and to bully me and I let myself go once and threatened to go immediately to Moscow. After that he was much more docile and amenable to reason.

After I had finished my next appointment in the afternoon I told Leonid, my friend, about my troubles regarding Samarkand and Ivanov. He tried to telephone someone at the Academy but as it was only five minutes before closing time, he was not successful. Another woman on the staff who was connected with the House of Friendship, which was an Organisation that looked after foreigners offered to telephone the President of the Academy direct at his home; this proved most opportune as he promised to give immediate orders that all my expenses to Samarkand and back be paid by the Academy. So that was that. Next morning I had a fearful row with Ivanov for this direct approach that I made to the President. I told him to go, jump in the lake!

FIFTH DAY:

### CLINICS AT A KOLKHOZ

I had my long anticipated visit to a kolkhoz (= Collective Farm) but I was shown only the maternity homes and the medical care. I was very anxious to see the inside of a worker's home but was not allowed to. Dr. "Khrushchev" was too nervous to take the plunge and to get into trouble. I should have told him of my wishes earlier which he could then have transmitted to the President of the Academy or to the Minister of Health for their approval. It was very tiresome, this fear and uncertainty that was so obviously shown by the lower and middle rungs of officials!

The Director of the First Maternity Home that I visited at the kolkhoz was an Armenian, Dr. Karakozovan. She had been trained in Tashkent like many of the Armenians, and like most of her nation was swarthy but handsome. In fact the best looking race in the whole of the U.S.S.R. were in my opinion the Armenians.

The medical clinic attached to this maternity home was started in 1948. This one was a peripheral unit, collecting cases for the central clinic at Kibrag which we were to visit later in the morning. The main task at this clinic was immunisation. I learnt that polio immunisation with the oral Sabin vaccine which had been given en masse up to a year ago to every child from two months to twelve years of age was not compulsory now and would be given only if there were any cases of the disease. I was however assured again and again that no case of polio had been reported in this region for the last three years.

Cases of *typhoid fever* occurred sporadically and every child was immunised at 7 years against it; this was repeated annually till the age of 50-60 years. *I therefore presumed that in these kolkhozes it still remained a public health problem.*



Pregnant women worked in the kolkhozes till the seventh month. After the fourth month they were given only light duties. They were not allowed to work but were given full-pay leave from the beginning of the eighth month till the infant was two months old i.e. for a period of four months, two before and two after delivery. *I am not aware of any other country which provides so much maternity leave with full pay.*

At the Kibrag clinic there was another charming hostess, Dr. Mahmoodova, an obviously Moslem name. Eight doctors were on the staff, of whom only two were men.

There was a children's ward with ten beds in addition to the maternity ward. Most of the child patients suffered from respiratory infections and dyspepsia; diarrhoea, I was informed, was very rare; so were intestinal parasites like the round worm. Trachoma which had been very common earlier was now almost completely eradicated. (Trachoma is a viral disease of the eyes very common in the Middle East.)

Rheumatic diseases and nephritis were seen twice or thrice a year; chicken pox and measles were common but scarlet fever was only seen once or twice a year.

The doctor here told me that she had not seen a case of polio for thirteen years. My immediate reaction was that she must have missed an awful lot when she was younger and less experienced. She also told me that every woman living in the kolkhoz must have a twice-yearly vaginal examination.

The staple dish here, PLOV, i.e., fried rice with mutton, was given to children from the second year of life. They were also very fond of a kind of dumpling with lots of fat, meat, onions and pastry. Macaroni, tomatoes and potatoes were the other common ingredients of the diet. Fresh fruit, like apples and grapes, was available to the kolkhoz throughout the winter. Dried fruit, like apricots, dried apples, raisins and figs, was also plentiful during the winter. Fish was not a popular dish.

## LUNCH BREAK

After the preliminary talk and orientation, I was invited to a sumptuous lunch. Our chauffeur, Nicholas, also joined the party. We started with bread, butter and jam, all locally produced, followed by salads containing the inescapable cucumber and tomatoes as well as the delicious chopped onion leaves. Plenty of Georgian tea which was served in fair-sized bowls, similar to those ones found in Chinese restaurants in the Far East or U.S.A. but very much larger. No milk of course was served as it was green tea but cube sugar was available to those who wanted it.

Some of the Uzbeks, I noticed, did take sugar with their tea. After some time the *plat de jour* was brought in like the Prima Donna appearing at the Opera in the second Act. It was called "*Kaurma*" in Uzbek and consisted of grilled mutton cut like a Kabob and served with onion leaves, fennel (=dill) and the salad. This was very tasty but they gave me such a Himalayan helping that I had to leave half behind. Maria, the interpreter, was very kind and helpful, telling me the names of all the things on the table in Russian. She was very touched when I said how much I missed her the previous day when I had another interpreter who was not half as friendly or as efficient as she. She insisted on paying for a cassette which I bought for the colour film given me by the hotel manager. When I asked her why must she pay for this, all she said was, "This is my gift for you". Maria is an Armenian, too, in origin. These people are most unselfish and generous.

Suddenly in the middle of the meal, Dr. "Khrushchev" looked at me and said something. Maria translated this as "I like you". I reciprocated these words and said that that was why I called him "Khrushchev".

These Uzbeks and Armenians have a sense of humour and they can laugh at themselves. Life is not all toil and trouble. They do find time to sit and stare, to laugh, to gossip and to enjoy one another's company.

### A WARD ROUND

After lunch we donned long white coats and went round the clinic. I protested at the sight of the swaddled infants. The temperature must have been about 85°F. The doctors complained that when the infants' limbs were left free, they got very restless and sleepless. I told them frankly that I did not believe such stories and begged them to try keeping the limbs free. They said they would, but I wondered!

One chubby infant recovering from broncho-pneumonia came into my arms at once when I stretched them out and smiled sweetly at me. Everyone including the mother was most surprised and pleased when I hugged and kissed her thinking of my grandchild of about the same age.

When I left, the doctor gave me the Uzbek salutation which was the right palm on one's heart, rather striking as much as to say, "I give you my heart". On the way back I reminded Dr. "Khrushchev" about my wish to see a worker's home. He pretended that there was no time which was not true because we had one and a half hours left for my next appointment!

Dr. "Khrushchev" was a supposedly pure Uzbek. His first name was Shafideen and he was of Moslem stock, but now delighted



in eating pork! It was strange that he resembled so closely the *de facto* head of the U.S.S.R. State who was a so-called pure Ukranian. This went to show that there must have been a lot of cross-channelling in the blood of the various races that comprised the Soviet Union.

I had supper on the roof cafe at the Tashkent Hotel. I understood that this hotel was the only one where tourists could stay or have their meals; but it also seemed to a visitor to be about the only hotel in the city which locals liked to patronise! This was something that was difficult to understand because all hotels and restaurants were State-owned and so was Intourist and yet the coupons issued abroad by the latter organisation to intending tourists was legal tender only at certain specified hotels. I got a partial answer to this problem later in Moscow.

My Australian friends had returned from Samarkand, not disappointed except that a request to change their plans and go on to Bokhara had been turned down by Intourist. My Japanese Professor friend, who was a specialist on Central Asian History, had informed me that in his opinion Bokhara was much the more interesting of the two. The Uzbek Academy of Science had also turned down my request for a trip to Bokhara without adducing any reasons for its intransigence! I was diffident to press my claims which I could have done by contacting the President but I did not wish to be considered too great a nuisance; besides, I was a guest and, therefore, had to abide by my host's wishes and lastly I would have to forego some of the more scientific conferences which it was more important for me to attend.

I joined my Australian friends later after finishing my meal. They mentioned one interesting point which I had missed and that was that very few of the Soviet citizens wore spectacles! On checking I found this true not only in Tashkent but also in the other cities I visited later like Kiev, Moscow and Leningrad.

The Australian, being a cloth merchant, had wished to visit a textile mill but was shown only the clinic attached to it. Intourist had informed them that a visit to the mill itself could not be arranged. I suspected that this was refused on purpose because my friend was a textile merchant! The Head of the clinic had asked him what his salary in Australia was and was flabbergasted when it was mentioned! He also informed him that junior female mill workers in Australia got higher wages than the assistant doctors at his clinic. He was however told that the rear wages in U.S.S.R. were probably more because the taxes were very much less. I had no opportunity to investigate whether this was actually so or not but the maximum income tax rate for a bachelor doctor was approximately 10% while one with ten children, like Dr. "Khrushchev", paid only 1%!



On the side of the hotel opposite my room, I saw a large provision and wine store which was open as late as 10 p.m. and crowded with shoppers. The food prices quoted earlier were those I had marked in that store (page 39).

*I was also informed by Ivanov that pilgrimages to Mecca were still allowed for a limited number of people every year.*

#### SIXTH DAY:

I started the day by doing a stupid thing by getting a splinter of glass into my sole. My heel bled a bit and on palpation with my finger over the surface of my heel, I thought I felt a sharp piece embedded in my flesh. After breakfast, I consulted Leonid about a doctor and was informed that there was one on the first floor just below mine. He gave me a card saying that I only wanted some Tincture Iodine to be painted on my cut. The doctor happened to be a youngish female but looking most depressed and worried. She obviously had a deep personal problem to grapple with at the moment. I pointed to my heel and tried to make her understand by signs such as pointing to the window that there was a bit of glass embedded in my foot. She understood me all right. I next asked her by signs to try and extract it. She gave my heel a very cursory glance in a very bad light and did not even flash a torch on it. She then mumbled something in Russian or Uzbek to the nurse who dabbed my heel with Iodine and then bandaged it. The bandage was of very poor quality. The doctor now disappeared and I told the nurse that I was a doctor. I was disappointed at the way the woman doctor had treated me. Her only excuse was that she probably had a very serious problem on her mind at the time but I have never been treated so off-handedly by any doctor in any foreign country.

I wrote to the Hon. Secretary of C.A.A.S. that no one in future should leave Ceylon before he made sure that he was given adequate foreign exchange by our Government and also that his full programme had been arranged and fixed in Moscow before he got his foot on any plane in Colombo for U.S.S.R.

I left the key of my suit case in Leonid's safe keeping and told him to keep it for me. He was the only person in the hotel in whom I had complete confidence. I gave Dr. K. half a pound of Ceylon tea. He was as pleased as Punch. The same chauffeur Nicholas, drove our car and we picked up Maria on the way to the airport. She informed me that neither her mother nor she ever went to church though she had the name of Maria and they were Armenian Christians by tradition.

We went straight to the luxurious waiting room where I had my weary one and a half hour's wait for Ivanov on my first arrival in Tashkent.



I got Maria to write her name and address as well as Dr. K's in my address book. He asked Maria to tell me that he was a "Doctor of Honour" in Tashkent. It was difficult to get an interpretation of what that exactly meant but all I comprehended was that it was some sort of title for distinguished services to medicine. He had been in the Public Health Department since 1937 and had written papers on the effect of the silkworm on the health of the workers of that industry. Dr. K. denied that amoebiasis was a problem in Tashkent or in the U.S.S.R. I have checked this several times wherever I went and each time it was endorsed; so it must be true.

Dr. K. insisted on carrying my bag right up to the gate beyond which he was not permitted to go. Here I wished them au revoir until tomorrow when both of them promised to meet me at the airport on my return from Samarkand.

Over a dozen planes were parked on the field. I was not allowed to photograph them. Some of the planes were military ones. I wanted to take a shot of the pretty colour-striped awnings over the seats in the garden surrounding the main airport building but the Intourist hostess told me it was forbidden. I could only photograph the side of the building away from the tarmac. Even at this airport there were trolley cars conveying passengers back and forth between the planes and the building, though each time I ventured on a plane here (four times in all) I did it on foot!

When we got to the gangway, the Intourist girl and myself, a big crowd of locals were ready to get on, but everybody was told to hold back till I had boarded the plane. As I was a foreign guest I was a privileged person and must be allowed to take my seat before any of the others. This gave me rather a pleasant feeling, but I wondered how I would have reacted if the shoe had been on the other foot!

Next to me was a middle-aged Uzbek and his son aged about 5 years, a very pretty boy with a ripe-apple complexion, browns and reds and yellows, all mixed up. The plane looked almost as ancient and quite as decrepit as the quarter-century old Dakotas of Air Ceylon! She also had two engines; the seats were poorly covered and the paint was flaking off the sides. I said one silent but fervent prayer for divine protection when I emplaned and another of sincere thanks when I disembarked! The sweets that were handed out were sticky and the silver paper wrapping could not be completely detached from them. The air hostess had an untidy mop of dark hair, black eyes and high cheekbones, but she was not altogether unattractive. I would say that she was an Uzbek but one could never be sure.

I noticed we were following a river most of the time and flying well below 10,000 feet, probably nearer 5,000. We passed a fairly large town, ten minutes from Tashkent; this was followed by a series of kolkhozes, almost all the way to Samarkand. *I could not see an inch of uncultivated land anywhere.*

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Over a dozen planes were parked on the field. I was not allowed to photograph them. Some of the planes were military ones. I wanted to take a shot of the pretty colour-striped awnings over the stairs in the garden surrounding the main airport building but the Latvian hostess told me it was forbidden. I could only photograph the side of the building away from the tarmac. Even at this airport there were trolley cars conveying passengers back and forth between the planes and the building, though each time I ventured on a plane here (four times in all) I did it on foot!

When we got to the gangway, the Latvian girl and myself, a big crowd of locals were ready to get on, but everybody was told to hold back till I had boarded the plane. As I was a foreign guest I was a privileged person and must be allowed to take my seat before any of the others. This gave me rather a pleasant feeling, but I wondered how I would have reacted if the shoe had been on the other foot!

Next to me was a middle-aged Uzbek and his son aged about 5 years, a very pretty boy with a ripe-apple complexion, brown eyes and red and yellow, all mixed up. The plane looked almost as ancient and quite as decrepit as the quarter-century old Dakotas of Air Ceylon! She also had two engines; the seats were poorly covered and the paint was flaking off the sides. I said one silent but fervent prayer for divine protection when I climbed and another of sincere thanks when I disembarked! The sweets that were handed out were sticky and the silver paper wrapping could not be completely detached from them. The air hostess had an untidy mop of dark hair, black eyes and high cheekbones, but she was not altogether unattractive. I would say that she was an Uzbek but one could never be sure.



**Samarkand**

WE reached Samarkand in one hour and the Intourist man was at the foot of the gangway to meet me. He informed me that my interpreter and a car were waiting for me at the gate. We drove straight to the Hotel Samarkand through the town which looked very dusty and unkempt (but not dirty). It looked as if it had not rained there for a hundred years!

I had been allotted a double room facing the front with the usual entrance lobby, etc. There was no bath but only a shower; this had to be shared, as I discovered later, with my next door neighbour. The room was well-furnished and had double windows as in Vienna. The linen was spotless but the floor of the toilet was untidy and unpolished. The waiters and waitresses in the hotel restaurant knew not a word of English. My interpreter came and helped me with my order; she did not sit with me but at another table nearby with another female interpreter.

Most of the things I wanted like plov, kabob, caviare and smoked salmon were out, and so I eventually had to be satisfied with a rather greasy dish of roast mutton with fried potatoes and the inevitable salad. Fortunately, a bottle of grape juice and another of mineral water quenched my thirst. No dessert and no fruit were on the menu.

The day was again very hot, though Samarkand was 1,500 feet higher than Tashkent.

The most interesting sight in this ancient city from a scientific point of view was the *Observatory* founded on a hill in 1428 A.D. by Ulubeg, the grandson of Tamerlane or Timur the Great. I have already mentioned him during my visit to the Historical Museum at Tashkent. I believe that this observatory must have pre-dated those at Jaipur and Agra, judging from the remains of all of them. The Indian ones were much better preserved and looked as if they had been built at a later date. Originally the observatory had been housed in a three-storied building which had now completely disappeared. The main instrument was a sextant. The building itself had been covered with beautiful coloured bricks of black and yellow and blue. Many ancient maps were also displayed on the walls. The height of the original building had been 90 feet and the diameter 141 feet. The observatory itself was sited on the top of a small hillock and from the summit one got a view of the surrounding country side which was covered with foothills whose slopes were bristling with loose rocks. Nothing seemed to grow or could be cultivated on this desolate land.

The next sight was the mausoleum of Shahi-Zinda. This was actually a collection of a number of tombs occupied by the remains of various relatives of the great Timur but I must here relate the legend of the Living King as given me by my interpreter.

A cousin of the prophet Muhammad, Kusam-ibn-Abbas by name, was sent by him to convert the heathen from Zoroastrianism to Islam. He was praying one day on a hill-top, when one of the native fanatics who had been enraged at the success of his mission crept up behind him and chopped off his head with his scimitar. The reverend gentleman promptly picked up his head and placed it back on his neck, as if he were putting on his hat and continued with his prayers. When he had finished his meditations, he went forthwith and lived deep down in a well; why he did this was not quite clear. That he did live there was accepted far and wide by the true believers till the time of Timur, who however was rather sceptical about the truth of this story. So he ordered one of his soldiers to go down to the bottom of the well and investigate the truth of this tale. This intrepid adventurer did meet Kisam-Ibn-Abbas who spoke to him and asked him why he had come.

“ I was ordered by Timur himself to find out about your life ”.

The saint told the soldier that he could return to his master safely, but the moment he started speaking about what he had seen he would be struck blind. Timur, of course, insisted on knowing the truth and when this was revealed, the soldier was indeed struck blind.

My interpreter very cynically added that no such well had been found, which did not mean a thing either way; but Kisam-ibn-Abbas' tomb had been found on a hill-top and many holy men and their relatives had been buried around him.

One had to climb gently along a long passage way past the numerous tombs to the one at the end which held the remains of Timur's chief wife. Most of the doors and thresholds had intricately designed tiled and fret work with walls of marble, onyx and other semi-precious stones. On the way I saw a group of three old men with flowing beards sitting on a bench. They were dressed in long robes and had turbans on their heads and their costly garments were richly coloured. One was obviously a hydrocephalic. I could have imagined that these were the three Kings from the Orient come to pay homage to another Messiah! I asked their permission to photograph them but was brusquely and rather rudely refused. This embarrassed my interpreter a great deal as she was an ardent communist, because it had disclosed to me that there were still some superstitious and ignorant people about in this rationalistic land.



The remains of the *largest mosque ever built in this world* were also in Samarkand. This was due to the endeavour of Bibi-Hanoon, the chief wife and Empress of Timur. She built this mosque during the absence of her husband, who was busy conquering India at that time. The chief architect who was building it got involved in a much more courageous act; he fell in love with Bibi-Hanoon herself and refused to proceed with the building unless she first allowed him to kiss her. She must have reciprocated his feelings to some extent because she neither rebuked nor dismissed him but instead brought seven eggs, each painted and decorated in a different colour and design but one as beautiful as another.

"Look at these eggs. They all look beautiful. Each is as attractive as the other and if you tasted one, it would be the same as if you tasted another. There are a hundred women in my husband's harem, so why don't you kiss one of them? You will get the same pleasure as if you kissed me".

The architect went away but returned in a few hours with two beautiful cups, richly ornamented in gold and precious stones and each as wonderful to gaze at as the other. He filled one with vodka and the other with water.

"Look, beloved one, these cups are both equally beautiful but if I taste the contents of one, it makes me cold and if I taste those of the other, it makes me hot. It is the same with one beautiful woman as against another!"

Bibi-Hanoon had no answer to this ingenious retort and succumbed to her paramour's charms. Unfortunately his passion was so unrestrained and as it was only a kiss that he was permitted to have, he bit the cheek of the Empress so hard that it left a permanent scar which no drug or balm could remove. When Timur returned after his conquest of India, he saw the beautiful blue domes and minarets from afar and hastened to Bibi-Hanoon to express his gratitude and love for her but, alas, the architect's tooth mark on the Empress' cheek was all too conspicuous. She had to tell him the truth and who was responsible for this unsightly scar. Timur immediately sent for the architect to wreak his vengeance on him. He, wise guy, had foreseen what was in store for him and climbed the highest minaret and hidden himself there with a favourite pupil. When the Emperor's emissary asked the latter where his master was, his reply was, "He has taken wings and flown far, far away and he will never return".

Bibi-Hanoon's mosque covered an enormous extent of ground, though the central courtyard must have been open always to the sky. I would guess that it covered an area as large as S. Peter's does now. There were numerous passages and corridors and stalls for sale of holy and unholy goods round three sides of the



square. The main gate was colossal with minarets on each side with ornately decorative motifs in tile work in the characteristic blue, green and yellow with white Arabic lettering from the Koran. A lovely blue dome only half intact attempted to cover the main sanctuary. The tile work everywhere was superb. A massive marble lectern stood in the centre of the courtyard on which used to rest a gargantuan Koran. The structure itself was well-cared for and in good order but the courtyard was overgrown with weeds, grass and scrub.

The Madrasah in Registran garden was another large institution and comprised three separate colleges built during a period of 300 years. The original building was constructed by Ulubeg in 1417, eleven years earlier than the observatory. There were several courtyards and quadrangles here. One had a facade of a tiger on either side over the main gate with a sun and moon round a human face above each tiger. The rest of the design was in a delicate floral pattern similar to what is seen on Persian carpets.

The last sight we visited was the Gur-i-amir mausoleum where Timur himself as well as Ulubeg was buried. This, in my opinion, had the most beautiful and well-preserved dome of all, blue ridged rows of tiles with a few tufts of grass growing in the hollows in between the ridges.

The Soviet Government is spending large sums of money in restoring and preserving these monuments displaying the ancient culture and skill of the Uzbeks. Timur, the greatest name in Uzbek history, was buried at the feet of his teacher, Seid-Berika, according to instructions left by the great Emperor himself. How many modern Kings, Presidents, statesmen or even politicians would think of paying the same respect to their teachers as this conqueror of his world did in the semi-dark ages of history!

On one side of Timur's grave rested Mohammed Sultan on whose tomb was a large slab of light green onyx, while Timur's tomb itself was of dark green nephrite (jade). At Timur's feet was the tomb of Ulubeg, the greatest scientist of his time in Asia. Several other smaller tombs, belonging to the young children of Ulubeg and Timur who had died prematurely, surrounded them. Each body was buried several feet underground exactly below each tomb on the surface. One could see these graves too by descending to the crypt. The balustrade round the ground floor tombs was of marble and had been made according to the instructions and guidance of Ulubeg. A large amount of restorative work was being carried out at the time of my visit so the full beauty of the interior could not be appreciated owing to the presence of the scaffolding and planks. I was told that the lettering and the walls were all of marble and gold and that the government was attempting to restore them to their pristine glory.



On emerging from the mausoleum we saw a party of three Uzbek women and two men being photographed by one of their party. One of the women expressed a desire to be photographed with me. I readily agreed provided that they allowed me to 'shoot' the three women together. Unfortunately the two untidy, unshaven, and unshorn men also joined in and rather spoilt my artistic effort. The women were handsome and dignified in their long, geometrically patterned though shapeless, Uzbek gowns with scarves round their heads and cheap jewellery round their necks and ears.

We went for a drive round the town. These drives always ended up by a sight of the multi-storied apartments which were springing up like mushrooms in their hundreds and thousands in every city that I visited. I believe that every guide and interpreter has been given strict instructions that every foreign visitor should be shown these rat-traps! The walls of the old houses which were being demolished were of clay. Both here and in Tashkent the old houses were certainly very primitive with low walls, tiny windows and sometimes thatched roofs. Some of these older homes were built round a central courtyard. My interpreter assured me that this was not the usual pattern. Some of them were to my surprise still owned privately by the occupiers. This was allowed till new apartments were built and the occupiers moved to them.

The rent of a three-roomed apartment in Samarkand was between 4-5 roubles a month (Rs.27). This did not include gas and lights. The former was cheap as it was natural gas piped all the way from Bokhara, 280 kilometers away. The roads round the periphery of the city, where these new flats were being built, were appallingly bad and as full of pot holes as in Ceylon nowadays; the chauffeur had often to go on the wrong side of the road in order to avoid these deep depressions.

In the town I saw veiled women for the first time in this country. They were covered from head to foot like the Egyptian women one used to see in Port Said and Cairo.

At the dinner the orchestra was playing Russian, not Uzbek music. The latter was very similar to Hindustani music and I had had a surfeit of it on my radio in my bedroom at Tashkent. I had a lovely kabob served on skewers, a very good red Uzbek wine and fresh apricots and coffee. Altogether the tastiest dinner I have had so far in this country.

After dinner I went for a walk in the amusement park which was just behind the hotel; very few people were about but a symphony concert was on in one of the halls. I heard a quite a lot of applause arising from within, so the majority of the people must have been patronising that show.



I saw an open air dance hall with a cement floor. The music was supplied by a gramophone. There were exactly five couples, one couple comprised two girls and another two soldiers of the gallant Red Army!

Lots of photographs of political leaders, party meetings, children's parades, Komsomols, etc., were scattered at frequent intervals throughout the Park. There was a small artificial lake with cafes built on it with wooden planked paths leading from the shore, but very few people were patronising them.

Samarkandians seemed to take their pleasures soberly and wisely; romping and kicking up the dust as one would find in the West were conspicuous by their absence. The whole atmosphere in this Park meant for fun and frolic as well as for Culture was too sedate and restrained. There must be something wrong with people who take their pleasures so seriously! This was the only place at which I got this reaction.

Summing up my impressions of Tashkent and Samarkand, I would say that the Uzbeks did have a sense of humour. Except for Ivanov, and the two Uzbeks who were asked to make room for me at the restaurant, I have not seen any manifestations of bad or quick temper anywhere. I had yet to see a drunk but this did happen later. They were rather easy going and unreliable. They would promise you the world and thought nothing of breaking their word. It was taken for granted that your wishes could not be fulfilled but they were too polite to say so or had been instructed not to do so to foreigners. I do not suppose many foreigners were taken in by this insincere politeness but why they persisted in doing it beat me. It must do their reputation a great deal of harm but at the same time most of them were very generous, kind and friendly. They were nervous to change arrangements once made. I suspected that this was due to the fact that all appointments for foreigners had to go rather high up on the official line and then trickle down at the opposite end. No one else was allowed to initiate these directly. For instance, if I wanted to visit a kolkhoz, it had to be referred by the Secretary of the Academy to the Minister of Health or to his deputy and then to a senior official who would probably telephone his opposite number in the relevant Ministry. He then would go to his Chief, who would resort to his Minister, and it was only after the Minister OK'd it that it would filter down again and the kolkhoz was informed or *instructed* to welcome me. I also suspected that the degree of welcome would depend on the status of the visitor but that was generally true for all countries, communist or capitalist. *I also believe that the Soviets still have a chip on their shoulder.* If one said anything that sounded the tiniest, weeniest bit critical, they reacted strongly. For instance, when I was discussing legalised abortions with some doctors, I wanted



to get to the bottom of the reason for the fairly large number of abortions performed in Tashkent. They said it was because the mothers had too many children or there were medical reasons. It was also not necessary to get the husband's consent, which rather staggered me. They thought that I was being critical of their policy and that I was judging and condemning them, too harshly. I said legalised abortions were not allowed in my country, except for medical reasons, due to religious and moral objections, but I sometimes wished they were and I assured them that I was not being critical but was fully in sympathy with their attitude. There was a sudden change of atmosphere and all of them became much more friendly and co-operative. I also said that in Ceylon we had a family planning campaign which was making headway but that there was none to be seen here. They also resented my critical remarks regarding swaddling newborns. They thought they knew better but their reasons were puerile.

The Deputy Minister of Education at Tashkent wanted to know from me what the status of women in Ceylon was. I mentioned our woman Prime Minister and women ambassadors, etc. She was surprised and incredulous that any Asian society could give equality of status to their females except through communism. I thought that she was quite sincere about this. Time and time again they doubted my veracity when I said that Ceylon had free education right through school and University, free medical aid, subsidised rice, etc., but we were by no means a communist state.

When I asked my interpreter in Samarkand whether it was true that no one was allowed to read the Koran, she said that it was in Arabic but there was no translation in Uzbek or in Russian. These were forbidden but my interpreter did not know this and I was quite sure she was speaking the truth.

#### SEVENTH DAY:

#### ANOTHER BONE AND JOINT TUBERCULOSIS SANATORIUM

After breakfast I set out with my interpreter to visit the so-called Children's Hospital. It turned out to be a Bone and Joint Tuberculosis Hospital for both adults and children, the exact counterpart of the one I had already seen at Tashkent, except for the presence of adult patients. I was furious and told my interpreter that this was a waste of time. She insisted that I had been informed by the Intourist manager yesterday that this was a T.B. Hospital.

"Nothing of the sort", I said. "If he had, I would have told him where he got off. Can't you telephone him and tell him that I want to visit the Children's Hospital?"



"This is impossible to arrange now. That hospital is situated far out of town and is under repairs and not open to visitors. You were told about this yesterday".

"I was not;" I repeated, "anyway as it would be an act of great discourtesy to turn back now, let us visit this place first".

This was a manifestation of their cast-iron bureaucratic system. There was no chance of setting right a mistake which their "machine" had made and what was more exasperating was that there was no acknowledgment or expression of regret for a *bona fide* error. On the other hand they tried to justify it by repeating a deliberate distortion of the truth!

We entered the reception office which was just within the imposing gates of this park-like campus. We were kept in a waiting hall-cum-clerical office for a doctor to appear and shepherd us round. Eventually a female medico appeared and introduced herself as the deputy superintendent and said that the chief was not well, which I heard with some scepticism. I was right about this, because the Head made a miraculous recovery and joined us about half an hour later when we were in the middle of our tour!

There were some large brick and tile wards which were utilised during the winter but at the time of my visit in mid-June all the patients were housed in open shacks situated in the midst of woods as at Tashkent—no walls, only tats, wooden roofs and most interesting of all, no water laid on and no sanitation! I saw women carrying pails of water from the main buildings to one ward. Apparently they had pits into which the excreta was emptied with some chemical solvent-cum-deodorant. The beds were again placed only 6"-7" apart but owing to the openness of every thing the pavilions did not give any appearance of being overcrowded. There were 575 beds here, 300 of them reserved for children. I asked how many new cases were admitted each year and the second in command said 500! This was a colossal number. When I related this later in Moscow to other doctors, I was told that it must have been a mistake, but my interpreter was excellent, she was an English Honours student, sitting for her Final Degree Examination in a week's time and so I was not convinced that it was an error. I shall refer to these numbers later on.

Unlike in U.K. and other countries they claimed that most of their cases of bone and joint T.B. were caused by the human and not by the bovine bacillus. This was interesting and rather unusual. They referred me to research and publications by Professor Lebedeva in Moscow.

After we had finished the tour they took me to a large concert hall-cum-museum where the patients' handicrafts, etc., were



displayed. As at Tashkent I was greatly impressed with the near professional quality of these goods. I was also asked to sign a gold visitors' book full of signatures and comments by foreign visitors. I saw many names of my American, British and other foreign acquaintances in it. They insisted on my writing my comments too. I said that what impressed me was the happiness and contentment of the patients and the dedicated and devoted services of the staff. There was an atmosphere of reverence to the God of Health which was very striking.

We had a lengthy discussion on the aetiology, prophylaxis and treatment of tuberculosis. There was not much difference between us except for what was previously mentioned and the fact that they practised oral B.C.G. vaccination in newborns while we, like most Western practitioners, used the multiple puncture or intradermal method. I was beginning to suspect that the high prevalence of bone T.B. in this Region was probably due to this. The deputy superintendent was inclined to agree and confessed to me that they were about to start the multiple puncture method. This was later denied by the Minister of Health in Tashkent (page 206).

## HISTORICAL MUSEUM

We proceeded from here to an interesting Historical Museum. The ceramics from Bokhara and Samarkand were impressive. The last two rooms of the Museum were housed in what was the banqueting hall of a rich merchant's palace before the October Revolution. The walls were decorated in red, brown, blue and green coloured as well as embossed plasters. The ceiling was richly carved and painted in gold and in the same colours as the walls. I was told that the merchant "presented" this house to the State after the Revolution. I did not dare to ask whether it was an act of grace or one of compulsion! There were some priceless tapestries and ceramics as well as rubbishy modern stuff among the exhibits; some ornately but beautifully hand-painted tables, chairs and cupboards with the same designs as those appearing on floral Persian carpets. Some of these had been painted as recently as in 1954. It was stimulating to see such first-class craftsmanship in this modern machine-ridden age.

It was altogether a worth-while one hour as it gave me an insight to the high artistic ability and vision of these little known people.

I had lunch at the hotel with my interpreter and another girl called Galia. They ordered me a dish called *Golubee* which consisted of a roll of mutton cooked inside a cabbage leaf with a red sauce, slightly reminiscent of tomato but it must have other secret ingredients as well. I waited half-an-hour for my coffee



At the end of this my waiter expressed regret that none was available and this only after he had been reminded about the order. Galia was very annoyed and after the two girls had an animated discussion, she got up after saying something which sounded like "impression", excused herself and went towards the kitchen. She returned in about two minutes and said the coffee would be served in a few minutes! The waiter was dumbfounded! I was amazed that Galia was so anxious to correct any bad impression created by the waiter's nonchalance, that she took all the trouble to intervene in something that was none of her business but which she considered was her patriotic duty. I wondered how many of us would let down a fellow-countryman to a foreigner in order to retrieve our country's honour! I thanked Galia profusely and said, "You have saved my life". Galia was much more attractive than Ena, my interpreter, who was a scraggy blonde with icy-blue eyes, a slight hunch and an ironing-board chest! Galia on the other hand was a brunette with a fetching smile, very short but charming, I asked her where she hailed from. She was too attractive to be a pure Uzbek and yet she was too dark with jet black eyes and dark-brown hair to be a Russian. She however insisted that she was a sunburnt Russian. I said the sun could not burn her eyes to that colour! She then confessed that she was half-Russian and half-Ukrainian, who in my opinion were a far handsomer race.

We were discussing books when I asked the girls whether they had heard of Nabokov, the Russo-American writer. They were non-plussed. Apparently his books were banned and they had never heard of "Lolita" or "Laughter in the Dark" or "Invitation to a Beheading" etc. I told them that he was today the most popular fiction writer in U.S.A. and many people thought that he wrote better English prose than most authors who were born and bred in English speaking countries. The girls also told me that the only books in English or other foreign languages available were those published by the Foreign Publishing House in Moscow. (I do not think this was 100% correct.) I asked them whether all foreign books were then banned. They reacted in a classical manner, turned red, fidgety and hesitant and blurted out after a silence of a few seconds, "We do not know". They were awkward and did not know how to handle this seemingly embarrassing question; of course they knew the answer but were afraid of getting into trouble by telling me things that I should not know! They would have liked to have gone for instructions on how to handle this inquisitive guest before they committed themselves any further!

I asked them whether Intourist girls were stuck there for life.

"No, we do it for a few years till we find a better job. Some



of us do this in order to have a chance of practising a foreign language especially if we are taking a course in one at the University”.

Interpreting was the only extra-curricular job students did in their spare time and they seldom did this for economic reasons, because the State paid stipends to most students whether they needed help or not.

I told them that in Ceylon too many University students got bursaries (stipends) but if they failed their examinations or got into trouble for misbehaviour, etc., they were in grave danger of getting their bursaries cancelled.

“Did that happen here?” I asked. After denying it at first, probably because they did not understand my question, they admitted that the same danger existed in U.S.S.R. The students did not help in running their hostels though they paid only R. 1/50 (Rs.7/50) a month as room rent and were given stipends sometimes amounting to as much as R. 100 (Rs.500/-). If the students failed and lost their stipends, their parents usually came to the rescue.

I saw a Moslem funeral on my way to the airport. It was no different from such a funeral at home. The bier which had no bottom was carried on the shoulders of male relatives; but there was none of that soft chanting of their heart-rending dirges! Several mourners were following the coffin on foot; there were no flowers—there seldom are at Moslem funerals.

The houses that we passed were built of clay, very dusty and untidy looking from the outside. The road was in a dreadful state of disrepair. It was however being mended, metalled and widened but the dust was awful.

I learnt for the first time that it was not compulsory for a foreign tourist to have an official guide. A French foursome, who were at the Samarkand Hotel and included one member who spoke Russian, had no guide. The Hotel manager himself acted as their guide and showed them the sights. We bumped into them several times yesterday during our tour.

I was again treated like a V.I.P. and allowed to board the plane ahead of the others. The plane was late, however, and there were some confusion about the tickets as there were two passengers more than the number of seats available. Two of them were claiming seats already occupied by others. All the tickets except mine were rechecked by the air hostess. The police were sent for and an awful lot of shouting and abusing went on all round me.

After a ten minute battle royal two of the passengers who were already in occupation of their seats were turned out and we started to rev-up and were aloft twenty-five minutes later than scheduled. Someone had got sick at the back of the plane and on the gangway and it was an unholy stinking mess, which I had to wade through in order to disembark.

I told them that in Ceylon too many University students got bursaries (stipends) but if they failed their examinations or got into trouble for misbehaviour, etc., they were in grave danger of getting their bursaries cancelled.

"Did that happen here?" I asked. After denying it at first, probably because they did not understand my question, they admitted that the same danger existed in U.S.S.R. The students did not help in running their households though they paid only Rs. 150 (Rs. 750) a month as room rent and were given stipends sometimes amounting to as much as Rs. 100 (Rs. 500). If the students failed and lost their stipends, their parents usually came to the rescue.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Back at Tashkent

MARIA, Dr. K. and Nicholas, the chauffeur were there to greet me. Maria gifted me two packets of picture postcards of Samarkand and Tashkent as well as a plaster figurine of a long-robed Uzbek sitting down on his haunches and sipping tea. Maria has a most generous and kindly heart. I expressed a wish to see some Uzbek dancing in the evening but this was not to be.

Leonid had kept the key of my suit-case in the large iron safe in the office. They denied that any thefts occurred anywhere but when you left anything in their care it was always put away in a safe place under lock and key! For instance, when I left my camera in the medical superintendent's office at the Maternity Hospital, she promptly put it away in a drawer which she proceeded to lock immediately! Why should they be so careful if there was no risk of pilfering?

I told Maria that I wanted to visit a worker's home the next day. She spoke to Dr. K. about it who as usual promised to arrange it but never did. They spoke about a couple who were childless and had adopted twelve war orphans but they never gave me a chance to meet this family though I expressed an earnest desire to do so.

I learnt from Maria that all foreign books were not banned only those definitely anti-communist.

Soon after I unpacked and washed, I went out to get a shoe shine as I had not brushed my shoes since leaving home a week ago. I had forgotten to pack a shoe brush and cream. The shoe-shines operated in enclosed wooden cabins on the street. Besides shining shoes they also repaired them. They also sold shoe and boot laces and other small paraphernalia. I saw two of them within ten yards of each other and I chose the one that was empty of customers. It belonged to a tall heavily-built Uzbek, an unusually strong specimen. He must have been about 65 to 70 years of age. He gazed at me several times in questioning wonder. He then asked me something in Uzbek which I guessed was, where I came from. I mentioned Ceylon and asked him by signs whether he knew where it was. He nodded yes. He did not speak Russian. That was as far as I got with him. I felt so frustrated. I would have loved to hear about his life, his fears, his philosophy and yet this language barrier prevented my getting nearer my fellowman. One could learn so much more of a country



if one knew its language; yet to think of Englishmen, who have spent thirty to forty years in Ceylon and not learnt a single word of Sinhala though they learnt Tamil to order their "coolies" about their duties.

Maria could not arrange a Uzbek dance recital for me. She suggested that we went to the open-air theatre in the amusement park for a musical comedy with dancing but Leonid and his staff did not fancy this very much. They thought that I would be disappointed. Leonid also apologised for not having invited me to his home as his wife was away with his child in the country and said, "My home is now like Sodom and Gomorrah. I eat salads and fruit from my garden". Apparently he had mixed up his biblical knowledge. He probably meant the Garden of Eden!

Maria had bought three ballet tickets for Dr. K. me and herself. She refused to accept any money from me and said, "You are our guest and you must not pay". How different she was from Ivanov! I hoped Dr. K. paid for his ticket at least. I tried to pay the money to the girl at the desk through whom Maria had bought the ticket but she too refused to accept my money. They knew that I had very little money with me and were trying to help me in every way. Who says that Russians are less generous than ourselves or the Westerners?

Dr. K. brought us some fresh apricots which he had grown in his own garden. They were delicious and I could not remember ever having tasted fresh ones before. Dr. K. told me that he had planted the tree himself and it had taken four years to bear fruit. I told him that some tropical fruit like durians and mangosteens, which he had not even heard of, took ten to fifteen years to bear!

We had seats in the second row at the ballet. In the first row I saw a lot of foreigners in tweed suits. One looked very like Sir Zafrullah Khan, the U.N. President whom I had never seen before in the flesh. I told Maria that I guessed it was he. She said she would find out as she knew one of the interpreters with the party. I was correct and felt quite proud of my identification!

The first act was Scheherazade by Rimsky-Korsakov. The music was terrific. The star ballerina was half-Uzbek, half-Tartar, rather phocine with an incipient double chin. I thought she was about forty years of age though Maria swore she was nearer thirty years. We checked later and found that my guess was nearer the mark! She was considered to be the most famous Uzbek ballerina, Galleya by name. The male star had a mouth full of silver teeth which rather took the edge off the love scenes but the dancing was of a high quality. Again I was most impressed not by the stars but by the corps-de-ballet. The story of Scheherazade is well known, very sad and poignant and the point was



well-taken by the audience. It showed that the dancing was effective in putting the story across. The second act was a medley of Johann Straus's pieces called *Straussiana*. Some of these were very amusing. They were so picturesquely arranged that it made me nostalgic for old Vienna where I had spent three months in pre-war days. The programme had promised us a third act of Bolero dances but in its place a concert was provided in honour of Sir Zafrullah and his colleagues from the U.N. The first violinist of the orchestra led off with a solo number. Three or four Ukrainian folk songs were sung by a powerfully built and plangent-voiced Russian tenor. A soprano also entertained us with some lively Russian songs.

During the interval we toured the Opera House. There were three floors and each of them had one or more Halls named either after historic men like Navai who was a famous writer or after some renowned City like Bokhara, Samarkand or Hivar. Each of them had wall paintings in delicate colours and those lattice-worked walls resembling embroidery in plaster, outlined in gold—very striking and tasteful. The concert was over at 11 p.m.

I requested Maria to ask Dr. K. why he had not introduced me to his wife.

"Was he afraid?" They laughed and he promised to do so the next day.

#### EIGHTH DAY:

#### A PIONEER PALACE IN TASHKENT

From the Ministry of Public Health, (page 206) we went straight to a Pioneer Palace. This was for children in the primary and middle school from seven to fifteen years. They enrolled as Pioneers and graduated to be Komsomols or Young Communists. If they passed various tests and proved themselves worthy, they were then much later elected as full members of the Communist Party. One has to earn the right to be elected a member. Application for membership is one thing, election is another.

*Every school child was obliged to be a Pioneer.* He or she took an oath on enrolment. "I am a Junior Pioneer of the Soviet Union. In the presence of my friends, I promise to love my country, to live, to study, to work just as Lenin taught us and as the Communist Party teaches us". It was a pity that the stimulating grandeur of the first part of the oath was rather debunked by the etiolation of the last line but perhaps it did not sound so much like a pricked balloon in Russian or Uzbek!

The Pioneer organisation was initiated in 1922. It is therefore over forty-one years old now. It was awarded the Lenin Order on the fortieth anniversary by the Communist Party.

The Pioneer Palace in Tashkent was the former home of the Romanovs who belonged to the family of the Tsars. It was opulently yet elegantly decorated with the usual profusion of marble everywhere. Soon after the October Revolution it was converted into a museum and became the Palace of the Pioneers only in 1935.

Till January 1962, the Pioneers in Uzbekistan were an organisation dealing only with urban children but since that time they have drawn in the rural population as well. The palace of the Romanovs was now the Headquarters for all the Pioneer Palaces in Uzbekistan. There were more than a hundred in all. In Tashkent alone they numbered six. Children between the ages of 10-17 years went to school from 8.30 a.m. till noon, 1 p.m. or 2.30 p.m. depending on each one's grade. He first went home, had his mid-day meal and rested for three hours. He then attended the Pioneer Palace at least twice weekly. During the vacation he might be there most of the day. The Pioneer Camps on permanent sites in the country were run by a separate organisation. Both of these were under the control of the Minister of Education.

*The main aim and purpose of the Pioneers was to deepen the knowledge received at school.* This was what I was told. I have come to the conclusion that apart from this aim, there was a much more important purpose and that was to discover a pupil's talents and skills and be in such a position as to advise and guide him as to his life career. In other words a glorified, organised, magnified version of a Career's Master! This particular Palace in Tashkent had forty different circles, grouped into three main departments.

- A. *Arts*—playwriting, drama, drawing, sculpture, etc.
- B. *Science and Techniques*—photography, cinema, aeronautics, ship-building, radio, T.V., automation, etc.
- C. *Pioneers*—organisation of meetings, evening parties, matinees, excursions, tours, etc.

Each child might join one or two departments, rarely three. Home work was also given in these subjects. The total number of children attending this particular Palace was 2,000.

*Staff.*—School teachers were paid extra money for working in the Pioneer Palaces. A few did honorary work but students from Universities and Technical Institutes who also helped in the teaching were never paid though they probably got credit marks in their examinations for this honorary and voluntary work.



There were forty head teachers, one for each circle and several assistants. Fifty pupils on an average were enrolled in each circle; some of course had more, others much less. The Director and Deputy Director did not do any teaching. No meals were supplied at these Institutions. Games like football, volley ball and in some places swimming were available at these Palaces.

I was disappointed that in spite of my having asked for it several times, a visit to a children's diarrhoea clinic could not be arranged. I have some reason to suspect that I was deliberately kept away from it though the Minister of Health was very angry when I told him that I had asked for a visit at the beginning of my tour and it had not yet been arranged.

The same with regard to a worker's home which I had asked to visit. They were not keen on my seeing one. Undoubtedly this was due to the danger of my drawing odious comparisons between the workers' homes in Western countries and their own!

The Foreign Service Radio Station representative in Tashkent, M-v, tape-recorded a short statement of mine in my bedroom. He requested me specially to say a few words about the record breaking space flight then in progress which up to that time had been proceeding for over 36 hours and was eventually to last for 5-6 days.

I said I was very happy to be in U.S.S.R. especially at that time when another space ship was in orbit which had beaten all previous records. He asked me for my impressions about Tashkent and Samarkand which I gave as briefly as I could. I managed to get in a few words about Anuradhapura, our own Ancient City in Ceylon, in relation to Samarkand. After I had finished my radio talk I went down to tea in the cafe with Ivanov and M-v. The latter was a contemporary of Bydakov, my contact at the Soviet Embassy in Colombo.

After we sat down, a brunette at an adjoining table made a pass at me. She was as thin as a pi-dog, thirtyish or so but with a mouthful of gold teeth and her costume was quite pavonine! I did not know what possessed me but I returned the pass and she kept staring at me in a most embarrassing way. Ivanov and M-v had their backs to her and did not notice what was happening. In the position she was sitting in, she had to twist her face round at right angles to her body in order to look at me. I also observed that she was regaling herself from a large bottle of champagne, all on her own! I took no further notice but carried on an animated conversation with my two table mates. Suddenly, there was the strumpet standing by me and exhorting me to join her at her table. I stood up in order to speak but M-v warned me not to go as "she was not nice". After a few seconds she returned to her



seat but again kept on inviting me by gestures and signs. I shrugged my shoulders and looked at M-v as much as to say that I could not possibly leave him in order to join her. The sequel to this true story was very amusing. Not ten minutes later our conversation had drifted to Soviet Laws and I was trying to ferret out information regarding legal processes, courts, etc.

### SOME LEGAL PROCESSES

M-v spoke about the different kinds of law courts.

- (a) *The Comrade's Court* with a lay judge elected by the people.
- (b) *A People's Court*, ditto. These judges were quite innocent of the law but the cases coming up for their disposal were for minor offences like drunkenness, assault, etc. I ingenuously asked him about accosting. As he did not understand the meaning of the word I had to explain what it meant. M-v said the question did not arise as there were no prostitutes in U.S.S.R. He must have thought me very naive!

In addition to the two types of court mentioned above there were also—

- (c) *The District Court* with a lawyer judge elected by the people.
- (d) *The High Court*. I could not ascertain how the judge was appointed and, lastly,
- (e) *The Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R.* The ultimate court of appeal. The judges of this court must, I presume, be appointed by the Supreme Presidium of the U.S.S.R. which was quite separate and independent of the Presidium of the Communist Party.

### CULTURAL EXCHANGES

We spoke about the exchange of Soviet scientists with those of other countries. Both Ivanov and M-v assured me that this was happening more and more. I checked this later in Moscow and found it to be correct. There was an annual exchange of scientists even with U.S.A. I knew that the exchange with U.K. had been going on for a very long time and I learnt of others who had been to Australia, Canada and Sweden in the course of my tour.

I was also told that I could send any books from Ceylon as gifts to anyone, free of duty; only anti-communist literature would be banned. Of course, anything in the slightest degree critical of Soviet foreign or domestic policy would be considered anti-communist. In that case this diary, if ever published, would suffer the same fate as Gunther's "Inside Russia today"!



M-v informed me that the import of foreign books was not banned but very few were in fact imported because of foreign exchange difficulties and, secondly, all books of specialised professional interest like those on science, medicine, art and other top-class literature, were readily available in public and university libraries. There was therefore no need for the general public to buy them for themselves. However, most of the books in English, published by the Foreign Publishing House in Moscow were snatched up immediately they were displayed on the shelves of bookshops, showing that the ordinary citizen was avid to read books in foreign languages.

My considered opinion was that this partial ban on foreign books that did exist was not entirely due to foreign exchange difficulties but also to a fear of too liberal ideas infiltrating the mass mind! I might however be quite wrong in this surmise.

I asked M-v specifically whether kissing by consent in public was a crime. When he denied this, I asked him, "Why then were so few courting couples to be seen in public?"

Ivanov interrupted to deny the correctness of my statement but I told him that I was only comparing what I had seen in western countries with my visual experiences in Tashkent and Samarkand. M-v was inclined to agree with me when I suggested that the reason probably was due to the Moslem tradition. As I have mentioned earlier, this generation of young women was the first that had been out of purdah since puberty. In Moscow too one noticed this dearth of public petting but in Kiev and Leningrad they were much more westernised though even here their petting only extended to holding hands and looking ravishingly at each other. Not once did I see two young people kissing passionately nor lying about in embarrassing postures in public parks and gardens. They were much more discreet and civilised in their public display of private affairs than in London, Paris or New York.

### A UZBEK HOME

I had at last an invitation to visit a Soviet home, the first and last I ever had! Like the Japanese, the Soviets very seldom invited a foreign guest to their homes. It was awkward for me to ask my hosts why they did not do so more readily because they might have thought that I was cadging for invitations! Maria was to pick me up at 6.30 p.m. and take me to "Dr. Krushchev's" home in the suburbs by taxi. Actually she did not arrive till 7.10 p.m. and she was the first and only Soviet citizen ever to



apologise to me for being so late, so I forgave her readily. We passed through sectors of the city that I had not seen before though I recognised the entrance to the amusement park. The city streets were full of people. The town looked very dusty but yet clean. There was no litter, some of the houses were of clay, bungalow-typed and a few had very low thatched roofs. I saw a few children playing barefoot in the drains filled with water but this was to be expected anywhere with children of the same age. Their clothes were decent and not ragged.

Dr. K's home seemed a long way off. Maria had gone there in the afternoon with Dr. K. in order not to lose her way when she was escorting me, but in spite of this she succeeded in doing so. After many meanderings back and forth and going over prominent pot-holes and dustful pits we at last found Dr. K's home. It was sited in what was called a "New District" and was forty minutes by bus from the centre of the town. Some of the houses, which were quite new and for the most part one-storied, already looked derelict. The brickwork was uneven and of a faecal brown colour. Many had unplastered walls and only very occasionally was an upper storey to be seen. Judging from Dr. K. and his family, I would say that this was what would be called in the West an upper middle-class district like Cinnamon Gardens.

Dr. K's home was most interesting, not opulent and corresponded to the home of a skilled worker in U.K. It was far below the standard expected of a doctor's home in the West, especially of a senior doctor's of thirty years' standing!

The outer wall of the house was right on the side walk. One entered through a large open portal as wide as a garage door into a porch. Looking straight ahead, one saw a garden of about a quarter acre's extent full of fruit trees—apples, apricots, peaches, plums, etc.; also a few flower beds growing daisies, lilies and roses but the *pièce de résistance* of the whole garden was a gigantic grape vine which spread like a banyan tree over half the extent of the whole campus. It had several large clusters of unripe grapes like unlit chandeliers hanging down from a ceiling. The main entrance to the house was to the right and faced the garden, and on the opposite side of the house to the portal and immediately opposite this main door and under the spreading vine was placed a colossal iron bed sufficiently roomy to hold about six people at any one time but for the fact that its centre was occupied by a low tea table. Four mattresses, one on each side of the table, were folded and placed on the bed. Apparently four members of the family slept there during the summer. Dr. K. had, besides his buxom wife, ten children; the eldest boy was a final year medical student, very good looking and fair for a Uzbek. To help him in his studies he had a friend, a dark-skinned medico also living



with him; they had just sat for and passed one of the intermediate examinations. At the opposite end of the garden was an out-house. I was told that it was the summer kitchen. In winter the food is cooked on a stove inside the main house. All the male members of the household, Dr. K., his son and the latter's friend were in striped pyjamas with loose shirts when I arrived. His wife was in the pavonine, night-dressy, geometric patterned Uzbek costume with imitation pearls round her neck and in her earlobes. She was handsome and dignified but alas! had her oral cavity full of gold teeth. The son resembled her more than he did the father. Her complexion was like that of an overripe peach, light-pink shading gradually and inexorably into brown.

As the light was about to fade, I suggested that I took a snap of all of them immediately. They readily agreed but the men ran in before I could stop them and changed their colourful pyjamas and shirts into utilitarian trousers and shirts.

Now we entered the main house after removing our shoes at the threshold and walking in in our socks. We came to the dining room on our immediate left, the floor of which was covered by a large, thick, Tashkent carpet—reds, yellows and greens predominating. I mistook it for a Bokhara but I was told it was a Tashkent. There were about three bedrooms besides the large entrance hall which had trellis work all round and contained the refrigerator, the cooker and other pantry and kitchen paraphernalia; only one bedroom had a carpet on the floor. Some of the beds were of iron, others of old fashioned brass; but none was of wood. Neither T.V. nor a telephone was to be seen but there was a medium-sized radio set and one cheap Chinese landscape print on the dining cum sitting room wall. The rest were all family photographs.

The dinner itself was interesting. It must have been nearly 8 p.m. before we commenced to eat. We started off with sweets, home-made strawberry or cherry jam with chunks of Uzbek home-baked bread. This was certainly an improvement on the Uzbek bread served at the hotel, much crisper and less flat. We were also served with numerous cups of green or black Georgian tea. I had the former as I wished to learn what it tasted like. I preferred its taste to black tea without sugar and milk. It was very light and the brew was greenish-yellow in colour.

I had been warned by Maria that the *plat du jour* was to follow so I restrained myself though the strawberry jam was very alluring. Dishes full of fudge, sweets of various kinds and one which contained a mountain of sugar candy were on the table. This last was Uzbek sugar. I forgot to ask what it was made from but it was probably from beet, as sugar cane did not grow anywhere in the State.



By the time we came to the end of the bread and sweets, Dr. K. and his son had disappeared and his wife and friend were left to do the honours. I did not want to ask why his daughters were not there but I presumed young unmarried girls still observed partially their ancient social custom of purdah.

In a few minutes an enormous dish of PLOV was brought in proudly by Dr. K. and placed proudly at the centre of the table. The host served me himself and gave me all the choicest and largest chunks of mutton which were heaped in the middle, at the peak. The inescapable salad of onions with their leaves, tomatoes and cucumbers was also there. The host had prepared this himself. I was also informed that in any Uzbek family both the boys and the girls learnt cooking. When I had finished the generous helping Dr. K. had served me with, he tried to heap another one on to my plate. I had to beg and plead with him with my palms pressed against each other and almost worshipping him in a *namaskara* (=oriental salutation) in order to prevent him doing so. Poor Maria's plate was snatched by Dr. K. when her attention was diverted and filled to the brim with a second alpine portion. I did not think madam protested too much! As at a Chinese dinner, one drank plain green (or black) tea right through the meal.

The student friend admitted on questioning that he had girl friends whom he dated quite often. As he was a very shy customer, I did not go into further details as to what actually happened at these meetings!

### A DOCTOR'S SALARY

I also learnt by rather judicious and not very impertinent questions that Dr. K. had started his career on a salary of 90R. (Rs. 450/-) a month, 30 years ago as a Health Officer. He had to do a six-hour roster for six days a week. In addition to his salary he was also given a risk allowance of 15% (=Rs. 70/-) of his salary which was on an incremental basis and today he drew a wage of 220R. (Rs. 1,100/-) a month, which was very poor compared with one in the West and was the same as what a Ceylon Health Officer was paid after a similar term of service, but of course Dr. K. only paid about 1% of his salary as income tax while those in other countries were compelled to fork out anything up to 30% or even higher! There was also no income tax to be paid after a Soviet citizen had reached 55 years of age. The salary paid for teachers in medicine was also higher. A Professor's salary was about 500R. (Rs. 2,500/-) a month. An Academician's might be double that, which compared most favourably with those paid to their opposite numbers in western countries.



## A TEACHER'S SALARY

A teacher (of English) in an Academy received a salary of 170R. (Rs. 850/-) a month. If she was unmarried, she paid 19R. (Rs. 95/-) tax a month on this. A school teacher received 100-900R. (Rs. 500/-Rs. 4,500/-) a month depending on her qualifications and experience. These scales, I would imagine, were far better than those paid in most Western countries. Teachers were not the Cinderellas of the professions in U.S.S.R. They were well-paid and their standard of living was the same as that of any other professional person except a nuclear physicist or a ballet dancer who were the blue-eyed darlings of the Soviets. All salaries throughout the U.S.S.R. were standardised and as far as I was aware there were very few anomalies.

All of us left Dr. K's house about 8.50 p.m. as we wanted to go to an open air theatre in the Park. The son had already gone ahead to try and get us a taxi. We walked about quarter of a mile to a petrol station. The streets were very dusty and badly surfaced. While walking one noticed the exceptionally poor standard of brick work in some of the new houses. My Australian friend had also remarked about this with regard to the new multi-storied apartment houses. We had to wait about ten minutes at the petrol depot before we were successful in getting a lift in a private car. Dr. K. paid him a fee though there was no meter and no identification marks, such as the special painted checks, to indicate that it was for hire. I was sure that this was an illegal gratification and the driver readily accepted it. However, we were grateful for the lift as we would otherwise have missed half the show. We had to pay for admission to the Park as well as to the theatre. We had a good ten minutes walk to the theatre and hurried along as fast as our feet would carry us.

## OPEN AIR THEATRE

We reached the theatre soon after the show had started. The stage was covered but the auditorium was open to the sky. It was a Full House except for the back rows. There must have been at least 500 people there. Dr. K. whispered something to the man at the door; I suspected that it was that I was a distinguished foreign guest. We were immediately ushered to the front row and the occupants were forced to crowd closer to one another on the long bench and to make room for the four of us! There were no audible grumbles or even rumbles! They expected this sort of shoving together for which I was very thankful; even if they resented this herding together, they were much too cultured and courteous to show it.



The historical Uzbek play was about a virtuous and progressive Queen mother and a rotten profligate son who was misled by a lot of reactionaries. The high standard of the decor was a surprise. The chief actress was extremely good. Unfortunately there was very little Uzbek dancing. Some of the steps were obviously Western. We had to leave at the end of the third act (another whole act was to follow) because it was already 11 p.m. and I had to catch my plane to Moscow very early in the morning. The "Khrushchevs" walked a short distance with us and I said good bye to my hostess and thanked her for her sumptuous meal. I insisted that we returned by tram as I did not want Maria to pay any more taxi fares for me which she always insisted on doing. I also wanted to ride in a tram. I saw a petting couple for the first time in U.S.S.R. They were seated on a park bench but even after 11 p.m., they were not kissing but sitting very close to each other and holding hands; what restraint and decorum in the most aphrodisiac of environments! Dancing was going on at an open air dance floor. I could not see any males dancing together but when I asked Maria whether this was allowed, she was surprised at my question and said, "Why, of course it is the *done* thing!"

Tashkent possessed very few private cars. None of the doctors whom I met owned a car, nor did the hotel manager. There were also very few taxis about. The public transport was good but inadequate. One evening Maria had to wait half an hour for a bus and eventually took another because she was tired of waiting for her own number.

#### NINTH DAY:

#### FLIGHT TO MOSCOW

I was called at 5.15 a.m. by telephone. The porter came for my baggage at 5.35 a.m. I was down at 5.45 and Dr. K. and Nicholas arrived for me five minutes later. We picked up Maria who was standing on the road near her home. After a wait of over half an hour in the chandeliered waiting room with which I was getting nearly as familiar as with my own home, I was ushered out with Maria and Dr. K. I said good bye to Maria and Nicholas, the chauffeur but Dr. K. carrying my brief case was allowed to accompany me to the plane which was a T.U. 104. I was permitted to walk several yards ahead of the other passengers but when we got to the bottom of the gangway we were ordered back as there was likely to be a forty minute delay. We rejoined Maria and both of us sat on the garden seat with the pretty striped awnings near the gate. She asked me whether I had been to U.S.A. When I told her that I had made three trips there, she wished to know whether I liked it.



I said "Yes, very much but I would not like to live there. To visit 'yes'; to be a citizen of U.S.A., 'no'".

"Why"? she asked.

"Too much hustle and bustle. No one has anytime for anyone else". In N.Y. one is afraid to ask anyone the way. I had been snubbed several times. The negroes were worse than the whites in this respect; but the further west one went, the more polite and courteous the American became. The Californian was exceptionally polite and so were those from Oregon but in Washington State, on the other hand, the natives were frigid and I was not made welcome at all even by my academic colleagues.

Maria said, "Moscow, too, was always in a hurry; Leningrad was much more relaxed though the weather there was much worse than in Moscow".

I found the people of Leningrad very friendly but the weather curiously kinder to me than in Moscow. I did not think there was much difference in the tempo of life between the old and the new metropolis. Leningrad was a totally Western city while in Moscow one still saw Oriental influences everywhere and therefore it was more interesting in a way to an Asian, just as Europeans and Americans found a greater affection and affinity for Leningrad.

It was refreshingly fresh and cool. We eventually got off at 7.50 a.m. Tashkent time (4.50 a.m. Moscow time). Dr. K. again walked to the tarmac with me carrying my heavy brief case. I gave him a good Russian hug which he greatly appreciated. He was a dear old soul and he began to like me as I did him but he was rather ineffective and bit off more than he could chew! His total lack of English was also a barrier between us.

I again enjoyed the privilege of a V.I.P. No one was allowed to board the plane till I had taken my seat. The TU 104 was built on the same lines as far as I could see as the IL 18 but was much noisier and more vibratory than the latter. The public address system was all in Russian and the air hostess knew not a word of English. I checked up on the number of spectacles used by those reading and found several old grey heads like myself using no glasses; there were indeed precious few.

The TU 104 could carry a full load of 100 passengers but on the present flight it had only 69. The TU 114 (on which I returned from Moscow to Delhi) could carry 220 passengers. The former had two pilots, one navigator, one engineer, one radio operator and three stewards. It did the 3,000 kilometre flight from Tashkent to Moscow in three and a half hours at a height of 35,000 feet; that is, an average speed of 535 miles per hour! Soon after we took off I started writing this diary. This was unfortunate because

the air hostess distributed pens as souvenirs to those who wanted them but as I was already using one she completely ignored me. When I asked for one later, they were all finished or so they said and all I was given was a polythene cover for a pen! There was no caviare for breakfast (internal flight?) but a horrid Hamburger with canned apricots, rye bread plus a roll of white bread, a light cake and a cup of plain black tea; sugar was however available. Meals on these internal flights were far inferior in quality to those on the international ones, but this is true of many air lines in the world.

At 7.15 a.m. we were flying over intensely cultivated land which looked like a patchwork quilt with rivers meandering in and out like large rents. There were several white buildings grouped together at intervals. They must have been kolkhozes. The whole landscape was like a billiard table for mile upon mile, hour upon hour. It was most monotonous. We also flew for over an hour over the enormous Kara Kum desert of Kazakhstan, which was reputed to be much larger than the Sahara, and over the edge of the Aral Sea. We eventually arrived over the fertile fields and forests of Russia proper, green and resplendent in the morning sun and landed at Moscow at 8.25 a.m. (Moscow time) only 15 minutes late having made up 25 minutes on the flight.

It was refreshingly fresh and cool. We eventually got off at 7.30 a.m. Tashkent time (4.30 a.m. Moscow time). Dr. K. again walked to the tarmac with me carrying my heavy brief case. He gave him a good Russian hug which he greatly appreciated. He was a dear old soul and he began to like me as I did him but he was rather incohesive and bit off more than he could chew! His total lack of English was also a barrier between us.

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## CHAPTER 5

### Moscow

THE heavy baggage had been unloaded on to a huge truck which had halted below the wings of our plane on the side opposite to the gangway. I saw some of the passengers moving off with their luggage within five minutes of our arrival. I have never seen such a quick service with luggage in any country in the world. Of course, this technique is impossible on international flights owing to Customs but why it is not copied as a routine for internal flights in other reputedly more advanced countries beat me—no queueing up, no weary waiting in a draughty airport or in an open-air shed for anything up to forty minutes. All this nightmare could be spared if more airlines adopted this efficient Soviet system.

As soon as I moved over to claim my luggage, a medium-sized, rather off-white complexioned Russian with hair falling all over his face but with a charming smile came up to me and asked me whether I was Dr. de Silva. He introduced himself as Dr. C. from the Academy. He rescued my suit case in double quick time and carried it for me as I was heavily loaded with two cases plus books etc., in addition to my overcoat which I was also carrying.

The air was quite nippy but the temperature was as high as 68° F. Tashkent was usually in the mid-eighties, so this was a change. I was glad to be wearing my thick sports coat. The drive in to the city from the south was interesting. We passed a few kolkhozes on the way. The dwelling houses were dilapidated and ramshackle and many of them had thatched roofs.

I got my first view of the tapering skyscraper of Lomonosov University. Many a time did I see the top-half completely hidden by clouds and invisible from the ground during my stay in Moscow. It had a beautiful approach from the river and the main road. A special view point of the city was situated opposite the University which was a popular sight for all tourists. The private "palaces" of the V.V.I.P's of the government sprang into view. They were all well-hidden behind high walls and locked gates but no sentries were about. In spite of this one could not easily gain entrance into one of them. In one of these lived Mr. Khrushchev (then P.M.) himself. Though I have called them "palaces" they were really not ostentatious enough to deserve that name. The guest house for important state visitors was also on this road and Fidel Castro had been the last occupant of it; the next were to be the



Chinese delegation which came to Moscow at the beginning of July in a last endeavour to settle the Sino-Soviet rift but who left without achieving their aim. Our ex-Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranaike also was housed here, I presume, when she visited Moscow in the autumn of 1963.

The road was very wide and skirted the Moskva river most of the way. It had a dual carriage way and took eight lines of traffic in each direction. This part of the city was called the Lenin Hills. The main streets of Moscow were the widest I have seen in my travels. The main approach road from the airport was lined on either side and in the middle by young saplings of maple, elm, birch, etc.

Dr. C. was very apologetic for not putting me up at the Hotel Ukraine which was the largest and most modern hotel in the city and looked rather like one of those gargantuan skyscrapers in N.Y., such as Woolworths or the Chrysler building. He said that the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union was meeting at Moscow that week and all the rooms were booked. The Women's World Congress for Peace was due to start the following week and delegates from over thirty or forty countries including Ceylon were beginning to arrive in the city. I told him that there was no need to apologise as I hated these massive but highly impersonal and characterless hotels which catered for one's bodily comforts with 100% efficiency without one word of welcome or friendliness to a single one of their 2,000 guests!

I was taken to a small, family type of hotel near the Kiev Railway Station. It would probably have earned two stars in any tourist guide but it was homely and odourless. It was situated in a very busy and crowded part of the city, nearly 21 kilometres and south-westerly from its centre. It would correspond in London, to Brixton or Clapham. Moscow's population was rising rapidly and had now topped the six million mark, which made it the fourth or the fifth largest city in the world.

Looking out from my bedroom window I could see the outline of the Hotel Ukraine in the distance and of two other tall buildings, the Foreign Ministry and a luxury apartment building inhabited mainly by ballerinas, film stars and powerful politicoes, no one else could get a flat there for any amount of money! In the foreground was the Kiev railway station which was one of several termini in the city; as elsewhere there were crowds at every hour around it. It pleased my eye to see the gay colours sported by the females—reds, blues and yellows. The younger section was quite attractively dressed though they were hardly Dior fashioned! They were certainly not so drab nor so dull as one often saw in the provincial cities of U.K or even in the poorer



suburbs of London. The older women appeared to be down at heel, poverty-stricken and dowdy. At the ballet in the evening I noticed again this marked contrast between the two generations. The younger, smart and spruce, the older like charwomen out on a spree! One also observed that it was only the younger women who used lipstick. In Tashkent I asked my interpreter why she painted her nails but not her lips and she said that most of them did the same. The only reason she gave me for this curious dichotomy was that she did not like painting her lips. The waitresses serving me at Moscow, though not such heavyweights as at Tashkent, also had no lipstick on and some had dirty finger nails! Though we arrived at the Hotel at 10 a.m. my room, which had been reserved several days ago, was not ready. I had to sit in the public reception room which was carpetless and had besides the offices, a book stall, a curio-shop and a post office. After a wait of about twenty minutes I was ushered into a lift by Dr. C. and out on the third floor to my room. The concierge at the central desk apologised to us for not having the room ready but gave us the key. It was the last room on the corridor and had two beds and large double windows, a radio, a telephone and very modern furniture, with beige coloured walls and a landscape in oils on one wall. A fairly decent carpet covered the floor. The beds had been made but the ash trays were full of cigarette stubs and the bath, very deep and long, was dirty and no new towels had yet been placed there. Dr. C. insisted on my accompanying him to the restaurant downstairs. I had some coffee and Dr. C. ordered a "*Sipnik*" which was translated as a pancake but was more like an English muffin with lots of sour cream on top of it. He insisted that I taste a bit of it and when I remarked that it was very good, he forced me to take the whole of one.

He told me that though they could not give me any money, I was only to mention my needs and they would be supplied! And, *mirabile dictu!* all tickets to ballets, operas, cinemas, etc. would be supplied free, not only for me but also for one other person who would act as my interpreter. That was a very generous gesture on the part of the Academy. I heard later in Ceylon that all foreign guests also got the same privilege; but when you are told that whatever happens in the metropolis also occurs in the remotest village in U.S.S.R., do not believe it because I had to pay for all my entertainment myself or be placed in the rather despicable position of an unwilling guest of a poor but over-generous interpreter at Tashkent. Dr. C. also promised that another doctor would share all my meals so that I would have no trouble about ordering them. Whenever I wanted any transport to go anywhere, I had only to mention this to Dr. C. who would order a car from the Academy. I mentioned rather hesitatingly my difficulties about laundry. He said that it would be paid for by the Academy



but it was not. This was the most expensive item and amounted to about one rouble a day. I was much too tired at the end of the day to do any washing myself.

To my great comfort I found that a 36 exposure Agfacolor film cost only 1R.05K. (approx. Rs 5/-). The same film in U.K. cost about 25s. and in Ceylon, if available, about Rs. 25/-. The secret was revealed on the packet as it came from G.D.R.—the German Democratic Republic, a satellite state. That explained the whole thing!

The Soviet colour film which had been gifted to me in Tashkent and which I had exposed there and at Samarkand turned out to be a negative film and what was the worst of bad luck, it was outdated (February 1963). I was sure that Leonid who had presented it to me was as unaware of this fact as I was when I exposed it. The date was on the cover but I had been so careless as not to have read it. It was however dishonest of the salesman not to have mentioned this to Leonid.

Though the hotel bedrooms have telephones, none are furnished with directories. In Tashkent even the main hotel office had no directory. I saw my friend the Manager looking up telephone numbers in an exercise book in which he had entered several numbers in his own handwriting! When I asked Dr. C. to get me the Ceylon Embassy's telephone number, he could not do so because there was no directory even in the hotel at Moscow! Dr. S. my medical guide, arrived soon after I had finished my bath. He was thin and shortish with dark brown hair brushed straight back and black eyes with an oval-shaped face and a charming smile. Most of these Russians do look their best when they smile; and they do smile with their eyes! When S. was serious, he looked severe and concentrated like a detective searching for a clue. He told me that he was a specialist in Higher Studies of Neurophysiology at a special Research Institute. This was way above my head; I informed him that I was only a common or garden paediatrician!

Dr. S. and I walked to the Hotel Ukraine as I wanted to get familiar with my neighbourhood. The houses nearby were very old and built of logs of wood placed one on top of the other, and single-storied. I was told that even these were owned by the State or the City.

We passed an old woman very dirtily and shabbily clad and shod who was selling posies of some wild flowers. I asked S. whether this was private or public enterprise but I was assured that it was private. These and market stalls selling vegetables, fruits and flowers were the only forms of private enterprise that I



encountered during the whole of my stay in U.S.S.R. I was informed by several persons whom I questioned that there was none other but I could not be certain whether this was 100% accurate.

Walking on we found ourselves on a Prospekt, which was the Russian equivalent of a French boulevard, but much wider and more modern. The multi-storied apartment houses lined both sides of this road. The ground floors of these were often occupied by shops. These buildings were most unattractive and uniform and looked like giant boxes; they were prefabricated and each block took only twenty minutes to erect on the spot with gas, water and lights laid on! Most of the work was done in the factory and the different parts were transported by truck and assembled together in situ by armies of workmen. Each year the whole country was adding about 4-5 million new apartments! A colossal number when one ponders on the figure. Mass production in factories is undoubtedly the answer to the housing shortage in most countries and I think the U.S.S.R. was tackling this problem more successfully than in many other countries except perhaps the most advanced and affluent Western ones. The rent for an apartment in Moscow was the same as in Tashkent, the lowest in the world.

The bank at the Hotel Ukraine was open though it was a Sunday morning. I wanted to cash my bank memo for Rs. 110/- (£8) which was drawn in favour of the Bank of Foreign Trade. The girl, who spoke fairly good English, asked me for my currency clearance certificate which all tourists were given on entry to U.S.S.R. and without which they could not cash any letters of credit, bank drafts or travellers' cheques. I told the girl that I had not got one and that it was the first that I had heard of such a thing. She did not believe me and insisted that I should have got one. Dr. S. then informed her that I was a guest of the Academy and that I was not given this certificate. She accepted this explanation and deigned to examine my bank memo, but said that I would have to wait till tomorrow to cash it at the Central Bank of Foreign Trade which was situated somewhere else. I asked her whether I could cash any of the Australian or other foreign currency notes that I carried with me. She promptly pulled out a huge tome which had photographs of all foreign notes and repeated the same story that I would have to try my luck tomorrow.

As a last effort I asked her to cash a Cook's travellers' cheque for £2 and this she did and saved me a lot of embarrassment as I was scraping the bottom of my purse at that time! But she kept on staring at the endorsement on the back of the cheque which had stamped on it the countries where I was entitled to cash it



and this stated "U.K., India and the countries on the continent of Europe". As she seemed rather dubious, I asked her whether U.S.S.R. was not in Europe? That settled it and she promptly produced the cash. I had however been told at my bank in Colombo where I had been given all my travellers' cheques that those particular cheques could not be cashed in U.S.S.R. They had issued me a separate lot of cheques for £10 for encashment in that country so I tried a fast one really and got away with it!

There was no ballet at the Bolshoi theatre that week; only concerts and opera but the cast of the Bolshoi was performing a ballet at the Kremlin Palace that evening just before they left for London. The girl at the desk promised to do her best to get us two tickets for it and wanted us to return at 3 p.m. She however gave us a firm reservation for the Puppet Show later on in the week. I remembered Gunther saying in "Inside Russia Today" that if he had only one evening to stay in Moscow, he would spend it at the Puppet Show and not at the ballet. After seeing both shows, I could not disagree with him more; but of course Gunther understood Russian and I did not: that would make a great difference to the enjoyment of the former!

S. ordered an Academy car for me through the telephone and we wandered around window-shopping on the streets adjoining the Hotel Ukraine. We drove to the Ceylon Embassy which was sited in a very old and unfashionable part of Moscow and right away from the other foreign missions. There was a policeman in a dark blue uniform with red piping at the gate of the Embassy. He saluted me smartly when our big seven seater Zim stopped at the door. The front door was locked and there was no answer to the ring but the constable informed us that we could walk in through the gate and enter through the back door. A notice in English and Russian, but not in Sinhala, requested visitors to shut the door but both the outer and inner doors were wide open. As the ring brought no response, we walked up the passage and into a reading room where all the Ceylon papers were displayed. There was not a soul in sight. We tried another room and found ourselves in the kitchen. S. hulloed and at last we heard a response and a Sinhalese cook dressed in a sarong and pull-over appeared. He told me that the Subasinghes were away in the country for the day. When I enquired for my letters, he called another man, dressed in trousers who informed me that I would have to call for them tomorrow as the office was shut.

We returned to our hotel for lunch. Here I was informed of the successful launching of the first woman cosmonaut, Valentina. Everyone was naturally most excited and thrilled. It was superbly timed as the Women's World Congress for Peace was due to open in Moscow in the following week. Valentina's pictures showed



her to be an attractive and charming personality. What a wonderful achievement for a country whose women were almost slaves two generations back and at the beck and call of every kulak's son!

S. ordered a sturgeon steak for me and explained that this fish was only found in the Volga and the Caspian Sea and that black caviare was consequently only obtained there. A sturgeon grew to about fifteen feet in length; the flesh was very firm and almost as delicious as veal. It was called "*Osetrina*" in Russian and the most interesting thing about it was that it had no bones, only cartilage, so it must be a very primitive species.

No grape juice was available but they served us with three large juicy Algerian oranges. These were all imported, as oranges, I was informed, did not grow anywhere in the U.S.S.R. Later I read that some citrus fruit is now grown on the shores of the Black Sea.

We went sight-seeing in the car after lunch. The sun was shining brightly. This was the first of the only two fine days I had during my first brief stay of six in Moscow. When we reached the Lomonosov University it was drizzling. The road was built on a cliff overhanging the Moskva river which was about a hundred feet below one. Nearby was a huge ski jump which I gathered was used for international contests. Right opposite us on the other bank were a Palace of Culture and another for Pioneers; also a gigantic Stadium to hold 200,000 people.

It was a beautiful view of the city with the large apartment houses in the periphery, the river twisting and turning round many bends like a python beneath our feet, a few modern skyscrapers scattered about and the golden onion domes of an old monastery that was not in use in the mid-distance. As the weather had changed for the worse we had nothing to do but to return to the hotel where I managed to get an hour's sleep before setting forth for the ballet. We drove through Arbat Street which contained the homes of all the most renowned Russian writers like Gorki, Chekov, Dostoevsky, etc.

Dr. S's English was not as good as Maria's. The Academy had decided that as I was a medical man I must also have a medical interpreter. Unfortunately none of the medical men assigned to me, could have passed a fifth Grade test in English. At Leningrad, fortunately I had non-medical interpreters who were excellent.

## THE KREMLIN AND THE BOLSHOI BALLET

As we had plenty of time we walked round the Red Square and stood outside Lenin's Mausoleum which was closed to the public at that hour. I discovered that it was open only for three



hours at a time on four days a week except on Sundays, when it remained accessible for two hours longer. It was a striking russet-red marble building; I cannot quite compare it with any familiar object. It was much darker than sandstone and was interspersed with black lines. Lenin's name in Cyrillic characters ЛЕНИН at the top of the main threshold was the only decorative motif on the whole of the exterior.

The Kremlin wall about 40-50 feet high with a curious curvaceous motif on top was also of a similar colour to Lenin's tomb but was not of marble. It had several ancient towers at the points of the compass with enormous gates like dragons' mouths opening into the interior.

Around the square were the Historical Museum, the enormous GUM store, rivalling Macy's in N.Y., as the largest shop in the world and S. Basil's Church which was fantastic and exotic but hardly architecture in the best taste. It reminded one of the pictures of the Ogres' Castles one was familiar with in one's childhood. It had five cupolas, each of a different shape, size and colour as well as with an individualistic style of decoration; the Church was at present closed to the public as it was under repair. S. Basil's drew your eyes to it again and again; it was as if they were attracted to it against your will as when you faced a very ugly man with a very strong personality. It stimulated in me this unique sense of attraction.

Over the Kremlin wall one saw the tops of the numerous palaces peeping and asking "Who dun it?" Some ancient buildings have earlier also given me this feeling of aliveness, like Windsor Castle or Fontainebleau or the lovely churches of Florence but never have I been so frightened of buildings as I was that day when I saw those of the Kremlin; they seemed filled with screams of terror and horror, of bones and blood, of sweat and tears. To-day they were only Government offices, filled with files and more humane officials but even in the recent past they have harboured monsters and they have been responsible for many deeds of injustice and cruelty. One remembered with a shudder the story that the architect who built it was first blinded and then encased alive within its walls on the Tsar's orders! The history of Ceylon can match that act of cruelty. One of our Kings who usurped the throne buried his own father alive in the bund of the Kalawewa Tank. When this usurper asked him where his treasure was hidden, the poor old man asked him to look around and whispered, "This is all the treasure I possess", and pointed to the blue waters of the immense tank which he had built.

We walked through one of the gates. Many hundreds of people were making their way in the same direction. We passed Ivan's Great Bell which could comfortably shelter more than a dozen



men, standing up, within its shell and which had fallen and cracked with a piece of it lying separate. It was richly engraved all over; near it was also an ancient royal canon with an intricately decorated exterior.

The Kremlim Palace Hall was primarily built, very recently, for meetings of the Communist Party and for International gatherings like the Women's Peace Congress. It was all a glass and chromium affair, very modern and chic but rather out of place with its grey-stone dour neighbours, like some beautiful debutante in a circle of grey-haired dowagers. It was completed in 1961. Its exterior resembled somewhat the Festival Hall in London but it was more boxy in design and on one level unlike the latter. It was four or five storeys high and on the main ground floor foyer over the top of the lifts was a mosaic frieze in russet-red, white and gold, extending over the whole length of the building and depicting the crests of the fifteen republics of the U.S.S.R. One ascended to the higher floors by escalators or stairs. Stalls at frequent intervals were selling souvenirs, sweets, short-eats, etc. on each floor.

I bought a lovely little Russian doll in a foam rubber-like material for my grandchild in London. It cost only R.1/24 (Rs. 6/-) which I thought was very cheap by our standards. The auditorium was breath-taking. All the seats were covered in scarlet rexine. The whole floor was steeply sloped so that every seat had a complete view of the widest stage in the world, 100 feet from end to end. Each seat was equipped for simultaneous translations in six languages including Chinese.

An amplifier was placed in front of each occupant so that even the partially deaf could follow every word spoken on the platform. The whole hall seated about 6 or 7,000 persons and contained several tiers of galleries and boxes. Over sixty instruments occupied the orchestra pit. Most of the male audience had jackets on but without ties; a few wore only open shirts. The women on the whole were more smartly dressed than the men, though as mentioned earlier, the elderly ones were very dowdy and shabby looking.

The lighting was brilliant and the manipulation left nothing to be desired. A whole line of lamps was strung across the top of the upper circle from end to end and each could be swung round and focussed on any single point of the stage. The walls consisted of intermittent narrow strips of wood extending from the ceiling to the floor but I did not see any lines of nylon thread in between these strips as at the circular Academy of Science building at Canberra in Australia. I was told there that these eliminated echoes and enhanced the sound. I could well believe that because one frightened Polish girl who had to read a learned paper in Canberra suddenly got a hysterical dysphonia and could just



manage to whisper into the mike, but every single word was heard clearly right up in the gallery! The acoustics at the Kremlin Palace Hall also left nothing to be desired, I am sure, though I was not in a position to judge this because I was in the fourth row of the stalls and no speeches were to be heard but only ballet music.

Sorokina and Nikonov were the female and male stars. They were magnificent and got standing ovations at the end of each act when the over-enthusiastic younger members of the audience rushed to the front and standing behind the orchestra kept up a chorus of bravos and encores; Sorokina and Nikonov must have taken at least a dozen curtain calls after each Act. I saw Chopiniana for the second time and the male lead, Koslov, was a great improvement on the one at Tashkent. I liked this ballet best of the three but Dr. S. and most of the audience seemed to prefer *Capriccio Espangol* whose composer was Rimsky-Korsakov. The music was inspiring and masculine as all his compositions were. The decor, costumes and dances were all *Espangol* and *wunderbar*. The third Act was the familiar Tschaikovsky's Nut-Cracker Suite which I had heard some years ago, if memory holds the door, at the Festival Hall in London.

It was a wonderful show, the technique, design, composition, decor and choreography were out of this world and the number of performers in some single items exceeded a hundred. It was the proud but justifiable boast of every citizen that in the art of the ballet the U.S.S.R. was incomparable!

*The ballet is the supreme form of dramatic art.* It is international; it surmounts all boundaries of language and nationality and the exquisite beauty of its form, its style, its movement, its decor and design are difficult to surpass or even to equal in any other form of stage-craft. No other art gives me so much emotional or aesthetic satisfaction. Dr. S. asked me about our national ballet and I told him that we had a very powerful and modern school, Chitrasena's ballets—*Karadiya* and *Nala Damayanti* which represented a healthy and vigorous major break-through from the inhibitions of a restricted and stylised traditional art to the vitality and vigour of a modern one. This was achieved by the adaptation of modern techniques to our own Ceylonese images. This troupe visited the U.S.S.R. and other European countries later in 1963 and created a very favourable impression.

After the ballet, S. and I had dinner together in the smaller dining room at the hotel restaurant. At the next table was a group of four youths and two girls. S. informed me that they were senior school children about 17-18 years of age. One youth, he could hardly be called a man, combed his hair forward from the vertex to the forehead and it curled up at the end like a duck-



tail. He was well soaked and looked and behaved himself like a beatnik. I observed him looking at me in a peculiar manner and making a nasty wisecrack because all his companions turned round to look closely at the horror; but to my relief, he was immediately pulled up by one or more of his friends and also by the cashier who coming up to him, whispered something in his ear (I guessed it was that I was a guest of the Academy of Science) and that he had better watch his step. The sot ventured repeatedly to the window to relieve himself. We were on the first floor (by English connotation) and the emesis must have produced some unpleasant reactions on people walking on the pavement below our window! One of his girl friends went up to him and started to pet and stroke him and gave him slices of lemon to suck. After some time two of them led him to the toilet and he returned well doused with water from the head down. At that stage another of the party also began to be ataxic, so they decided to call it a day and departed. Between them they had consumed well over half a dozen bottles of vodka and wine, not to mention the number of beers!

#### TENTH DAY:

When I woke up at 5 a.m. it was quite light though it was raining heavily. The pillows in U.S.S.R. were enormous and squarish in shape but quite soft; only one was provided but as there was another on the twin-bed, cased and clean, I had no pangs of conscience about borrowing it for my use.

On going to the toilet, I found it flooded with about half-an-inch of water. On pulling the flush, I discovered a leak in the inlet tube. The flush continued to gush for hours like a waterfall till one lowered the hand pedal twice, once to start the current of water and once to stop it. The light switch also had to be turned through two right angles before it lit the lamp over the shaving mirror, one turn only lit the main bath-room lamp which was very dim. All this was most tricky; not having a mechanically or electrically minded brain at all, these things had to be shown to me by others. No hot water was on tap till after 8 a.m. Fortunately for me my maid knocked on my door at 7 a.m. and I showed her the flood and the leak and tried to tell her by signs that I wanted some hot water. She was not very bright or my signs were not communicative enough. She brought a large cloth and mopped up the water on the floor which she continued wringing into a bin for over half-an-hour! The concierge on the floor also arrived in my room by this time and I repeated my signs. I had to shave in cold water but soon after I was sent one medium-sized kettle full of hot water for my bath! I managed to get a totally inadequate cat-lick with it because I had to empty it into the big deep bath and not into the wash basin which had



no plug: a fact pointed out by Walter Citrine, a British Labour Party leader in the twenties, as a sign of Russian inefficiency; but the Russians wash in running water and therefore did not need a plug. However in an emergency like mine, a plug would have helped me to get a more efficient wash!

On arrival Dr. C. informed me that the Ceylon Ambassador was expecting me in the afternoon. We went to the Bank of Foreign Trade to cash my bank memo for Rs. 110/- Dr. C. was very sceptical that the piece of rather crushed paper from the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank in Colombo which I carried would be accepted as legal tender but I had been assured by my bank that it would be as it would be writing direct to the Bank of Foreign Trade in Moscow about me. The first girl we encountered found this letter from Colombo with ease. We were however kept about 45 minutes before any action commenced, rather too long in my opinion because there were very few clients waiting at that time for service! I also cashed some of my currency notes. They would not accept the Indian, Malayan or Thai notes but took the Australian and Pakistani ones. Dr. C. who was a collector wanted to buy one of the Malayan ones. I said I would not dream of selling one but would present it to him.

## THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCE, MOSCOW

We were one hour late for our next appointment with the Secretary-General of the Academy, Dr. Georgi Dmitrievich Aphanasyev. I liked him immediately. He had a Falstaffian figure with a rubicund laughing face, baldish and charming. He had been in Ceylon for ten days in September 1959, at the fateful time of Mr. Bandaranaike's assassination and had therefore not been able to meet as many people or to see as many things as he would have liked to. Dr. Aphanasyev had seen the late Mr. Bandaranaike's lying-in-state and was impressed by the never-ending crowds that came to pay him their last respects. He had climbed to the top of Sigiriya in spite of his *avoiirdupois* and been to the ruined cities.

I asked him what were the chances for oil being found in Ceylon. They were rather dim, he said, as oil was seldom found where granite was the basic foundation of the subsoil as in Ceylon. I informed him that oil had been struck in S. India, very near Ceylon. The rock formation and the lay of the land there were apparently different from ours. He, however, ended the subject on an encouraging note, that it was always worth prospecting—nothing venture, nothing win!

I discussed my programme with him and told him that I wished to meet more people who could give me information regarding Science Education of the masses. I also wished to see another



kolkhoz as I had been shown only the medical facilities at the one in Tashkent. In spite of repeated reminders this request was never gratified. The Secretary-General said I could go anywhere even to the Caucasus if I wished to. I told him that I would like to go to Kiev and Leningrad but nowhere else as I had no wish to rush from place to place like a butterfly sipping countless flowers on its flight as it journeyed to and fro.

I was served with hot lemon tea and masses of biscuits and chocolates. This was my first taste of Russian chocolates. They were not as tasty as Cadbury's, Nestle's or any of the classy Swiss or Dutch ones, but I enjoyed them none the less.

When I told the Secretary-General of the Academy that I hoped one day to publish my impressions of this visit to the U.S.S.R., he was quite enthusiastic and said that they welcomed all such publications; (not if he knew what I was intending to write about!). I told him that I held a letter from the General President of the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science to the President of the Soviet Academy of Science and could I please be granted an interview? He said that it was almost impossible as the Central Committee of the Communist Party was meeting in Moscow that week and when I returned from Leningrad in two weeks the annual meeting of the Academy itself with elections of office-bearers was due to take place. The present President was standing for re-election but he had an opponent. He has had one term only, of four years, in office so far. His name was Kelaysh and though the office of the President of the Academy was the third most important in U.S.S.R., *he was not a member of the Communist Party!* After one and a quarter hour's interview I rose to leave as I was anxious to contact an airline office about my trip to London and to cable instructions regarding payment for my ticket to London and back.

On leaving the Secretary-General, I was introduced to the Press officer of the Academy who was a stout, short and smiling woman. Dr. C. told her that I had offered to broadcast or to appear on T.V. It was the easiest and most legitimate way of earning some roubles to replenish my shortage. She wanted to know what was "the theme" of my talk. I had none but would like to acquaint their people with mine and create an interest in my country. I was visualising a question and answer interview with a compere and an interpreter. The Press Officer said she would contact the radio and T.V. authorities and let me know later. I wondered whether that would suffer the same fate as my offer to lecture in Tashkent! I got a feeling that she was not very enthusiastic about my "theme". She would have much preferred a talk on what I thought about U.S.S.R. and its peoples or why I was a communist, which I was not!



I was next shown round the building. The Academy was housed in an old summer palace belonging to Catherine the Great. She had presented it to one of her numerous paramours but when he fell into disgrace, he not only lost his head but his heirs lost the palace; Catherine very meanly confiscated it, as an added mark of her displeasure. It had an impressive approach and was fronted by a large garden of roses and numerous fountains. Behind, the garden descended by several terraces, almost to the Moskva river from which it was separated by an open-air theatre. The palace was built by an Italian and was reminiscent of that country's architecture of the same period. There was a profusion of marble everywhere. The interior decorations were Italian in appearance. The main meeting Hall of the Academy was at one time Catherine's banqueting hall or ball-room and overlooked the gardens stretching down to the river. The room contained a massive gilt table and chairs which were gifts from the Emperors of France to Catherine.

Dr. C. thought of ordering my transport only when we got to the front door to depart. The cars were all garaged on the premises. There was a mighty fleet of them but it took about half an hour before one arrived. After waiting for about ten minutes and telephoning, Dr. C. went himself to the garage and on returning stated that a car had already been dispatched for me but someone else had pinched it at the front door! He also found the chauffeurs all playing chess and not willing to be disturbed! He added, "*They are not very disciplined*", a very significant remark and revealed the extent to which Mr. Khrushchev's policy of loosening-up had spread. Though personally inconvenienced at the moment, it gave me a comfortable feeling to hear that. Could such things happen in a Police State?

The woman in charge of the Aeroflot Office near the Hotel Metropole was surprised at my unprecedented request that my return air ticket to London and back be allowed to be paid for in sterling there. She had never heard of such an arrangement before. However, she referred me to the K.L.M. or B.E.A. Office which was in the same building. We tried our luck at the latter which was staffed by a smashing Russian blonde who asked me, "What can I do for you?" in perfect English without the trace of a foreign accent. She fell in readily with my suggestion that I paid for my ticket in London and also told me that there was a cheap round trip return for £85, nearly £40 less than the usual fare.

It was now 3 p.m. and we still had not had our lunch but the Ceylon Ambassador was expecting me before 4 p.m. We eventually reached the Embassy at 3.45 p.m. The Ambassador was extremely courteous and came out of his office to the lobby to



greet me and said that he had been trying to contact me on the telephone, without success, since the previous day. We had tea with cashew nuts in his private sitting room. Dr. S. tasted these for the first time in his life. There is a vast untapped market in U.S.S.R. for cashew nuts if only we grew enough for export on a commercial basis. Long before we thought of doing that, the Indians would have collared the trade!

Mr. Subasinghe had been very ill a short while ago and had been hospitalised here in one of the biggest institutions which had special facilities for the treatment of the diplomatic corps. He was very pleased with the standards of medical and nursing care; so much so, that one of his nephews had been specially flown from Colombo in order to be treated by Moscovite specialists.

## SCIENCE AND GOVERNMENT

Subasinghe gave me some interesting information. The Presidium of the Soviet never acted without the advice of the scientists. The Central Committee of the Party was packed with scientists and no act was passed without the most minute and scrupulous examination by many scientists who were experts on one or more aspects of any particular problem. I told him that this was just what we had been trying to advocate in Ceylon. I had said publicly and it had been given prominence in the Press that "we scientists do not crave to be *on top* but we have the right to be *on tap*". This was just where our political leaders were lacking in vision and foresight. They were still thinking in terms of party, religion and language. Most measures and acts were decided on grounds of political expediency and not on those of national advantage. Subasinghe is a man to keep in touch with. After his term in U.S.S.R. he has realised the fundamental importance of science and scientists in the development of a country. This is such a self-evident truth that it sounds like a cliché but those who know modern Ceylon will realise how sterile such a belief is there.

## A RUSSIAN FILM

When we reached our hotel it was 4.45 p.m. The restaurant closed at 5 p.m. but the management was kind enough to serve us with a full-dress luncheon as we needed it. Dr. S. tried to get tickets for a new Russian film "The Optimistic Tragedy" which had won an international award at Cannes as the best revolutionary film produced in 1962. He found it impossible as all tickets had been sold. It was being shown at a new cinema called the "Russia". However my guide was hopeful that if I took my passport along that he would manage to buy our tickets at the door. The "Russia" was a striking new building of glass and chromium



like a younger and plainer sister of the Kremlin Palace Theatre. Huge crowds were queuing up for tickets in front of us; I was very pessimistic but we took our places in one queue and when we got to the top, Dr. S. took my passport and I believe said something like the following to the man at the cubby-hole.

"This passport belongs to the President of the Ceylon Academy of Science and he is the guest of the Soviet Academy of Science and he cannot possibly be refused a ticket". This statement caused no interest but two tickets were immediately produced. This showed what prestige the Academy of Science had in the country. In no other country could such a thing have happened. My respect for the Soviets rose by 100%. The screen was a cinema affair. I am not personally very enamoured of these very wide screens. The human faces look so acromegalic and distorted at times. One lives in a Gulliver-like phantasmagoria and it was difficult to project oneself into reality. but good cinema must surely do that! I also observed that in the "Russia" there was a loud echo, especially when the actors raised their voices and shouted in anger. The story of the film was based on the civil war between the Whites and the Reds. It depicted the heroism and guts of a young woman commissar in charge of a tough lot of sailors; she had the power of life and death over them. She had to start exercising her authority by shooting dead one rough who tried to get fresh with her. The black and white film was acted superbly well but it was spoilt sometimes by too liberal a dose of communist propaganda. It was starkly grim and coarse in parts but there was quite a bit of humour and the Russians were very quick on the uptake. Dr. S. tried bravely but unsuccessfully to translate the spoken words to me in whispers. Try as I would, I could not hear what he said so I gave up listening though he continued whispering. The voices of the actors were too loud, so was the music, almost as blatant and as unpleasant as at an Indian or Sinhalese films at home, and that is saying some! I asked Dr. S. why the film had been called "The Optimistic Tragedy". "Though the heroine died, the revolution won through, that was the optimistic side to it". Rather a stupid title, I thought.

After the show we walked through the Pushkin Square with an immense bronze figure of the poet. In every city, almost in every town of importance and in some of the villages one saw monuments to this great writer. He was the national poet like Shakespeare in English, Goethe in Germany or Kalidasa in India. It was only occasionally that one saw similar memorials to Tolstoy or Chekov, Turgenev or Gorki or any of the other undying names of Russian literature. Pushkin, one thought, had been deified while the others had been denigrated. I wondered whether I was correct in that analysis or was I unjust to the Soviet Government? We



walked up Gorki Street which corresponds to Regent Street in London, the Champs Elysee in Paris or the Fifth Avenue in N.Y. Many luxury goods were for sale, synthetic plastic textiles, real jewels and furs including mink and sable. There was a special shop selling souvenirs with many expensive articles in them; only the Americans could afford to pay these prices. We walked for over half an hour through a grilling mass of people and went down to a metro station as I had wanted to return by the underground to my hotel.

## THE MOSCOW METRO

One had heard so much of this glittering sight of Moscow that one was eager to see the spectacle. I was not disappointed. It was the cleanest, most luxurious, most efficiently run underground railway of any city that I had visited. The N.Y. underground looked like a decrepit beggar and the London and Paris ones like poor relations of the Moscow one. There was marble everywhere on the floor, walls, ceiling and in all colours, red, black, yellow or streaked with many tints like Joseph's coat; opulent bronze lamps or glass chandeliers fit for an Emperor's banquetting hall, with miles and miles of marble corridors. We went up one escalator, down another and up a third before we reached the correct line. Advertisements were conspicuous by their absence; what a change from London with advertisements displaying women's unmentionables, drugs for B.O., halitosis or piles! Instead here were lovely mosaics in bright colours, and statues in bronze or marble. At one station every single archway (and there must have been fifty of them) had a pair of bigger-than-life-size bronze figures, one on each side. Each station had a distinctive decor, one in Ukrainian style; another in Baroque, etc. Apparently this last was very popular with Stalin, or so Dr. S. said, and *it was the first time that anyone had mentioned Stalin's name to me.*

We reached the hotel at 10.30 p.m., half-an-hour before the restaurant closed for the day; usually no full dinners, only snacks were served after 10.15 p.m. but again they were most kind and made an exception in my favour. I tasted a good Georgian red wine for the first time. It was called *Saperavi*; it was full of body and bite. The pork chop was awful with huge chunks of fat which I detested.

## ELEVENTH DAY:

There was actually warm water for a bath at 5 a.m. This was the one and only day that this happened at this hotel or in any hotel except the "Warsaw" (also in Moscow) where hot water was available throughout the 24 hours. Even in a first class hotel in Leningrad with an international reputation, hot water was at



a premium and was on tap only for a few hours each morning and evening. This must be due to a lack of fuel or such is conserved for more important measures; but the Soviet Government is so keen to create a good impression with foreigners that I was surprised that they had allowed these sub-optimal conditions to exist in their hotels.

I had a surprise when Dr. S. walked in at 9.20 a.m. with another doctor. He informed me that Dr. L. would take over from him as he had to leave town on some urgent work. I did not believe this for a moment and thought that I had driven him too hard or upset him in some way or other. S. was very good though his English was not up to much and he attended to my creature comforts like a Jeeves, but I realised that he was a research scientist doing some high-powered investigations and had been dragged out much against his will probably and ordered to cart me around. He got some extra money for it and also some of them were keen to do this job in order to improve their knowledge of English, but after a few days any scientist would crave to go back to his laboratory. S. said goodbye and promised faithfully to meet me before I left U.S.S.R. but he never did!

Dr. L. was swarthy, tall and broad with a low forehead, thick eyebrows, wavy dark hair just beginning to grey; he wore thick myopic lenses and I guessed that he belonged to the chosen race! On going down to breakfast I warned Dr. L. that he had better stoke up hard and fast because he would not get any more fuel till about 5 p.m. as I had two appointments both interesting ones at Lumumba University and the other at VOKS, the House of Friendship.

It was a very wet day again. We had a buxom wench as our chauffeuse who displayed her knowledge of local roads by promptly losing her way within five minutes! She also missed barging into lorries by inches. I shut my eyes and said my prayers. We dropped Dr. S. at his laboratory on the way and arrived at Lumumba University (see page 217).

I understood that each foreign student as soon as he arrived in Moscow was given a six months' intensive course in Russian and in the next six months a less intensive one in addition to reading the subjects that they were intending to follow; medical students would read Russian text books in Chemistry, Physics and Biology after the first six months of intensive study with help from tutors. At the end of the second six months none of them as a rule needed any help with the language. They could follow their lectures as well as do all their reading in Russian; and these are students who for the most part did not know even the Russian alphabet when they left their homes! When I suggested that all Ceylonese students in order to gain an adequate comprehension of English



before entering the University of Ceylon for science and technological subjects should be given an intensive course in English for five days a week for five months, I was laughed to scorn, and yet Ceylonese students who knew not a word of Russian in Moscow were quite adept at it after a six month intensive course! Our students on the other hand have had anything from 2-10 hours of English a week for the last two or three years if not longer in school. *In no University of repute in the world are the majority of students mono-lingual.* It is only primitive savages who know only one language. We are throwing away a precious heritage of knowledge of a world language in order to pamper to the petty jealousies of politically introverted pseudo-nationalists whose love for their country is bounded by a horizon of one religion, one language, and one community. Have the leaders lost all vision? *Leaders must lead and not be led.* They see clearly but they think confusedly. Surely plans for the next generation should have priority over those for the next election; that is what politicians unfortunately find it impossible to do.

While I was ferreting in the library, four Ceylonese students who had been apprised of my presence appeared suddenly; two were Sinhalese and two Tamils; two were following a medical course, the third an engineering and the other an economics one. There were 88 Ceylon students of a total of 2,000 at the time of my visit.

I gathered that the majority of students from Ceylon were following engineering and medicine; only two or three were doing agriculture and only four Ceylon students had left Lumumba before completing their courses. Of these one left for study of the techniques of the film industry in Moscow itself; another because he could not stand the pace or the place, and two were returned to Ceylon because their preliminary educational standards had been too low for them to follow their courses at Lumumba. The Pro-Rector very graciously admitted that it was partly the fault of their University authorities because the preliminary screening of their academic record had been defective; but I thought he was being unnecessarily over-generous. These students were primarily selected by the Ministry or Department of Education in Ceylon who interviewed them. Lumumba authorities could not and did not do so until their arrival in Moscow.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn that not a single Ceylon student had had a physical or mental breakdown, though there were among them, eight females all doing medicine. All four Ceylon students assured me that it was their intention to return to Ceylon after the completion of their studies. "Are you sure that your degrees will be officially recognised?", I asked.



"By the time we finish, we hope that something would be done about this", they replied. "If U.S.S.R. first recognised our degrees, then we would recognise theirs". I shouted in a loud tone, forgetting that I was in a reading room where silence had to be observed by everyone. Immediately there were several "shoos" from all parts of the room calling for silence. I realised what I had done and was careful not to be so vociferous again! Within three months of my return, the Ceylon Parliament passed a bill enabling these foreign qualifications to be legally recognised provided they passed a preliminary test set by our own faculty. I must add that I cannot take any credit for that generous gesture.

I asked the four Ceylon boys to gather more of their compatriots and meet me in the Pro-Rector's room in half-an-hour. On the way there I was shown a computer which did 3,000 calculations per second: that would take a human brain a lifetime of sweat and toil. My guide wanted me to see the student's dining room but as it was now past noon, I preferred to go straight to the Pro-Rector's room. He was a beefy-red, corpulent, hypertensive type with red-brown wavy hair and moustache, who had been in Ceylon and spoke very good English. I asked him what he thought about the Ceylonese students here. He was satisfied with their work and conduct. I asked him what had happened about Ceylon recognising U.S.S.R. medical (and engineering) qualifications. Negotiations were apparently proceeding not only with Ceylon but also with India.

I was assured by the Ceylonese that no lectures nor any talks on communism were given to them throughout their course though these were *de rigueur* for Soviet students. The Ceylonese, except for one or two grim specimens, looked quite happy and contented. There were two Sinhalese girls from Gampaha doing medicine, both in frocks. I asked how they fared in the winter. They stood it all right but longed for the Ceylon sun! "Do you suffer much from coughs, colds and diarrhoea?"

"Constipation is our chief trouble", they replied to my surprise.

"It's probably due to Vodka" I remarked. Their clothes looked warm enough and they were well-shod. Each of them had received an initial outfit allowance of 300 roubles (Rs. 1,500/-) with which they bought their winter clothing. Some of them had already possessed tweed or woollen suits at home and had wisely brought them along. Each of them, like all foreign students, received a standard monthly stipend of 90 roubles (Rs. 450/-) from the Soviet Government. I thought this was a very generous allowance when their opposite numbers at Peradeniya (University of Ceylon) got only about Rs. 50/-Rs. 100/- a month which paid for their board and lodging. The Lumumba students had to pay for their meals but their rooms were free of rent. They also



had to pay for the laundry of blankets, towels and sheets which they could not handle themselves. They thought that the changing of sheets once in ten days was extraordinarily generous! Their passages to and from home also were paid by the Soviets, altogether a very generous gesture on their part. They asked me how unsettled things in general were at home. I said it was the usual story and the S.L.F.P. Government thought it would cure its headaches by changing its pillows (a reference to the recent Cabinet changes, the same old crowd indulging in a game of general post). If a man has done a good job as a Cabinet Minister in one field, he should be retained in the same post. If he has been a failure he should be sacked and not given another post of equal responsibility! That surely is logic. Of course this happens in other countries too but it still does not make the habit less illogical.

Mrs. Bandaranaike's long and famous interview with *Pravda* had appeared in that morning's paper and I asked one of them to translate this for me. He did this very well but it took a long time. Before he had finished, Doctors C. and L. were back and urging me on to the next assignment. As there were too many of them to shake hands with, I did a *namaskara* (oriental salute) and wished them all good luck in their studies and examinations and a safe return to Lanka. I told them that they had a great obligation to fulfil for the privilege they had had of a technological training in U.S.S.R. and that was to preach day in and day out in Ceylon the fundamental importance of Science in the development of the country. Some people thought our government was heading straight for a medieval theocracy which was a much greater danger, to my mind, than communism and it was the duty of all of us who have had a scientific training to resist such a movement.

In spite of much Press publicity our government was still not convinced that scientists must be consulted on all important matters. In fact, many of those in charge of development in important ministries were persons without any scientific background at all and what is more, these and the administrative high-ups were jealous of anyone with technological know-how getting close to the political leaders. They had been the sole cocks of the walk and it was their intention to remain so for the rest of their lives! Could anything be more tragic for a developing country? I told them that it was a challenge to them to fight for the right of science to be at the centre of power, not to be enthroned but to be on tap by the throne.

### HOUSE OF FRIENDSHIP (VOKS)

My next visit was to VOKS, the House of Friendship. This was a very ornate looking palace in one of the main Moscow streets. It had belonged to a merchant tycoon who had owned



several other houses in the city; this was the one he had most recently built before the October Revolution. In fact it had been completed just in time for it to be taken over! The interior decor was very ostentatious and opulent, with gilt and embossed plaster in every corner. This palace had served first as the Indian and then as the Japanese Embassy before it was handed over to VOKS, the organisation which dealt with all foreigners and to which were affiliated associations like the Ceylon Soviet Friendship Society. There were forty such societies affiliated to VOKS.

Before my departure, I was presented with a book on Soviet-Ceylon friendship; a copy of the Constitution of the Soviet-India Friendship Society and a long playing record, Tschaikovsky's Concerto No. 1 for piano and orchestra played by E. Gilles, the most famous Soviet pianist and the U.S.S.R. State Symphony Orchestra.

I had to wait a few minutes till the arrival of the woman in charge of medical matters. She looked most efficient, though plumpish and good-looking. She studied my programme and suggested certain changes. I offered to deliver a lecture to the paediatricians and wanted her advice on the title of my talk. She advised me to speak on KWASHIORKOR (PROTEIN MALNUTRITION) because my Russian colleagues were quite unfamiliar with it. This lecture, as I expected, never materialised.

I was served with hot lemon tea and chocolates. While I was waiting for my transport to arrive, Dr. C. telephoned to say that T.V. wanted me to appear on the 20th evening at 9 p.m. I had already reserved seats for the Puppet Show on that evening. After refusing to give these up at first and asking T.V. for another date, I was persuaded by Dr. C., who was not very pleased with my decision, to change my mind, to cancel my reservations for the Puppet Show and to appear on T.V. as requested.

### TRETYAKOV GALLERY

Dr. L. failed to get an Academy car for me at 5.30 p.m. when I wanted to view the TRETYAKOV gallery which had with the Russian Museum at Leningrad, the largest collection of Russian paintings in the world, from the earliest times to the present. Their nineteenth and early twentieth century pictures were all in the classical academic style and some of them portrayed very telling stories as with Hogarth's or Vermeer's canvases: ill-suited marriages, priests cadging for donations from rich travellers and ignoring the plight of the poor peasants, the sufferings of the children during the thaw, railway workers being beaten by sadistic foremen while at work. Some of the more modern ones were inspired by the French impressionists like Renoir and Monet but one particular artist's technique reminded me of my old friend,



Justin Deraniyagala, so tantalisingly ugly but attractive. Some of the more recent Armenian paintings had very bright colours, reds, blues, purples and greens predominating but nowhere could I see an example of cubism, surrealism or of abstract art. The Soviet Government frowns on all these new fangled-isms. Their argument is that Art must serve the people. There must be a meaning and a purpose in Art as in everything else. Where there is no meaning, there is chaos; where there is chaos, there is licence, indiscipline and every other undesirable trait. Some might agree that the afflictions of France and England could be traced to the licence of her painters and writers; or are we mixing up cause and effect? Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

#### THE TWELFTH DAY:

As Dr. L. was late in arriving, I breakfasted alone and made my needs known by drawings and signs to a highly intelligent waitress who was completely ignorant of English. I managed to order successfully toast, butter, cheese, jam, sausages, salt, pepper, mustard, coffee and milk. That was an achievement because many a time have I failed to get any comprehension from the waitress and have had to give up some of the items in sheer desperation.

#### SCHOOL OF ASIAN STUDIES

The whole morning was spent at the Ministry of Education (page 236).

In the middle of the morning while I was busy at the first of these interviews, Dr. C. suddenly appeared at the door and informed me that the authorities at the School of Asian Studies would appreciate a visit from me. I was in no mood to visit it as I had a severe attack of hay fever on that morning and it was all I could do to get through the two conferences at the Ministry of Education, but Dr. C. was politely but firmly insistent, so I had no option but to agree. When I had finished my two interviews, no transport was available for over half-an-hour. By the time I reached the School of Asian Studies, I was really in extremis with my nose dripping like the Trevi Fountain and feeling as if it held a ton of bricks inside! Only Dr. L. was sensitive to my sufferings, Dr. C. could not care less. The programme arranged by him must be fulfilled even if I ended up a corpse. The Director of the Institute had many contacts with Ceylon and went on and on. He was quite impervious to my frequent sneezes. I could not take in 5% of what he said but that made no difference to him. His piece had to be recited or else the Heavens would fall! I was given the full works—the history, purpose, research, teaching etc., etc., of the Institute from the day it was conceived up to the present



time and there was I sitting like a lamb led to the slaughter, mentally and physically exhausted to such a degree that he might as well have been speaking to a blank wall!

One of the assistants had been in the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya for two years with our Professor of Sinhalese learning Sinhala and had now the temerity to teach it to seven Russian students at Moscow University! They showed me round their reading room and library. Dr. Malalasekera, our ex-ambassador as well as our ex-Professor of Pali at the University of Ceylon, had been a good friend of theirs and helped them a great deal with their studies in Pali and Sinhala. They presented me with two Russian books, one modern paper back titled UNAOHA which to the uninitiated I might translate as CEILONA, the Russian for Ceylon. The writer was a woman called Talmud and I suspected that its contents were a recent history of Ceylon. The other volume was a cloth bound edition of a Russian translation of the Jataka stories! Before the day was out I had presented both of them to Dr. L. who could make better use of them than I ever could. I was never good at learning languages. I have tried at odd times when I was much younger to learn French, German, and Spanish and have given up the unequal struggle after a few weeks.

At lunch I managed to inveigle out of Dr. L. that he was an Ukrainian Jew. At the Institute of Asian Studies, the Director thought he was also from Ceylon! He was so swarthy-complexioned! He also informed me that he was not a member of the communist party. On asking him why, he replied, "I am not interested in politics but in science". He was a neurophysiologist but his experiments and observations were on human patients, not on animals, as in the case of Dr. S. I asked Dr. L. whether it was not a handicap to his career not to be a member of the communist party. He denied this and quoted several names of prominent academicians who were not members of the C.P. He admitted, however, rather tardily that on the administrative service, it was a distinct advantage. That in my opinion was justifiable favouritism in the present set-up though it was hardly logical!

I asked him about anti-semitism. He denied its existence at the present time but admitted that there was plenty of it in the Stalin era. Apparently during the war, some Jews did not seem to pull their weight in the front line or were alleged to have sought and obtained safe jobs in the rear. This led to a wave of unpopularity among the masses. Dr. L. admitted that Stalin was very cruel to everyone, not only to the Jews. If Gunther is to be believed he was even more cruel to some Ukrainians and other minorities who collaborated with the German during the invasion.



I am also told that Hebrew did not have the same status as a regional language. I suspected from Dr. L's whole attitude to life and his behaviour that there was some unpopularity of the chosen race still prevailing in U.S.S.R. He always reminded me of a rather timid dog who sniffed the stranger very carefully before he made any advance! Did that not mean a sense of insecurity? If not, what did it mean? He was a highly intelligent, respected scientist knowing the last word on Cybernetics, a name I was totally ignorant of till I met him and yet here he was moving about like a beaten child among his compatriots!

A Ceylon student from Lumumba University came to see me and gave his name as Kulatunge from Sri Palee in Horana, the school planned, designed, constructed and worked by my cousins, Mr. and Mrs. Wilmot Perera. I also had another link with Kulatunge; two of his aunts were at that time my students in Colombo. I got him to open out a bit and asked him the straight question, which was the reason for my asking him to my room, whether they the foreign students had any lectures or teaching on communism. He quite assuredly denied this, confirming what I had been told earlier at Lumumba but he admitted that in the third year medical curriculum, which was just out for the first time, two hours a week had been spared for Philosophy. These lectures had not commenced at the time of my visit but I shall be very surprised if they do not contain liberal doses of Marx, Engels and Lenin to the exclusion of most other Western and Oriental philosophers.

We have no right to complain, however, because the Soviet Government has paid all the passages, as well as kept these students at their expense and they have been selected and sent here by our Government. If the Soviet Government pays the piper, it has the right to call the tune. That is indisputable.

Kulatunge told me that all the students had sufficient warm clothes and they kept a reasonably good standard of health. Some of them, not all, played squash rackets in the winter and had organised a cricket club in the summer. They also played volley ball and hockey.

The Soviet Government had up to recently given each student an outfit allowance of 300 roubles (Rs. 1,500/-) on arrival in the U.S.S.R. This practice had had to be abandoned owing to various abuses, but all clothes actually purchased by the student were paid for by the government. This story reminded me of what I was told in Sydney two years ago that the Indonesians on arrival there in the summer expended all their outfit allowances on cameras, tape recorders, radios and T.V. sets, etc., so that when winter came, they just froze in their tropical clothing. The Australian



Government then had to come to their rescue and advance them the money from their monthly subsistence allowance in order to save them from premature death from pneumonia.

Kulatunge also informed me that they had started a Society for S.E. Asian students but this was mainly a social club to enable them to get dates with decent girls—a very laudable and praiseworthy effort. Kulatunge was secretary of this show. On the whole the Ceylonese looked a happy and integrated lot and as usual mixed extremely well with students of all races. That is one thing that could be said to our credit. We are good mixers and our youth, left to themselves without indoctrination from semi-literate demagogues, were some of the finest types in the world if only the politicians would keep their claws off them!

I gathered Ceylon had the third biggest national contingent at Lumumba; Indonesia was first and I think Cuba second; we had 88 students while India had less than 30! Five months after my return I heard that India had increased her numbers to 110.

After an hour's interesting talk, I excused myself as I had to dress for Subasinghe, our ambassador, who was coming himself to fetch me for dinner at the Embassy. Subasinghe showed me the site where the new Lumumba University was being built.

We also discussed the training of our medical students in U.S.S.R. and I told Subasinghe that its great weakness was the lack of patients with tropical diseases. The reactions to disease and their patterns were often quite different in tropical peoples. There was no Institute or Hospital for Tropical Diseases as in London, Liverpool, Amsterdam, Paris or Brussels. Part of the answer might be an exchange of medical students for part of their training with medical schools in the tropics and part the invitation to professors and lecturers from these schools to be visiting teachers at Lumumba for periods of one or two years.

My hostess, Mrs. Subasinghe, was very charming, highly intelligent and attractive. The house was much larger than I had visualised it to be on my first back-door entry! We sat in a large sitting room where the internal decor was all Ceylonese: Dumbara mats, Kandyan spears, sesaths, and Ceylon brass trays. The staircase walls were also hung with printed Ceylon flags in red, white and black. The dining room was panelled and could seat a hundred guests with ease. The wooden ceiling was also richly carved and decorated. This house had belonged to a rich sugar merchant and showed all the signs of ostentation associated with the easy money of a big business tycoon. Rice and curry gave me pangs of homesickness. It was my first Ceylon meal for a fortnight. The Subasinghes had two daughters of 13 and 11 years respectively at school in Moscow. They refused to use the Embassy



car to go to school because their schoolmates jeered at them and called them "softies" whenever they did so; they therefore always chose to go by bus. What a difference to the likes and dislikes of the same class in Ceylon? The Subasinghes thought that the standard of science teaching was higher in U.S.S.R. than in Ceylon. The headmistress has asked Mrs. S. permission before ordering her children to scrub the floor and do other menial tasks which every Soviet school child must perform. I was very proud to learn that Mrs. S. had told the school-marm that whatever the other children did, hers must also do. There must be no difference shown. I wondered how many Sinhalese mothers with the same background would have acted as wisely. I had no doubt that even if Mrs. S. had not been an ambassador's wife, she would still have behaved in the same manner.

We talked about Ceylon politics. Subasinghe was once a leader of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Trotskyites) but had later left it and called himself an Independent Socialist. He had also been one of our finest Speakers of the House of Representatives. He reminded me that the last time we had met was at a dinner at Bonn in 1955 thrown by the M.R.A. group. He was with a Ceylon Trade delegation visiting Western European countries and I was touring Western Europe in a car with my wife and daughter. S. obviously had a very good memory to recall that event. My remembrance of it extended to two points - that I sat next to a West German Minister for Refugees who informed me that each month he had to find housing and jobs for 25,000 refugees from East to West Germany. That was before the days of the Berlin Wall! The other was the colourful M.R.A. film called "Freedom," acted by an all African amateur cast.

Subasinghe admitted that his was a very difficult job. Every small request of the Soviets was examined microscopically by officials at our end, who knew as much about the conditions or policy of U.S.S.R. as they would those of the Kingdom of Heaven, or of Hell for that matter! The U.S.S.R. had requested our government to train three Soviet students in Sinhalese at the University of Ceylon. Although S. had backed this request with all his might and main, our big boys had asked who was to foot the bill when they knew that at that time the Soviet Government was spending as much as 100,000 roubles (Rs. 500,000) a year on stipends to Ceylonese students at Lumumba University only, not counting the cost of their passages and clothing allowances, etc. If we included all this, the sum would approach nearly Rs. 1,200,000. The Soviet Government had also requested that a Professor of Sinhalese be lent to the University of Moscow for a few years and had suggested a certain well known lecturer in Peradeniya. I told him that our University regulations would not permit this and that we had lost more than one of our academic staff owing to these inhibitory rules.



When one denigrated the architecture of these modern, box-like apartment blocks displaying no artistic originality, most Russians would disagree but a few of the more enlightened would make excuses by stating that till recently the U.S.S.R. was a prison house with no windows open to other countries, but surely they had every access to books and literature on architecture and must have learnt even second hand about the fascinating new forms of architecture rising in Brasilia and other places. More recently there has been a minor break-through from this dead uniformity of design and I observed myself some attempts to decorate the exteriors of these buildings with moulded floral motifs of cement and brick. The Kremlin Palace of Congress, the "Russia" Cinema, the Lenin Library, the Panorama building and the Hotel Ukraine were successful attempts but these cases were few in the architectural desert. It must not, however, be forgotten by critics that the life of U.S.S.R. had only lasted for 46 years; before that the only people who counted were the Nobility, the Church and the Kulaks. Except for a few palaces, churches and theatres there were hardly any architectural gems prior to 1917 in Moscow. Leningrad was different. Let it also always be remembered that in the middle of their period of regeneration, they had to fight a cruel and savage enemy who destroyed twenty million and maimed ten million human beings besides causing incalculable material damage to their land and buildings. Never in history had a single country lost so much in so short a time and yet recovered so quickly. We sophisticated Asians seem to forget when we scoff at the clothing or the housing of the Soviets, that these things are much worse for the majority of the citizens of our own countries. Why this eyebrow raising sophistry?

To any intelligent, unprejudiced observer, it is obvious that the Soviets have done a tremendous job extremely well in a relatively short period of time and that not only as far as material comfort is concerned. They have emphasised the importance, nay the necessity, for cultural activities, which are available to and within the means of the vast masses of the people, unlike in our countries where culture has been till very recently the preserve of privilege. Today, with the growth of the new generation of rising expectations, cultural displays are fortunately indulged in by wider and wider sections of our people.

In Moscow and Leningrad every performance of the ballet, concert and opera was completely sold out. The parks of culture, picture galleries and museums were chock-a-block with people, but *none of them was free*. The people obviously needed these things if they used them so widely; it meant that the general level of education and culture must be fairly high. If these activities do not satisfy the longings of the human soul for spiritual solace, comfort and exhilaration, what do they do? Is it necessary for



the growth of the spirit that one must worship God in a church, a temple or a mosque? If one believes that the human soul is the Temple of God and that He is within you and not in outer space, then even atheists and communists may be the blessed children of the Almighty. I have met as many Russians with divine characteristics as British, American or Ceylonese, no more, no less; even if one denies the existence of God, it does not mean that God does not exist nor does it mean that God cannot bless his errant children. It does not make the unbeliever any the less god-like. I may deny that I have suprarenal glands till I am blue in the face but that does not mean that they do not exist and that I can live without them. They bless my life in spite of me.

### THIRTEENTH DAY:

#### CENTRAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH EDUCATION (See also page 219)

The day started with a visit to the Central Research Institute for Health Education of the Ministry of Public Health, U.S.S.R. A special interpreter was detailed for my interview. She was a beautiful brunette in her early thirties and she spoke the best English of any Russian I had met up-to-date. She was a linguist by profession and her special job, when not interpreting for visitors like myself, was to translate English publications on Health Education into Russian. This Central Research Institute was a vivid testimony of the Soviet Government's desire to place health education on a scientific basis. This Institute was also housed like many others that I have already visited in what was once a plutocrat's palace. It was built in the eighteenth century and possessed the usual ornate trimmings; the ceilings and walls were feasts of decor with embossed plaster and painted frescoes. I was introduced to the Scientific Director and Head of their Institute, Dr. Ershov, who was unexpectedly not a Professor. He was also a member of the W.H.O. expert advisory panel for health education. He was a fully integrated and extroverted personality with an irresistible charm and sincerity of manner. He rather liked to hear his own voice and spoke almost without a break for one and a half hours when he had promised me that he would stop after one hour! However, he was so interesting that I was not a bit bored or tired but longed for more because he did not speak about himself but about the Institute and its work; he was naturally very proud of it. The interpreter and her interpretation had a lot to do with the continuance of my interest at this very long interview.

At the end of this exhaustive but not exhausting interview with Dr. Ershov I was led to a fairly small circular theatre which had served as a ballroom in its younger days when more gracious



living was *à la mode*. Here a number of Soviet Doctors following a post-graduate course in health education were present. By their faces one could see that they hailed from the many far-flung lands of the Soviet Union—Kazaks, Uzbeks, Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanians were there besides the Russians and Ukrainians.

Two coloured films were exhibited for my special benefit. The first was on the general care of the child and was very mediocre and did not hold my interest. I am ashamed to say it but I fell asleep during the show! The second was very good. It was based on a story of two children belonging to two different mothers. The first followed the clinic doctor's advice regarding dieting and child care but the second thought she knew better than the doctor, as many mothers in Ceylon and other countries too do, and as a result her offspring developed rickets though he was fat and chubby. This reminded me of my revered teacher Sir George Frederick Still's dictum that all the children portrayed on posters in U.K. displaying bonny babies and advertising a well-known brand of dried milk were suffering from rickets! Some humour was also introduced by the figure of a doll dressed as a doctor which had been presented to the "good" mother by the clinic doctor; each time the mother did something right, the doctor-doll would nod his head in approval and each time she did something wrong, he would shake it vigorously from side to side.

On the way to my next appointment at the Society for the Propagation of Knowledge, we went into the largest book store in Moscow. It was situated in its most famous shopping centre, Gorki Street. It was uncomfortably crowded as it was the lunch hour but the service was excellent. English books had a special corner. I bought a book on the Bolshoi Ballet, which Mrs. Subasinghe had advised me not to miss. It was beautifully produced and profusely illustrated in black and white and cost only 4 roubles (Rs. 20/-), which was cheap on British or American standards. Books were one of the cheapest buys throughout the U.S.S.R. There was also a monumental demand for them but the supply seemed like the Niagara.

All along Gorki Street I observed that the shops were full of luxury and utilitarian goods. The shortage of consumer goods which, Subasinghe informed me, had been distressing in 1956 has almost disappeared to the point of no return in 1963. This undoubtedly was due to the new production slant of the wholly state-owned economy and its recent relative concentration on consumer goods though capital goods still held a priority. We found the offices of the Soviet Society for Knowledge with some difficulty. The entrance was from a secluded courtyard which was approached from a huge wooden door, bang on a small side-street near the Red Square. I was escorted into a small, richly



carpeted room with a very long table. Seven important members of the medical section of the Society and two of its paid officials were there to receive me.

The Chairman introduced each member present briefly to me and we seated ourselves at the long table laden with luscious-looking strawberries as large as Ceylon limes, fresh peaches and apricots as well as chocolates and meringues as big as saucers. As it was well-past 2 p.m., I was as hungry as a horse but for over half-an-hour no one asked me to partake of any of the food. It was torture of the choicest kind. When they did, I helped myself to two strawberries which I had to eat without cream or sugar as did all the others. They tasted as good as English strawberries but were much bigger, as large as the tasteless Californian ones. I would have loved dearly to dip them in some sweet wine as the Italians do but it would have been bad form to ask for some. The chocolates were also a great improvement on the previous ones and were walnut-kernelled. We were served with hot lemon tea from Georgia. Unfortunately no one offered me a meringue which I was salivating to taste!

I was proud to note that the dominating personality at the conference was the dowager Professor of Paediatrics, Sokolova Ponomarieva who had been to the All Asian Congress of Paediatrics in New Delhi in 1961. I asked Sokolova whether it was true about the vaccination treatment in pregnancy for rhesus negative mothers. She had no first hand information about this but I was told by the neonatal expert much later when I visited her hospital that this treatment which they crowed about so much at Tashkent had already been abandoned at the metropolis. Medical news, like the rest, seemed to travel slowly in U.S.S.R. I also asked her about a drug to stimulate growth which an Indian friend had requested me to enquire about in U.S.S.R. She probably did not understand my question with Dr. L's poor interpretation and denied all knowledge about it but later Dr. Fateeva who worked at the same hospital as Sokolova informed me that it was bee-milk or Royal-jelly. I shall speak more about this later. When I attempted to ask Sokolova a third question, she got rather annoyed and impatient as she wanted so much to get her set piece off her chest; so I told her to carry on. It contained the usual platitudinous twaddle of no value to me but she was so charming and majestic that I readily forgave her torrent of verbosity. Her performance, I would guess, vied with any audience that Queen Victoria, whom she resembled closely though on a physically magnified scale, was graciously pleased to grant to any minor Indian princeling. On leaving I saw her stepping into a luxurious chauffeured Mercedes with a tiger-mascot swinging at the rear window. How bourgeois! In spite of her patronising and patrician manners, I did really like her especially as she said she



would like to come to Ceylon soon. I offered to take her back with me on my return flight. Dr. L. could not translate that effectively and I had to repeat it so many times before he got the hang of it, so much so that the humour was completely lost! Sokolova was 75 years of age but as active as a hawk though she had the figure and posture of the Great White Queen of the 19th century. I continued to refer to her as Queen Victoria and this was later conveyed to her and she was flattered by the comparison! She was brought up in pre-revolutionary days and probably had, like most of her generation, a secret admiration for Royalty and all its trappings; she must have belonged to an aristocratic family. On leaving, the chairman pinned a red, gold and blue enamel badge with the head of Lenin on the lapel of my jacket and said I was now a Honorary Member of the Society for Knowledge. I proudly wore it throughout my stay on the same lapel and never took it off till my return home!

I did not get my lunch till 4.30 p.m. but managed to rest for half-an-hour after it. I was due to appear on T.V. that evening but on the way up to my room, the concierge informed me that it had been cancelled by telephone as a special T.V. programme had been put on in which the male and female cosmonauts, Valery and Valentina, who had returned to mother earth on the previous day would appear. All Moscow, nay all U.S.S.R., was jubilant over their wonderful flights.

Dr. L. and I went out to see the Panorama building which was a new sight for Muscovites and tourists. We had tried to get into the building that morning but were unsuccessful as we were too early. On the way there we passed through some of the worst roads in Moscow, huge puddles of water, mud as thick as packs with ruts, pot-holes and what-have-you. This apology for a road was very near my hotel. The only excuse was that there was a great deal of new building going on around there and new roads were also being constructed.

The Panorama was a circular building with a flat top in the shape of a large Christmas cake. It was built to commemorate the Battle of Borodin and the great Russian generals of that time. It will be remembered that Napoleon won that last battle before the gates of Moscow. How many nations would care to immortalise a crushing defeat? To my mind that showed a high respect for objective truth, however nationally humiliating and emotionally distressing that truth might be. On the front exterior of the building were large mosaics illustrating the Great fire of Moscow of 1812 with figures symbolic of war and death on one side and on the other, a very ironic mosaic of Napoleon on his great retreat, Riding in his phaeton with his chin lowered down on his chest and looking the picture of misery and despair.



The Panorama itself was vividly and realistically painted and was a distinct improvement on the very similar one at Waterloo. This was not surprising as it was painted much later. On the way up the stairs to the Panorama we attached ourselves to an official guide who was explaining the numerous paintings and statues, etc. to two lone visitors. Dr. L. asked their permission for us to join them. They happened to be two delegates to the Central Committee of the Communist Party which was meeting in Moscow at that time. When they learnt that I was from Ceylon, they informed me that they were islanders too from Sakhalin, near Japan. It was nearly 30,000 square miles in extent, 5,000 more than Ceylon and very long and narrow but it had even today not more than 300,000 people against our 10 million! My friends had remarkably European looking features and complexions. I expect it was the first time they had met a Ceylonese as it was my first experience of any Sakhalinese.

This building and its contents had been open to the public only for the previous six months. It contained relics, banners, maps, etc. illustrating the Napoleonic wars. Though we had to pay an entrance fee, all guides were free and they did not cadge for not expect tips as in western countries. Whether it was forbidden for them to do so, I did not discover but tipping was accepted gladly in other services, as I shall relate later.

On the way back we went into the Children's World, the biggest toy shop in Moscow. I bought one of those delightful Ukrainian wooden painted dolls, each had about three inside, one within the next, and also another take-to-pieces wooden toy. These were very cheap and colourful and would amuse my grandchild in a few months. On emerging from the main entrance I heard a great deal of shouting going on and found a tall strong young man of about 19-20 years holding a younger youth in his early teens by the scruff of his collar and shaking him like a dog would shake a kitten, shouting at him all the time. I also noticed that the bully had a toy in his hand which he was holding in front of his victim's face. Each time he wanted to emphasize some particular point, he would give his victim an extra-hard squeeze of his neck. I have never in my long and much-travelled life ever seen such a look of superlative terror as I saw on that poor boy's face. He was protesting his innocence no doubt and lying like a Nazi but he must have been caught in the act by his tormentor. There were scores of people looking on at this exhibition of sadism and no one felt any the worse for it. I thought it was terrible, however heinous the crime, that the punishment should have been so severe and cruel. Obviously the bigger boy was a shop detective and if such were employed, it meant that thieving was fairly prevalent; so all this high-sounding propaganda that there was no need for



anyone to steal in U.S.S.R. was just bolony! I must however say here and now that I did not lose even a pin all the time I was in U.S.S.R. and I am apt to be most careless about my belongings. I have left cash, camera, lenses, every valuable thing I possessed in my unlocked hotel room and gone out and nothing has ever been touched. One cannot say this even of the U.K. which has an international reputation for honesty at all levels. In 1939 just before the war I lost an Agfa camera in my hotel in London. This was definitely stolen and though I got partial compensation from the Insurance Company, it left a bitter taste in my mouth as it happened the day before I left London on my return voyage home. In Ceylon things are much worse though I have heard from my foreign friends that the biggest thieves in Colombo were the crows!

When I returned to my hotel for dinner music and dancing was going on in the restaurant. The standard of dancing was very low. They certainly kept time to the music but their steps were terrible and they moved their arms like windmills and their bodies like reptiles. Several women were dancing together but thank goodness, no males. It was inexplicable that this nation that excelled all others in the supreme art of the ballet should be such shockingly poor ball-room dancers. This merry making was by a special group of young persons who were celebrating some occasion or other; some of them started singing but their voices were a bit the worse for wear and booze and the effect was far from melodious. One of the women rose and made a speech and everyone clapped loudly. In the adjoining room a wedding party was on. They had commenced eating when I came in for lunch at 4.30 p.m. and were just about to leave at 10 p.m.! Many of the men were ataxic and had to be aided in their locomotory functions by their companions. *Drunkenness however was conspicuous by its infrequency at any rate in public.* There were certainly far fewer drunks to be seen in Moscow than in London or Stockholm or New York. Alcoholism however must be a headache to the authorities because many of the health education lectures, etc. were devoted to its prevention. Like sex promiscuity, the Soviets were successful in concealing this weakness from the prying foreign eye.

That evening I attempted to count the number of good-lookers among the women both in the restaurant as well as on the escalators in the metro and at the Panorama; my rough estimate was that not one in 100 would have ever tempted me to break the seventh commandment!

#### FOURTEENTH DAY:

When I woke up at 4.30 a.m. the sun was streaming in. Hurrah! a fine day at last, for the first time after I had arrived in Moscow.



An apple was obtainable or once on the menu; it was soft and tasteless. The tablecloth was dirty and the service abominable. Dr. C. arrived for me soon after 9 a.m. much earlier than expected. I told him politely but firmly that I was not satisfied with my hotel and would he get me a better one on my return from Leningrad. I was to leave for Kiev that evening and proceed direct to Leningrad from there and then return to Moscow. All these journeys were to be performed by train. I was not averse to this because it gave me an experience of Soviet trains.

The streets and some of the public buildings and entrances, including the Academy had been decorated with red flags and banners in order to welcome Valery and Valentina, the cosmonauts who were to have an official welcome on the following day on Red square. I was unfortunate enough to miss this by a few hours but I saw them in greater comfort on T.V. The Kremlin walls were hung with 40 ft. long banners, each bearing a crest of one of the 15 Union Republics.

After some delay during which Dr. L. and I walked round the Academy gardens, we went on to the Institute of Higher Neurophysiological Studies where all my medical guides like Drs. S. and L. worked. I was introduced to the third doctor who was to guide me to and at Kiev, Dr. Rostoslav Michailovich Merschersky. It was extraordinary with what ease the Academy dragged out these high-powered research workers from the same Institute, one after the other and ordered them to act as guide-interpreters to guests like myself for several days on end. Their guiding was excellent but their interpretation was very mediocre. The first one was moderately good, the second just intelligible and the third was almost illiterate as far as English was concerned. I suspected later on that the last had friends in Kiev whom he wanted to visit at the Academy's expense and also to earn some pocket money!

I met the Director of the Institute, Dr. Esraz Asradovich Asratjan who was an Armenian and had been rescued by the Russian army from the hands of the Turks when he was 12 years of age. His father and several of his relatives had been slaughtered but his mother with her children had managed to escape. They had settled in what is now called Armenia and had migrated later to Moscow. His mother aged over 80 years was alive and was the only member of the family who still believed in God and went to church. The Director himself was a dedicated member of the Communist Party and believed honestly and sincerely that it was only in the U.S.S.R. that a man of any race, colour, religion or language group had an equal chance with any other to rise to the top on his merits and merits alone. He was firmly convinced that in no other country would he, a poor Armenian, without any



money or influence have been able to have become the Director of a top-ranking Research Institute. Would he not be right as far as Ceylon is concerned? Here was a foreigner born abroad who had entered this great country as a penniless refugee with only his brains and his guts to pull him through. He had succeeded beyond his wildest dreams and was now making a valuable contribution to the advancement of science in his adopted country. Not only that, he was a devoted, contented and patriotic citizen of U.S.S.R. There was no room for any "buts" in his credo. He was very sincere and extroverted with an infective sense of humour. I have never heard anyone who laughed so loudly or so uninhibitedly, with the single exception of the present Metropolitan of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon!

Dr. Asratjan was a lover of Ceylon tea and bought it whenever it was available which was not very often. He confessed that it was the best in the world, followed by the Indonesian, Indian, Chinese and Russian in that order. He laughed loudly at that last quip! I loved him at once. I never met anyone in U.S.S.R. who did not prefer Ceylon tea to their own. What was surprising was that there was hardly any difference in price between Georgian tea and ours but it was often in short supply. Apparently, import of foreign tea was only allowed when their own stocks ran short.

Dr. Merschersky who was to accompany me to Kiev was a handsome, young-looking Russian just beginning to grey round his temples. I guessed his age as 35 but he was actually 42 and the father of a boy of 8 years; he was also divorced and remarried.

I had a great disappointment when I went to fetch my processed Soviet colour film which contained all the shots of indescribable Samarkand. It was just awful and the whole film looked a stale vin rose! The man said it was an outdated film. Some of the exposures looked good and it was worth getting black and white prints of them! I had to go to one end of the town to get these black and white prints and to another to get colour prints of two of the exposures which were passable. Each of these cost 1R. 15k. (Rs. 8/50) which was pretty expensive considering that a 36-exposure Agfa color film only cost 1R. 05k. The explanation was that the printing was done in U.S.S.R. and the Agfa color film was imported from the German Democratic Republic!

## LABORATORY OF RESUSCITATION

We wound our way to the *Laboratory of Resuscitation* headed by Professor Vladimir Negovsky, a man with an international reputation and whose books have been translated into many languages and published abroad. He looked like an overgrown, overfed



baby with a cherubic smile and welcomed me heartily. He was very proud that all foreign medical men visiting Moscow made his laboratory one of the "musts". He gave me several reprints of his papers in English, French and Russian particularly with regard to "Resuscitation of the Newborn"—one on the value of external massage of the heart with two fingers at the lower end of the infant's sternum and the other on the alleged superiority of positive pressure over mouth to mouth breathing in asphyxia of the newborn. He showed me round his fairly small laboratory, sited in a very old rickety building just off the Red Square but containing all the very latest in electronic gadgets. There was an operating theatre in which some of his numerous assistants (there must have been at least a dozen of them) were operating on dogs. One dog was quite conscious and had numerous electrodes connecting his heart, lungs and blood vessels to separate drums. That particular experiment was to record the effects of fibrillation and defibrillation on the heart. Negovsky claimed that his method of defibrillation was superior to any other. I was not competent to express any opinion. All these new-fangled gadgets were above my head. I cannot at my time of life develop any interest in them. The second experiment that I saw was the stimulation of a dog's brain with micro-electrodes. These were so minute that one of them could stimulate a single neurone. Negovsky claimed that he could resuscitate a dog two hours after hypothermia and clinical death. I asked what was the longest period after clinical death without hypothermia in which a human being could be resuscitated. Negovsky asserted that resuscitation was possible for ten minutes after death!

I was shown a short film on resuscitation in children and adults. Negovsky had 5-6 child patients who were clinically dead but who had been revived by intra-arterial transfusions of blood and external massage of their hearts. He believed that the latter method was superior to direct massage. Why, he did not say. He was specially proud of his results in older people whom he had resuscitated after death from cardiac infarction (coronary deaths). The film showed these patients.

His office was the first that I had seen with flowers in it—a lovely vase of pink peonies. He was also a balletomane like myself. He naturally said that no country could compare with his own with regard to the excellence of the ballet. He had witnessed an Indonesian ballet the previous evening. I told him the Ceylon ballet was far superior to that and informed him that my friend, Chitrasena would probably visit Moscow later in the year with his troupe and told him not to miss the performance of "Karadiya" and "Nala Damayanti". There were major break-throughs in modern Oriental Ballet. (Chitrasena did visit U.S.S.R. and

Europe later on in 1963 and had a tremendously warm reception both in Leningrad and in Moscow. I wish I had been there to witness the Russians erupt at the end of the performance.)

Just by the Kiev Terminus Railway Station in one of the busiest streets of Moscow, I saw a mother pulling down the pants of a toddler and getting him to piss against the wall of the station in full view of the crowds! No one took any notice. When I told Dr. L. that if that happened in London or New York the mother would have been heavily fined, he was astonished!

I also observed several people, especially men, spitting promiscuously all over the place. I told my guide that this too was strictly prohibited in the West. To console him, however, I said both practices were very common in my own country and we could do nothing about it.

Doctor L. and I together with my new guide, Dr. M. left for the station at 7.10 p.m. It was a very crowded train but our four-berthed sleeper was occupied only by my guide and myself so we were more than comfortable. The seats could be lifted and large suit cases placed in the hollow under them. The compartments conformed to accepted international standards. Dr. L. wished us good-bye and promised to contact me on my return from Leningrad. We were served with hot tea in glasses with silver holders. The female conductor was very friendly and kind. I tried to converse with Dr. M. without much success as his English was almost nil. He had fortunately brought a Russian-English Dictionary along with him which helped matters, but only to a slight extent because there was no English-Russian counterpart.

I found much difficulty throughout U.S.S.R. in buying school exercise books; only a few shops stocked them and often square ruled arithmetic books were the only ones on sale!



## CHAPTER 6

### Kiev

#### FIFTEENTH DAY:

THE train was very jolty and stopped abruptly at frequent intervals, as if a novice were driving it. The toilet was dirty and there was no paper. However, I had a cat-lick in the morning, and made my way back. I had not the foggiest notion which was my compartment. I knocked at one; a fat middle-aged woman looking half asleep opened the door. I apologised and tried the next one. Luckily it turned out to be the correct one. No tea was served in the morning. We reached Kiev at 8.05 a.m. On approaching it, I saw a large monastery with golden onion-shaped domes, glittering in the morning sun in the distance and was told by Dr. M. that it was the famed LAVRA which was situated on the top of a hill rising sheer from the banks of the Dneiper. On the following day I was to see the same monastery from the river itself, when I was taken for a joy ride in a small privately-owned speed boat.

When we had alighted and unloaded our luggage on the platform, there was no one to meet us but Dr. M. left me with the luggage and returned soon with a tall, big-made Ukrainian doctor who introduced himself as Dr. D. the local representative of the Academy of Science.

Kiev itself was a very beautiful city, much more so than Moscow or Tashkent! It had been almost completely destroyed by the Germans during the occupation and rebuilt since its liberation. The lovely old old churches and monasteries like S. Sophia's, S. Vladimir's, S. Andrew's and the Lavra had however been spared by the Nazis. Perhaps Hitler's astrologers must have acted as the emissaries of the Almighty in warning him about the danger of destroying these citadels of God, among the loveliest in the Universe. The streets were all lined with tall poplars, elms and limes, giving a boulevard-like effect. The main streets had dual carriage ways with a walk in the middle so that each of them had four lanes of thickly planted trees.

My hotel was a pre-war structure, spared probably because it had been occupied by the German officers. It had seven floors but only two rickety lifts. It took from ten to twenty minutes to get the services of each unless one was very fortunate. As usual everyone was expected to use a lift for ascent only and never for descent; as my bedroom was situated in the sixth floor, this gave me plenty of exercise!

As I had left my razor behind at Moscow, I had no option but to buy a new one at the Hotel shop on the ground floor. A Czech safety razor with an extensible handle, gold-plated with two bijou cases of the same colour, one containing a miniature shaving brush and the other a shaving stick plus a dozen blades all packed in a chic plastic case cost only 3 roubles (Rs. 15/-) which I thought was cheap. The reason was that it was imported from satellite Czechoslovakia! However I could not use it when I wanted to as the handle of the razor was stuck and by the time I got that straightened out, it was too late for a shave!

### MINISTRY OF HEALTH, UKRAINE

I was relieved to hear that it was only an official in the Maternal and Child Health section of the Ministry and not the Minister himself that was to interview me. Her name was Meediyarik and she was a charming but a very effective and extroverted person with Titian hair, a pleasant face but rather busty. She was a Candidate of Medical Science (Ph.D.) and was in charge of paediatrics in the Ministry of Health. I thought her very young for her job. She looked and spoke like a dedicated communist and believed implicitly in the delusion that in no other country in the world save the U.S.S.R. were the same blessed conditions obtained by the masses.

When she showed me the graphs of the infant mortality rates for the Ukraine, from over 200 in 1913 to 24.7 in 1962, she made two errors of fact, one of which might have been due to ignorance but the other was, in my opinion, deliberately made for political purposes. The first was that the 1913 infant mortality rate was only second to India's in the whole world. I told her that Chile's was probably worse and India's at that time was not worth the paper it was written on! She claimed that the present Ukraine infant mortality rate was better than U.S.A.'s which she told me was 27! I said my recollection was that it was 24 or 25, almost the same as Ukraine's! She was taken aback at my prompt rebuttal but kept silent. I had a very good female interpreter, as Dr. M. was as helpful as a broken reed. Besides the communist Joan of Arc, several officials were present at this conference which lasted one and a half hours but was an interesting Question and Answer sessions. At the end I thought my communist friend must have liked me because she presented me with a large heavily illustrated album of all the Health and Social Services of the Ukraine. This she autographed after writing a special message of remembrance to me and adding that the gift was made in order to foster good relations between our two countries. It was not so much a sign of any affection or regard but a part and parcel



of what she thought was her duty to her Party and her Republic! She was a very well-trained communist and everyone addressed her as Comrade which only happened between party members.

On our way from the Ministry I had a passing glimpse of the Blue Palace of Queen Elizabeth II, (of Ukraine) next to the House of Parliament. I expressed a wish to see it because I remembered Gunther's advice that it must not be missed. I was informed that it was now closed to the public and shown only to special visitors. I claimed to be one and asked my guide whether he could not get a permit for me. He was dubious but I was glad he did not say that he would try because I was quite sure that he had no intention of doing so. When I reminded him on my last day about this, he informed me that permission had to be obtained from Moscow. I told him that he had only to telephone the Academy there and the permission would have been obtained. I was sure that he was hiding the real reason from me.

In the middle of our next conference at the Institute of Paediatrics (page 192) we were urgently summoned to another room to witness the T.V. show of the public reception to Valery and Valentina in Red Square at Moscow. What amused me was the amount of hugging and kissing that was indulged in, not only between men and women but between men and men and these were not perfunctory bunny hugs like the French indulge in but appeared on T.V. to be passionate kisses on the lips between Khrushchev and other leaders on the one hand and Vallery, the male cosmonaut on the other! These Russians can be very demonstrative in public when they are moved but usually they are like men in iron masks! They keep their emotions pretty tightly corked and bottled but when the occasion presents itself, they erupt like a vintage fizz! The British who also hide their emotions effectively never erupt. In fact they would consider it bad form to do so but are the British capable of deep personal emotions? They seem to be more moved by the death of a Sovereign than of a mother but on the other hand, cruelty to any animal moves them to great heights and depths of anger and fury. If a Prime Minister of Great Britain were to kiss and hug a British hero in public as Khrushchev did, would he be lynched or just laughed to scorn? I noticed that some of the crowd were very amused at Comrade Khrushchev's antics—some of which must have been good publicity for the Loving-Father figure! Who says that the personality cult is as dead as the Dodo?

A little girl aged three or four years came and stood by me as I was given a seat right in front near the T.V. set and all the patients and staff of the whole hospital filled the small room to suffocation. My petite friend was very chummy and allowed



me to put my arms around her and seat her on my lap. Everyone was fortunately more interested in Valentina and Valery than in me!

Professor Khohol had been at the International Congresses of Paediatrics at Copenhagen and Montreal but our paths had never crossed. The only Soviet guest I had met was Professor Maslov from Leningrad who was now dead. He was so morose and monosyllabic when I tried to start a conversation with him at Montreal that it discouraged me from any further attempts at fraternisation with Soviet colleagues. After a very late lunch, at 5.15 p.m. Dr. M. announced that if I did not mind, he would like to be excused for the rest of the evening as he wished to visit some of his friends. I told him quite firmly that I did mind being left alone for the whole evening, but if he would get me an Intourist guide, then he could be released. Being a Saturday it was too late to get an official guide, so wily Dr. M. promised to call for me at 7.30 p.m. That would give him two hours with his friends. Obviously the main purpose of his visit here was to meet them!

Later in the day Dr. M. and I went for a walk and visited S. Vladimir's Cathedral. This church was within a quarter of a mile of the hotel, on the same street. I shall speak more fully about this decorative gem in tomorrow's diary. We went along the main shopping street which had a curved frontage reminiscent of Regent Street in London. It had the same crescent-shaped, gracefully curved buildings. The shops and apartment houses were better designed and adorned than in Moscow; so were the girls! There were many more good-lookers tastefully and attractively dressed. Kiev was a very hilly city. It was like Rome built on seven hills and the streets were quite steep in parts as in San Francisco. I had a drink called "*Kwasi*" from a street booth which Dr. M. told me was made from wheat. It was not highly fermented though and tasted rather like a slightly-fermented sweet toddy! I suspected it had a minute amount of alcohol though Dr. M. denied this. We wandered round the streets for some time.

Dancing was on at the hotel restaurant when we returned. The standard of dancing was certainly better than what I had witnessed in Moscow but our Bambalawatte (=Colombo) kids would have beaten them to a cocked hat. The men were shabbily clad in shirt sleeves or loose jackets with no ties. They were however freshly shaven and brushed; their shoes were dirty but some wore sandals. The women were much better dressed and about two or three of them had shoes with stiletto heels though the majority wore low-heeled walking shoes and two-piece tweed or cotton suits; only one couple attempted to jive and even the rhumba music did not make them forget themselves! It was very respectable and restrained dancing like a cheap edition of a dinner dance at the "Galle Face".



## SIXTEENTH DAY:

In spite of heavy dark-blue velvet curtains drawn right across my window, I was wide awake at 6 a.m. I dressed quickly and walked to S. Vladimir's Cathedral which I had visited the previous evening. The external appearance was not striking—nineteenth century Baroque—but within, it was one of the most exotically decorated churches I have ever seen anywhere in the world not excluding Italy. I wish I had the pen of a Ruskin to describe the ineffable splendour of its frescoes, in blues and greens with a minimum of reds and golds. The apse behind the main altar displayed a large wall painting of the Madonna and Child with angels who had their wings folded over their avian bodies thronging around; the wall on either side was painted with incidents from Christ's life. In the central dome over the middle of the nave was a striking Christus in red and blue. Every inch of the walls and ceiling was painted over with frescoes of floral or fruity designs—one had strawberries! I walked up the aisle to get near the chancel screen. There were no pews or chairs anywhere; many people were standing and praying, a few were kneeling and lots were walking about. The chancel was separated from the nave by a marble screen with painted panels depicting Jesus, the Madonna and some of the disciples. A semi-transparent curtain with a large embroidered cross hung across the main door of the chancel. This completely separated the priest from the people, rather symbolic of what has happened in U.S.S.R. since 1917.

The altar rails were of brass with bright-red and blue enamelled flowers as a decorative motif. To my right was a life-size figure of Christ on the Cross which worshippers approached ever so often and after genuflecting and crossing themselves, took a rather insanitary looking cloth with which they wiped Christ's feet and then kissed them, genuflected and crossed themselves again and wandered off to another part of the church. Next to the crucifixion figure was a rich tapestry, believed to be a holy relic before which too the worshippers genuflected before kissing it. Almost immediately in front of me was a coffin with an open lid. As many people were going up to this bier in great reverence and kissing the body as well as the feet, curiosity got the better of me and I too went up to see a glass lid over a lot of robes with a painted mask at one end. I did not kiss the glass over the dead saint but bowed low over the coffin as if to pay my respects otherwise I would have drawn attention to myself and people might have guessed what was indeed true, that I was more curious than reverent!

To my left was a similar bier which again drew many worshippers. Further to the left was a bearded priest with hair down to his shoulders hearing confessions. The people were queueing



up in a long line in front of him as he leant over a lectern-like desk. As each fresh confessor approached him, he threw one end of his stole over her head and neck and bent low to hear the whispered sins; not two feet behind one sinner was the next who could hear much of what was confessed especially if she were keen enough to do so and who would not be in those circumstances? At the end of each confession, the priest received a material token of appreciation and gratitude for the spiritual services rendered! Superstition was still rampant but the vast majority of worshippers were on the wrong side of sixty or seventy years! While I was watching and praying intermittently I saw two mothers bringing two children, each about three and six years respectively and raising them to kiss the lid over "my" dead saint.

I have seldom seen such a large congregation in any church in Christian England on an ordinary Sunday morning except when an extraordinary preacher was performing.

After a stand of twenty minutes or so, I thought it best to wander round to the other side of the nave. Mass had now commenced; no bell rang, no organ pealed but an unseen priest was intoning in a celestial voice. It was like a peal of distant throbbing drums. The choir made the responses in an equally inspiring manner. No musical instrument of any sort could be heard. Never have I realised as at that moment the supreme beauty of the human voice. No instrument made by man could ever equal the melody or the harmony of God's handiwork at its best.

The whole atmosphere of the church was lifted up in the great paeons of praise and thanksgiving. I, even I, felt this sense of holiness and reverence. I was loath to leave.

Most of the worshippers were very poorly clad, one or two in rags and tatters like old-clothes men and women. The latter all had scarves tied down their heads and their clothes were drab and dirty. I went to the rear of the church and stood for a while trying to memorise the whole scene. I would not like this scene to fade out, ever.

A young woman in her early twenties suddenly started to sob loudly and to drop her head on to the shoulders of an older woman who was quite unmoved and did not lift a finger to console her. I felt so sorry for her. She must have been in some great trouble or suffered some sad bereavement.

While standing at the back of the church, I saw many people climbing up a staircase to my left. I followed suit through curiosity. In front of me was a one-legged man with a crutch. He could not have been more than fifty years of age but he was trying to climb those steep stairs as best he could. Once he stumbled,



so I thought of staying close behind him to help him in case of need. Many of the locals passed by on the other side without giving a thought to help this poor cripple. When I reached the third floor I saw a crowd of about 250 people in a side aisle leading to a chapel. The voices that I had heard downstairs had emanated from this spot. Even up here every inch of wall and ceiling space was painted in the same colours as below. The curtain separating the priest from the people had been drawn asunder and through this opening I could see a richly-painted but not very big cross resting in the centre of a squarish altar. Behind it was a bearded, long-haired priest with a rich golden chasuble round his shoulders. In the nave was an acolyte, fairly good-looking, mid-thirtyish, tall but running to fat with his hair cut in the style of a long bob. He had a most wonderful tenor voice. At one stage, what I took to be the Host was elevated and carried in two red velvet-covered boxes in front of the congregation. Not for one moment did the intoning by the acolyte or the singing by the choir cease. There was not one second of silence throughout the one and a half hour's service. Everyone stood all the time except for six very old maids who were allowed the luxury of a backless bench!

This was indeed the ritual of the High Mass of the Russian Orthodox Church; it was much more complicated and abstruse than the Roman Catholic. Collections were taken three times during the service. Three women dressed in black marched, one immediately behind the other, holding contraptions that looked like buckets cut in two longitudinally; they were lined inside with velvet. Everyone dropped a coin. Some demanded change which was given. I was not surprised at this because most of the worshippers looked very poor. On the second round of collections only one woman came round with a brass tray. This performance by all three sideswomen was repeated a third time near the end of the service to catch late-comers. The same person gave alms only once as was to be expected!

In the middle of the service a young woman took a large basket on her head from the back of the chapel to the vestry. It contained several small rolls of bread and other sweet meats. Later on I saw the same woman bring back the empty wicker basket into which she loaded these small rolls with scribbled pieces of paper round them. I presumed these were petitions to be offered to God via the Priest. When I turned round, I saw just behind me a stall selling candles as well as these small "hot-cross" rolls or buns. Each had stamped on it, a cross and words in each quarter. These were presented to the priest as payment for offering up their petitions to God.

At one stage the curtain between the chancel and the nave was drawn across and I thought the service was over but not a bit



of it; the long-bobbed acolyte appeared in front and chanted. He then turned round towards the congregation and led it with his hands like the conductor of an orchestra in singing an anthem which sounded very much like the "Gloria in Excelsis" of the Anglican Holy Communion Service! The choir was composed of a youngish woman conductor and about a dozen middle-aged men with women of a younger vintage. They sang without any accompaniment but their voices were so rich and so vibrant that the organ music was not missed.

After a further interval the curtains were drawn apart and the true Elevation of the Host took place. In one hand the priest raised a large bun and in the other a silver flask of wine; most of the people, but not all, genuflected and crossed themselves. I saw a young boy in his early teens with his father looking thoroughly bored. Near him was a young girl more interested in what was taking place but probably through curiosity rather than through reverence, like myself! Finally the acolyte conducted the whole congregation in another long hymn of praise. The curtains were drawn and the people started to disperse.

No doubt was left in my mind about the great spirit of reverence shown by the majority of the congregation. Both upstairs at Mass and downstairs there must have been 4 to 500 people present. The majority undoubtedly were old, decrepit, handicapped, a few looked mentally deficient but there was a significant sprinkling of the middle-aged and the young. I was sure that in U.K. the proportion of younger people would not have been higher. In U.S.A. it probably would because it was still the right thing to do to attend Sunday service in church or chapel. One could not compare catholic countries where it was obligatory to attend Mass on Sundays.

I thought there was too much buying and selling; too much exchange of filthy lucre. Was it not for this crime that Christ for once lost his temper and drove the merchants from the Holy Temple at Jerusalem? This abuse I would imagine was one of the reasons for the success of the anti-religious movement in U.S.S.R. The priesthood of the Russian orthodox church has been one of the most corrupt in history. There was too much worship of ikons and images, of relics and corpses. This was superstition pure and simple.

I would not have missed this service for a million dollars. When I went in I expected to spend half an hour. I actually stayed one and a half hours, standing or walking all the time. Never have I been less fatigued by standing erect in one place, for so long.

On my way down the stairs I saw the first beggar in U.S.S.R. An old woman suffering from paralysis agitans and holding out one hand very surreptitiously, half-out, as if afraid to be caught



in the act. I dropped her a coin and was glad to see others doing the same. Charity was not entirely dead in this so-called Paradise. There were undoubtedly people in need but they were conspicuous by their infrequency.

After breakfast Dr. M. and I went out for a walk at 10.30 a.m. and after much searching I at last found a shop selling Agfa color films.

I invested in an English-Russian Dictionary for 69 kopeks (Rs. 3/50) and a beautiful piece of modern Ukrainian glass, a figure of a Dachshund with blood-shot eyes, the only bit of colour. It was as heavy as Swedish glass and as good and cost just under Rs. 15/- which was very cheap on Scandinavian standards. A small ceramic of a Ukrainian woman cost about Rs. 5/50. The ceramics were not as good as the Scandinavian or the Dutch ones.

I had ventured forth in my light Dacron suit without my hat and coat and we were caught in a fairly heavy shower of rain. We sought shelter in a shop till it cleared and then walked up a steep hill to S. Sophia's Cathedral which was the *piece-de-resistance* of the show places in the city and its environs. It was a massive Baroque structure with about five or six golden-shaped domes. The present church was built over the shell of an older one which had been standing there from the twelfth century. Though smaller, its decor etc., reminded me of S. Sophia's at Istanbul. Large crowds of school children and tourists were going round at the same time as we. An entrance fee was demanded from all.

S. Sophia's had a very elaborate wooden gilt screen with panels of holy pictures in oils. A blue and gold mosaic of the Madonna and Child was seen on the main dome over the chancel; also several other very beautiful mosaics. Some of the original wall paintings had been plastered and painted over; these had now been damaged in places and the more interesting and artistic older ones thereby partly exposed. The original floor had been of brick and was seen in a few places peeping up from the more modern flooring of wrought steel laid down in the nineteenth century.

After lunch a chauffeured Zim car with my Academy guide Dr. D. who met me at the station, was at our disposal. The sun was shining again and we decided to go on the river in a motor boat belonging to a naval officer. We first went down the river and got some shots of the Lavra. I got my first glimpse of what looked like a "hovercraft" though it was not the same. Its hull was completely above the level of the water but there were two steel wings at the front and the other at the back, sticking down below the level of the water. It moved very fast, was called a "Racketi" and was used as a passenger ferry boat.



A few people were fishing and others bathing but many beaches and huts were empty. The inclement weather in the morning must have kept many would-be picnickers at home. We passed a few speed boats, cabin cruisers and small river craft. *These, I was assured, were private property!* We returned ashore after half an hour. It was a disappointing trip on the whole. The scenery was not as exciting as I was expected to believe by the travel blurbs.

We drove on and arrived at the monument to the Unknown Warrior. It was a straight narrow column taller than Cleopatra's Needle in London. An eternal flame burnt at its feet as at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. The main avenue of approach to it was lined by a series of plaques with the names of great generals and lesser mortals who had distinguished themselves by their bravery and patriotism during the last war.

These people had suffered terribly, even more than the Muscovites. Nearly 90% of the Jewish population had been wiped out. Many of the pre-war Ukrainians had originally been of German extraction and there had been an underground independence movement for Ukraine with headquarters in Poland prior to 1939. Some of these Germano-Ukrainians had collaborated with Hitler during the invasion. For this crime on the part of some, the whole German population of the Ukraine had been transplanted, bag and baggage, to a distant part of Siberia or Central Asia by Stalin immediately after the liberation. But even today there is an Ukrainian Government in Exile with headquarters in Munich. The Ukrainians have a rich indigenous culture of their own and as far as I could gather during my short stay, there is no love lost between the Russians proper and themselves! They are a very mixed race, some Dinaric, some Alpine, some Nordic or Mediterranean, and others Armenian and Mongoloid. Each area has its own particular richly, embroidered costume. The Ukrainian shirts and blouses are very popular buys for tourists. They are most attractive. The faces of the older inhabitants are lined and tell the tale of past suffering and famine but they compensate for these bitter memories by more joyous living with music and dancing and story telling.

The view of the river from the Unknown Warrior's monument was better than that of the city from the river. We next visited the monument to General Valinin who liberated Kiev from the Nazis but who was later assassinated by a member of the underground movement for Ukrainian Independence.

S. Andrev's church was closed for repairs. It was painted a bright blue with golden domes and stood on the top of a hill. It was stacked up on stilts and a large notice stated that it was



dangerous to enter the building. However, I had had all I wanted from the exoticism of S. Vladimir's and S. Sophia's that I was not disappointed.

Next door to S. Andrew's was the Historical Museum which was poor as it contained a lot of military rubbish and the best ceramics and tapestries were not Ukrainian in origin at all. They were gifts from various other republics like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, Kirghizia etc. Some beautiful glass was on display from Leningrad and a carriage which had been used by Queen Elizabeth II of Ukraine, the same one who built the Blue Palace. Though I wished to see the main museum which was situated near the centre of the town, I was not allowed to do so. The excuse being lack of time, which was not true. My guides were restive to get off the leash. I could not blame them. It was no fun for them as neither of them spoke much English and they made no attempt to ask questions! When I did, I got no coherent answers. After half-an-hour's rest we walked to the Opera.

### OPERA AT KIEV

The building itself was very disappointing after Tashkent and the Kremlin Palace but as far as Opera Houses of the nineteenth century went, it was one of the largest I had seen. I noticed two Chinese women in one box, a couple of Japs in the stalls and an Indonesian in one of the foyers during the interval, so the audience was quite "international".

The opera was an Ukrainian one and in that language and Dr. M. understood as little of it as I did! The music was heavy and dull and I fell asleep during the second and third acts except when there was some lively folk dancing. The bridal costumes, etc. were very striking. Dozens of brightly coloured ribbons floated down the back from the head which was crowned with a tiara of flowers. The gown and blouse were richly embroidered with many long strings of coloured beads hung over the ample bosom.

The performance was vivacious, like most folk dances with an almost complete lack of inhibition. The men did the so-called Cossack dancing extremely well. I could only enjoy this part of the programme and it came at the very end of the third and last act. The whole show lasted three hours.

It was a strange thing that few Soviet women wore any jewellery. The brooches on the collars of the waitresses at the hotel became most conspicuous. More young couples, holding hands, were walking about the streets in Kiev than in Moscow or Tashkent. They were also much better looking than the natives of these two cities. Perhaps that was the reason! There cannot be much fun holding the hand of a girl who looks like a witch from Macbeth or a rotund bit of cargo that resembled a balloon!



## THE UKRAINIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Our first call on that Monday morning was on the Secretary of the Ukrainian Academy of Science. He told me that the Academy of Medical Science had no branches in any of the Republics but only the headquarters in Moscow. All medical matters were referred by it to the local Ministry of Health. We had a rather floundering chat about organisational matters. The local Academy had been founded in 1919 and had nineteen sections in all. The famous Bogomoletz Institute of Physiology which was my next port of call was under the Academy of Science. I asked one pertinent question. What was the relationship between the local and the Central Academy and was there any superseding control by the latter? I thought he evaded a direct answer but worked round it. At the end I got the impression that there was some control though this was not directly admitted! I had a discussion with the Secretary about Leukaemia and its treatment. I said it was most disappointing but he asked me whether the present methods of treatment did not prolong life. I countered this by querying about the purpose of prolonging life? I said that if a child of mine were so unfortunate as to get leukaemia I would not treat him at all. He said that there would then be no progress.

"You must distinguish methods of practice from those of research; of course you must do research on specially selected groups of patients but the routine treatment of the general run of patients should be quite different", I replied.

The Secretary next talked about the treatment of cancer in adults. I told him that if I had an inoperable carcinoma of the stomach, I would not allow anyone to treat me. They laughed and called me a pessimist.

My whole point was to impress on my listeners that it was a doctor's primary duty to exercise compassion and pity and to do his best to relieve suffering and pain and not officiously to keep a patient alive, which in my opinion, was sometimes cruel and often inhuman.

I asked the Secretary about any new techniques developed locally for the investigation of physiological problems. He mentioned micro-electrophoresis, the apparatus for which had been conceived, developed, designed and built in the workshop of the Bogomoletz Institute. I saw this later on in the morning; (page 212). This apparatus is still not on the market. When I mentioned it to physiologists and physicians in Leningrad and Moscow they were unaware of its existence; apparently no work with regard to it had been published in the medical journals.



We returned to the hotel where I had my first taste of Kiev strawberries at lunch. They were quite small and tasty and were just like English strawberries. I saw many of the fellow guests carrying huge baskets full of this delicious fruit. They were in full season; many people went out and picked the wild strawberries growing in the woods.

We reached the station in good time and to my great relief I found that I had a four-berth compartment all to myself.

On the platform I saw a couple of rags and bones—a husband and wife. Seldom have I seen, even in India, such a dirty-dishevelled-down-at-heel pair. All their worldly goods were carried on their backs in three pillow cases. The man had a three day old beard! They were unwashed, unkempt and shod in slippers. Their clothes were all in tatters. *They were not very old—in their early forties*, I would say. Who says that there is no poverty in U.S.S.R.?

Soon after the train had moved on two young soldiers suddenly opened my door and asked me for a light. When I told them I had none as I was a non-smoker, they asked me whether I would join them in a game of cards. All this was exchanged by sign language. I said that would be difficult as I knew no Russian. One spoke a "leettle English". I invited them to sit down for a moment and told them that I was writing my journal of my stay in U.S.S.R. and that I hoped to publish it some day. They nodded "very good". As conversation was very difficult they soon left. I did not think they were card sharpers out for game as one sometimes got on English trains but young bloods out for company.

The countryside was as flat as a billiard table and most uninteresting—all wheat and grain country with a few small patches of forest. The soil was black and obviously very rich; one saw mostly women working in the fields. The train toilet had no paper but I had a premonition about this and took the precaution of stealing as much as I could from my hotel at Kiev! The wash basin was filthy; the faucet worked in such an eccentric fashion that it made it extremely difficult to get sufficient water to have a decent wash. One had to push a handle up and hold it there with one hand and collect the water which gushed forth at express speed with one's other hand. No plug was to be seen for the wash basin! Space flights and prehistoric faucets—what a life!

In spite of double-locking my door, it kept sliding back and forth throughout the night. Each time the train stopped, back would fly the door. It was most annoying as I had to get up and shut it each time that it misbehaved itself. The train again was very jolty. As Dr. M. had generously supplied me with four



large sandwiches, two each of salami and of cheese, I had no need to spend any money in the restaurant car, so I rationed myself and ate one at six hourly intervals like taking a dose of antibiotic!

#### EIGHTEENTH DAY:

When I woke up at 3 a.m. to shut my door, day had dawned. We were heading due north and it was mid-summer week. It was a feat of genius and gymnastics getting sufficient water to brush my teeth and wash my face!

We were at intervals passing small country towns with factories and immediately adjoining them collective farms. I saw a man fallen off his bicycle lying unconscious and a couple of school boys racing to him.

One noticed everywhere the dearth of private cars. There were about half a dozen commonly used makes of them on the road. The large Chaika which has replaced the older Zim, the medium sized Volga and the baby, Moskw, which corresponded to a Ford Anglia and others with whose names I did not get familiar.

The public transport system was so excellent that the dearth of private cars caused no inconvenience. I have already discussed high government policy with regard to this problem earlier so I do not wish to be repetitive. The Soviets might with the pooling system they propose delay their parking and traffic headaches for some time but eventually every highly industrialised nation would be nearly paralysed by its own Frankenstein. Small helicopters landing on roof tops and hovercraft etc. might be the future answers.

I read Petrischcheva's "Forewarned is Forearmed". It was an absorbingly interesting book. In one chapter she spoke of going to a distant Eastern country to help the natives against Japanese B. Encephalitis. Though the country was not named, it was obviously China. How ironic it all read now with the recent Sino-Soviet rift! She spoke about the wonderful spirit of co-operation that she found in towns and villages where every member of the public, including school children and medical students helped in the extermination of mosquitoes from their breeding places, such as pools, ponds, swamps and every little patch of stagnant water. A fascinating idea was the collection and examination of cobwebs to determine the kind of insect life one had to deal with at any particular spot at any particular time.

In this little book were described briefly many expeditions undertaken by the workers of the Department of Diseases with Natural Foci of the Gamaleya Institute of Microbiology and Epidemiology—a mouthful that! These expeditions visited large



construction sites, newly cultivated lands and forests in the Far East and Siberia; irrigation projects in the deserts of Central Asia, the areas of construction of the Volgograd (ex-Stalingrad) Hydro-electric station; the virgin and long unused lands of Northern Kazakhstan, Krasnoyarsk Territory, Altai and many other places.

Each type of country bred its own peculiar parasite which was responsible for a dread disease. Forests were foci of tick-borne encephalitis; steppes of tick-borne typhus fever; deserts of leishmaniasis and tick-borne relapsing fever. In the Far East, tick-borne encephalitis was predominant in the spring and summer but in the autumn, mosquito-borne Japanese B. encephalitis took its place. As a result of work of this nature U.S.S.R., the largest country in the world, has completely eradicated leishmaniasis, tick-borne relapsing fever and sand fly fever, a truly wonderful achievement. Our scientists have a lot to learn from these Russians—their self-sacrifice and single-minded devotion and dedication to Science and Country.

*I also discovered at Kiev that the top-ranking medical specialists in U.S.S.R. could engage in private consultation practice for gain but I was repeatedly assured that the total amount of fees earned by any single consultant was negligible when compared with his salary. This is exactly the opposite of what occurs in Ceylon or India or in U.K., but the salaries paid by the Government to top ranking consultants in the U.S.S.R. were much higher than those paid to men of equivalent calibre in our Eastern countries.*

In spite of the many halts, we were right on time at Leningrad. When we eventually did reach it, I was not aware that it was Journey's End until a young and handsome Russian with blue eyes and blonde hair opened my door and said "Mr. de Silva"! He fetched me a porter and we were off in a jiffy! It had been excellently organised unlike in Kiev, Moscow or Tashkent.

## CHAPTER 7

### Leningrad

ON the way to the hotel, Y. introduced himself and pointed out the various sights of this fabulous city. He was the Secretary for Foreign Relations at the Leningrad Academy of Science and was 29 years of age but just married. He was a charming and lovable chap with a bubbling sense of humour and was intensely loyal to Leningrad and always compared it with Moscow to the inevitable denigration of the latter. He called it uncivilised, barbaric and all the dirty names he could think of! My first impressions inclined me to agree with him. Leningrad was much more westernised and more beautiful than Moscow, but the latter's exotic orientalism had a special appeal to a person born in Asia like me, however much Europe pulled at my cultural heart strings. The Leningraders were much better looking and better-dressed than the Moscovites or the Ukrainians. I was booked at the Hotel E, which was internationally famous but was at the moment in the throes of suffering a serious American invasion. It was however heartening to a cosmopolitan like myself to see so many cultured and intellectual Yankees, as well as those not so egg-headed, making so many contacts with the ordinary Russian. May these touches increase more and more. I believe firmly that the more the ordinary people of different nations get to know each other, the less likely it will be that our world will end up in smoke within our own or our children's lifetimes. I also honestly believe that in no country in the world, not even in China, does the ordinary man or woman want war. Human nature is surely today attuned towards peace, prosperity and contentment and against battle, murder and sudden death. It is the spirit of distrust and of suspicion between political leaders which acts as an excellent fertiliser for stimulating the growth of the war weed; that, plus the external diversions created by power-hungry politicians in order to distract their peoples from internal bankruptcy and starvation. These are now, I believe, the only dangers to eternal peace. How better to destroy and exterminate these noxious weeds than by more frequent contacts between the peoples as well as the leaders of different fields of activity like science and technology, arts and the humanities and even politics and economics. I was happy to learn that there was a delegation of six Buddhist monks from Ceylon on a cultural exchange mission in U.S.S.R. Similar delegations should also be sent to U.S.A., U.K. and Western Europe.

Y. informed me in the car that he had already reserved seats for the two of us at that evening's ballet. This left me ninety



minutes to bathe, dress and eat. When Y. left me in my room, I promised to be ready for dinner in fifteen minutes. He took my order for dinner and wished to know whether I would drink lemonade.

"Certainly not; I would prefer some wine, please," I said.

He seemed surprised. There was only tepid water for my bath at 6 p.m. All the horrors of Moscow were to be repeated as regards the lack of hot water but this hotel in Leningrad was a first-class one in contradistinction to that at Moscow!

We had a quick dinner off a chicken which both of us tackled with our fingers like all good Russians did. I told Y. that if we did that in London or Paris, we would be thrown out!

"This is not London. This is Leningrad", was his proud reply.

I agreed; when in Rome do as the Romans do.

The Kirov Opera House or the Marinsky Theatre was tastefully decorated with splendid French and Russian chandeliers, etc. There were six tiers of galleries and boxes. The orchestra held about 50-70 players. The conductor and the orchestra got their own special applause at the commencement of the second or the third Act, never at that of the first! A strange custom.

Y. kept on trying to tell me how and why the ballet at Leningrad was superior to that at Moscow. As far as an amateur like myself could judge it was six of one to half-a-dozen of the other!

The ballerina, Kolpakova was superb, her partner was her husband, Semionov; both of them were personal friends of Y's; Semionov had a better and a lighter build but was not such a polished technician as his opposite number in Moscow. The second star ballerina was Petrova, who was like a voluptuous dream.

During the interval we walked out and while studying the weekly wall programme in one of the main foyers, I saw someone staring at me in a questant manner. I smiled and he approached me and asked me whether I was Dr. de Silva. His face was familiar and then it clicked; he was Dr. Vesterdahl, Professor Plum's assistant at Copenhagen who had been the General-Secretary of the International Paediatric Congress there in 1956 at which I had the honour to read a paper before the plenary sessions. He had his wife with him and they were on vacation in Leningrad but were proceeding to Helsinki on the following day by road.

There was still plenty of daylight at 10 p.m. when the ballet ended! One could see the sun fairly low on the horizon. Y.

drove me round the city to show me the sights. I saw the Neva for the first time with the Academy of Science and the University on the opposite bank. We passed near the widest part of the river near the Peter and Paul Fortress. This part had functioned as the harbour in Czarist times and was the historic site from which the cruiser "Aurora" had fired two shots in 1917 as a signal for the start of the October Revolution. Y. assured me emphatically that no one was killed by those shots—it was only a signal!

The city appeared to be most ingeniously planned with plenty of lungs in the shape of parks and squares and over 400 bridges across the Neva and its tributaries. In parts it reminded me of Paris, in others of Stockholm. Y. said that the French always said it was like Paris. That, if true, was a great compliment indeed because the French never liked to say that anything foreign was quite the same as at home! We passed the Hermitage, the Winter Palace of the Tsars. It was actually five palaces in one and looked to me as large as Versailles. The Admiralty spire of which the natives were particularly proud was a landmark from most parts of the city. Several times Y. drew my attention to the fact that from whatever angle a man looked at it the square pedestal always showed two equal sides facing him!

Peter the Great's equestrian statue was in front of S. Isaacs' classical cathedral and was surrounded by a colourful garden square and several attractive eighteenth century buildings around.

When I got to bed there was still sufficient light to read a newspaper though it was 11.30 p.m. These were the famous white nights of Leningrad when night never came and twilight was succeeded by dawn. It was all so strange to someone who sprang from near the equator.

#### NINETEENTH DAY:

I woke up long after the sun had risen at 4.30 a.m. Fortunately my bed was in a recess with a curtain which I had drawn across over the arch separating it from the main chamber. I had scraps of "chicken sleep", as we say in Sinhala, till 6.30 a.m. No hot water was running in the bath room till 8.45 a.m. I read an official publication on "*Education in the U.S.S.R.*", extracts from which are worth quoting. (Page 236).

All primary and middle schools are co-educational and are distinguished by numbers and not by names. Why this was done was not clear but I could not imagine that cheering for a 'Number' at sports could be as enthusiastic and spirit-raising as shouting with all one might for Eton or Harrow, S. Thomas or Ananda!



Mr. Khrushchev in his speech of welcome in Red Square to the two cosmonauts, Valentina and Valery said, "It was to ensure this advancement (i.e., of the country's economy and culture) that millions of people went to anti-literacy classes, enrolled at workers' faculties to learn the *fundamentals of science* to master knowledge and strove towards the radiant summits of progress. It may well be that the most important thing for every Soviet man in our life, in our daily work, is the firm conviction that all our plans, all our dreams will certainly be realised".

Those words (with the exclusion of 'Soviet') should be enshrined in the heart of every true patriot whatever his country and should be the ideal for which he works and lives. How can we too develop this sense of devotion and dedication and this thirst for scientific knowledge? All is given and done for the greater glory of one's motherland. Would to God, (and I use that name most reverently) that those who profess such firm convictions about the superiority of the system of parliamentary democracy were as dedicated and as patriotic as these communists whom they often fear, sometimes ridicule but seldom emulate. It is not all black on one side and white on the other. There is plenty of grey on both sides but which had the deeper and which the lighter shades of grey is a matter for unprejudiced observation and intelligent interpretation.

Walking back to the hotel along Nevsky Prospekt during the lunch hour recess was an experience; the crowds were very dense. Y. proudly proclaimed that Moscow had no centre like this shopping street and that nowhere in the rival city were the crowds so thick. I countered with Gorky Street. He replied that that was not a centre. I did not quite fathom what his reasons were but Y. got hot under his collar so I dropped the argument. He had an intense local patriotism and when I suggested that it appeared to a stranger that Moscow and Leningrad were rivals, he sneered superciliously, "Oh no; we are so much more cultured and civilised that we do not consider Moscow as a rival"! This was the typical Western European attitude to anything that had even a faint touch of Asia! Yet later in the afternoon the same Y. was attacking the Westerners for adopting this superior attitude to the Soviet Union as a whole!

The discussion arose with regard to a remark made by my Danish friends, the Vesterdahls at the ballet on the previous evening. Both of them and I liked the first number "Egyptian Nights" very much but Y. and another Russian friends of his whom he met casually there, did not. He got quite annoyed about this Danish attitude and said.

"These Danes are like most other whites (that was the exact word used). They don't know anything about the Russian ballet



but yet they have the audacity to express opinions on matters they do not understand. The white people who come here think that the only good things in U.S.S.R. are the space ships, the cosmonauts and the ballet; everything else they condemn and criticise as being inferior to those found in their own countries". He was getting very red and angry like a dog preparing for a fight and was bristling all over!

He continued, "They say we are poor; our clothes are shabby; our shoes are torn; our food is horrid; our houses are fit for pigs etc., etc.! They like to go home and boast to their friends that they have seen the Russian Ballet and how wonderful it is even when they have witnessed a very ordinary and mediocre performance". I whispered as gently as a dove, "But the Danes have a wonderful ballet, the Royal Danish".

He immediately hit back, "Yes, but the Russian is the best and the Danes know nothing, *petit bourgeois*", he spat out with venom.

I left it at that. This was definitely an adolescent reaction, a manifestation of the chip-on-the shoulder. Y. had spent two years abroad in Syria and was very proud of his French cut clothes and his English accent but in spite of these advantages, he could not stand any criticism about his country or his people from outsiders. He was a highly educated Russian and was preparing for his Candidature of Science which was equivalent to the Ph.D.

As Y. was wearing a very fine grey checked English tweed suit, I asked him whether he had bought it in Syria. He said "Yes", and said that a similar suit would cost him Rs. 1,000/- in his country. Russian woollen suits would cost between -Rs. 300/-Rs. 500/- each. He also told me that many of the elite had their suits made to measure. This would cost them Rs. 180/-Rs. 220/- extra for tailoring! He did not think that these prices were excessive; to me they were frightening and were much more than those paid for suits of the same quality in London.

I bought some long playing records of Tschaikovsky's—Swan Lake and Concerto No. 1 with Cliburn, the American pianist and Rimsky Korsakov's Scheheradze for one rouble each (Rs. 5/-). These were extraordinarily cheap and were produced in U.S.S.R and not in satellite countries.

It took me one and a half hours to get served at lunch. The waiters were dirty, with unwashed faces and white coats, unbrushed hair and begrimed finger nails. They looked lazy and worked like run-down robots in spite of the fact that this was a first-class hotel. After lunch Y. informed me that he would have to work at the Academy for the next two days but a woman interpreter would take me round. He also told me that his birth-



day fell on the following day and that he was having a party for his friends and would I excuse him? I said of course but I was sorry as I was beginning to like him very much. He was very human and though he had a quick temper, he also had a great sense of humour. He tried unsuccessfully to get me seats for a Tchaikovsky concert but succeeded in getting me one for Spartacus which was a ballet with lots of masques and fighting but little dancing! The girl who sold the ticket told me that the music was excellent. Y. was not keen on my seeing Spartacus but as the alternative was a straight play in Russian called "The Lost Son", I had not much choice. Eventually Y. bought me two tickets for Spartacus, one for the girl interpreter and the other for myself. All these tickets were paid for by the Academy unlike in Tashkent.

A Zim arrived for me about 4 p.m. and we went sight-seeing. After photographing the main sights, we drove out to the outskirts to the Kirov open air stadium which held 100,000 people and was built on the shores of the Baltic. It was eight years since I last saw this sea when I crossed over by boat from Stockholm to Helsinki and back again. Unfortunately the view was blurred by a sea-mist though it was brilliantly sunny and as hot as in Colombo.

We met an American couple from Chicago here who knew friends of mine in that city. A discussion arose between the American lawyer and Y. with regard to the poor showing of U.S.A. in a recent football match against Brazil. The Chicagoan remarked that Brazil was just a pea-nut to the U.S.A.! He also added that in his country football was played for money while in the U.S.S.R. it was played for the club or the country. Y. added cynically, I thought, "We play for money too". It was only later that I realised that he had been annoyed about the "peanut" remark and wanted to be sarcastic!

The Americans had been in Ceylon and the women referred to it as a jewel and expressed a fervent wish to re-visit it. I exchanged cards with them and asked them whether they had had a difficult time at the Ceylon Customs. They said they had got past without trouble. They were only annoyed by the crows; not even the tourist bureau guides nor the sharks in the jewellers' shops disturbed them. Their poise and diplomacy were quite un-American and would have done credit to any Chinese Ambassador! But they had had a damnable time in Iraq where they had to undergo a severe cross-examination for two hours in a police station before they could get an exit permit. He said that he would never go back there even if he were given a million dollars and that it was the only place in which he had lost his temper and erupted—"To hell with the whole lot of you".



This city is famed for its large number of open spaces. Whole families were wandering about carrying their picnic baskets. *What I missed were the dogs*; very, very few of them were about. The pavement bookstalls were crowded and people were lying about on every patch of grass. There were no unhealthy restrictions about keeping off the grass as you get so often in Germany and some other Western countries. Scores and scores of petting couples were walking about the streets. At last we have arrived in Europe but no embarrassing horizontal couples were to be seen in the parks as in S. James Park in London. The theatre audiences in Leningrad were also much better dressed than in the other cities that I have visited so far. Some women even wore bead necklaces but I have yet to see ear-rings or even ear-studs except on foreigners. It was considered to be *outrè*—that was as far as I could get from my guide.

We went to the Pushkin Theatre after a glass of lemon tea at the Hotel Cafe. This Theatre is situated behind the statue of Catherine the Great and is about 150 years old. It was not well-maintained. It had floral designs painted on the outside of the boxes and galleries and on the walls of the foyers. The usual exuberance of priceless chandeliers hit you in the eye. Y. sat next to me in the front row and tried most conscientiously to translate into English the words uttered on the stage. I could not hear most of it. The seats were most uncomfortable as there were hardly nine inches between one's seat and the partition of the orchestra. No footlights operated but all the lighting was manipulated from the boxes on either side of the sixth floor. Many, though not all, the background scenes were projected from slides and in between scenes the curtain did not come down but the stage was completely darkened and the sets moved about. The play was by Dostoevski and was translated to me as "The Card Player" or "The Gambler". The acting was very good. It was set in the nineteenth century and the last scene was laid in Paris. As in all Dostoevski's stories there were lots of people tied up in psychological knots which were not loosened but tightened at the end.

The story hinged round the life of an inveterate gambler who loses, then wins and loses again. A love story was woven into it and also the sordid intrigues of a whore and her pimp. An Englishman was the only decent gentlemanly character in the whole plot. It was a surprise to me that such a bourgeois play portraying not only the vices but also the virtues of such a society should be shown in a socialist State. I was informed that the story had been adopted for the stage only in the last three years, long after the death of Stalin! One could not imagine its public presentation during his regime. Actually the play was stolen by an actress who played the part of an old grandmother, Kozlova



who resembled the widowed Queen Victoria. She was immensely wealthy till she got an irresistible desire to gamble, which she did without ceasing and her relatives' eternal damnation because she lost all her property at the gaming table. This was such a humorous part as only Dostoevski could portray in the midst of a grim tragedy.

On the walk back to the hotel, Y. told me that soon after the 1917 revolution, the Communist Party was undecided as to who should be extolled as the greatest Russian Litterateur of all time in that country. The matter was referred to Lenin who ruled that in his opinion Dostoevski was the greatest writer ever but he had no ideology, no message for the people, no solutions to the problems of the ordinary Russian man or woman, while Tolstoy, though not so great a novelist, had portrayed the character of the ordinary man and woman with consummate skill, had left a message of hope and inspiration and was a tremendous idealist so he was chosen as the No. 1 writer but as I have remarked earlier it was Pushkin whose statues one saw in every town and city and not Tolstoy's. Why?

The whole of Leningrad was this day filled with fluff floating in the air. It was called Castana by the locals and was derived from the poplar flowers. It lay thick white on the pavements and parks, like snow, an attractive sight!

## TWENTIETH DAY:

My first appointment for the day was at the Pavlov Institute of Physiology, about 20 kilometres out of Leningrad at 10 a.m. Y. appeared for breakfast at 9.30 a.m. long after the time he had promised. As it was his birthday I could not say anything but wished him and presented him with the last packet of Ceylon Tea that I had with me.

We went to the Academy of Science to pick up a female interpreter as Y. said that he had to work in the office that day. The Academy was situated on the opposite bank of the river to that on which my hotel stood. One got superb views of the Hermitage, S. Isaac's Cathedral and other landmarks from its entrance. It was cold and rainy and I was wearing only my thin summer suit and had ventured forth without overcoat or hat. After some minutes Y. returned to the car and informed me that if I wanted to meet Professor Tour, the Senior Professor of Paediatrics in Leningrad I would have to do it that morning as he was leaving for Moscow in the afternoon for a few days. If I did not meet Tour I would not see a children's clinic here so I opted to see him and postponed the visit to the Pavlov Institute for a later day.



As we had an hour to spare we visited S. Nicholas' church which was one of the few still active and open. As usual it was nineteenth century Baroque, blue and onion-domed and was sited on the edge of a public park. In spite of it being a week-day morning, a service was in progress with a few worshippers who were old, poor, decrepit and mostly feminine. An old woman was begging for alms at the entrance and Y. very cleverly shepherded me past her. I thought that he was trying his best to make me avoid her so I played ball and pretended that I did not see her. It was only in churches that one met beggars. They were always old women in rags and tatters though they were very few, never more than one or two at any one place. Apparently it was only at church that they could ask for charity safely and get away with it because begging, as in western countries, was strictly forbidden.

The walls within were decorated with paintings. Many priceless ikons were scattered among cheap and worthless lithographs of holy pictures and several tombs of saints, which many of the worshippers kissed in reverence and in faith: invariably a large till hung by the side of the tomb!

Y. remarked that it was a curious coincidence that he was in church on his birthday. I asked him whether he would not like to say a prayer but he was either too shy or too honest to respond. I saw three fresh coffins on one side aisle with the near relatives standing by looking respectably sad and mournful but not weeping. Y. refused to go near them, whether from fear or respect, I would not know. One coffin contained the body of a small child; he was clothed in a white shroud and surrounded by fresh flowers. A priest was holding a funeral service for one set of mourners at the same time as Mass was being chanted at the main altar. Though there was much crossing of themselves and genuflecting, a constant movement of worshippers went back and forth; this to a foreigner spelled irreverence but apparently the natives did not think so "Tot homines, quot sententiae".

The intoning was as inspiring as at Kiev. Y. told me that church bells were rung in Leningrad though I had never heard one throughout my stay in the country in spite of spending five Sundays there! I wondered whether Y. wanted to create a wrong but favourable impression—that was quite the accepted practice in the Soviet land!

Though the inside of the church was neither so beautiful nor so richly decorated as S. Vladimir's at Kiev, yet one saw that the church was well-cared for and maintained. Its flock however consisted of the poorest of the poor, the dregs of humanity. *I do not believe that poverty does not exist in U.S.S.R.* It does, but it is far



less common than with us and is confined as far as I could see to the older age groups. The young do not look after their parents and grandparents as we Asians do and the State does not seem to care for the old as much as they do for the children and young and middleaged adults. *If, as claimed, the children are the privileged class in U.S.S.R., it may be equally well-said that the aged are the under-privileged.* These were my impressions. I did not check on the number or quality of any homes for the aged. I believe some are in existence. The Soviets however looked after their old historic buildings including churches much better than they apparently cared for their aged people. Some of the churches were used as museums, others for other secular purposes such as barracks, stores, schools etc. The Kazan Cathedral, one of the most beautiful classic buildings in Leningrad was an anti-religious museum. When I told Y. that I would like to visit it, he discouraged me and said it was not worth it as it contained a lot of photographs of the history of the anti-religious movement as well as models of the Spanish Inquisition. Y. knew that I was a Christian and thought that such a visit might create a bad impression on me! I visited it later with another interpreter and was not at all affected, either pro or con!

I asked Y. about *contraceptives* and how easily they could be bought in U.S.S.R. One could purchase all of them (except condoms) only on a gynaecologist's prescription. The condoms could be bought by anyone. There seems to be a widely-spread belief, even among well-informed internationally minded family planners, that contraception is discouraged and abortion encouraged in U.S.S.R. I do not think that this is an entirely correct interpretation. I shall quote from a Report of the Medical Exchange Mission to the U.S.S.R. on Maternal and Child Care published in 1961 by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Public Health Service.

"Although a high birth rate is desired, abortions became legal in 1955 in order to cut down on the morbidity and mortality accompanying illegal abortions. A woman seeking an abortion is subjected to considerable persuasion to carry the child to term but is permitted to have the abortion if she continues to insist. Unless the abortion is for medical reasons, the cost to the patient is 5 roubles (Rs. 25/-). *Contraceptive information is widely available and contraception is promoted as a preventive of abortion*". It must however be mentioned here that no special family planning or birth control clinics are held anywhere in U.S.S.R., to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I asked Y. how commonly pre-marital intercourse was practised. He would not give me a clear and unequivocal reply but I gathered that it was just as common as in western countries. Y. said that



it was done for the sole purpose of finding out whether the partners were sexually compatible or not. He gave me the instance of a friend of his who married one day and was divorced a couple of days later because of this incompatibility! This may have been an exceptional case but there was no reason to believe that the Soviets did not indulge in pre-marital intercourse for ideological, religious or philosophical reasons. After all there was no slur on illegitimacy and all children born out of wedlock were well-cared for by the State. Further, an unmarried mother could, if she so desired, obtain a legal abortion solely for the reason of illegitimacy though she was advised against it!

Y. however told me that the country girls were on the whole unbelievably innocent of the facts of life till they got married. The parents did not enlighten them. One of the current stories was about a farmer who impregnated his newly-wed village wife soon after marriage and then left on a long trip on business. His robust next-door neighbour visited the young grass widow and informed her that her departed husband had only started the affair and if it were not effectively finished before he returned, the child might be deformed! He however out of the kindness of his heart offered to finish the job himself and had a rollicking good time till the husband returned many days later! When the wife was asked how she had fared in his absence, she replied quite innocently the Mikhail had completed the business that he had begun!

We next visited the Peter and Paul Fortress which was originally a fortress built against the predatory Swedes but was later converted into a prison. It had a beautiful chapel with walls and massive pillars of pink, green and richly-veined black and white marble. This chapel contained the sacrophagi of all the Tsars and some of the Tsarinas since Peter the Great. All of them were in white marble with gold lettering. The Tsar's throne in the chapel was still in a good state of preservation. I must take my hat off to the Soviet Government for the great care and large sums of money expended on the maintenance of these and other historic monuments to their past royal rulers.

The chancel screen was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever in gilded-wood with painted panels depicting the Holy Family and Saints. There was also a number of large and priceless French and Austrian chandeliers.

On the way from the Peter and Paul Fortress to Professor Tour's clinic I saw many dilapidated and decrepit houses. We were passing through a poor industrial area with many old houses which were in a state of considerable disrepair but how could I point a finger of criticism at the Soviets for this neglect when we allowed more than 60,000 men, women and children of Colombo's popula-



tion to live as squatters in one-roomed shanties built of cadjan and tin and without any sanitary amenities whatsoever! The Soviets at least were rapidly reducing their housing shortage and building a new flat every twenty minutes in Leningrad while we in Colombo were doing next to nothing except planning and blue-printing!

## INSTITUTE OF PAEDIATRICS, LENINGRAD

(Also page 193)

Professor Tour was a rotund personality, quite pleasant but not dynamic. He had been at the Copenhagen and Montreal International Congresses of Paediatrics but we had never met. Professor Tour hoped to make the next World Congress of Paediatrics too in Tokyo fixed for 1965. Our government is lavish with exchange for political and cultural conferences but think that they can manage without science and scientists! In 1963, three politicians were sent to a get-together at Cuba at the same time as exchange was refused for more *than one scientist* to be sent to the World Conference on Science in Developing Countries held in Geneva which was attended by 1,500 scientists from 94 countries and over which Professor Thacker from India presided. Six Buddhist monks were sent to U.S.S.R. on a Cultural Exchange mission and all their passages paid to Tashkent and back by the government of Ceylon. A very good thing but when two scientists were also invited at the same time by the Soviet Academy of Science under the same Cultural Exchange Agreement, the Government of Ceylon could not find the money for the passages to Tashkent and back. A few months later it however found the means to pay for the passages of a thirty or forty strong ballet group to tour Europe and U.S.S.R.! Culture of course is important; no one denies its importance but unless government policy is to keep Ceylon under-developed and medieval in its outlook for ever, scientists must be allowed to travel and mix with the best minds in the universe! Which is the priority, Culture or Science? Both are important admittedly but which should come first in a developing country?

Tour seemed to have almost more doctors than patients; except for one or two, all of them were women.

He became rather impatient after some time owing to his impending visit to Moscow and I got the feeling that he wanted to get rid of me. He was however courteous enough to walk all the way back with me almost half-a-mile to the main gate, to say goodbye and like everyone else said, "Come again to our country". On the way we passed the late Professor Maslov's clinic, which was now under the jurisdiction of a dozent and not of a professor but it was completely autonomous and independent of Tour's supervision.



While shopping off Nevsky Prospekt, we went through an arch into a cobbled courtyard and saw several pock-marked buildings, the unhealed shell wounds of the siege. This was the first time that I had noticed these reminders of the horrors that the Leningraders had suffered. It was really amazing, the rarity of these sights considering that the siege had lasted for 900 days, killing 600,000 of its inhabitants and destroying about one-third of the buildings.

When I gave in my positive Agfa colour film to be processed, the girl said it would take ten days. Immediately Y. said that I was a guest of the Academy of Science. She bustled inside and brought forth a middle-aged authoritative looking man who listened to Y's fabricated tales that I was a Minister from Ceylon and a V.V.I.P., etc. and that I was leaving Leningrad in four days' time and that I must have the film before that. He went inside and returned in two minutes and said it would be ready in 24 hours. Such was the power and respect in which the Academy of Science was held. I asked Y. what he would have done if his request had not been allowed. He would have got the Academy to ring the man up. If he still refused he would have been reported to the Communist Party Headquarters who would have turned on the screw. He would not have had a moth's chance in a flame to refuse the "request". Such were some of the blessings of totalitarianism. Could you imagine such *flexibility* in London or N.Y. or Paris where the mills of freedom grind exceedingly slow but not always exceeding small? Which would you prefer freedom to starve or tyranny to eat? I honestly do not know the answer to that one.

#### PAVLOV INSTITUTE, LENINGRAD

(See page 213)

After lunch we went to the Headquarters of the Pavlov Institute in the City, where I had expressed a wish to interview some haematologists. The Professor would insist on speaking in English though his powers of expression were very limited. He was apologetic about it but for some mysterious reason preferred not to use Y's expert knowledge. The latter got bored and sleepy and walked out of the room after sometime.

Y. had observed at lunch that I seemed to have tremendous energy and vitality as I never seemed to tire. This was the first afternoon that I did feel terribly tired and I fell fast asleep in the car when he left me for a few minutes to attend to some work! I told him that ever since he had remarked that I never felt sleepy, I was falling asleep! He appreciated the joke; he has a great sense of humour and was quite the most lovable Russian I met throughout my tour.



He informed me that there was a lot more trouble. The girl interpreter who had promised to accompany me to Spartacus had cried off and he would have to come to the theatre with me and try to sell the extra ticket. This was done quite often and never was one sold at black market rates; what was demanded was only the price at which it had been bought! Such scrupulous honesty was not often met with even in a city like London. I was sorry for Y. as it would spoil his birthday party and he would be late for his guests. He however managed to sell one ticket to an American through the service bureau at my hotel.

At the theatre the American who had bought my spare ticket asked me what I had heard about Spartacus; I told him. I was particularly keen to hear the music which was composed by an Armenian, Khachaturyan whose reputation in the U.S.S.R. was very high though he was not much known outside it. The American's wife had refused to join him because she had heard that the show was a flop, when it had been staged by the Bolshoi Ballet Troupe in New York and was withdrawn from their repertoire. My impressions of Spartacus confirmed what I had heard. The music was emotionally satisfying but the ballet was a farce. There were several tableaux with stand-still frieze-like impressions which were picturesque but not what one expected to see at a ballet. The story was historical and showed an unsuccessful revolution in Southern Italy against the Roman power.

At the end of the show, I asked myself whether I had enjoyed the show, whether I had learnt anything and whether I would have lost something if I had not seen it. On these criteria I would say that though I did not learn anything, I enjoyed the colour, the crowds, the terpsichorean fighting and duelling, even felt angry at the sadistic tendencies displayed by the Romans but was emotionally satisfied with the aphrodisiac dancing in some of the scenes. I would have lost a feast of colour and design which I had seen on a comparable scale in a live show only once before and that was at a performance of Aida at the open-air theatre in Rome.

At dinner an American asked my permission to sit at my table which always had the Ceylon flag on it; no one else was expected to sit at it. There were a few other tables with flags of different nations on them; these were also reserved for their respective guests.

The American turned out to be a psychiatrist from Los Angeles in private practice. He was at that time attending a conference on medical psychology in Leningrad. He was that *rara vis*, an American radical socialist with a sincere appreciation and sympathy for the Soviet Union. He was of Russian-Jewish origin and had been born near Kiev but had emigrated in 1919 as a boy



of twelve with his father—two years after the revolution. He had paid his first visit to this country in 1959 with his wife and children and found only one school-mate of his still alive. The rest had died from war wounds or been massacred by the Nazis. He had discovered only three houses standing in his old village, the others had been razed to the ground but in those three houses he had found people who remembered his parents and grand-parents. He told me a story about a son of his who had fallen ill in Rostov-on-Don in 1959 with a fever of unknown origin. He was removed to an Infectious Diseases Hospital and only he, not even his wife, was allowed to visit the boy. During the convalescent stage he saw a lot of women in blue overalls floating around his son's ward carrying children and infants. As he knew Russian pretty fluently, he asked them who they were and what they were supposed to be doing there. After teasing him about his inquisitiveness, they had informed him that they were convalescents from a neighbouring ward who had been asked to adopt one child each while in hospital! A wonderful way of satisfying their frustrations of mother love, very pleasing to my psychiatrist friend too! This demonstrated more than anything else the inborn intense love that all Russians have for children.

I asked my friend whether he did not get into trouble with the State Department for his socialist views and sympathies. He admitted that he had; he had been summoned before the un-American Activities Committee at Los Angeles.

As soon as you appeared before this committee, the press published your name and photograph with as much of your personal and family history as they could gather, whether you were innocent or guilty. Immediately my friend had received his summons he had written to the un-American Activities Committee and given it the history of a female patient of his (without her name of course) who had been under his treatment for schizophrenia for a few years. He had warned the committee that if his photograph were published in the papers, his patient would lose all confidence in him and would suffer a set-back in her clinical condition and all his work of years would have been set at naught. He had also told the committee that not only she but several others of his patients would also suffer in the same way and he would be forced to give publicity to this fact in the Press and hold the committee responsible for the retrogression in the condition of his patients. After several weeks the committee had replied and asked him to attend a private session with his lawyer and that no press publicity would be allowed. He had been advised by his lawyer to refuse to answer any questions which he had a legal right to do under Amendment 5 to the American Constitution which entitled any citizen of the U.S.A. to the rights of privacy regarding his personal life. The members of the committee had asked him thirty or



forty questions with regard to his private and professional activities for the previous thirty years of his life but he had refused to answer each and every one. After a couple of months the committee had again written to him stating that a further communication would follow but two and a half years had now elapsed and this promise had gone unfulfilled; every time he opened his big mouth in public, however, the F.B.I. was there taking a full transcript of his speech! He had been a lecturer in psychiatry at the University of Southern California and had been asked to resign from his teaching post. The Head of his Department who was a personal friend of his told him the reason in spite of instructions that he was not to do so. He had refused to accede to this request. As a result no teaching duties in psychiatry had been assigned to him; apparently he had been paid by the session; therefore no lectures, no pay! He also told me that many American scientists, physicians and surgeons visit the U.S.S.R. and on returning home they wrote many eulogistic articles about the country but nearly always took the precaution of covering themselves by some word of denigration. One scientist had reported how nice the people were—peaceful, lovable, friendly, cultured etc., but added almost as a post-script that the leaders were horrid, but my friend knew for a fact that he had never met any of them! Another well-known Professor of Paediatrics, had also written an enthusiastic article in a widely read lay magazine about the Soviet care of children and how splendid and healthy they were but added “but they are awful when they grow up”. If that is not malversation of the worst sort of a whole nation, I do not know what it is!

I asked my psychiatrist friend whether the “Pravda” and “Izvetzia” could be bought freely in the U.S.A. To illustrate his answer he told me of an experience when he was in U.S.S.R. in 1959. His eldest son aged about 18–19 years and he were surrounded by a crowd in a public park in Rostov-on-Don and eventually got separated. The crowd asked them questions about USA. His son was over 6 ft. in height and he could see him over the heads of the throng as well as hear him. He was raising his fist and shouting in Russian.

“Why can’t I buy the New York Times or any American Newspaper I want in your country? In USA I could buy the Pravda or the Izvetzia anywhere.”

As he was getting very worked up under the collar his father became anxious and tearing his way through the crowd, tapped him on his shoulder and advised him to cut it out and led him away.

However, when he got back home he and his son tried every bookstall in L.A. in order to buy a copy of the Pravda or Izvetzia or any Russian paper without any success. His son was guilt-



stricken and shame-faced. He had spoken a lie publicly in Rostov. You could order a Russian paper from USSR but when it arrived at one's local P.O. in the USA, the postmaster sent you a note stating that a communist newspaper had arrived to your name and address and if you wanted it, you had to go to the P.O. and sign a form to state that you had ordered it. This was immediately reported to the Committee of un-American Activities and your name was black-marked. What price Freedom?

I asked him whether he could buy a copy of the San Francisco communist paper, "Peoples' World" in L.A. When he asked his newsagent for it he was invariably greeted with "what do you want to read that communist rag for?" As he knew someone on the editorial staff, he had one posted to his home in a plain envelope, thereby evading the eagle eye of the post office.

What is the difference in practice of freedom or lack of it between a country which openly prohibits the importation of newspapers and books prejudicial and often antagonistic to its official policy and another which on paper says that any newspaper or book from anywhere on any subject may be imported but in practice penalises and punishes the recipient when it thinks it fit to do so? Which country would you rather live in? If I had to be a permanent citizen of either, which God forbid, I would certainly plump for the one in which I knew where I stood!

My friend also told me that as a member of the American Medical Association he was forced to pay \$125 a year for the anti-socialistic propaganda etc. of the medical profession, much against his convictions and conscience. His only alternative was to resign. There were however many disadvantages and handicaps, direct and indirect in non-membership of the most powerful and influential trade union in the world!

This interesting psychiatrist also told me another story of great interest. He had heard while in the USA of a woman whose husband had been tortured and shot and she herself imprisoned for several months during the Stalin regime. She had been released and her husband's name rehabilitated posthumously by Khrushchev. My friend had gone to see this woman and found her with great difficulty one evening after 10.30 p.m. He was hesitant to knock on her door at that late hour realising what her past experiences had been. However, as he had spent much time and labour looking for the house, he thought he might risk it. Immediately the door was opened and the woman beckoned his wife and him into the house. Having explained why they had come to see her, they got quite friendly and she told them that she was a dedicated communist and was intensely loyal to the Party and to the State. My friend (remember he was a trained and experienced psychiatrist) was quite convinced that she was sincere.



He asked her, "Have you no bitterness, no resentment about your husband's death and your own suffering?"

She replied, "In a revolution one must expect such things. Mistakes are bound to occur but the revolution must succeed. We must be loyal in spite of our personal losses and sufferings".

How many of us could boast of such a spirit of courage and loyalty in the face of adversity and death? What is it that makes communists display this so much more than, shall I say, social democrats? Fascists too, horrible beasts, had the same spirit. Why does democracy lead so often to flabbiness?

## TWENTY-FIRST DAY

Mrs. Kapina, my woman interpreter, was a plumpish pleasant faced woman in her mid-thirties with mouse-coloured, untidily brushed and cut hair. She was dressed in a nigger brown two-piecer, and as ordained by tradition she had about three gold teeth. When I knew her better I asked her why Russians preferred gold teeth and she said, "Because they last longer."

"Do they?" I asked in all innocence.

"However, if I have to have any more, I shall have the usual white teeth and not the gold," she replied.

My first visit was to the *Cadaver Blood Institute* whose official title was the laboratory for the Conservation and Transplantation of Tissues (Tissues to include blood). (page 216)

## THE HERMITAGE

From this Institute we went straight to the Hermitage. An entrance fee of 30 kopeks (Rs. 1/50) was charged from each person; my interpreter was free by arrangement with the Academy. Large crowds of school children and soldiers and also of the ordinary men and women were going round. Lots of the children were in parties, being lectured to by their teachers; some of them were in white uniforms with red scarves or ties with funny dunce-like truncated caps on their heads; many of them were not attentive to what was being told them by their teachers but were wandering round like lost sheep or more interested in strange apparitions like myself as children all over the world would have been.

The Hermitage contained over 1000 rooms and was built on the orders of Peter the Great and his daughter Elizabeth in the sixteenth-seventeenth century by an Italian master, Rostaielli who lived in Russia. It was almost entirely in marble and was one of the first signs of Peter's window that he "cut open" to Europe. The Americans and Western Europeans love Leningrad. Un-



doubtedly it is the most Europeanised of Russian cities but to me the charm of Kiev, the exoticism of Moscow and the orientalism of Samarkand were much more attractive though architecturally there was no comparison between Leningrad and the rest.

From the entrance lobby of the Hermitage to the main Ambassador's staircase was a distance of nearly 200 yards. It was flanked on either side by copies of Greek sculpture of the Periclean era. We ascended the marble staircase and entered a large hall called the smaller throne room. Where the throne had been the Soviets had placed a huge map of the USSR made of coloured tiles with each city pin-pointed by a precious or semiprecious stone which could be lit up. For some inexplicable reason, this had won a Grand Prix at an international exhibition in Paris. In front of each window was a beautiful vase, each pair made of a different semi-precious stone like malachite, different coloured jasper, jade, onyx, alabaster, marble etc. The ceiling and walls were embossed in gold floral patterns on a white back-ground and the floor which was inlaid in different coloured woods, had exactly similar designs on the spots directly below the corresponding ones on the ceiling. The usual profusion of elaborate and ornate chandeliers was there in abundance. It was one of the most beautiful and regal looking chambers that I have ever seen and I have visited many dozens of palaces in Europe and Asia. As our time was limited I told Kapina, my interpreter, that I only wanted to see the famous collection of French Impressionist paintings, the Rembrandts which comprised the best collection of this Master outside Amsterdam and the Spanish collection. If there was time I would also have liked to have viewed their Oriental section; unfortunately this was closed to the public on that day. The gem of the Rembrandts was the painting of an old man in a red shirt. I did not think the colour of his shirt had anything to do with its elevation to the place of honour in a truly wonderful pack! It was not as versatile or as valuable a collection as at the Rijkmuseum at Amsterdam but it was certainly only second to that and superior to any other in the whole world. The collection of Murillos was good but there were only two feeble Velazquez and one poor El Greco. Two large rooms were devoted to Picasso including some pictures of his Blue Period. Kapina told me that the Soviet Government and people considered Picasso a very great master and a genius but discouraged their own artists following the same trends. Art, according to the communists, must be realistic and be close to the grass roots of the people. Otherwise it would not act as a source of inspiration or of national pride, of entertainment or of pleasure to the common man.

Two rooms were filled with paintings by Matisse and one each with those done by Cezanne, Renoir, Gauguin, and Monet plus a few by Pissarro and other lesser known Impressionists. A few Rodin sculptures, not very exciting, were also on view.



An American woman at dinner remarked that if a U.S.A. gallery has such a priceless collection, it would have given it the place of honour in the most conspicuous room on the ground floor and not stored it in the "attic" as she described what in U.K. or Ceylon would be termed the second floor!

I also saw an ingenious peacock clock made by an Englishman. The peacock and other birds were life-size. The former spread its tail, the cock crowed, the owl rolled its eyes and its cage turned round each time the clock struck the hour. It was unfortunately not in working order!

I was shown the small room in which the Kerensky Cabinet had been arrested and the Red Republic declared in October 1917. A small marble and gold plaque commemorating this occurrence stood on the mantle piece. The irony of fate was that this portentous event took place directly under a chandelier presented by Queen Victoria to one of the Tsars!

Two million art treasures were housed in this one building, probably the largest in the world not excluding the Vatican and the Louvre and yet there was not a single decent album in colour in English or in Russian to be bought!

On the way back to the hotel we went to the Agfa colour processing shop; I saw what I thought was my film under a lamp; it looked dreadful. I was so disappointed that I put it away for closer scrutiny till I got back to my bedroom.

We also went into a bookshop on Nevsky Prospekt and asked for medical books in English. I was handed two paper backs; one was on neurological complications of general systemic disorders. I read the section on lymphogranulomatosis or Hodgkin's Disease. It did not impress me at all. The other book was quite worthless.

I bought two books, a copy of Dubrovsky by Pushkin, a short story. I was told it was very popular and had been filmed. The other purchase was a modern novel called "Colleagues" by a young writer called Aksonov. This story also had been filmed and depicted the life of a young doctor first as a medical student and then at work in a remote country town in the far north of Russia.

When I returned to my room and unrolled and examined the colour film, I found to my dismay that it was not my film at all but someone else's. I went down immediately to the service bureau and told the girl there about this error. She kindly telephoned the shop which requested me to come there as soon as possible. I ordered a taxi through the bureau. This was the only way one



could get a taxi. There were no taxi ranks and no coasting. One could not hail one at will as one did in the West or at home. I had to wait 45 minutes to get my taxi but it cost me only Rs. 4/- to get to the shop and back. It must have been about two miles away. This was much cheaper than in London but more expensive than in Colombo. When I went down to dinner at 9.30 p.m. after a good rest, I found the dining room over-flowing and my table usurped by natives. The Ceylon flag had been removed. I appealed to the female maitresse d' hotel (to coin a word) who found me another table immediately and apologised profusely for the missing flag. Three Americans at the next table including a retired surgeon from Alabama and his wife were rather disgruntled at the delayed service and intransigence of the Intourist Agency. The surgeon had asked to visit a hospital but up-to-date had not succeeded (on the following day he informed me that he had been taken round a T.B. Hospital which he found very decent). His wife remarked that Intourist always refused their requests the first time as a matter of principle but later it relented and allowed most of them ! I was glad to hear that and said it was better than my experience where the Academy officials promised to do their best to fulfil my wishes but seldom did anything about it ! The surgeon's wife said that Intourist strategy reminded her of an American country doctor without much skill or knowledge who always told his patients that they were very seriously ill but if they stuck to him, he would see them through !

Two Russian students asked my permission to sit at my table and I gladly consented. They knew very little English but seeing "The Colleagues" with me, they said it was a very popular and well-known book by one of the best of the younger set of writers. One of them wrote down the names of three popular Russian authors:—

1. YEVTUSHENKO who is now well-known abroad as his works have been translated into English and he has recently got the headlines in the Western newspapers owing to his criticism of Communism in practice !

2. VOZNIRSIENSKI, and

3. ROSTERDIESTVIENSKI whose books have not as far as I am aware been translated into any foreign language. After a few minutes and as I was getting acquainted and opening up, they were asked to leave by "madam" as two Intourist guests had to be accommodated at my table. One was a blonde Brazilian and the other an American brunette. The former told me that she was of Polish descent. The American girl was het-up because she was due to leave USSR the next day and Intourist had returned her a lot of coupons which she was compelled to expend before she left the country or forfeit the money. She could only exchange



the coupons in the restaurant or in the office but not in the souvenir shop in the hotel. Therefore, besides her hotel bill which had already been paid, she had only the choice of caviare, brandy and vodka. The restaurant would not sell any liquor so she was loaded with over two dozen one ounce tins of caviare which she had to carry with her ! Considering that both the shops and the hotels were state-owned and run, I could see no reason why a tourist overburdened with returned extra coupons was prevented from exchanging these for souvenirs. It seemed most unfair. I could get no explanation for this incomprehensible regulation.

On the following day I met my Brazilian friend just prior to her departure and she gave me some astounding information about her country! She was a communist so her information might not be 100% reliable but I give it for what it is worth. She said in Northern Brazil the average survival period was only 27 years and that 2000 *children died daily of starvation in that region!* Even if twenty died daily it would be a disgrace to a much poorer country than Brazil. The labourers of rich absentee landlords were paid their daily wages in loaves of bread and no cash. Though communism was banned it was spreading. There was economic exploitation of Brazil by U.S.A. and anti-Americanism was rampant. She also added that the standard of living of the middle and upper classes in Brazil was higher than that of similar classes in Europe ! The American cartels, rich landlords and the Roman Catholic church were the main stumbling blocks to progress. She prophesied that the revolution would start in North Brazil and that Venezuela would be the first Latin American country to go communist. That was a great surprise to me in the face of recent Cuban developments.

Soon after the American surgeon and wife left, the adjoining table was occupied by a loud-mouthed coarse American of the worst sort with a charming, silent, suffering wife; both were middle-aged and greying. He had frog-like eyes and a receding forehead with curly hair and looked rather like a bleached baboon! His wife was far above him culturally. As soon as they sat down, he shouted at her, "Why didn't you put your hand out and stop the waitress. You know we were told not to be over-polite in USSR." The poor woman blanched but was as silent as a deaf-mute.

I tried to pour oil on troubled waters by remarking that one could never get a meal under one and a half hours anywhere in this country.

"An hour and a half ! Two hours at least," he shouted. "I spend six hours a day at meals."

He had not a single good word for the Soviets. They were inefficient and unorganised. He had been round the world including Ceylon and said, "*Even in your country we had better service.*"



I retorted, "In the East we give the best service of all."

All the ills of the USSR he laid at the door of communism. It was all due to the lack of incentives to do any better. He was shooting away like a Maxim gun rather out of order. His wife got in an odd word or two, never to contradict but always to endorse what her lord and master expressed. He threatened that as soon as he returned to USA he would expose this simulacrum of an organised State which is the Soviet Union in the U.S. press etc. He was a hotelier from Las Vegas. He claimed that if he were given in charge of the restaurant in the hotel, he could clear up the mess in one week. All that was needed were two bus boys. In my ignorance I asked who these might be—they cleared the tables of dirty plates as soon as the customers had finished eating. His wife and I agreed that the delay was not so much due to the waiters as to the kitchen staff.

The hotelier also complained that he wanted to leave the USSR days go by cutting short his trip but was prevented from doing so because his original plane reservations had to stand. He had been told in the USA before his departure however that these could be changed at any time.

He had to pay fifty dollars a day for his wife and himself for all charges including transport etc; if he travelled alone, he would have had to pay thirty five. At the Hotel Ukraine, the best and most modern in Moscow, he had been refused breakfast service in his bedroom. He had always had this in every other country. When he telephoned for breakfast, he had been asked whether he was ill. When he said he was well, he had been "ordered" to go down to the restaurant. Many of these complaints were justifiable but it was the nasty manner in which they were made that made him one of the most emetic of human beings it has been my misfortune to meet!

To me it was not a case of inefficiency but of priorities. What "Las Vegas" forgot was that this was a primitive agricultural country less than fifty years ago and, less than twenty years ago, it was invaded by a merciless enemy who devastated the land, killed millions of the people and destroyed their industry. The country had to put first things first and serving meals quickly and efficiently with breakfast in bed and hot baths at all hours were hardly of high national importance! Once the USSR has caught up with the industrial production of the USA, these petty faults would be corrected; I am as convinced of that as of the fact that I am alive. On leaving, the wife complimented me on my sense of humour and that I was able to laugh at all these deficiencies. I patted her husband on the shoulder and advised him to look at the funny side of things a bit more; both of them



would then enjoy their tour as much as I did. I was so sorry for that wife. I am sure she must have got a shelling or worse before she got to bed !

## TWENTY-SECOND DAY

Y. paid me a surprise visit while I was at breakfast. He was looking as fresh as a daisy after a hair-cut at the hotel. He had previously informed me that I had exhausted all my allowance for theatre and ballet tickets but when I said that I had reserved one ticket for the ballet that evening which I offered to pay for from my own pocket, he generously said that he would get another ticket and ask the Academy to pay for both. He was supposed to be on privilege leave yesterday but had gone to work voluntarily because he was sorry for his chief who was overworked. I wondered how many of my assistants would do that for me !

## PAVLOV INSTITUTE AT KOLTUSHI

(See also page 213)

Kapina and I set off at 10 a.m. for the country, to a village called Koltushi which was about fifteen miles out of town. There were no kolkhozes on the outskirts as in Moscow. We passed a stretch of pine and birch forest as well as barren land. The soil looked infertile and peaty, unsuitable for the cultivation of grains or vegetables. We were making for a branch of the Pavlov Institute of Physiology at Koltushi and the first landmark of note we encountered there was a life-sized bronze statue of the great Pavlov clad in a long laboratory coat, his right hand resting on the head of a dog on his haunches who was looking up at him in a most affectionate manner.

After a few minutes in a small library which contained thirty eight volumes of the Life of Lenin, we were conducted on foot for a distance of about quarter of a mile to the *Institute of Higher Nervous Activity in Children*. This was under the control of Professor Kolsova, a buxom woman with crows' feet just appearing under her grey eyes but without a single grey hair; whether this was due to nature or nurture I would not know. She had a charming smile, was very friendly and spoke haltingly in English that was just sufficient to make her comprehensible. I thought she looked between 45 to 50 years of age but she was a grandmother and her son was 29 years old !

At the end of a long interview I was mentally fatigued but my hostess invited Kapina and me to lunch in the next room. We each had a chunk of boiled mutton with a heap of unpolished rice. The Russians seldom ate polished rice; that was my experience right through my stay. We also had a glass of Ceylon tea which the Professor had prepared in my honour. Like everyone else she



too preferred our tea to their's but found it difficult to obtain it at times. After lunch we had a stroll round the laboratory and its surroundings. The laboratory building itself was a one-storied wooden shanty consisting of about four to five small rooms which contained the most complicated and modern of electronic apparatus for recording and photographing differences of electric potentials etc. I asked the Professor whether she correlated these data with electro-encephalograms from the same child. These latter were done at the Headquarters of the Pavlov Institute in Leningrad which I had visited the previous day. I asked her why they were not done here. The children who were under observation and study, she told me, were drawn from the families of the scientific staff workers at the local institute. They did various experiments on animals and were really anxious and worried that these investigations on their own children would lead to harmful effects—an interesting and significant psychological reaction on the part of scientific workers. These studies could in no wise have injured any child's brain. It reminded me of the great difficulty that I had experienced at home in obtaining permission from the teaching staff of the Faculty of Medicine in Colombo for the fingers of their toddler children to be pricked in order to investigate their haemoglobin levels. I wanted to compare these with similar readings from children of the same age belonging to the underprivileged classes; as for getting permission to draw any venous blood from the children of my colleagues, it was quite impossible ! This made the whole scientific world kin !

I saw groups of healthy children at play in the garden and after I had taken two photographs of one small child, she came up to me and insisted on my taking another one. They were very uninhibited, happy, healthy and strong, all between 3-5 years of age.

We walked further afield past Pavlov's statue which I have described earlier. We came to a huge cage with four chimpanzees showing off their paces in front of an admiring crowd. These chimps were such exhibitionists. They have never bred in captivity but they looked quite healthy. The Institute keepers were very proud of these chimps as Leningrad was the furthest north where they had survived the harsh North European or American winters but in spite of them they remained healthy and strong for several years.

We next passed the large two-storied *Laboratory of Experimental Genetics* with a park in front of it. There were three marble busts in in one row and a single one behind the rest. The first was of Descartes, one of the Fathers of European science who first wrote about motor and sensory reflexes. The second was of Charles Darwin. The third was of a Russian scientist, of whom I was quite ignorant, Sectionov who first developed the hypothesis



about conditioned reflexes which was subsequently proved to be correct experimentally by the immortal Pavlov, whose bust stood by itself a few yards behind the others.

The whole campus looked very rural and park-like but no fruit trees were to be seen, only large oaks, poplars, birches and elms and some flowers like peonies, roses and pansies.

As the chauffeur had not had his lunch, we left soon after 2 p.m. and went straight to the Kazan Cathedral which housed the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism.

### THE MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGION AND ATHEISM

The Soviets were now getting sensitive to its having at one time been called an anti-religious museum. It was built in the classical style in 1811. It had a very long and wide semi-circled colonnade of Ionic pillars on either side of the main church. It reminded me of S. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The cathedral was made of black, grey and white marble with resplendent paintings of the walls. We did a hasty Cook's tour with the help of a pretty guide. She had a good grasp of the English language.

The cathedral had functioned as a museum since 1929. It is situated in the most fashionable and busy part of the city, facing Nevsky Prospekt and containing a very large number of paintings and sculptures depicting the history of Christianity. Occupying the most conspicuous spot in one gallery was a modern, life-size bronze figure of a man walking, bent in two, under the weight of a heavy cross tied on to his back ! It symbolised the Oppression of Mankind by the Church ! Very near this was one of the most beautiful and life-like marble representations of Jesus, sitting down with his arms outstretched in front of him, as if speaking the words, "Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give ye rest." What a contrast !

A striking painting on one wall depicted not good art but good propaganda. It portrayed the Holy Trinity at the top of the picture with a vertical blue column descending to Christ on the Cross; standing immediately below it were the Tsar and his family, the Nobility and the Church, symbolising those who enjoyed the Grace of God ! At the periphery were the hoi-polloi, the underprivileged with yellow angry arrows of light and fire directed at them and their burning homes, signifying the Wrath of God on those who did not accept the authority of the Church and of the State !

The side-aisles of the church held many nineteenth century Russian paintings depicting the hideous disparity of wealth and poverty which alas still exists in South Asia and in many other



regions of the world. These pictures were still very popular and were painted by great masters like Serov, Vasentov and others. In the basement was the world-famed model of the Spanish Inquisition with the originals of some of the instruments of torture, like the hunger mask life-size models of men on racks, on turning wheels, stretched and maimed with nails and fire, thorns and thongs: the sadistic instruments devised by Holy men for the greater glory of a merciful God and of his handmaiden, the one, true and only church, and to the eternal damnation of his creature, Man.

Flanking the walls of this chamber were the busts of Spinoza, Copernicus and Galileo as well as one of Milton. Sarcastic paintings of gluttonous priests were in abundance but nowhere did I see any indecency or, what a scientist would call, blasphemy. To an ultra-religious person the whole place would stink of blasphemy but such an interpretation could not be claimed to be objective! As far as my knowledge went everything in this Museum was historically true!

In addition to the above, there was a large relief wall model of a portion of the surface of the moon with a Red penant stuck on it to commemorate the Soviet conquest of the moon in 1959. A model of a spaceship as designed by Tsiolkovsky as long ago as 1883 was on view. It was he who first used the word "sputnik." The model itself was about 6-8 ft. long and had two or three decks with ships' ladders between them. Tsiolkovsky designed it so that the ultimate ship itself could hold a crew of a dozen men!

Numerous charts and figures and several busts of Lenin were displayed at intervals of a few yards. I could not however see any of Marx or of Engels or of course of Stalin whose memory has been almost completely blacked out. I was asked whether I would like to see the Museum depicting the History of Chinese Religion. We had to climb about 100 ft. almost to the roof of this great cathedral and in a dark and dismal attic was hidden away a priceless collection of richly-carved Buddhas in many different attitudes of meditation. Most of these had been brought from Mongolia in addition to some artistic treasures from China and Japan, Burma and Cambodia etc. These were marred by other crude, nightmarish and barbaric looking life-size figures demonstrating those participating in initiating ceremonies or the casting out of devils like at our Bali ceremonies in Ceylon. One of these statues had the snout of a pig with the huge clawlike hands of a lion and the face of a skeleton. These creations must have originated from Mongolia and not from China as the Chinese are too cultured and artistic a race to be guilty of such monstrosities.



The ballet that evening, *Taras Bulba*, which has since been filmed and shown in the West, was based on a story by Gogol. It was pure Ukrainian and displayed some magnificent Cossack dancing. The performance that I witnessed was also notable for the come-back of Dudinskaya, a very distinguished ballerina and at one time a close rival of the immortal Ulanova. Dudinskaya looked nearer 60 years than 50 but was still a superb technician. She appeared to be extremely popular and in the middle of the third act flowers were strewn on to the stage from the roof while she was performing and many bouquets handed up from the proscenium at the end of her turn. The whole performance was delayed for over ten minutes till these obeisances were ended. By virtue of the fact that she did not appear in the next one these fatuous expressions of admiration were repeated at the end of the third. Some of the flowers thrown down from the roof hit the ballerina but she did not seem to mind that. She must have taken over a dozen curtain calls before the audience was satisfied.

At supper in the hotel after the ballet, the two best dancers were Negroes, both dancing freely with Russian girls. They were jiving splendidly and everyone was watching them with admiration; there was not a single look of resentment anywhere—no Americans could be seen. I also observed that the Negroes were going up to unknown white women and inviting them to dance. Their husbands and partners, showed no signs of objection. The women loved it because the Negroes' dancing was well above that of the Russians. This was indeed refreshing. No Negro would have dared to do this in a first-class hotel in London or New York; In Paris perhaps, but nowhere else!

### TWENTY-THIRD DAY

I had a half-boiled egg for the first time at breakfast. It was very small like a Ceylon village hen's egg with a pale, yellow yolk, probably a deep litter hen's which had had no added carotene or greens in her diet!

I met an elderly American woman after breakfast who had just recovered from an attack of pneumonia for which she had been hospitalised. I asked her how the treatment compared with that in USA. Unfortunately she had never been a patient in an American hospital but she was quite satisfied with the treatment, diet and nursing she had been given in Leningrad. She had two grumbles. The first was that in the acute stage of her illness she had been wheeled out-of-doors in her night dress only and lying on a trolley, to be X-rayed! The second was that no one from the medical or nursing staff had seen her off or wished her good bye when she had left the hospital. It was all too mechanical but highly efficient! The most admirable aspect of it all was that it was free of charge unlike in her own country where even if she had been insured,



she would have had to pay a significant proportion of the costs. To be quite fair to the Americans I must say that I had myself a full two days for a check up at the Roosevelt Hospital in New York in 1949 with a battery of tests without a single cent to pay. I was told that medical men were given this privilege and the cost was met from a special fund, for which act of grace, I am eternally grateful. It was good to get that certificate on Russian hospital treatment straight from an American woman's mouth. She could hardly be called a fellow-traveller or a sympathizer of the communist regime!

Y. arrived with his wife, Olga, who was gentle and svelte, as fragile as a bit of Dresden china. She was however *enceinte* and was feeling definitely under the weather; she had beautiful bluey-grey eyes and natural Titian-tinted hair with a pointed chin and full lips. When she smiled one imagined the gates of heaven to be opened with S. Peter beckoning one in! The couple had been wed only for four months and were much in love with one another. Y. was a great tease. Olga knew no English but he would insist on speaking to her in it in my presence in order to annoy her!

## PETERHOF

We went to Peterhof, the summer palace of Peter the Great, about 20 miles out of Leningrad. It was a blue-white dream perched on a hill and surrounded with golden-coloured fountains and statues set in an extensive park, stretching down to the sea. Y. declared proudly that the fountains were the most picturesque in the world but I believed that they were second to those at Versailles whose chief attraction was that they were grouped together and the eye could take in at a single moment the whole ensemble. At Peterhof they were scattered about over the Park but one looked in wonder at the chief cascade flowing down the main descent from the palace to the Baltic sea, a distance of over half-a-mile. The *piece-de-resistance* was the larger than life-sized gilded statue of Samson struggling with a lion and tearing its mouth apart, symbolising Russia tearing Sweden apart! Y. added that the Swedes were never told about this symbolism! From this fountain the water flowed down in one straight line to the sea in a six-foot deep, cement-lined canal whose banks were dotted with smaller fountains at regular intervals.

Enormous crowds were present that sunny Sunday morning as the Youth Festival was being celebrated with bands playing, flags flying, and politicians braying (which last the visitors took very little notice of). A very healthy sign of the liberalisation and flexibility of the present regime.



The Peterhof Park was a few 100 acres in extent with numerous summer houses and cottages scattered about and in front of each was a fountain; one of which had a revolving fan of water; another was a chess mountain cascade, where the torrent gushed from the open jaws of three hideous multi-coloured dragons, to traverse down the slopes of a black and white marbled chequer board.

The palace itself was Baroque. The Nazis had occupied it during the siege of Leningrad and had vandalised it to such an extent that it was left in ruins. Y. was not anxious for me to see the interior of the palace for some reason or other. He said it was still empty, the furniture had all been burnt for fuel by German officers and the restoration was not yet complete.

Later, I saw a refreshing sight, people of all ages picking wild flowers to their heart's content in the woods of Peterhof. If one did that at Windsor or Kew, one would be fined or at least dealt with severely on the spot! Freedom, one realised, was such a relative term! Here in a totalitarian state one could have a drink at anytime, walk on the grass or pick the flowers in any public part but in freedom-loving England one could not do any of these things but one was free to criticize anyone except the Sovereign herself! Anyone who did that was likely, not to be shot, but to have his face slapped in public! Y. and Olga presented me with an illustrated paper-back album of Peterhof and signed it "To dear Mr. de Silva from his friends at Leningrad, Y. and Olga". I was very touched and further on when we came to another book stall I saw a paper back on Ceylon, Indonesia and Cambodia with many pictures for 80 kopeks only (Rs. 4/-) and wanted to buy it for them but they refused absolutely to accept it from me but paid for it themselves. One was struck by the large number of bookstalls scattered about the park. I asked Y. whether they were privately owned. He denied this and said there was a central book depot from which these books were distributed to various retail sellers who were government employees.

Y. was a passionate lover of books; like me he spent most of his money on them as well as on records. He bought an artistically produced book of famous paintings in colour for only 5 roubles (Rs. 25/-). This would have cost at least Rs. 80-100/- in any western country. I believe all books are subsidised by the State and are sold below cost as a deliberate measure of education. In Ceylon, on the other hand, there is at the moment a severe restriction of the number of books imported in order to save foreign exchange and every bookseller is given only a small quota of his previous imports. Let all the windows open to other countries, especially to the West, be shut; that is the only way we can keep out "Thuppahi" (Western) culture. Let our people continue to believe that they are the centre of the universe and that no other nation or country has had such a distinguished history of culture



or civilisation as we! Recently the Press in Ceylon reported that a very high Government official had advised the *university students to spit on all their colleagues wearing western clothes*. What a peak of national culture this "gentleman" portrayed! Has he paused to think to which haven all this emotional chauvinism is leading our poor benighted country?

### PUSHKIN VILLAGE

From Peterhof we returned almost all the way to Leningrad before we got on to the road to the village of Pushkin where was situated the palace of Catherine the First. On the way, just beyond the columns marking the boundaries of the city, was a German Tank preserved to commemorate the ultimate position that the enemy occupied during the siege. It was a span's length from the columns. I had not realised earlier how near the Germans had been to the city proper. This spot was within twenty minutes by car from the centre of the town. It was the longest and deadliest siege in the history of war but the city never surrendered! Could anything speak more eloquently of the indomitable will-power, courage and tenacity of the Russian than that? Supplies could only be flown in by air and hardly a family was left in Leningrad that had not lost a father, a brother or a son, quite apart from the large numbers of women and children who had perished.

One entered Pushkin village through the Egyptian gates which portrayed frescoes from the temples of Isis and Osiris in steel, a most imposing entrance to any town.

The Palace was colossal and was built by Rostaielli, the Italian architect who built the Hermitage. In many ways Pushkin Palace reminded me of Schonbrunn palace outside Vienna the same long unbroken line, the same expanse of parks, gardens, lakes etc. The palace looked as commodious as Versailles but the park was even larger and had a big artificial lake where hundreds were boating, sailing or bathing. The banks were flowered with sunbathers. This was the first really warm day I had experienced in Leningrad and the temperature must have reached 80°F. After wandering round the park and partaking of ice-cream and fruit drinks at the way-side booths, we entered the palace itself, only a portion of which was open to the public as the Nazis had again done a thorough job of vandalism. They had gone to the extent of pulling up the beautiful parquet floors and carved ceilings and using them for fuel! These were being gradually restored to their pristine glory. My impression was that both Catherine I and Peter must have attempted to rival Versailles when they built and decorated this beauteous edifice. It was too divine for humans. No human being seemed worthy to live in such paradisial surroundings. Two or three Chinese rooms were stacked full of priceless, ceramics, statues and



tables. One was ordered to wear over-slippers to walk over the floors of a few of the recently restored rooms. On the ground floor was a chapel with walls of a deep royal blue with gilded altars, screens and other decorative ornaments. The outside of the palace was painted a lighter blue and along the entire length of one wall, about  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile in length were a series of brown plastered large-than-life nude figures at intervals of 6-8 feet.

Our next post of call was the *Pavoluski Palace* built by Catherine the Great for her unfortunate though cruel son, Paul. We had no time to go inside. Y. told me with assurance that the Pavolovskt boasted the largest park in the world. As I kept silent he repeated it to impress me. I teased him by saying that the Central Park in New York was probably much larger. He did not bite!

As it was past 3 p.m. and Olga was visibly wilting, we returned to the city via Moscow Prospekt containing the new residential districts with mass upon mass of the new multi-storied apartment houses. The Prospekt itself was 10 kilometers long (6- $\frac{1}{4}$  miles).

I presented Olga with one of the silver brooches depicting a Kandyen dancer. I got to my room at 6.15 p.m. after saying goodbye to Olga and Y. The latter was very honest and reliable. He said he was going away on his holiday on the following day and could not see me off nor could he post any papers etc. direct home for me because of his absence. I liked that better than the usual promises to do this, that and the other with no intention of fulfilling them. I said goodbye to Y. with a sad heart. When I said that I was sorry for having worked him so hard, he said it was a pleasure and I was sure that it was not just a polite gesture but was sincerely meant. I have one amusing story which portrayed Y's weakness. He asked me once whether his wife could be mistaken for an English girl. I said not likely as her colouring, size and complexion were very unlike those of an English maid. Y. asserted dogmatically that the latter were either very pretty or very plain and very few were betwixt and between. I said "what rubbish." I thought, but did not say it, that the average incidence of good-lookers was much higher in the U.K. than in USSR. Y. next asked me whether he could be mistaken for an Englishman. I said "yes; provided you didn't open your mouth!" He was very insulted.

"How so, I have not got an Oxford accent but there are many accents in England and I think I can pass off as a provincial. Many Englishmen have told me so".

I did not tell him that Englishmen abroad proverbially lie for their country but I said that I have at various times spent nearly eight years of my life in U.K. and was fairly conversant with most of her better-known provincial accents but I did not think his resembled any one of them!



As he was getting hotter and hotter, I quickly added that even mine could not be easily mistaken for an English accent. If I spoke behind a curtain someone might possibly think I were a Welshman but never an Englishman!

Y. was very insulted as he was definitely an Anglophile and displayed a curious side to his character. I wonder how many educated Russians still hold the image of the cultured Englishman as the *beau ideal*! Y. also spoke good Swedish and Arabic and tolerable French and German but he was proudest of all of his English—a queer but lovable fellow!

#### TWENTY-FOURTH DAY

This was my last day in this fair city. Though Moscow and Samarkand were oriental and therefore closer to me in spirit, yet I have enjoyed far more my stay in Leningrad. As I emerged from my room I nearly knocked against one of the Ceylon Buddhist monks who was in the delegation of six on a Cultural Exchange Mission. I had no idea that they were such near neighbours of mine though I had heard earlier that they were in the same hotel at the same time. The monks were wearing their saffron robes but had on, I was glad to see, some warm under-wear and also shoes and socks. They were indulging in the national habit of chewing betel. I hoped that they were supplied with portable cuspidors! I asked one of them how he was enjoying his visit to the USSR. He said "very much." They had been taken first to Mongolia where Buddhism still prevailed. A lay Sinhalese, the assistant registrar of Vidyodaya University, was their manager and interpreter from English to Sinhala. There was also a Mongolian Buddhist Priest in the party who was the interpreter from Russian to English. One or two in the party knew English, especially the late Vice Chancellor of Vidyodaya University who died soon after his return to Ceylon. They were curious to know what I was doing here. I told them; they were leaving for Rostov-on-Don by air in a few hours.

#### HOSPITAL FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN CHILDREN (SEE PAGE 202)

We were directed to Professor Libov's Hospital for Communicable Diseases by the Academy. When we got to that address we were informed that the professor did not work there but at another clinic at the other end of town. We had a very long tram ride and a longer walk before we found it eventually at 11 a.m. I particularly wanted to meet Libov as he had worked with Professor Sheila Singh Paul at Delhi for three years and had published a number of papers in the Indian Paediatric Journals. Libov's sanctum was decorated with autographed photographs of Indian



notabilities like Nehru, Radhakrishnan and Amrit Kaur, the Union Ex-Minister of Health. Libov told me that he had edited five books in his three years in India. Many of the contributions were solely his. Nehru in a speech had once remarked that an average Indian woman produced one child a year but that Libov had done better by producing five books in three years! At the beginning of this interview the great man was inclined to the dogmatic and patronising. I was not taking that lying down so I contradicted him several times. An argument arose over the prevalence of round worm infection in Leningrad. Libov maintained that it was no commoner than in any other place in Europe. I flatly denied this. I told him that the only place on that continent where I had found as high an incidence was in Hamburg. He said "what about Berlin?" I had never been to Berlin after I qualified but I said I would accept his word for it but I knew for certain that it did not occur to any significant extent in any city in U.K., Scandanavia or Holland. I did not know about France or Belgium because I had not enquired about its prevalence there. I suggested that the common factor between Leningrad and Hamburg was the use of human compost for growing vegetables. Libov at last declared that he was not a parasitologist and changed the subject. He should have said so at the commencement of the argument.

Like a proud father introducing his children he showed me his five English books on paediatric problems in India published by the Indian Red Cross. At the end of one of them was a table of doses for commonly used drugs. The recommended doses were calculated by age. I asked him whether these were for Indian or European children. "It does not matter, it is the same," he grunted in annoyance. He either took me for an ignoramus or his comprehension of English was not that perfect. I thought I had better not argue the point any further but any junior paediatrician, who has worked in a European clinic as well as in a South Asian one, knows that there is no comparison whatsoever between the weights of children in the two regions! From then on I followed a deliberate policy of not contradicting him however foolish some of his statements appeared to be. He was a sort of Demigod of Paediatrics in the city and this reputation had billowed his ego. My tactics worked and at the end of the interview he presented me with a sample of anti-influenza serum in powder form which was specially made for doctors and nurses at times of epidemics. One had to sniff the stuff up like snuff on five successive days!

I made the nodding acquaintance of the Australian communists at the hotel. They had arrived that very morning in Leningrad. The Australians were the guests of the Soviet communist Party and at breakfast had salami, eggs, masses of bread and butter and a bottle of brandy! Besides the official female interpreter, a repre-



sentative of the local C.P. was also present at their table. Speeches of welcome and replies to them went on for over half-an-hour right through breakfast! One would have imagined that they were addressing a huge public meeting!

After lunch Kapina and I paid a visit to the Russian Museum. It was once the Palace of Prince Michael, the brother of Tsar Nicholas I. It was impossible to tour the whole exhibition, so I chose the moderns only. This museum was limited to the Russian artists exclusively! The impressionist school was represented by one artist, Bogayesky; two of her pictures painted in 1960 were inspired by Cezanne.

Trufanov's picture of a Miner was sensational. A painting called *The Lovers* by Korjov I did not expect to see in a communist gallery. It displayed the bourgeois posturings of sex. Chuikov had three striking portraits of Indian faces. He hailed from Kirghizia. He had obtained a brilliant effect of the tropical sunlight burnishing the burnt-charcoal faces of the Indians. One was entitled "*The Song of the Coolie*." Two artists, Livitin and Julin, jointly had painted a semi-political propaganda picture called "*The Fresh Issue of a Workshop Paper*." The greatest Russian landscape painter of the nineteenth century, Suskin, was very well represented. He loved to paint forests and trees. There was a colossal canvas by Palinov of Christ and the Woman taken in sin, extremely realistic and sympathetic.

Repin, whom many Russians considered their greatest artist, had an enormous painting of the State Council in Session with the last Tsar, Nicholas II in the Chair and the members of the Council in full-dress uniform gathered around him. The same artist had an arresting full-length portrait of a barefoot Leo Tolstoy dressed in a white smock! Rubel, a modernist, had a technique all his own rather like our own Justin Deraniyagala, the same sober colours and palette knife treatment but the finished effect was far less repellent than Justin's.

Eda Rubinstein, the wife I believe of the famous composer, was shown in the nude! I was pleased no end to see a lovely portrait of the immortal Pavlova, whom I had the privilege of seeing in the flesh at Convent Garden in the middle-twenties when I was a medical student in London. Both these pictures were by Serov, another well-known Russian painter.

Roerich had a one man show of paintings of The Himalayas and Tibet. He lives in India and is married to an Indian. His father was also an artist. The son used the most startlingly brilliant colours—reds, purples, and bright blues and obtained arresting effects. I particularly liked two of his pictures. One canvas painted in pavonine colours of red and green and called "*The Women*"



by Malyavin and the other, "Guests" showing four gossiping women by Arhipov (1915) caught my attention. Lastly, I stood in reverence for a moment before the greatest singer the world has ever known, Chaliapin in the full regalia of Boris Gudunov by Galovin.

As S. Isaac's Cathedral was closed at 4 p.m. we could not visit it, so we went shopping and I bought some gifts for my family and myself.

The selection of articles in the souvenir shop of a big department store was not as wide as at the one at my hotel though the prices were exactly the same, unlike in capitalist countries where the prices at hotel shops were usually much higher. There was also no sales or purchase tax. You had to pay your money to the cashier seated in a box and get a receipt which you handed to the sales girl before your article was handed over to you. This was a nuisance to me because I had to have an interpreter with me each time I went shopping. It also meant that you had no receipt yourself for customs purposes etc. I bought some amber jewellery as gifts for the family. This was cheap, much cheaper than at home.

There was one charge on each mode of transport—for 3 kopeks (15 cts.) on the train, 20 cts. on the trolley bus or 25 cts. on the metro, you could travel any distance and change your vehicle without paying extra. I believe this system operates in U.S.A. also, but in U.K. transport charges are much higher and if one lives in the outer suburbs it costs a considerable sum daily to travel to the west end of London. Transport charges in Ceylon on the other hand are ridiculously cheap and have not been raised in the last fifteen years or more. All transport is State owned and run at a heavy loss.

The Metro escalators in Leningrad were much longer than in Moscow. Owing to much clay and the water level descending to a lower depth, it was much more difficult to build the metro in the former city, but neither the stations nor the platforms were so ornate or so opulent as in the latter but the lighting was as good. A new line was to be opened on that very day but we were too early for it. At one terminal station, far out in the Moscow district of Leningrad there was no platform. Soon after the doors of the train slid open, another set of station doors opened exactly opposite the first set and one stepped straight on to the inner foyer which stretched from one end of the station to the other. The train came to a standstill by some automatic device which made it impossible to come to a halt except at the points where the doors of the station and of the train were exactly opposite one another. It was a space saving and novel device and probably also cheaper on capital cost of construction.



On alighting at our station we met three Indians, one a bearded and turbanned Sikh. They were trainees in electrical engineering in a local factory for eighteen months and had arrived in USSR only a month ago. They told us that seventy Indians were being trained in that particular factory. They had been taught Russian for eight months before leaving India by a Russian who had been specially imported by their Indian firm for the sole purpose of teaching them the language. That was private enterprise! Would that our Government did the same!

I had a hair cut at the hotel saloon. The barber had a white smock and cap on just like a doctor. I noticed one refinement in technique. The barber sterilised the cutter ends of the electric clipper over the flame of a spiritlamp; that I have never seen before; no, not even in asepsis-conscious America. He also wrapped some cotton wool over the comb before using it on me, so that the grease on my hair should not contaminate that of the next customer. Everything was spotlessly clean. When I gave him one rouble and was leaving, he stopped me and handed back 70 kopeks change. The charge amounted to 2s 6d in English money which was much less than I would have had to pay in London, Paris or N.Y. for a similar service at a shop of the same standing. I saw the previous customer giving the barber a tip but as I did not quite know how much this should be, I did not tip him at all. I was surprised when I saw him accepting the tip, but I saw the same thing in Melbourne (Australia) where I was told that the barber did not expect a tip but he took one with glee not only from me but also from the locals. One could not leave a barber shop in Paris, N.Y., London or Colombo psychologically integrated without a generous tip!

When I asked Y. about tipping, he said waiters and porters expected them. I saw my American surgeon friend giving ten roubles to a table waiter who accepted it with visible pleasure; only the Americans could afford to tip on that generous scale and in any case none of the restaurant staff in that particular hotel or in most of the others deserved any tip at all; they were such a lousy lot.

My last meal at Leningrad was excellent with fine black caviare, fried and rolled up Soodak fish with an onion sauce, A Kiev chicken cutlet which just melted in my mouth and an ice cream with no fruit but heaps of cookies and a bottle of red Georgian wine. The maitre d' hotel was specially attentive and asked me whether I was satisfied. Apparently he had heard that I was leaving! I slept for an hour and a half after dinner as I was not due to leave till 11 p.m. I had to tip the porter who took my bags down. He carried them right into the car, so unlike what happens in the East where one man would carry it to the lobby and another to the car so that two of them could get a tip each; these are the fruits of extreme poverty.



No porter was at hand at the railway station so I had to carry all my bags myself.

Sleeping berths were divided into two categories, hard and soft. I imagined these meant without and with bedding respectively. After dumping my bags down on what I took to be my berth, I went out to say goodbye to Kapina. When I returned a few minutes later another woman was in and was pointing to my bags which were on her berth. I apologised and her male companion very kindly took my heavy suitcase and heaved it over his head and placed it in a large empty vault above the door. I had the lower berth opposite to the woman's. There was a second woman too in the party. They were very friendly but spoke very "leettle" English. A Russian might not always wear the clothes of a gentleman but many of them wear the heart of one. My grey hairs brought me a lot of undeserved sympathy and sometimes compassion.

I told Kapina that never in my life had I travelled in the same sleeping compartment with any woman except my wife. In U.S.A., I never travelled in a night train. Ceylonese would be scandalised if they knew! The practical difficulties were that one had to sleep in one's trousers! As we were due to arrive in Moscow at 8 a.m. the following morning this was not too heavy a price to pay.

This train which was an International one from Helsinki to Moscow had different classes and was run much more smoothly than the previous two. The toilet also was much cleaner and for the first time in USSR I saw a plug for a washbasin but no toilet paper as usual!

## CHAPTER 8

### Back in Moscow

#### TWENTY-FIFTH DAY

I woke up at 5.30 a.m. long before the others. As we approached Moscow, the land became more undulating with many streams, lakes and collective farms. It was indeed a green and pleasant land but hardly a painter's paradise!

I learnt that till very recently only a dacha or country cottage could be owned privately by a citizen who was given this privilege for distinguished services in science, arts or industry. Now the laws were being changed and anyone could purchase one apartment or a separate house in the city if one joined a Cooperative Housing Society. Here was an idea that we could safely imitate for a quick solution to our housing problem.

We arrived in Moscow right on time. There was no one to meet me when I alighted but in a minute or two I saw Dr. C. with his untidy mop of hair running along the platform to greet me. I was taken to a new hotel, BAPWABA, which translated meant WARSAW or WARSAWA to be strictly accurate; this was more recently built, more commodious and more modern in every way than the previous hotel that I had stayed at in this city. It was a dripping wet and cold morning. I was actually shivering though it was the Second of July. The 'WARSAW' was situated on the south side of the city, about two miles from the centre. As usual Dr. C. had made a mistake and reserved my room from the First and not from the Second of July but in spite of that, it was not ready for me at 8.30 a.m.

The restaurant was not open but a cafeteria was, where I had breakfast off smoked salmon and coffee. While I was attending to my toilet, Dr. C. was busily telephoning and fixing up my appointments for the day. As I expected nothing had been done till he was convinced that I was still alive! He informed me that the President of the Academy of Science would be pleased to see me at 3 p.m. so I wore my best suit.

On our way to the Ceylon Embassy, I saw a long queue on the road. I was informed that they were waiting to register their names for new apartments. The chauffeur managed to lose his way several times but eventually found the Embassy. It was then that Dr. C. made his very significant remark, which I have already related, that the Academy of Science can succeed brilliantly in marvellous achievements like space flights but it flounders badly about sending



a car or keeping an appointment on time! At our embassy I found that the ambassador had had to leave for Ceylon suddenly but his wife and family were here. I saw the First Secretary. On leaving the embassy Dr. C. who had promised to spend the whole day with me found suddenly that he had some urgent work to do. When the car got stuck on the road and the young chauffeur could not get it started, a stalwart Amazon walked up, turned a bolt here and a screw there and got it right in a few seconds, much to our chauffeur's embarrassment. He did not even thank her as far as I could discover!

The service at the Warsaw was the best of any hotel I stayed at in USSR. It was also the only hotel where running hot water was available throughout the 24 hours. Though there was a long queue of non-residents outside the main door of the restaurant which was situated on the eighth floor, I was allowed to crash it. The hotel was full of Poles, no other foreigners could be recognised. Dr. C. was another Russian who had decently tailored suits but on questioning him, I found that he had bought them abroad in India and Hongkong. In USSR he always got them made to measure and one cost him 170-180 R (Rs. 850-900/-). That is almost a Saville Row price for hardly a Saville Row job!

## ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

When we arrived at the Academy I was informed that the President was unavoidably detained at the annual meeting of the Academy which was in sessions on that day. I was however most graciously received by one of the Vice-Presidents who refreshed me with tea and biscuits. We had an exhilarating mental fencing match about USSR and Ceylon. He asked me about my impressions of his country. I said that I had seen so much in so short a time and met so many people that I was more than a little confused and would want some time in order to digest what I had imbibed. I made two suggestions which I thought were practical, useful and valuable for better cultural relations between USSR and Ceylon.

1. Soviet scientists should be sent out to Ceylon to work for short periods on ad hoc research projects. The Vice-President thought that this was an excellent suggestion. So often in so many countries I have the same reaction to similar suggestions but nothing further has happened. There was little to choose between the red tapism of democracy and of totalitarianism in this respect.

2. I had thought, incorrectly as it transpired later, that there was no Institute of Tropical Medicine in USSR. It was overdue in my opinion as the Russians were training many hundreds of future doctors who intended to practise their profession in the tropics.



The Vice-President parried this suggestion by asserting rather wildly that sickness was international and the same everywhere. I said I could not disagree more; not only were the diseases, that were common in the tropics, uncommon or absent here, but also the signs and symptoms of the same disease were often different in the two places.

Further, they had taken a great responsibility in training doctors for service in their respective countries who had no idea at the end of their period of training in USSR what diseases they would meet and how they should handle them. After a lot of talk during which I said that in U.K. they had not one but two Institutes of Tropical Medicine, one in London and the other in Liverpool and that there were opportunities in that country for anyone to gain a first class skill in the diagnosis and treatment of tropical diseases. One of those present said, "Oh but Britain did that for political reasons".

I parried, "But whatever the motives, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. What Britain taught and shared with us, has been of immense benefit to the health of our people".

At the end the Vice-President and his colleagues suggested that I discuss this problem with the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Rector or Pro-Rector of Lumumba University.

The Vice-President was rather scathing about medicine as a science. He considered it a very backward science. I stood up for it as best I could, a lone minnow among a shoal of tritons and all they could tease me about was the inaptitude of medicine to cure a common cold and influenza. I informed them about Libov's anti-influenza serum (page 161) which they knew nothing about!

The Vice-President asked me what specific problems Ceylon needed help on from the Academy. I told them that it could probably help us with research into rice and tea. I added that we had first-class research institutes for these industries but were short of highly trained research workers.

They asked me about the functions and work of the Ceylon Institute of Scientific and Industrial Research of which I happened to be chairman. I told them as much as I could as to what we were doing and what we hoped to achieve. I handed over to the Vice-President the letter I carried from the General President of the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science to the President of the Soviet Academy of Science requesting him to send a delegate to our annual congress in November. The Vice-President promised me that our invitation would be accepted. This promise was not kept in 1963 in spite of a letter written to the President of the Soviet Academy of Science from the General President of the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science



in August, and my interviewing an official of the Soviet Embassy in Colombo in October. In 1964, we had the honour of having the first Soviet scientist as a guest of the C.A.A.S. We have had guests of many Western, Asian and Australasian countries, but never from any Communist State till then in spite of our Governments' policy of strict non-alignment. He also asked for details about the C.A.A.S., and medical education. I told him about our difficulties regarding post-graduate education and how some "reactionaries" of my generation were still insisting on higher British qualifications for specialisation. *All of them said that they had had to experience the same difficulties in USSR soon after the revolution.* The numerous Institutes that I saw in 1963 were only established in the 1930's and after a long struggle. Before the revolution there had been the same tendency to favour foreign degrees and diplomas. I left after an hour saying that I was disappointed that I could not meet the President but that I fully understood the reason for this failure. The Vice-President came downstairs to the front door to say farewell to me. I appreciated that gesture.

We next went to Voks house to meet Professor Alexiev who was a very friendly sort of chap and offered me tea in the cafe in the basement of VOKS house (page 204). A big meeting was on that day in the main hall as it was Ghana Independence day.

The woman in charge of foreign medical personnel was rather amused at my request to visit a nursery and a kindergarten. I wondered why. She said it was difficult to arrange these as the delegates to the Women's Peace Congress were still in town and were being taken round these places. I said that nothing could be easier than for me to attach myself to one of them like a barnacle! This suggestion was not favourably received. Did they think that I would seduce an Asian, an African or a Latin American?

On the way out we barged into Professor Ersin, the Pro-Rector of the Lumumba Medical Faculty whom I had met there on a previous occasion. I told him about my suggestion for an Institute of Tropical Medicine. I suggested Odessa; Ersin was trying to pass the baby back to the Academy of Science. Having agreed with my suggestion, he wanted me to write a memorandum on it. Before I did that I would have to be convinced that the Academy of Medical Science and Lumumba University would consider it in a favourable light.

We drove a long way out to drop Professor Alexiev in one of the new residential districts where he lived. On the way we passed the permanent Exhibition of Economic Achievements which I was to visit later. Near the entrance to it was a colossal silvery gray statue, about twice or three times life size, of a young man and maiden marching forward arm in arm—he holding a hammer and she, a sickle aloft. It symbolised the union of industrial and



farm workers going forward together in unity to forge the development and progress of their country. It was certainly a great work of art—that statue.

I had great difficulty in buying a tube of tooth paste. I had to go to three shops before I succeeded. Eventually I found a small tube manufactured in East Germany for the equivalent of about 30 Ceylon cents! Another example of exploitation of goods from satellite countries.

I investigated the prices of antibiotics in chemists' shops.

Oral Pencillin V tablets in packets of 10 of 100,000 units each cost about Rs. 1/50 Ceylon money.

An ampoule of 250,000 units of Penicillin G (the common variety) cost about -/25 cts.

10 Tablets of 100,000 units (sic) each of Tetracycline cost about Rs. 2/75.

A million units (sic) of Streptomycin cost Re. 1/-.

These were ridiculously cheap compared to Western prices but some of them were probably imported from East Germany! Dr. C. gave me almost without realising it, another surprising bit of information. Hotel and travel charges on plane and train etc. were much higher for foreigners than for natives. The charge at the best of hotels in Moscow for a Soviet citizen was about 5R (Rs. 25/-) a day for the room only. The meals at the most would cost another Rs. 30/-, while the minimum inclusive daily charge for a foreigner was Rs. 170/- but that included transport and other incidentals! This was the chief reason why Intourist insisted that all expenses inside USSR be paid for in one's own country before a visa was granted. Guests of various organisations like the Academy were billed at the foreign rate. As we never paid these nor asked about the cost I was not aware of this difference. Tourists were also served only in certain restaurants where the prices were, I presume, higher than in the others. Since more and more tourists were visiting USSR each year, especially from U.S.A., these hidden methods of extraction were potentially valuable sources of foreign exchange.

Soon after dinner a young man introduced himself to me and wanted me to appear on T.V. at 8 p.m. on my last evening in Moscow.

I said, "Not on your life". I had already got two tickets for the Puppet Show. I could not make him understand what a puppet show meant, so I had to take him up to my room and show him the word in my English-Russian dictionary! He next suggested that I could appear on T.V. after the show;



"If I were fetched, I would come", I said.

He wanted my script which was not to exceed a eight minute talk on the following morning.

## TWENTY-SIXTH DAY

### INSTITUTE OF POLIOMYELITIS AND ENCEPHALITIS (SEE ALSO PAGE 205)

Dr. L. my Jewish interpreter came for me that morning. We were to visit the great Professor Chumakov, Head of the Institute of Poliomyelitis and Encephalitis. This institute was sited about ten miles out in the country along the main road to Kiev. I had asked specifically for this interview as it was Professor Chumakov who had sent Ceylon the oral Sabin vaccine together with one of his assistants, Dr. Sergei Drozdov, to advise us on our mass immunisation campaign against polio. We protected over 80% of our children between 2 months and 8 years of age during the course of one week over the whole island in May 1963 with one dose. It was extremely well organised by our Department of Health and we had 100,000 volunteers to help in the campaign but the second dose was given only to 55% of the same age group. So we are in great danger of another epidemic in 1967 or 1968.

It was a bitterly cold and wet day and I was glad to have a thick woollen pull-over on in addition to my heavy gaberdine overcoat. Though we were ten minutes late for our appointment, Chumakov had not yet arrived but did so a few minutes later. He was a big hulk of a man with untidy hair falling all over his forehead like most Russians but he was very neatly dressed in a natty, foreign-tailored suit of good English tweed! He had a complete hemiparesis after experimenting on himself with some vaccine or other—another martyr of science, a man of great courage and of great love for his fellow man. He was one of the finest characters I have met anywhere in any country. He was charming and for nearly one hour went to great pains to explain to me the organisation and structure of this world-famous Institute of which he was naturally very proud. His wife, I learnt, was also a scientist, a microbiologist, and worked as one of his assistants but at the moment was away in Geneva at an International Conference.

After the morning was spent in talk and a short tour of some of the laboratories, Chumakov suggested a coffee break at 1 p.m. It was really a luncheon served in his office with sandwiches of cheese, salami and smoked salmon respectively. He had bought the last himself, when he was on holiday on the Volga where he had gone out in a fishing boat. The salmon tasted much less salty and fresher than the usual stuff so meanly served in our hotels and restaurants. Even the central vertebrae of this fish could be



chewed with ease and delight. He forced me to eat three of these sandwiches. I did not protest too much because never again perhaps would I have the chance of tasting such fresh and tender smoked salmon. He also served a very good three star Cognac from Georgia-*Dagestanski*. There was a five-star brand of the same name. Drozdov asserted rather dogmatically that foreign connoisseurs were now convinced that the best Georgian Cognac was superior to the best French! I wondered! I am no expert in this but the Georgian was very much to my taste and was as good as a Napoleonic brandy taken as a liqueur. One of course had to take a whole small wine glassful down in one gulp—"bottoms up". I think this rather spoils a good brandy which should be sipped and licked slowly in order to be enjoyed to the uttermost. It had a slightly sweet taste and was not as strong as a Hennessy's Three Star; even the Armenian brandy had this saccharine flavour. As I drank so much, Chumakov insisted on my taking a whole unopened bottle of it with me when I left. That was very generous of him. We drank the usual toasts, he to Ceylon and the exchange of scientists and the growth of friendship between our two countries; I to seeing Chumakov in my country before too long. I suggested that he did a lecture tour in India, Pakistan and Ceylon.

After lunch he took me to a small auditorium and lent me an excellent woman interpreter. She had translated the book on oral polio vaccine, a huge volume containing all the papers delivered at an International Conference in Moscow in 1960. Sabin had written the first paper. Chumakov presented me with a copy in English as well as another in Russian of the papers delivered at a Soviet Congress held only one month previously. I was astounded at the rapidity with which the proceedings of the last had been published; I have sometimes had to wait as long as two years before similar proceedings of International Conferences held elsewhere have reached me! These books which should have been forwarded to me by surface mail had not reached me at the time of my going to press (1965). I wrote to him and told him that I had not received them in October 1963 but so far no reply has been received.

He came to the car to wish me farewell and asked me to return often to the USSR! He was highly intelligent as well as very human; a man of great courage and vision combined with a high degree of organising ability with the know-how of getting other people to do all one's tedious work. Was not that the secret of Winston Churchill's success? He had hidden sources of strength and vitality and above all, an unending love of humanity. I could see that he was loved by all his staff. He seldom smiled and that was generally true of most Russian men, but the better they liked one, the more often they did so!



The Soviet citizens were still averse to entertaining foreigners in their homes. Only Dr. K. my Uzbek friend afforded me that honour and privilege during all my stay in USSR. I was told by one of my colleagues in Ceylon that a professor of music had entertained him in his home; that was in Tashkent too—and his interpreter had reprimanded him for going there without her. Since his return to Ceylon he had written several letters to his musical host without a reply; that was in 1959.

On returning to the hotel, I asked Dr. L. to try to get me some transport from the Academy to the ballet, but try as he would, he was unable to contact the authorities. The telephone service was as willowy as in Colombo! I managed to find my way to the Bolshoi Theatre by taxi which I was lucky to pick up as it unloaded a client opposite my hotel. It was a 10-minute ride and cost me about Rs. 3/50 including a tip which was readily accepted.

The ballet, "Cursa" was based on a story by Lord Byron. As the Bolshoi ballet cast was at the moment in London, a troupe from Novosibirsk, in the heart of Siberia, was performing here. One could not expect the same perfection of technique as at Leningrad or at the Kremlin Palace with the Bolshoi cast, but it was certainly good by any other standard.

The theatre itself was dated and built in a neo-classical style. The interior was in a rather vulgar gold colour. The ceiling had delicate almost pastel shade paintings of angels and wreaths in the usual Italian style of decorative art.

It was raining hard when the show ended and I had to stand on the road between the Hotel Metropole and the Bolshoi in a queue for a taxi. One turned up every two or three minutes. After I had waited for my chance for about twenty minutes, a kindly middle-aged man in front of me let me have one out of turn; that was yet another sign of Russian courtesy to foreigners. I sat by the side of the chauffeur. I had armed myself with one of the blurbs advertising my hotel but unfortunately it was in Polish and the driver could not decipher it. I also had a small piece of paper with the address of the hotel written in Russian on it. He shook his head as much as to say that he had never heard of it. I told him by signs to follow my directions as I knew the way; I had made a point of fixing this in my mind the previous day. He was however very sceptical about my knowledge as he halted the taxi after a mile and asked a policeman where the Hotel Warsaw was! I was quite right in my direction. When we got to the hotel, the driver announced that he had been there before!

The T.V. man walked into my bedroom at 10 p.m. demanding my script. I told him that I had left it that morning at the Service Bureau according to instructions and no one had fetched it. It was



now closed and he would have to wait till morning. This was another bit of evidence of the casualness with which small matters were attended to; their handling of minor affairs left a very dim impression. This was the paradox of old Mother Russia, so vigorous and vital in many things, so effete and fossilized in others.

## TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY

### FIRST INSTITUTE OF PAEDIATRICS, MOSCOW

(SEE ALSO PAGE 194)

The polyclinic or O.P.D. at the First Institute of Paediatrics handled 1500 cases a month, the same number as the Childrens' Hospital Colombo had in one day. This was partly due to the fact that every patient seen in Moscow was referred by a doctor or a clinic or was a follow-up case from the hospital itself; while in Colombo, every Tom, Dick and Harry had direct access to the one and only teaching hospital in paediatrics in the Island. For the treatment of 50-60 patients a day at the Moscow polyclinic, 3 doctors were available while for 1500 patients in Colombo no more than 16 were! The difference in the standard of care was inevitable. Unless our Government made it a rule that no one could seek advice at the O.P.D. of a teaching hospital except with a letter from a doctor, a clinic or an ayurvedic physician, the overcrowding could never be controlled. On the other hand it would grow worse with the population explosion, with the lower depths of housing and sanitation, with the increasing under-and unemployment and the drift to town from the rural areas. No political party in power so far has had the guts to take this one and only step necessary to upgrade the efficiency of our teaching hospitals. No so-called civilised country has allowed its population free and unlimited access to the teaching hospitals. This must be sought through other medical centres. When political expediency is paramount, all social standards including those of health and education must fall. This has happened and will continue to happen in Ceylon while expert advice is thrown into the waste paper basket and all that the Minister considers is "If I follow A, how many votes will I gain; if I follow B, how many votes will I lose?" I know for a fact that this is how many minds of many Ministers work, whatever their politics, whatever their party. It is only the statesman who can rise above considerations of political expediency because he thinks of the next generation while the politician's horizon does not extend beyond the next election!

The T.V. youth had been harassing Dr. C. for a translation of my script the whole morning and I was glad that he had been persuaded to appear on T.V. tonight with me in order to give a simultaneous translation of my words. Dr. C. pretended not to like it but I thought that he was as keen as myself to appear.



The theatre, where the puppet show usually took place, was closed for repairs; so it was held in the hall of a military academy. There were no empty seats but they were packed so close together that I began to be afraid before the torment was over, I would suffer severely from leg cramps. A famous French play, "The Straw Hat", was the show that evening. The technical side was superb and quite a bit of French was spoken on the stage. The humour was at times Rabelaisian, three chubby cherubs were floating about on wires and singing naughty songs at frequent intervals; a puppet pony started chewing a lady's straw hat (this was the theme of the whole play) and then defaecated on the stage with his tail up in a characteristic manner! This sent the audience into prolonged spasms of laughter; a bride on her wedding night found herself in bed with the groom's grandfather by accident, but he was quite incapable of causing any domestic upheaval! After the bride had tumbled out of bed, he followed suit to look for a chamber pot without success!

On the whole I was disappointed as I was led to expect so much by Gunther. Perhaps I was '*tres fatigué*' and could not get the point in many of the jokes owing to my language difficulties. If it had been in English or if my French had been of a higher standard, then I may have agreed with Gunther that it was the one show you should never miss in Moscow.

After the show the youth from T.V. met Dr. C. and me at the door and rushed us in a big Zim to the studio. We got there at 10 p.m. but it was long past 11 p.m. when I went before the arc lights. The compere was a middle-aged heavy-weight but extremely handsome with one of those marble white complexions so typical of some Slavs. He spoke very good English, better than Dr. C. so I thought the latter's appearance was quite superfluous. Though Dr. C. and I were both told to limit ourselves to five minutes each, the actual "show" lasted about fifteen minutes and that was after two passages were cut without warning by the compere. Before I commenced I was asked whether I minded being asked whether I was a communist. I said I did not but I told them they should be delighted at that because I was giving them praise for their achievements in spite of not agreeing with their political system. In spite of this I was never asked that question! Significant? I was informed by the compere that this particular programme was seen by over forty five million people throughout the USSR, a staggering thought and responsibility!

When I was right in the middle of relating the story of Ceylon, the compere cut out the rest abruptly and asked me what my impressions of the USSR were. One of the main aims and purposes of my talk was to make the Soviets more Ceylon - conscious but they were not as interested in learning about foreign countries as in



what foreigners thought of their country! That was the feeling I got. It betrayed an adolescent state of mind. In time the Russians will grow out of this attitude, the sooner the better for the rest of the world.

When we reached our hotel it was 11.40 p.m. and the restaurant was closed. When we asked the buxom wench at the front desk whether we could be served with some food, she said "nyet, nyet." However Dr. C. and I went up to the eighth floor and at first were served with one cucumber, one tiny tomato and three slices of bread between the two of us. Eventually the young and friendly maitre d' hotel had pity on me and gave me a very tasty Polish steak which Dr. C. refused to share. He said he could get some food at home. We also had some Cognac to wash it down with. I gave the maitre d' hotel one of the Kandyan silver brooches for his wife and thanked him profusely for saving my life and said that when I returned from London and had been paid by T.V. for my services, we would celebrate the occasion together. This was mis-translated by Dr. C. and he thought that I was offering him a tip and he naturally felt insulted! I got Dr. C. to correct it and pour oil successfully on the troubled waters. We parted as friends and so to bed.

#### TWENTY - EIGHTH DAY

I was very disappointed when Dr. L. informed me that the VOKS lady had told him that she could not do anything about arranging a visit for me to a Nursery and Kindergarten. I was annoyed because she had promised to do her best but it was the usual polite formula and I was almost certain that she had not lifted her little finger about it. Her only excuse was that she was still tied up with the delegates to the Women's Peace Congress!

We visited GUM stores, the largest department store in the world with the possible single exception of MACY's in N.Y. It was an Arabian night's dream. Imagine a cheap edition of the glass-roofed Burlington Arcade in two stories and multiplied ten times in length with three parallel structures of the same dimensions - that is GUM! Though the number of shops was astronomical all of them were not open; some were temporarily, others permanently closed but the ones that were open were full of stores; *there was no shortage of locally produced consumer goods*. There was however a great range in quality, quantity and price. Imported goods like Agfa films were very scarce. I had to go to four shops in different parts of the city before I bought some. No ear plugs were provided to listen to gramophone records at a neighbouring store; as a result an awful racket prevailed due to the competing noises from adjoining booths; with some selling classical, others jazz, some folk songs, others ballet, one could imagine the din when all of them were played in the same room at the same time! It also made it most difficult to judge the tone and quality of the record one was intending to buy.



I bought some Mozart, Rimsky - Korsakov and Tschaikovsky records. They were played by Russian artistes and produced in USSR. Their quality was excellent and up to the time of going to press two years after purchase their quality has not deteriorated at all.

We went to the *Exhibition of Economic Achievements*. The grounds were lavishly and tastefully laid out. One entered the grounds through an archway far bigger than the Arc de Triomphe or the Marble Arch, topped by twin statues of a youth and maiden marching forward arm in arm with a hammer and a sickle held aloft. (This was not the same statue as the one described earlier.) The central building resembled a Greek temple of the Periclean age and housed the exhibition depicting the whole history of USSR. Around this building in a complete circle were housed more than twenty other large buildings, fifteen of them depicting the history, art, industry etc. of each of the fifteen republics; of the balance one housed the Exhibition of the Academy of Science where at the moment were the models of the sputniks etc. used by the cosmonauts in their space flights; unfortunately it was not open to the public at the time of my visit. The other buildings were devoted to education, the professions, electronics, books etc. The R.F.S.S.R. the largest republic of all, had three separate structures all to itself! The architecture of each of the republic buildings mirrored the art and culture of that region. In the central courtyard enclosed by the above buildings were numerous fountains, statues and flower beds. This was called the Park of Friendship.

I had just time to visit the electronics and education buildings. We spent most time in the latter. We were shown round by special guides. Models of highly complicated electronic apparatus as well as more simple ones were on view, each and every model had been constructed by the trainee students in technical schools. Some of these models such as blood pressure apparatus, surgical instruments, lathes etc. were as good to look at as the commercial goods on sale in the shops.

A model of the latest development in education depicted the modern trend which was to concentrate all buildings from the nursery through kindergarten to primary and middle schools on one campus. Two such experimental schools were in existence at present, one near Moscow and the other in Tadzhikistan, a Central Asian republic. They were fully - residential schools; more and more of these residential schools were being built throughout the country.

We were also shown round an annexe containing models of nurseries and kindergartens, the nearest I ever got to seeing these institutions in the flesh! Here too the trend was to combine both



in one building or campus under one administrative Head. Child art was well represented. I tried to guess the age of the child artist of several pictures. I was almost invariably two years out, i.e., I thought he was 2 years older than he actually was ! They are an artistic race. Some of their educationists believed that all children have a congenital talent for drawing in some degree or other but it needed to be developed and guided aright. I wondered because in my own case I thought when I was eleven years old or thereabouts that I was a budding Picasso; and my parents had me taught art at one of the leading art schools in Colombo but I cannot now draw even a recognizable cat!

Though the drive back to the hotel took over half - an - hour and the lunch time traffic was very heavy in central Moscow, the hold ups were never as bad as in the western capitals.

I bought some caviare at the hotel restaurant to be taken to my son in London - 150 gm or approximately 5 oz cost me Rs. 20.

Dr. C. was most helpful and managed to get me through the line at the airport without my having to pay for my excess baggage. I was left with two roubles of Russian currency at the end. When I declared this, the Customs insisted that I spend it at the airport. There was no caviare to be bought. Two of us split a beer. I also bought a box of chocolates for my daughter - in - law in London with the balance. Dr. C. gave me a firm assurance before I left that I would be the guest of the Academy on my return to Moscow during the next weekend en route to Delhi, that he had reserved my room at the Hotel Warsaw from the 12th to 14th July and that a telegram had been dispatched to the Soviet Embassy in London informing them that I was an Academy guest and requesting them to issue me a visa without delay. Dr. C. refused three times to give me a letter to prove my credentials at the Soviet Embassy in London. When I got there three days later on a Monday morning, no telegram had been received ! I immediately wired back to the Secretary - General of the Academy of Science as well as to Dr. L. to attend to this without delay. I also took the precaution of telephoning to the Ceylon Embassy in Moscow from our High Commission in London and asked them to get cracking on the Academy. As a result of all these efforts at a cost of nearly £4 of my meagre resources, I eventually managed to get the visa after three trips to the Soviet Embassy and just 48 hours before my plane was due to leave for Moscow ! So much for Soviet efficiency!

Five Ceylonese engineers who had been training in USSR for one year were returning to Ceylon via London on the same plane. This was in order to enable them to fly Air Ceylon and save some foreign exchange but the added cost of the BEA flight from Moscow to London had obviously not been taken into account by some genius at home who had ordered this roundabout route to be taken by these trainees.



The plane was a Comet IV. It was as big as the IL 18 or the TU 104 but it was more noisy and vibratory than either. I also missed the coat hanger! The dinner was however very poor - a dry, overdone steak with wilted green peas and soggy frenchies, a vintage roll and a few half-ripe fresh apricots. I unfortunately put a triangle of Russian cheese wrapped in silver paper in my pocket with dire results. When I disembarked at London and put my hand in to get my passport out was all covered in a semisolid mass of cheese!

"Oh, we are very lax about such things now and that's why we get small-pox!"

This was amusing casualness, especially after the recent outbreak. Anyone could get in on the B.E.A. from a European city without a vaccination certificate even though he might have spent less than a week there and originally hailed from India or Pakistan!

There were three lines for passengers—one for British citizens, another for Commonwealth and the third for aliens. On the plane when the air hostess learnt after enquiry that I was a Commonwealth citizen, she said, "Oh, that's O.K.", and did not worry to look at my passport! We still have some privileges left in Britain. I hope my British friends have the same in Ceylon.

It was good to see my son after four years and his Bavarian wife and their baby, Miriam, aged five months for the first time. It was a great thrill for me to hold a grand child in my arms for the first time in my life.

I saw Snow's play, "The Master" at the Savoy. When the University of Ceylon is being criticised so severely by the Commissioners and Press, I wondered whether any of them were familiar with this play. It would show that University politics was a dirty game everywhere, even in Oxford and Cambridge. Snow does not spare the don and spoils the play. He hit hard and accurately, left and in the centre; he did not hold his punches. Foreign intrigues lashed into old ladies' waist parties compared with the white bangs of Cambridge!

I also saw a second play during my week in London "Oh, What a Lovely War" at Wyndham's. I thought it excellent propaganda for peace but poor theatre and rather dull, so much so that I fell asleep during the first Act!

I had one wonderful dinner at one of those small bistro French restaurants in Charlotte Street with very good French wine which I tasted with prolonged and animated relish after four long years. How incomplete any meal is without wine. Quite apart from improving the taste of the food, I always think it cultivates and

## CHAPTER 9

### London Interlude

I ASKED the British Immigration official whether he did not need my health certificate. The young man remarked:

"Oh, we are very lax about such things now and that's why we get small-pox!"

This was amazing casualness, especially after the recent outbreak. Anyone could get in on the BEA from a European city without a vaccination certificate even though he might have spent less than a week there and originally hailed from India or Pakistan!

There were three lines for passengers—one for British citizens, another for Commonwealth and the third for aliens. On the plane when the air hostess learnt after enquiry that I was a Commonwealth citizen, she said, "Oh, that's O.K.," and did not worry to look at my passport! We still have some privileges left in Britain. I hope my British friends have the same in Ceylon.

It was good to see my son after four years and his Bavarian wife and their baby, Mirani, aged five months, for the first time. It was a great thrill for me to hold a grand child in my arms for the first time in my life.

I saw Snow's play, "The Masters" at the Savoy. When the University of Ceylon is being criticised so severely by the Commissioners and Press, I wondered whether any of them were familiar with this play. It would show that University politics was a dirty game everywhere, even in Oxford and Cambridge. Snow does not spare the don and spoil the play. He hit hard and straight, left and in the centre; he did not hold his punches. Peradeniya intrigues faded into old ladies' whist parties compared with the whizz bangs of Cambridge!

I also saw a second play during my week in London "Oh, What a Lovely War" at Wyndham's. I thought it excellent propaganda for peace but poor theatre and rather dull, so much so that I fell asleep during the first Act!

I had one wonderful dinner at one of those small bijou French restaurants in Charlotte Street with very good French wine which I tasted with prolonged and animated relish after four long years. How incomplete any meal is without wine. Quite apart from improving the taste of the food, I always think it enlivens and



invigorates the conversations. We Ceylonese have yet to learn that a good dinner not only means good food but also lively and witty talk.

I saw many of my friends at lunch at Great Ormond Street. I had dinner with Dr. Martin Bodian and his wife at their home in Hampstead. They had two of their friends to meet another Ceylon Professor and myself after dinner. The man was a successful company director and the conversation drifted on to the inevitable Profumo-cum-Keeler affair which was at that time rocking the British Cabinet badly. Bodian's friend was very scathing about the lowering of the moral standards in politicians of the top rank and thought that the whole country was going to the dogs! Bodian, who was an Austrian refugee from the Nazi terror, had lived in England since the thirties and was more English than most Englishmen. I knew for a fact that he had refused much more lucrative posts in American Universities because he loved the British way of life and he stood up to his friend with all his might and main and spared no punches. When things were getting really hot, Mrs. Bodian very adroitly turned the conversation to me and said, "Professor de Silva, we would like to know very much what you think".

I said that it must be borne in mind that in very few countries in the world would public opinion have been so strong as to force a resignation from a Cabinet minister on a seamy sexual episode. The untruth he uttered in order to wriggle out of it would not have been considered sufficiently blameworthy of such a punishment. It spoke very highly for the standard of British morals that this resignation was forthcoming as soon as the facts became patent.

They were also interested in my Leningrad friend's Y's, anglo-philism (see page 159). Bodian was very impressed with that story.

Within three months of my return to Ceylon Bodian was dead of a stroke. He was a very good friend and fond of Ceylon where he had been two years ago as chief guest at the annual meeting of the Ceylon Paediatric Association. May God rest his soul.

My week in London sped like a comet and I was back in Moscow before I could realise how lucky I had been to see my son and his family for even so short a time but it was a real heart-rend to say goodbye to Mirani and her parents at London Airport. When will I see them again?

## CHAPTER 10

**Weekend in Moscow****TWENTY-NINTH DAY:**

AS soon as I landed at Moscow Airport, I saw Dr. L. awaiting me, dressed in a bright green open shirt and jacket and carrying his *vade mecum* brief case. A very long delay ensued at the Customs and Dr. L. was too timid to ask permission from the commissionaire at the door to come inside and speak to me. No one instructed me what I should or should not do at the customs. Tremendous confusion prevailed due to lack of adequate staff. After waiting about forty minutes, I asked the commissionaire myself for permission to allow Dr. L. to come inside and help me to explain to the Customs official that I was a guest of the Academy. Once that penetrated his skull, it was plain sailing.

When I gave the porter who carried my bags up at the hotel 40 kopeks (over Rs. 2/-) as a tip, he gave me a most unpleasant stare! I did not know why because that was the amount that Dr. C. had asked me to give the porter when I left the same hotel a week earlier! He probably thought that I was a stingy capitalist trying to save money!

I gave my friend the maitre d' hotel two tins of English cigarettes which I had bought on the plane. He was pleased as Punch and served us himself at dinner. I showed Dr. L. the book on Cybernetics for beginners that I had bought at Foyle's and he thought it very good. When I went to my room after dinner I had a very pleasant surprise when my T.V. friend came in and handed me 25 roubles in cash (Rs. 125/-) for my performance! I was told by Dr. C. not to expect more than 5-6 roubles.

However, I had been asked by a new Soviet journal to write an article for which they were willing to pay me about 25 roubles. I thought that this was for circulation in U.S.S.R. and I therefore wrote it for Soviet readers. I was somewhat critical of certain things which I have already mentioned in this Diary. Later on, after I handed in my script I was informed that it was for distribution in Ceylon and was to be translated into Sinhalese.

When I enquired about it on my return from London I was told that it had been rejected as unsuitable for publication! So what I lost on the swings, I gained on the roundabouts!



## THIRTIETH DAY:

I asked Dr. L. what was the average age of marriage in U.S.S.R. He said that it was about 23 years for both sexes, but I had noticed that very few students were married. He replied that with the exception of students, 23 was the average age. He himself had married at 22 years and our chauffeur that day who looked very young was already spliced at 23.

I asked him what the illegitimacy rate was. At first he confessed that he did not know; then he knitted his brows, thought for a moment or two and blurted out, "Very rare". If he did not know the rate, how did he know it was rare? He was suspicious of my question. Every woman who got pregnant out of wedlock had the right to legal abortion on that score alone, so illegitimate live births might very well be rare.

I asked him about anti-semitism; he denied its existence after Stalin's death. He informed me that one of the Vice-Presidents of the Council of Ministers of U.S.S.R. was a Jew and there were several others on the Central Committee of the Communist Party, though none were at present on the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. To quote from Menon's "The Flying Troika," "The Presidium of the Party is more important than the Council of Ministers: the former makes policy, the latter executes it." Dr. L. said that he himself had never personally encountered any difficulty because he was a Jew. He was quite content and satisfied or so he said but his general behaviour, attitude and reactions tended to show hidden fears and a sense of insecurity. Unlike Dr. C. or Y. in Leningrad who were Gentiles he was not willing to assert himself in order to get things done.

## THE ACADEMY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES

I visited the Academy of Medical Sciences that morning. It was housed as usual in a marble palace 'stolen' from a rich tycoon or an aristocrat. I met one of the Vice-Presidents, also an Armenian, very swarthy but pleasant looking with a charming smile. He had his left arm in a sling; he was just recovering from a Colles' fracture. I spoke about the doctors in our respective countries getting closer together. When doctors from U.S.S.R. visited Ceylon, the Medical or special Associations like the Paediatric, were not informed in time. As a result we lost the opportunity of more intimate contact. I suggested that once our Government accepted their nominees as guests of Ceylon, there should be the right of direct communication between their Academy and our Medical Associations. I was also told that according to the present cultural exchange agreement between U.S.S.R. and Ceylon, there was no provision for exchange of medical personnel!



He was not particularly interested in my suggestion for the establishment of a U.S.S.R. Institute for Tropical Medicine as the Academy of Medical Sciences was only interested in research and not in teaching! He was however not aware, up to that moment, of the existence of an Institute of Tropical Medicine for Research in Moscow. That was a surprising confession from a Vice-President of the Academy. It erupted almost unconsciously! That such an institute was functioning was told me by Professor Gromov, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Lumumba a few hours later. This made me suspect that very little co-ordination existed between different departments of even so august a body as the Academy of Medical Sciences!

### LUMUMBA UNIVERSITY AGAIN

After lunch we went to Lumumba University to meet Professor Gromov, the Dean of the Medical Faculty who looked too youthful for so responsible a post. He had very pleasant manners, and was highly intelligent and quick off the mark. He tried to speak in English sometimes but at others asked Dr. L. to translate for him. Fortunately two Ceylon students turned up after a few minutes and it was then plain sailing with the interpretation. I was very impressed with the ease with which they translated from English to Russian and vice-versa. I was visiting Lumumba a second time for the purpose of enquiring what they intended doing about tropical medicine. The Dean informed me that they proposed to invite visiting lecturers and professors from abroad for short periods at a time. They had already invited a Professor of Tropical Medicine from Brazil. He also told me that it had been suggested that the students in the clinical years (the first batch was due to commence these in September 1963) spend one month in each of the three clinical years in hospitals in Odessa which encountered cases of tropical diseases in sailors etc.

I asked him about tropical paediatrics. He had not considered this problem though it has now reached international status and has a journal of its own as well as text books. He noted my question for future study but agreed with me that what they had done regarding adult medicine should also be followed in paediatrics.

A heated argument then occurred between the Dean and Dr. L. on one side and me on the other regarding the medical curriculum for Soviet medical students. I had been told at Tashkent (page 190) and at Leningrad that all medical students at the end of the second year could trifurcate into one of three branches of study. (1) Therapy which included medicine, surgery, obstetrics and specials (2) Paediatrics (3) Sanitation and Hygiene. This information was also given to the Dean of the Medical Faculty, University of Ceylon when he visited U.S.S.R. as a member of a



W.H.O., visiting team of medical educationists in 1962. There had also been reports to the same effect in the English journals. This assertion by me was hotly denied by the Dean and Dr. L. who gave their own personal experiences. They had specialised only at the end of the fifth year! They alleged that I had misunderstood what I had been told or that the interpretation was not correct. I said both were impossible as I had checked back on what I had written and no one disagreed with it. After the ball had crossed the net back and forth several times, the mystery was solved. They admitted that there were certain Institutes of Medical Education e.g., Institute of Paediatrics, Tashkent where the students were allowed to trifurcate at the end of the second year but the majority did not permit this. So it boiled down to the fact that there were two parallel systems of medical education in existence at the moment in the Soviet Union.

A. *General Medicine*, where every student followed the same course throughout the six years with the proviso that if he so wished, he could do research or study one special subject of his choice more intensively in the last one or two years, but the systematic lectures and other teaching given him were the same as for the rest of his class. The Dean was not sure of his figures but said that approximately 75% of the medical students of U.S.S.R. followed this course.

B. A minority of about 25% followed the early *trifurcated course* from the end of the second year.

I informed the Dean that medical schools abroad were not aware of this dual system and most authorities believed that only the second curriculum was in operation in U.S.S.R. This to my mind was a serious misapprehension and should be corrected. The Dean gave me the impression that he could not care less what the rest of the world thought!

After a shopping expedition in the afternoon, I had dinner by myself and ordered some vodka; when the waitress asked me how many grammes I wanted, I said 200. I wish I had not! It made me quite dizzy and upset my alimentary system for several days; I went straight to bed at 8 p.m.

### THIRTY-FIRST DAY:

I slept for over 10 hours but got up feeling awful, off my food and headachy. At 10 a.m. when Dr. L. was due, he rang up to say his mother had died but that he would be with me at 12 noon. I asked him whether he wished to be released but he said not. Later on I gathered that it was not his mother but a friend's mother who had passed away.



We visited the Lenin Mausoleum. It was a Sunday, bright and warm, and the queue was over a mile long but it was moving slowly and continuously all the time. Dr. L. actually plucked up enough courage to ask a couple of policemen for special permission for us to crash the queue as I was an Academy guest. This permission was readily granted. We were inside in ten minutes as we were not ushered in immediately but had to join it somewhere in the middle but nearer the head than the tail. I have described the external appearance of the mausoleum earlier so I will not repeat it here. A couple of large permanent wreaths were standing up against the outer wall and a sentry was at attention on each side of the main entrance. The whole building was air-conditioned. All talking ceased as soon as one got within the portal and even whispering was immediately suppressed by Sh-Shs! Soldiers in uniform and standing at attention were placed at frequent intervals as one descended several steps down to the main chamber containing the body of one of the world's greatest men ever. A soldier was seated at his head and another at his feet and several others were standing round about him. The coffin was lidless; the body was floodlit, especially the face and hands. The dead marble-white skin was the most amazing thing about the whole fantastic spectacle. The hands were delicate and refined like those of a pianist. Yet those fingers had doomed so many to untimely oblivion—rightly or wrongly, history might or might not reveal which. The fingers of the right hand were semi-flexed; those of the left and both elbows were extended; the face was mask-like with the eyes shut but Lenin looked not dead but asleep. What struck me most was the atmosphere of deep reverence shown by everyone, even small children. No one was allowed to stand still for one moment; no one could even whisper, some women were shedding silent tears, the children looked frightened but every one including myself felt that this was Holy Ground. I was informed that there was a special Research Institute with full-time scientists working on methods to preserve the life-like appearance of Lenin's body!

On emerging from the Tomb, we walked immediately outside the Kremlin wall where the plaques and graves of the Heroes of the Revolution were. There were two or three busts to the first President of the U.S.S.R., SVERDLOV, who Dr. L. took pride in informing me, was a Jew. I had always thought that KALININ, who was also represented here, had been the first President. I saw the simple grass-topped grave of Stalin with a headmount but no bust, as lesser men had, but a border of fresh flowers surrounded the simple grave. Some of the visitors did spare a moment in awe, if not in reverence, before his place of rest.

We had to hurry across the Kremlin grounds as we had to enter the Orudjeinaia Palata, one of the Kremlin Palaces, for a



exposition of the crown jewels, etc. at 2.30 p.m. On our way we passed a small quadrangle with six separate churches grouped round the sides of it. Each one had a different type of architecture suggesting its construction in a different century to the others. We visited two of them. The first was Archangelski church which had primitive paintings on the walls reminiscent of the Sieneese school of painting. It also contained an elaborate gilt screen separating the chancel from the nave. Several sacrophagi containing the remains of Tsars prior to Peter the Great were here; the later ones were buried at the Peter and Paul Fortress at Leningrad. The Archangelski church had also been the coronation church of the Tsars.

At the small but exquisite Blagoveschenski church on the opposite side of the square there was the same profusion of frescoes and paintings but of a much later and of a more interesting period than those in the previous one.

The collection of crown jewels, etc. at the Orudjeinaia Palace was unique. I had been very kindly given the tickets by the woman at the service bureau at my hotel though she had got them for herself and a friend; when she learnt that it was my last day in U.S.S.R., she sacrificed them willingly for me saying, "Your need is greater than mine".

Each Tsar had a new crown made when he ascended the throne; unlike the British, the new Sovereign did not wear the last one's crown; it was just not done. Thanks to this extravagant habit, we had the privilege of seeing the finest collection of crowns concentrated in one glass case and in no other country have I seen so scintillating a display of precious stones in so small a space. This collection was very much larger than the corresponding one at the Tower of London. In the same room several thrones were grouped together: many gifted from foreign rulers like the Sultan of Turkey, the Shah of Persia and a Moghul Emperor of India. The craftsmanship on most of these was intricate and exquisite. Regal and ducal robes were as common as toppers at Ascot. Golden Bible cases and caskets, richly embedded with precious stones of every hue and colour and delightful enamel-painted cameos were the finest and the most numerous of any collection I have seen. The same went of course for the Ikons but that was no more than what one expected. Numerous examples of saddlery and Royal coaches, made and painted by masters from many lands—England, Germany, France and Italy were represented here. This collection again was far bigger and finer than the one at Buckingham Palace. One large room was filled with enormous show cases, each of which held gifts received at various times from a particular foreign country. Sweden's gifts were the costliest and finest. There were rich presents from England, France, Germany, Turkey,



Italy and Holland. Lastly a whole room was filled with chasubles, mitres and other garments of priests and bishops inlaid in real gold, pearls and precious stones. Each must have weighed half a ton! How any priest or bishop could concentrate on the Holy Writ while dressed in this heavy armour beat me! Each must have been worth a fortune!

The whole collection was glittering and unforgettable. It was well-arranged and displayed. I have seen some collections as large as this one at the Sultan's Palace, Istanbul, but the latter was so badly displayed that it lost its attraction. Nowhere in the forty odd countries that I have visited have I seen such a vast array of regal and priestly paraphernalia—so varied, so brilliant, so memorable as in this palace. The whole world should feel a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude to the Soviet Government for the care it lavishes on these unique and historic *objets d'art*. Though the system of government is antagonistic to all that monarchy and priesthood imply, yet these items of historic interest are cared for as lovingly as if they were children, born of their own flesh and blood. That is a good lesson to some of us who wish to destroy the monuments of foreign rulers. I believe it was Nehru who once said that it was only an uncivilised nation that destroyed historical monuments, when it disagreed with the policies and ideologies of its past rulers. Whether we like it or not, these monuments are a part of our indelible history and whatever the future may hold, the past cannot be forgotten and cast away like a worn-out sarong!

Dr. L. assured me that the Exhibition of Economic Achievements would be open after 7 p.m. but when we got there, every pavilion was closed for the day! This again was evidence of the casualness of the Soviet citizen. Dr. L. had only to telephone or to make some enquiries at the hotel. It was a long way to the Exhibition from my hotel and it was such a waste of time and energy on my last evening in the country! Though there were many booths selling coffee, ice-cream, fruit juices, etc. there was not one anywhere on the grounds where I could get a glass of tea!

Though we got to the airport more than an hour before the TU 114 was due to leave for Delhi, there were about eight people in front of me in the queue for Passport Control. Dr. L. at last showed some guts and came inside. The TU 114 was up to that time the largest passenger plane in existence. It held 220 passengers and was a double decker. There were six seats in a row with a centre aisle. Thus it was the widest plane I have travelled in so far. The engines were revved six times before we eventually took off. I thought the plane was much noisier and less comfortable than the IL 18; there was no coat hanger and the lamp was in the wrong place for reading with the seat tilted back.



Two hours after the take-off we were served with supper at 2.30 a.m.—caviare, roast chicken with two vegetables plus bread, butter, cake and lemon tea. My stomach was so upset that the sight of food revolted me. All that lovely caviare had to be returned uneaten! About 6.30 a.m. a full breakfast was served with caviare and Kabob! I had coffee instead of tea and a little of the Kabob but could not stand the sight of the caviare! What a waste! I could not recollect any other airline except the Air India International that was so lavish with their meals as Aeroflot!

At dawn I had a magnificent view of the Himalayas with the early morning sun shining on the peaks, but it lasted for a very short time only as the plane flew at over 600 miles an hour. Forty minutes before landing at Delhi we were asked to fasten our seat-belts! I was getting nervous because we were flying blind through cloud. We were half-an-hour late on schedule but had a perfect landing.

## CHAPTER II

### Some Medical, Scientific and Educational Matters

#### THE FIRST INSTITUTE OF PAEDIATRICS, TASHKENT.

THIS was the first assignment of professional interest that I had in USSR. I was given by Professor Alexandrava a fairly detailed account of the curriculum of the medical student at Tashkent.

*In the first grade* - Courses of physics, chemistry, including organic chemistry, as well as of general anatomy and physiology were followed for one year, at the end of which an examination was held.

*In the second grade* - General anatomy and physiology were continued. In addition biochemistry and microbiology were introduced.

*The total hours spent on anatomy including those on dissection amounted to less than 600 hours and on physiology, 250 hours.* The student during these two grades was also obliged to study one foreign language for 220 hours which included a course of Latin. She could opt to follow these courses in the medium of Uzbek or of Russian but more students preferred to do it in the latter medium than in the former.

*In the third grade* - Courses in epidemiology, general pathology and pharmacology were given; also an introductory course on diseases of children including social paediatrics.

Therapeutics was divided into two parts, taught separately by different teachers - general therapeutics and paediatric therapeutics.

(Therapeutics should be translated as internal medicine rather than as *materia medica*). Paediatric anatomy and physiology courses were also continued throughout this year.

There was also an introductory course of paediatric surgery with lectures and practice for ten months.

A State Examination was held at the end of the third grade. The student might be referred in individual subjects or fail the whole examination. In either case he had the right to repeat the examination in part or in toto as necessary. The examination was held twice a year.

*Fourth, Fifth and Sixth grades* - Surgery, including both general and specials like neuro-, cardio - thoracic, orthopaedic etc.



Therapeutics, i.e. internal medicine in adults.

Paediatrics (Clinical).

Neurology.

Infectious Diseases.

Experimental Surgery.

Topographical Anatomy

Psychiatry.

Ophthalmology and E.N.T.

Hygiene – general, school and industrial for two years.

Obstetrics and gynaecology for two years.

Newborns including pathology.

*In the fourth grade, the students also practised as nurses in city clinics once a week throughout the summer.*

*In the fifth grade they acted as assistant doctors and in the sixth as associate doctors, under supervision for six weeks.*

These assignments in the 4th – 6th grades are to the best of my knowledge and belief unique and are not followed in any medical school in Western or Asian countries.

During the first four years the students were obliged to attend courses of lectures on *Communism and its history as well as on political economy for nearly 400 hours!*

The stipend that a student received depended on the results of the examination. Each might range from 20R to 100R (Rs. 100 – 500) per month. In the first grade each started with 20 – 25 R and this was increased or not each year according to the results of the examinations.

The student in his final two years might also join a *special research circle*. This was entirely voluntary. At the end of each year there was a conference at which papers were presented by the students on their research. The best works were rewarded and the best were selected for post graduate research posts.

In this Institute with eighty children's beds the following staff was available.

- 1 Professor,
- 2 Assistant Professors,
- 2 Dozents,
- 5 Assistants,
- 2 Doctors doing post graduate training for higher examinations after five years work in the suburbs,
- 3 Post graduate students.
- Consultants – 5 Internists
  - 1 Radiologist.
  - 1 Physiotherapist.
  - 1 Clinical pathologist.
  - 1 E.C.G. technologist.

Admission to the medical Institutes throughout the Soviet Union is by competitive examinations taken at the age of 17 years. It is a written examination and the subjects are Marxism, biology and a foreign language.

### INSTITUTE OF PAEDIATRICS, KIEV

My appointment was with Professor Helena Nicolina Khohol, the senior Professor of Paediatrics at Kiev. She was a Correspondent Member of the Academy of Medical Science, which was the penultimate stage before one donned the full regalia of an Academician. She worked at the Kalinin Hospital. Her unit had eighty beds, very close to one another in small rooms containing six - ten beds each. The children were segregated according to age and sex, under threes and over threes. Even in the younger age group there was strict segregation according to sex. When I asked why, they only smiled as much as to say you should know! The services of twelve full-time teachers plus fifteen practitioners doing part time research were available for these eighty patients.

Professor Khohol showed me three patients with chronic cholecystitis (inflammation of the gall bladder) which she claimed was common in children. It was caused by the *Giardia lamblia*, a protozoal organism very commonly present in the intestines of children in all countries. Besides the *Giardia*, she also thought that the *B. Proteus*, a bacillus very resistant to all antibiotics, *Salmonellae* and *Escherichia coli* might also cause this inflammation of the gall bladder. The disease was milder than in adults. Jaundice was not commonly seen; the temperature was only slightly raised but abdominal pain and colic were severe especially over the liver which was enlarged; sometimes the gall bladder could even be palpated; vomiting and loss of appetite were often present.

It could only be diagnosed by introducing a duodenal tube with magnesium sulphate and collecting a specimen of bile which was then cultured. In addition a dye test and X-rays (cholecystogram) had to be performed for confirmation. Recurrences might occur for over one year. Treatment was with magnesium sulphate, mineral waters and antibiotics like chloramphenicol and streptomycin.

I was not at all convinced with this description nor with her evidence evinced by X-ray studies but it was a problem worth further study. Later, after returning home I read a report of four similar cases from U.S.A. in the Year Book of Pediatrics (1962/63) which suggested that Professor Khohol had stumbled on to something which had probably been undiagnosed by most of us. When I told Professor Khohol that I had probably seen only one case



of this condition in a child, she promptly replied that it was due to my not having investigated my cases in a correct manner. This might or might not be the explanation. As Professor Sydney Gellis, the editor of the Year Book, rightly remarks, "Owing to the old saw, fat, fair and forty drummed into our ears since childhood, the diagnosis of acute cholecystitis is usually not even entertained in the infant or young child. However, the correct diagnosis preoperatively raises the physician not only in the eyes of his confreres and the family but is followed, and rightly so, by a moderate degree of hydrops of his own ego".

Since 1955, Professor Khohol has treated 30 cases a year of gastro-enteritis without a single death. In other clinics the fatality rate has been less than 1% for a total of 300 cases; for the whole of Kiev, the death rate from this disease has been 0.9%.

Though her incidence was relatively higher than for corresponding centres in U.K. and Western Europe, the death rates were comparable. A large number of cases of rheumatism and rheumatic fever were also seen in the ward. She explained this high incidence by saying that her clinic had a special reputation for treatment of rheumatic fever and cases were referred to her from all over the Republic. However, the same could be said for the Hospitals for Sick Children in London, Boston or Stockholm, yet the number of cases I saw in those places was much less than that seen at Kiev.

## INSTITUTE OF PAEDIATRICS, LENINGRAD

Professor Tour was specially interested in haematology. His unit had a total admission of 1000 patients a year. One third of Tour's cases were suffering from diseases of the blood like haemophilia. He had, like us, used ground nuts in its prophylaxis, a treatment first discovered and published by Professor van Creveld's group at Amsterdam. Ground nuts were, however, difficult to obtain in USSR. There were no cases of Thalassaemia or haemoglobinopathies (diseases due to the presence of abnormal types of haemoglobin). Tour agreed with S-g that the cases of acute leukaemia in childhood were most frequently haemocytoblastic and myeloblastic but not lymphoblastic. This is the Cold War between East and West and I believe it is due to a difference of interpretation of the same kind of cell. Tour said that the average period of survival for his cases of acute leukaemia in children was 2-2-1/2 years. There were several cases of Hodgkin's disease and various types of anaemia including hereditary spherocytosis and Fanconi's anaemia. Tour had used the androgenic hormones for the last, an American suggestion from the Harvard group, with as disappointing results as we found ourselves. Nephritis, Tour thought, was getting commoner due to the early discharge of patients after scarlet fever.



He also confirmed that the round worm was the commonest helminth found in Leningrad but the threadworm (pin-worm), the whip worm and *Giardia Lamblia* were also relatively frequently encountered.

I asked him about any special research done in his unit and expressed a wish to look round his laboratories. At first he said he would; then at the end he stated that they were under repairs and there was very little to see. However he invited his laboratory staff, all women, to meet me. One group was working on the biochemistry of the blood cell in leukaemia. They had found significant differences in the electrophoretic pattern of serum protein fractions during the course of leukaemia. Blood tryptophane, was increased during the acute phase of leukaemia but decreased in the terminal. The significance of this finding was quite mysterious.

Another group was working on the antibodies found in various blood diseases such as haptoglobulins, anti-leucocytic and anti-erythrocytic antibodies, all very highly complicated substances but no one was very clear about the practical importance or application of these discoveries to clinical medicine!

A third group was working on renal diseases; erythropoietin activity and its correlation with disease was being studied. I have a feeling that this was the same as renin.

Tour's was the first clinic that I have seen in this country where the individual beds were reasonably widely separated from one another. There was no crowding together as at Tashkent and Kiev.

Each child had a separate partitioned cubicle with barrier nursing. There was no shortage of nurses here as at Kiev. Professor Khohol told me she had one nurse to twenty child patients, which ratio was much worse than that found at the Children's Hospital, Colombo.

### THE FIRST INSTITUTE OF PAEDIATRICS MOSCOW

The First Institute of Paediatrics was forty years old. This was a non-teaching hospital reserved only for research. *There was this strict segregation of teaching from research in Medicine throughout the USSR.* I did not see the point of this and in my opinion no one could be an outstanding teacher who did no research. The reverse was not true. The Director, Prof. Studenikini, a mild-mannered man near the point of retirement, informed me that there were 170 scientists and a total of 1000 persons on his staff! The Institute comprised two dozen departments. He enumerated them for me and wished to know which I would be interested in. I told him



that I would like to see the newborn and premature units, the departments of haematology and functional diagnosis and the polyclinic or O.P.D.

I also asked about my friend, Prof. Ponomariova, and about Dr. Fateeva who had worked on "Bee Milk" (Royal Jelly) for malnourished infants. The latter informed me at a conference later that there was a special *Institute of Knowledge of Bees* (that was how it was translated to me by Dr. L.) in a small provincial town in R.F.S.S.R. where this milk has not only been extracted from bees but also synthesized! This preparation was first used in Algeria in the treatment of Kwashiorkor (= protein deficiency syndrome) for increasing weights by one kg. per month in these undernourished and malnourished infants and young children. This work was also reported on at an International Congress on Bees in Agricultural Technology in Madrid in 1961. In London, the late Dr. Martin Bodian, informed me that the Japanese had reported on its use several years ago. Apparently the Soviet workers, like myself, were unaware of this. Bee Milk's special function was to increase catabolic activities and thereby enable the bee to ingest more food. It has been known that the bee larva increased 400 times in size in a very short period of time. This was the rationale for its use in human beings. In infants, up to three years of age, it was introduced rectally. After that age it was given as a lozenge to be sucked, not swallowed, three times a day for ten-fourteen days. After a rest of one week, a second course of a similar duration was given.

Bee's milk also increased appetite. Good effects with regard to weight increases were observed after two courses but no effect on heights was obtained; there were no contra-indications. The only complications were irritation of the mucous membrane of the rectum and rarely of the mouth. If I wanted to use it for research I could apply to the Ministry of Health for it. It was not available for sale. Since my return to Ceylon, I have applied for a supply but have had no reply to my letter though it is now over eighteen months since I first wrote.

The Premature Unit was well-run and organised though each infant was not strictly isolated in a separate cubicle. Breast milk was used as routine, unlike in USA but like in UK and Ceylon. They extracted milk from mothers with excess and gave it to babies whose mothers had none. Breast milk was also collected at clinics outside but there was no payment made for it and it was given free to those who needed it. They were very surprised when I told them that I gave vitamin D to my prematures on the fourth or fifth day of life, and Iron soon after by injection. They did not give the former till a fortnight and the latter till two months after birth! They promised to try my methods! I wondered! The



premature infants in the nursery had all been transported there from other clinics. *The nurses were not wearing masks.* We were allowed in wearing rather unclean white gowns taken from a dark cupboard at the entrance. I had a suspicion that they had been used before because they went back to their original abode on our departure! They were not enamoured of the continued drip method of feeding prematures which I had found unsatisfactory too but which has gained popularity in some American centres. They put the infant on the breast when he reached 4 lbs. in weight but they also considered other criteria like temperature, movements, ability to suck etc. This was more or less the same routine as we followed at home. At the end of the premature unit we saw a room full of gossiping mothers. I asked what happened to their other children while they stayed in hospital. Only one mother had another child; the rest were primiparae. The former told me that she had left hers with the grandmother – Babishchka – a lovely Russian word. If there was no babishchka, a mother could always use one of the nurseries or kindergartens which were there in abundance.

I had a long session with Prof. Ponomariova. She was nearly 75 years old but as active as a race-horse. Her speciality was rheumatology and she ran a well-organised unit. Some overcrowding could be seen as well as segregation of sexes after two years of age.

Her lines of treatment for rheumatic fever and heart disease were orthodox. She had a special room and staff for physiotherapy as well as for dentistry in the unit itself but none for clinical pathology. She had divided her patients into four grades during convalescence from rheumatic fever, according to the length of time that had elapsed since the outset of the illness. At the end of the fourth grade, she sent the patient to a sanatorium for three months. On return, he was followed at the polyclinic here. She was not in favour of penicillin given orally for prophylaxis but had used it intramuscularly. The whole unit breathed an atmosphere of strict asepsis as well as of warm humanity. One could sense a feeling of fellowship between staff and patient and I have no doubt that this was in large measure due to the professor's leadership. She was a very humane person. She presented me with an autographed copy of a book containing reprints of all the papers published from here clinic. It was unfortunately in Russian and there was not even an abstract in English or any other foreign language!

The female haematologist was adamant about the Russian viewpoint *vis a vis* the Western that the acute leukaemias in children were haemocytoblastic and not lymphoblastic. This was the view that Prof. Alexiev himself held some years back but had changed



now. They used peroxide stain diluted one hundred times the usual strength and obtained positive staining reactions with these controversial cells. Does this dilution make a difference? I saw the cells, first stained with Leishman's which I was quite sure were lymphoblasts but they gave a positive reaction with this diluted peroxidase stain suggesting that they were myeloblastic! She was on stronger grounds on her second point that she did not find the transitional types of cell from the lymphoblast to the large immature lymphocyte to the small immature lymphocyte to the small mature lymphocyte. According to the Russian text books of Haematology, one of which she showed me, what she called a haemocytoblast was the precursor of the myeloblast but not of the lympho- nor of the monoblast. This again was different from the American and British haematologists' points of view. We promised to exchange slides of bone marrow and blood as this controversy was extremely interesting and significant from an academic point of view though not from a practical or clinical one.

## A MATERNITY DISTRICT HOSPITAL IN TASHKENT

All expectant mothers were registered in the second or the third month of pregnancy by midwives at antenatal clinics. In the first half of gestation the mothers attended the clinic once a month, where their urines, blood pressures, haemoglobin estimations, pelvic measurements and weights were recorded. *They also saw a dentist and an internist at the first visit and if necessary at subsequent ones.* In the second half of pregnancy the midwife in charge was expected to visit the mothers in their homes once a fortnight.

The average weight gain during pregnancy, a reliable index of good nutrition was 8-10 kg. the same as in UK or USA. The incidence of toxæmias of pregnancy appeared to be considerably less than in these countries. *I asked for figures but these were not available.* The average weight of a newborn baby was about 6-1½ lb. (nearly 3 kg.) which was less than in Western Europe and USA and almost the same as in Colombo.

The incidence of prematurity on the world standard of 2500 gm. was 2.5% which was one-third to one-quarter of the incidence in the U.K. or USA, respectively. The average for the whole of USSR was 7%. 2.5% was therefore difficult to believe as the average birth weight was less than in the West and if this were so, one naturally expected the incidence of prematurity to be higher, not lower.



The mothers were kept in the hospital till the eighth or the ninth day; all of them were breast-feeding their infants when they left the clinic and the average duration of breast-feeding was five to six months – that is, longer than in the West. *The midwife was expected to visit the mother at home at least once a week during the first month after labour.* In case of illness, the infant was kept at home and attended by a doctor as well as by the midwife. The diet advised for a mother during pregnancy in Tashkent was interesting. She was expected to drink a litre of milk a day (which would cost her Rs. 1/50) during the second half of her pregnancy. *She was to take meat and fish only once a week.* Rice was the staple food with beans and peas and plenty of fruit. During the winter these consisted of dried apricots, apples, raisins and figs. Cucumbers and melons were taboo during pregnancy as well as during lactation. The reason for this was obscure and was probably traditional.

Abortions were performed once a week in this clinic, approximately ten were done weekly. 4000 *legalised abortions a year* were performed in Tashkent alone. One could only guess the number of criminal abortions but they were not likely to be less than the legal ones. Therefore, a minimum of 1-1/2-2 million total abortions a year occurred in USSR for a total population of 220 millions. It has been estimated by the National Academy of Science, U.S.A., that a minimum of six million abortions a year and possibly double that number took place in U.S.A., in 1962! That is for a population which was slightly less than 200 million, an incidence at least four times and possibly eight times as high as in the USSR!

In other communist countries such as Poland there were 217,000 legal and many more illegal abortions. In Hungary 33,000, in Czechoslovakia 92,000 and in Yugoslavia 60,000 legal abortions were reported in 1961! In all three countries it was admitted that the number of illegal abortions was very much higher.

When a mother was admitted for delivery she had to proceed through three rooms. The first was an office which registered her name; the second a toilet where she scrubbed her nails and washed her hands; the third was the bath room where she was given a complete bath. She was then carried up the stairs by women on a stretcher. The wards were overcrowded and the beds very close to one another. There was a small premature unit with ten cots placed much closer together than was the practice in other countries; only two premature babies were there, one was a Mongol and the other had a huge naevus covering half his face.

The normal full-term infants were all swaddled tightly like mummies. I asked whether this was the general practice but was told that it was not so but I never saw any normal full-term left with his arms and legs free as was the general practice in our countries. This swaddling was continued for at least three days



if not longer. It was a very hot day when I visited a clinic at Tashkent and I would think that this practice was an exceedingly cruel and uncomfortable technique as far as the poor infant was concerned!

This was another of those curious paradoxes one saw so often in this puzzling country. It was traditional to wrap up babies from head to foot. They had done it for centuries and therefore they continued to do so due to pure and simple tradition and this in a country that had staged the greatest Revolution the world had ever seen!

Two newborns had unexplained rises of temperatures. I would not be a bit surprised if these were due to this over-swaddling! When I asked the doctors and nurses why they did this, the answer was that it was the Professor's wish and he had learnt it from his teacher and so on, a purely traditional habit. The Soviets could be most conservative and reactionary in many ways!

#### A CLINIC AT A TEXTILE MILL AT TASHKENT

We went to a Health Centre of a Textile Mill in Tashkent, the head of which was a man, Dr. A. Kamalov. The mill also ran a hospital in a separate place which unfortunately was not on my programme. At the clinic the proportion was one doctor to 875 children or 8 doctors in all for a total of 7000 children. In the first month of life, the doctor who was in charge of that district visited the mother and child three times; after that, the infant was brought once a month to this clinic. *If the mother did not attend at the expected time, she was immediately visited by the doctor.*

During pregnancy the mother was expected to work only during the morning shift after the third month. After five months she was given very light work and as mentioned earlier was placed on full-pay leave after the seventh month but *she was obliged to attend the school for pregnant mothers for four hours each week.* This was run by the clinic in order to teach her how to go through her labour with the minimum of pain and anxiety; how to carry out her physical exercises; how to prepare her breasts for lactation and how to feed her infant etc. The clinic was sited in a very large building. It was meant only for out-patients. They called this the Consulting Clinic and the hospital, the Therapy Clinic.

I saw two patients brought for consultation. One was an infant aged 4 months, born prematurely, who weighed 4-1/4 lbs. at birth. He was now quite strong and healthy but was still on the small side. He had already had his oral B.C.G. vaccination against T.B. on the 3rd, 5th 7th days of life. *All throughout this Republic oral B.C.G. in the first week of life was the routine method of prophylaxis.*

The other infant was a normal baby about 10 months old, weighing 17 lbs. 12 ozs. with height of 27". On British or American standards this would be about average.

We were next marshalled into the Director's room which had as is the custom throughout the country an enormous portrait of Lenin, stretching from wall to wall and placed directly above the chair of the chief occupant of the room. Only very occasionally did one see a portrait of Khrushchev or of any other Soviet leader.

Two walls of the room were studded with charts. These showed the incidence of the more common diseases from 1958 to 1962, year by year; the infant mortality rates which were a world's record, averaging about 2.45 per 1000 (the average for the whole of USSR is now about 30 against 24 for USA and 15 for Sweden). The figures at the mill however, were from a specially selected small group with an excellent child care service so they could be correct.

### Incidence of Various Disease Per 1,000

#### Children Only

Disease	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Lobar Pneumonia ...	105.0	63.0	45.0	36.0	52.0
Acute Diarrhoea ...	17.0	11.0	7.1	8.6	6.5
Diphtheria ...	5.0	1.0	0.5	0.1	Nil
Whooping Cough ...	32.0	21.0	3.0	0.9	0.5
Polio ...	0.8	0.8	0.3	0	0

Immunisation with triple vaccine was started on a mass scale only in 1958 but the remarkable decrease in the incidence of Whooping Cough did not occur till 1960, while the fall in the number of cases of Diphtheria commenced a year earlier.

Mass Immunisation against Polio with the oral vaccine was undertaken in 1958-1959. As may be seen on the above Table there has been a 50% decrease in the incidence rate of lobar pneumonia in children in the last five years, though there was a significant increase in 1962 as compared with 1961. This was probably due to the very severe winter of that year which was generalised throughout Europe. The incidence of infantile and childhood diarrhoeas has also decreased by nearly 60% in the same period. This more than most other statistics tends to prove the fact of sanitary progress in a population. We too in Ceylon could achieve the same results with an intensive programme of health education for the parents on the prevention and control of infantile diarrhoeas. We need in the next few years to concentrate more on the education



of the mother, almost more than on the treatment of the child. Many would disagree with that statement but the longer I work the more I am convinced that what our country needs above all in health matters is preventive medicine and what it needs above all in preventive medicine is health education.

## HOSPITAL FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN CHILDREN, LENINGRAD

Professor Libov's clinic had 140 beds and was called the Institute of Children's Infectious Diseases. The polio ward which was the largest has now been closed for want of cases. There were many cases of meningitis, encephalitis and epidemic hepatitis. Infantile and childhood diarrhoeas were becoming less common. The fatality rate for these disorders was 8.26% in 1949 but was only 0.69% in 1960. The incidence rate was over 200 per year in this one unit. The estimate for the three units would therefore be about 600. This was very high compared with western clinics but this fact was vehemently denied. Shigella and E. Coli variant infections were far commoner than Salmonellae, but there has been no epidemic in newborn nurseries in maternity hospitals. *Libov claimed that he obtained 80% positive bacterial cultures from the stools of his cases of infantile diarrhoeas provided that each stool every day was examined from each child as long as he remained in hospital. If they were examined for the first two days only, the percentage of positive cultures dropped to 30%. This figure of 80% was a world record and was scarcely credible.*

Libov told me that *schools for mothers existed in every hospital.* I had not heard of these earlier except with regard to antenatal clinics. The mothers at the former clinics were taught about health education in general, the prevention of disease and the care of the infant and child.

He introduced me to a new Russian antibiotic, Monomycin.

Scarlet fever was no more a public health problem though a few sporadic cases occurred each year.

Libov still recommended the use of Urotropine intravenously in the treatment of virus meningitis though this had been abandoned several years ago in western countries. There was a new Russian drug - Metacil which was given by mouth in meningitis. This was not yet available on the open market.

The results have been good after the use of measles vaccine. The cost of antibiotics was fantastically low on American and British prices. A full course of Tetracycline or Chloramphenicol for the treatment of a case of meningitis cost only one rouble (Rs. 5/-)

Libov was the first person who mentioned Royal Jelly to me. This was the same as Bee Milk or the food which was specially meant for the Queen Bee (See page 195).

It was claimed by the Russians that the virus of infective hepatitis was first isolated by one of their compatriots, Shubladze. No newborn hepatitis had been reported from USSR. I suspected that they had not heard of Bodian's work in London. All Russian scientists were agreed that there were only two infectious agents causing hepatitis.

- (1) Virus
- (2) Leptospira

### CITY CHILD HEALTH DEPARTMENT LENINGRAD

At the City Health Department the first female official I interviewed wished to enlighten me about the organisation of the Health Services. As time was short and fleeting I preferred to see the chief paediatrician attached to the city, Dr. Dhamgarova.

The infant mortality rate for Leningrad at 23/1000 was the lowest in the whole of USSR which according to her stood at 33. I had been given the figure of 30 elsewhere. These figures I guess, were pretty approximate!

No figures were available for newborn or for perinatal mortality (i.e., newborn deaths within 7 days of birth plus still-borns per 1000 total births). This was most surprising for a city of the size and reputation of Leningrad. The prematurity rate was 7% which was almost the same as Birmingham's (U.K.) and was much more credible than the very low rates given me at Tashkent and Kiev!

I was not given the maternal mortality rate but was told that there were 17-18 deaths for the whole of 1962. If one calculated the rate from the population of Leningrad and the birth rate (approximately 15%) the maternal mortality rate could be estimated at approximately 0.4/1000 which was just over two-thirds the rate for U.K. (at that time). This figure was certainly more feasible than the figure of 0.02/1000 given me at Kiev! There were no figures available for preschool mortality, i.e., between 1-5 years of age nor could I get any information regarding the percentage of children's deaths to total deaths.

The main causes of death in children were as follows in order of incidence.



1. Leukaemias
2. Congenital Malformations
3. Cancers
4. Pneumonia

There was only one death from rheumatism and none from nephritis for the whole of 1962.

Scarlet fever and measles were still very prevalent. 45,000 children up to 7 years of age were vaccinated against measles last year. This will be rapidly expanded in the near future. They had used the vaccine plus gamma globulin which reduced the number and severity of side reactions.

Six cases of poliomyelitis had been reported during 1962. *This was the first and only place in USSR where it was admitted that polio had not been completely eradicated.* A few cases of pulmonary tuberculosis were discovered between the ages of 14-19 years; B.C.G. vaccine was given intradermally in the first 3-4 days of life and repeated (1) between 2-3 years (2) at 7 years and (3) at 11 years. Five cases of bone and 200 cases of mild pulmonary tuberculosis up to 14 years of age had occurred in 1962. These were cases with enlarged bronchial glands, low temperatures, and positive Mantoux reactions without any positive lung changes radiologically. Leningrad also had 4 cases of tuberculous meningitis in 1962 with no deaths and no sequelae. The treatment was the same as in western countries. In spite of these figures no one will admit that childhood T.B. is still a public health problem!

There were approximately 1,250 beds for tuberculous children in sanatoria, 20% of these were for infants and children under three years of age. I cannot see how it can be denied, therefore, *that childhood tuberculosis is still a public health problem in Leningrad.*

#### DIARRHOEAS

These were fairly common. There were special clinics for the treatment of diarrhoeas, one of which I visited (page 201). E.coli variants were the principal cause. Shigella infections were also prevalent - 10/1000 population, which was very high when compared with figures for western cities. The occurrence of amoebiasis was denied.

*Intestinal Parasites*—The commonest age affected was the school-going; it was uncommon in the preschool period because the child was better supervised and controlled by nurses. Round worm infestation, a sign of poor personal hygiene, was a common occurrence in school children and every such child was treated with piperazine twice a year. On trying to investigate why round worm was so common, I learnt that human compost was used for

growing vegetables in the farms round the city. Infection with the *Giardia lamblia* was also common but the hookworm and whipworm were hardly ever encountered.

No cases of diphtheria have occurred for several years, mass immunisation was given at 6, 7 and 8 months of age and booster doses at 3, 7, 12 and 14 years respectively.

There were two methods of giving cod liver oil to infants as prophylaxis against rickets.

(1) *Kiev method* – 20,000 units in a capsule once a day for 10 days only.

(2) *Leningrad method* – 400 units daily for over three months. No opinion was expressed as to which method was superior. I certainly did not see any cases of rickets in the hospitals or clinics.

Some cereals were fortified with Vitamin D. Sometimes multi-vitamin drops were prescribed. These had to be purchased outside but like all drugs they were much cheaper than in other countries.

Breast milk was given almost universally up to the fifth month of age, after that fresh cow's milk. Dried or evaporated milks were seldom used. Ionic milk processed in laboratories with the addition of electrolytes is being experimented on at Leningrad and at Kiev.

Fruit juices were supplemented in the second month; cereals in the fifth and meat and fish in the eighth. These practices were no different from those recommended by trained paediatricians all over the world.

The average birth weight was 3.4 kg (7-1/2 lb) and the average weight at one year 10.5 kg (23 lbs). These were up to American standards. They were not applicable to the whole country but only to the city of Leningrad.

#### INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR ALEXIEV, A LEADING HAEMATOLOGIST OF MOSCOW

My appointment with Professor Alexiev, a leading haematologist in USSR was very stimulating. His name had been given to me by S-g in Delhi. S-g was definite that Alexiev agreed with her regarding our dispute about leukaemias in childhood but to my pleasant surprise Alexiev told me that he had now changed his mind and believed that what they called haemocy-toblasts were really lymphoblasts as the western haematologists had always claimed. Therefore the common form of leukaemia in childhood was the lymphoblastic. I said I was very glad to hear this because S-g and I have had many friendly battles about



this and it was a great day for me when S-g's teacher himself had been won over, not by me but by his own greater knowledge and experience. This confirmed my belief that this difference of opinion between the West and USSR was not due to a difference in the type of leukaemia seen in children but entirely due to a difference of interpretation of the same cell by the experts in their respective countries.

## THE INSTITUTE OF POLIOMYELITIS AND ENCEPHALITIS, USSR

The Institute was one of the activities of the Academy of Medical Sciences and comprised nine major sections, each of which had 3-9 laboratories each. It was started in 1955 with a staff of 700, including 170 fully - trained and qualified scientific workers. All the polio vaccine for the whole of USSR and for export to countries like Ceylon was produced on this campus. Two clinics were also held here, one for acute infections of the central nervous system and the other for rehabilitation. The main problems under study were (1) Poliomyelitis (2) Tick - borne encephalitis (3) Rabies which was found not only in dogs but rarely in wolves, foxes, particularly the Arctic variety, cats, jackals (in Central Asia) and cattle. We had had two deaths in Ceylon in children within a few days of ingesting the Sabin oral vaccine. Chumakov thought it most unlikely that these could be caused by the vaccine but could probably be due to another neurotropic virus (not polio) which the children were incubating at the time of vaccination. Of over 90 million persons vaccinated between the ages of 0-20 years in USSR, only 9 or 10 had died within weeks or months of the vaccination. None of them had had an early reaction within days. Every single death had had a fully autopsy with careful histological examination of the brain. *In not a single case was there any evidence of a viral infection.* One showed a sub-cortical purulent encephalitis due to a bacterium which had been cultured. I asked him its name but he had forgotten it!

After his long talk, he took me on a Cook's Tour round many of the laboratories. A distinguished - looking ageing woman morbid histologist informed me that in some of the late deaths after polio vaccination there were degenerative lesions of the brain which they were convinced antedated the vaccine and were not caused by it.

I was shown tissue cultures of different viruses under the microscope. The measles virus produced multi-nucleated giant cells and the monkey kidney virus, vesicular structures which were absent in normal controls. Charts were also demonstrated to show the comparative incidence of polio virus carriers in various age groups between fully - vaccinated, partly - vaccinated and



non - vaccinated persons. When I told Chumakov that I had brought some slides to illustrate the clinical picture of our polio epidemic cases in 1962, he was very interested and wanted to see them and made me deliver a lecture to the staff present in the Institute at the time.

Though I wanted to leave after my talk, my host insisted on taking me round the rest of the laboratories, which we had not visited before lunch. In one of them he spent about twenty minutes lecturing to me on the monkey virus, S.V. 40, and the measures they took to make absolutely certain that their polio vaccine was not contaminated with it. He also informed me that over 100 million Americans had been inoculated with Salk vaccine containing S.V.40 without any ill-effects whatsoever though their bloods showed raised antibody titres against this virus. I asked Chumakov whether the presence of S.V.40 interfered in any way with the antibody formation against the polio virus. He did not know and he did not think anyone had investigated this problem in U.S.A.

#### MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH, UZBEKISTAN

I was given an hour's interview with the Minister of Public Health - Dr. Magzumnov, a Master of Science. Actually I spent nearly two hours with him. I had written out a list of questions to which I wanted answers in order to save time but there was so much discussion about some of them that I could not get through the whole list. Also present at this conference were Professor Lydia Alexandrova whom I had already met and the Chief of the Department of The Preventive Paediatric Medical Institute, Professor Uldasneva and the chief paediatrician of the Ministry of Public Health who worked under the direction of Professor Uldasheva, Assistant Professor Nuritdinov.

The total number of medical institutes, medical schools in our parlance, was three in this Republic (Population = 10 million) at Tashkent, Samarkand and Andijav. Besides these, there was a separate Institute of Pharmacy and another for advanced training of doctors or what we would call a Post-graduate School of Medicine. *Five years after graduation, every doctor was obliged to follow a refresher course of training for four-six months in hospital and clinics.* These courses included a large number of didactic lectures. I could not ask whether there were any on Communism, its history, aims and ideology as there were for undergraduate medical students.

Independently of the above there were special postgraduate courses in this Institute for training teachers and research workers and specialists, not general practitioners. Apart from these, two year courses in the professorial units of the medical institute



were available for rural practitioners. *These were not obligatory but the participants were given full – pay leave, a stipend for food plus free hostel lodging for a period 2 years!*

Further, about fifty to sixty doctors were sent each year to Leningrad or Moscow. These were strictly selected on their academic records during their under-and-post-graduate days. The selection was made by the Minister of Health, on the recommendation of the Professor. *Curiously those sent to these famed cities were not the best students. These were kept for local training!* There were eighteen of the best doing paediatrics with Alexandrova. Those wishing to specialise in narrow fields like E.N.T., genito-urinary surgery, cardiology, neurology etc. were always sent to these distant centres. In these fields the best students were always sent. In the three medical institutes of Uzbekistan there were 11,000 students, these included 1,500 pharmacy students. Excluding these it would be seen that the number of medical students equalled the number of doctors at present in the field, so that within approximately ten years, allowing for deaths and retirement as well as for the rise in population there would be one doctor to every 5-600 of the population, a proportion only second to that of Israel which has 1 to every 350. It is now accepted that USSR has the second highest proportion of doctors to population in the whole world.

There were four Faculties in each Medical Institute.

1. Therapy which included general medicine, surgery and obstetrics.
2. Public Health
3. Paediatrics
4. Dentistry – these students studied all the subjects that a medical student did but at a lower level in addition to a very high-powered course on the teeth.

At these Institutes all the students in each of the four Faculties followed the same course of lectures for the first two years. They divaricated in the third year. In Moscow I learnt that this was not generally true for all medical students in USSR (page 184).

Five Professors of Paediatrics in Tashkent alone were working in the one medical institute but quite independently of one another. Each Professor had his or her own speciality, e.g., cardiology, rheumatology etc. There was even a professor of Paediatric Anatomy, with beds and patients of his own!

For six weeks in the last year of training, each student had three patients under his immediate care and control under supervision by the registrars etc. The assistant professor did a daily teaching

round and was available for six hours each week except when the professor herself did a full teaching round. Both of them might teach on the same patient.

Each student was expected to be in the ward for *six hours each day*. On two nights during this six weeks' roster, two or three students were provided sleeping accommodation. During any one time there were twenty to forty students. This was a heavy load on western standards but the number of tutors and intermediate teachers available was almost equal to those in American hospitals and far more than in the U.K. I am not competent to speak about W. European standards. I am detailing this training because the general belief among western medical teachers is that the course of training in USSR is superficial and didactic and not up to western standards. My impression was quite the reverse. As far as paediatrics was concerned the training was far better than in most medical schools that I have visited and equal to the best in U.S.A. or U.K.

#### FAMILY PLANNING

I had an animated discussion on contraception. No figures of either were available to me. Contraceptive methods recommended were the diaphragm, jelly and foam tablets in that order. They did not believe in oral contraceptives. A lentoric, female Professor of Gynaecology who was in charge of this programme of contraception argued with me that these oral preparations had been tried and found to be a failure in Czechoslovakia. On the contrary, I informed her, that they had been found to be highly successful in Ceylon. I promised to send her the relevant literature.

#### Vital Statistics

The infant mortality rate for Uzbekistan was 30 per 1000 live births. This compared with Ceylon's 52 and UK's 21, while Sweden's and Holland's was each only 15. The maternal mortality rate for the whole Republic was 0.9 against UK's 0.7 and Ceylon's 2.3/1000.

*There were no figures available for deaths in children over one year of age.*

It was claimed that the general death rate was only 6/1000 for Uzbekistan which must be one of the lowest in the world. Ceylon's today is 8.6, while UK's and USA's were higher still.

The percentage of children under 15 years dying to total deaths was nearly 39%. This was astonishingly high when compared with similar figures in the western countries, which were between 5-10%. This again made me suspicious about their children's death figures. If they were as low as claimed, then the proportion of deaths to total deaths could not have been as high as 39%!



The still-birth rate of 30 was also high when compared with that in advanced countries. No explanation was afforded but whenever a comparison was made with other countries, the immediate reaction was that their's (USSR's) was not higher or an insinuation was made that the foreign figures were not credible! Another bit of evidence for their national chip! For instance, I told the Minister that I had never seen so many cases of Bone and Joint Tuberculosis of children in any of the countries that I had visited. His immediate and violent reaction was to deny that this disease was any more prevalent here than in other countries. He also told me that Lung T.B. was commoner than Bone T.B. and reprimanded me for jumping to rash conclusions after seeing the number of patients in two sanatoria but both of these were full of patients and between them held over 800 patients and this for a population of about 15-20 million which they drew from was excessively high! No impartial observer could possibly come to any other conclusion. When I related this story to the authorities in Moscow, all they could tell me was that T.B. was not a Public Health problem in the USSR any more. I was not competent to express any opinion on that but I do maintain that if in Uzbekistan there are at any one time over 800 bone and joint T.B. cases and it admitted that Lung T.B. is commoner, then *to my mind it does remain a Public Health Problem in that Region!*

Has this anything to do with the universal practice in Uzbekistan of giving oral B.C.G. to newborns? In the Ukraine and Russia proper I found that the parenteral method was the more usual practice and T.B. much less common. The Minister also denied what I had been told in Samarkand that there was to be a change from the oral route to the other for B.C.G. vaccination in newborns.

I apologised to the Minister for taking up so much of his time. It was an interesting two hours. It was so stimulating to discuss these matters with a top policy maker who was also a technological expert and who did not have to refer all technical questions to experts nor was intellectually bovine about the subject under discussion!

## MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH, UKRAINE

### PAEDIATRICS IN THE UKRAINE

There were 15 medical schools or institutes in the Ukraine its population was over 40 million and it had an area of 230,000 square miles, over 9 times the size of Ceylon. Only 7 of the 15 medical institutes had Faculties of Paediatrics. The periods of study and curricula were the same as for the rest of the Soviet Union.

There were also three special Institutes for Higher Medical Education in post-graduate medical schools in which three types of courses could be followed.

- A. A six-month practical course in the Institutes.
- B. A two-year course working in clinics with paediatricians.
- C. A three-year special research course.

At the end of each a certificate or diploma was awarded which helped the holder to advance his career by enabling him to obtain a higher paid post. There were four Research Institutes for Paediatrics. 80,000 doctors were available for the population of 40 millions (one to every 500); 11,000 of these were paediatricians, i.e., more than one-eighth of the total or 1 paediatrician for 4000 of the total population which would approximate to 1 for every 1000 children under 15 years. I believe in the U.S.A. it is 1 to 10,000 of the same age group! Of 5000 medical students in training yearly, 800 are specialising in paediatrics, i.e., in six years' time even a higher proportion than what is in vogue at present would be in active practice. *Truly the child in USSR is a privileged person.*

I succeeded in getting information with regard to some of the common illnesses of children. The commonest were due to air-borne infections, e.g., influenza and adenoviruses; scarlet fever – 1.5/1000 of the total population, and respiratory infections of bacterial origin. The next commonest were intestinal diseases, especially alimentary dyspepsias which was a euphemism for acute gastro-enteritis. Typhoid fever was still not uncommonly encountered which meant that sanitation was probably at fault though this was not admitted. There was however no amoebiasis nor typhus fever. Rheumatism occupied the ninth or tenth place in the order of prevalence.

It was obligatory for every newborn to have B.C.G. either orally or intradermally. It was admitted that the latter was better. *Here was a difference in practice between Uzbekistan and the Ukraine.* Very little bone and joint tuberculosis occurred in the Ukraine but this was what I was told in Tashkent too. I however found just the opposite. The officials told me that immediately after the war bone and joint T.B. was very common, especially in children. *I suspect that T.B. is still a problem in children though it is vehemently denied* because I gathered that of a total of 46,000 beds for all diseases of children in hospital and sanatoria, approximately 10,000 were reserved for T.B. Unless T.B. were a problem, no country in the world would reserve such a high proportion of beds for that disease!



Certain vital statistics were of interest.

	1913	1920 Per 1000	1955	1962
Birth Rate	41.8			20.6
Infant Mortality Rate	215	307	56	24.7
Total Death Rate				6.9

There were 3,700 maternal and child welfare clinics. The proportion per total population is the same as in Ceylon but those in Ukraine were much better staffed and equipped.

#### FIRST YEAR MORTALITY RATES

From birth to 3 months	47.0%	(26% in 1st month)
- 6 "	30.0%	
- 9 "	15%	
- 12 "	8%	

The percentage of prematures (2,500 gm.) born to total live births was 4.5% for urban and 1.5% for rural mothers in 1962. Of the former - 6.7%, and of the latter - 3.1%, died in the newborn period, i.e. before the end of the first month of life. These figures for incidence were significantly lower than those for the USA, but were comparable with those found in Western European countries and Oceania. *99.8% of births took place in Institutions.* Antenatal care was availed of from the second month of pregnancy or sometimes even earlier. The mother attended the clinic at least once a month during the first half of gestation and once a fortnight in the second half till the 9th month, when she made 4-5 visits.

The maternal death rate was claimed to be as low as 0.02/1000 which was about 1/35 the rate for U.K. and was difficult to believe! The chief cause of maternal deaths was post-partum haemorrhage but toxæmias of pregnancy were excessively rare. *The maternal death rate has been reduced thirty-fold since 1945.*

I asked about pre-school mortality rates but as usual they were not available. I was informed that they were of such rare and

infrequent occurrence that it was not worth their while to keep them, but the same argument held for western countries and yet all these figures were available from those lands.

## BOGOMOLETZ INSTITUTE OF PHYSIOLOGY, KIEV

The new apparatus for micro-electrophoresis which had been designed and produced at this Institute was a fascinating gadget and was a major break through in design of this type of equipment. It worked through a system of prisms. It was very simple, time-saving and accurate and worked with a minute sample of blood plasma; all great advances on the present types of apparatus for electrophoresis.

In the same room I was introduced to Dr. Podshibiakin who was investigating the traditional *Chinese techniques of Acupuncture*. He had researched on these for the last sixteen years, mainly as a diagnostic, not as a therapeutic tool. For example, the acupuncture centre for the stomach was situated on the 12th rib near the vertebrae on either side and for the appendix between the 4th and 5th lumbar vertebrae, 2-3 cm to the right of the spine. When these organs were diseased, there was a much greater difference in electric potential at these spots than when they were healthy.

I told Dr. Podshibiakin that I could understand his work and with further study might even agree with his interpretation of the data. It was scientific and rational but what I could not understand were the results claimed by the Chinese for the treatment of appendicitis, gastric ulcer, etc. by acupuncture! He admitted that his techniques were used only in diagnosis, not in treatment. He also admitted that there was no answer yet to my question but he was determined to continue his researches in order to find the key to these therapeutic mysteries – classical Chinese puzzles!

Research into ageing was also being undertaken at this Institute, right through from birth to senility in animals. The scientists were probing specially the effects of a lack of Oxygen and an excess of Carbon Dioxide on the organism. There was no time for me to study further this interesting problem.

Professor Kostjuk, my next victim, was the Professor of Experimental Physiology. He had worked with Sir John Eccles at Canberra and had been there in 1961 at the time of my visit to that city. Kostjuk looked a very cultured person and spoke good English. He had the latest in electronic gadgets. All experimental data obtained were fed immediately to computers which analysed, calculated and delivered the result in a minute fraction of the time that it would have taken the human brain to do a similar bit of work.



## PAVLOV INSTITUTE, LENINGRAD

The research on haematology was on tissue culture of bone marrow and leucocytes. The former was used as a method for estimating the erythropoietic and normoblastic activity of cells and plasma. They were also doing some very advanced studies on blood coagulation studies but were reticent about any new clotting factors discovered by them. Apparently whatever they have discovered has not been published or nothing of importance has been found by them.

Erythropoietic activity in renal disease was being investigated. Their results were inconclusive and contradictory. In many cases of acute and chronic nephritis, a reduced erythropoietic activity was found. In some severe cases there was no change while in much milder cases there were gross changes. They claimed to have invented a new apparatus called the Thromboelastograph made in Esthonia as well as in West Germany. It estimated not only the time but also the amplitude of clotting as well as other parameters.

I discussed some of the problems that I had encountered in my investigation into the Anaemias of Protein Calorie Malnutrition in Ceylonese children. They were very interested but not very helpful!

I told them that my chief difficulty was to explain the refractory nature of this anaemia which did not respond to the best of diets including minerals, vitamins and protein supplements of all kinds. Could this, I postulated, be due to a permanent knock-out blow to the bone marrow at a critical period of growth? Just as height, weight and even electroencephalographic changes tended to show permanent effects as a result of malnutrition, could not the marrow also manifest the same? They had no answer or helpful hints on how to investigate this problem.

## PAVLOV INSTITUTE AT KOLTUSHI

The Institute of Higher Nervous Activity studied the functional development of a child's brain particularly of the cerebral cortex. The laboratory was first established by one of Pavlov's pupils, Prof. Krasnorgorsky in 1907. He repeated in children many of his master's experiments on dogs and proved that the same laws operated for the governance of the higher centres of the brain in both species – the processes of stimulation and inhibition and the pathways by which they spread were the same. Krasnorgorsky was a paediatric-physiologist and was interested in the changes in higher nervous activity which occurred in children during different illnesses, in the peculiarities and difficulties of establishing conditioned reflexes during health and disease, in conditioned and



unconditioned reflexes i.e., defence reactions, in feeding and sucking reflexes etc., in inhibitory reflexes and finally in the pathology of higher nervous activity, e.g. the relationship between disorders of higher nervous activity and the endocrine glands. A vast range of research for one man to be responsible for!

The first law promulgated by him was that the child's higher nervous activity depended on the spreading of the nervous process. These studies of the Professor were closely related to practical paediatric problems. After his death, Professor Koslova who was his pupil succeeded him as the Head of the Institute. Her studies followed a different line of approach. She was more interested in the differences rather than in the similarities that existed between the cortex of the child and that of the animal. I shall quote her own (and Kapina's) words as far as possible.

"We tried to discover the degree of specificity of higher nervous activity in children. Its study helped us to understand the behaviour reactions, not only of a healthy normal child but also of an ill one. It was possible to define the type of nervous activity which lay under the peculiarities of behaviour of the child. It appeared that there were children with well-balanced processes of excitation and inhibition situated both in the cortex and the subcortex of the brain. In these children we observed stability of behaviour and resistance to the factors that caused neuroses.

"On the other hand, children with predominantly excitatory processes in the cortex and subcortex were most often subject to neuroses, while those with weak, but relatively balanced processes were easily fatigued (i.e., neurasthenic). Both these types, but more often the second, showed stammering and nocturnal enuresis (=bed wetting at night). These physiological differences were found to be localised in isolated parts of the cortex and the subcortex of the brain.

"Patients with enuresis showed weakness and fatigue of the processes in certain defined parts of the central nervous system. These children were given a special diet after 6 p.m. During the day they had their usual food, the same as what the other children had. After 6 p.m. the patient was not allowed to drink any fluids, not even water, but at bed time he was given dry food consisting of a hard-boiled egg, a slice of bread and butter with a piece of herring. Owing to the high salt content of this menu, the body tended to retain water. Butter was given in order to retard the processes of digestion and metabolism and thereby slow down excretion. It was postulated that the centres for micturition (i.e. passing of urine) in the spinal cord and in the central nervous system were thereby rested because fewer stimuli were reaching them. After two or three nights there was a marked improvement



in the condition. If the child was kept on this special diet for two weeks and there was no organic lesion to account for the enuresis, the disease was completely cured. I have followed a large number of children for many years, and have not had any failures. The age of the patients treated ranged from 3-16 years and more boys than girls were affected in my series.

"The treatment of stammering was disappointing. The main principle was to rest the nervous system. At the first sign of stammering all conversation with the child was prohibited. We also excluded as many stimuli as possible from the environment. The mother was given strict instructions not to talk to the child, not to relate stories. She was to give only simple instructions, e.g. 'Take your medicine or take your food.' The child was given things which helped her to use her hands rather than her voice, e.g. clay for modelling, brush and paint. Silence and strict isolation were observed for at least one week, sometimes for longer. In the summer the mother might take the child for a walk. Occupational therapy was often done in order to create fresh points of excitation in the cortex. Every new strong excitation created a new and fresh centre of unbalanced pro-cesses.

If we observed only isolation and silence without this fresh excitation, i.e. handwork etc., there was no improvement. Visual and auditory stimuli, e.g. radio and T.V., were useless; muscle impulses were the best, e.g. embroidery, serving at table, drawing, sculpture, etc.; without the inclusion of these new muscle impulses success was minimal. Special physical exercises were undertaken in order to give more freedom of movement to muscles. All hand and leg movements tended to be inhibited in stammerers. These patients also avoided vigorous forms of play and preferred quieter and more 'peaceful' games and amusements.

"In patients with post-poliomyelitic paralysis there was found to be a disorder of concept with regard to orientation in space after long periods of complete rest.

"The Institute had not undertaken any investigations with regard to Tics (= sudden repetitive involuntary movements especially of the face, eyes, lips or shoulders). A differential diagnosis between quiet and excitable children was often helped by a study of their respective drawings. The quiet children drew the same objects in a smaller, more accurate and more restrained form, while the excitable drew them much bigger, more distorted and in more contrasting colours. If small sized sheets of paper for drawing were first given and these were gradually increased in size, and the children asked to draw the same object on the different sized sheets, interesting contrasts were found in the two groups. The over-excitable children drew the same object in larger and larger sizes out of proportion to the size of the paper while there was a definite



correlation between size of image and size of paper in the drawings made by the quiet ones. If one started with the largest sheet and gradually worked down to the smallest, there was again a correlation in the latter group but not in the former."

## CADAVER BLOOD INSTITUTE, LENINGRAD

Dr. Medvedev, the senior research worker at the Institute interviewed me as the Director was on leave. This was the first institution in the whole of the USSR which had used cadaver blood and tissues since the early thirties. A special laboratory was first established in 1946. Since then many metropolises in individual republics have established similar laboratories. There were four such laboratories in Leningrad and six in Moscow. Each of these did research on separate problems connected with the conservation and transplantation of blood and tissues.

### PROCEDURE FOR COLLECTION OF CADAVER BLOOD, ETC.

There was a centralised morgue for the whole city to which were taken by ambulance the corpses of all the sudden deaths except those that had occurred in hospitals. All these had to have post-mortems, except when the coroner ordered that one need not be autopsied. The coroner was always a doctor-cum-lawyer. In addition, a surgeon, nurses, laboratory assistants and health inspectors were present at the inquest.

As soon as a body was received it was examined by the coroner who was a full-time worker at the morgue. He alone could decide whether cadaver blood was to be taken or not for transfusion. Once it was decided to do so, the corpse was doused with soap and water and scrubbed with a sterile brush. It was then removed to an operating theatre. Marrow from the sternum and the iliac crest were first removed. This was used for marrow transfusions. After incising the skin, blood was next removed with a sterile trocar and cannula inserted into the jugular vein in a head-down position; 3-4 litres of blood could be collected from each corpse into sterile bottles. As the venesection proceeded the body was gradually tilted down till it eventually reached 45°, with the feet up and the head down. Blood clotted immediately after death but dissolved again 2-4 hours later. Cadaver blood was therefore removed between 2-6 hours after death but not later than 6.

After the blood had been removed other tissues including skin, fascia, blood vessels, bone, cartilage, dura mater and brain, endocrine glands, cornea, teeth and joints were removed. Sometimes all the blood and the tissues had to be discarded because it was found that the donor had suffered from some disease like syphilis, cancer, etc. Thorough investigations were undertaken with regard



to sterility. All specimens of blood removed within 2-6 hours were found to be sterile if the prescribed technique had been scrupulously observed.

The tissues were preserved either at  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$  or  $-196^{\circ}\text{C}$  (the latter in liquid nitrogen). Experience has shown that the latter was better though it was more expensive. Freezing was first done at  $-196^{\circ}\text{C}$  and preservation maintained at  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

Tissues were also preserved by lyophilisation, some of these for a short period at only  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  in tyrocin solution. These tissues were tested serologically for antibodies and blood groups, as well as bacteriologically and morphologically. These investigations should all produce negative results before the tissues could be used for transplantation. Tissues varied a great deal in their facility to form antibodies. The cornea, bone and cartilage had very low power to do so, they could therefore be safely and widely used. Tissues like skin on the other hand possessed great facility to form these antibodies. In order to reduce their formation various techniques were followed, e.g., tissues from young subjects and embryos; fair blonde skins have less antigenic properties than dark ones; different blood groups have different degrees of antibody formation.

The durability of the graft has to be ensured; experiments and observations have shown that tissues preserved at very low temperatures have less antigenic properties than fresh, non-cooled ones.

Certain drugs like corticosteroids were given to recipients before transplantation in order to reduce their ability to form antibodies. Blood was preserved at  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  for three weeks. No citric acid was added as was done for blood removed from living donors; there was no need for this with cadaver blood because it did not clot.

### LUMUMBA UNIVERSITY, MOSCOW (FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS)

In the entrance lobby I saw all the horrid photographs of the Alabama race riots prominently displayed on a large board. It was not a very good introduction to Lumumba. I believe this is the only university in the whole of the USSR, which possesses a medical faculty. Elsewhere such is classed as a technical institute and has no connection with any university. The Pro-Rector, who was to meet me was detained at a conference but he had sent someone who looked like an untidy lion to act as my guide. He wanted to take me on a Cook's tour through the six faculties. I refused politely and requested him to show me only the medical one. We started with Physiology. Six students were sitting for a practical examination in a very small room with one invigilator. Each student had a different kind of apparatus in front of his,



most of which looked almost Martian to me. However, I did not wish to investigate these closely as it was not fair by the examinees.

#### PHOTOMICROGRAPHY, ETC.

We went next to an equally small room chock-a-block with apparatus. There were several cameras for photomicrography. One was most ingenious and I had never seen its like before though I had been interested in and used photomicrography a great deal in my own research. This particular apparatus had two microscopes mounted side by side with one common eyepiece. It was called a comparison microscope and enabled one to compare normal and abnormal tissues, side by side at the same time in the same visual field and also to photograph the two on the same plate of film. I asked for and was afforded a demonstration. It was fascinating to see on the right half normal tissue from the hypothalamus (near the pituitary gland) and on the left, abnormal after denervation from the same site in the same species of animal and similarly stained.

I was next shown a universal recording apparatus which could do an electroencephalograph, an electrocardiograph, an electromyograph and several other types of electrographs as well as record the arterial and venous pressures for prolonged periods – one apparatus in place of six! A universal photo-register was also provided to supplement the above so that permanent records might be kept of all data obtained.

The whole department was severely cramped for space, both for research as well as for teaching. One room for practical biochemistry had two double-sided benches which could not accommodate more than eight students but the Professor told me that he had double that number working on any single shift. There were two such rooms, so that thirty students were being taught at the same time. As their intake was 150, they were divided into five batches. This was feasible as there was a teaching staff of ten, while in Ceylon with double the intake of students but with much more spacious laboratories we have about six qualified teachers plus six demonstrators!

A new Lumumba University campus was being built with much more space on the outskirts of Moscow.

My next call was on Dr. Bekezov, the Professor of Biochemistry, a dark handsome Armenian. He spoke excellent English and had travelled and studied abroad at the University of Uppsala in Sweden with Tielius, a Nobel Prize winner. This gave us a topic of mutual interest as I too had visited and lectured at this ancient University and had participated in one of their convocations and balls held in that awe-inspiring medieval castle of theirs. Bekezov



was the most cultured and friendly "Russian" I had met up to that time. He took me to his minuscule of a den which already held three visitors and gave me catalogues in English for various new types of apparatus such as for immuno-electrophoresis which I specially asked for. He promised to send me his reprints. I gave him one of my visiting cards, and thanked him very much for his courtesy and generosity before saying good-bye.

#### THE LIBRARY AT LUMUMBA

We wandered to the library where it was alleged that 200,000 volumes were stacked. I thought this was more than a slight exaggeration, judging by the shelf space available unless some books had been kept in storage away from my prying eyes.

I examined the medical section fairly closely. The reference books on medicine and ancillary subjects in English were very few. There were none on paediatrics but this might be due to the fact that the medical school was only two years old and the first batch of students was about to start their clinical work next term; but I however observed that the classical English text-books on Anatomy, Physiology and Biochemistry, etc. were missing. A few journals in English on these subjects were available. All the teaching was in Russian and I presumed that every single medical journal published in that language was available here but it was most important that these students, 90% of whom came from Asia, Africa and Latin America should be familiar with medical publications in English.

The University has over 3000 students only 10% of them from the Soviet Union. They live in hostels and all of them are given free travel and generous allowances while in USSR (see page 92).

#### CENTRAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH EDUCATION, MOSCOW

Health Education - was an integral part of all health services in USSR. It was widely used for improving the health habits of the nation, and had high priority for bettering not only the health of the people but also their industrial and agricultural productivity and longevity. Since the October Revolution the general death rate for USSR had decreased fourfold and was 7.6/1000 in 1959, lower than Ceylon's (8.2) or U.K's which was nearly 9. The life expectancy in USSR had reached 68 years against 66 for Ceylon but was not quite as long as in UK or USA.

Many epidemic diseases which in Tsarist Russia took a heavy toll have been eradicated. Apart from higher living and cultural standards, healthier working and living conditions, this conspicuous improvement has undoubtedly been brought about by wide-based



health education which has always devoted great attention to the dissemination of knowledge and to the popularisation of immunisation programmes. It has among other things concentrated a great deal of attention on maternal and child care, prevention of accidents, correct dieting and physical education. Besides being an important function of the State Health Services, health education has also *figured prominently among the activities of the trade unions.*

The unique feature of health education in the USSR was *the obligatory nature of its work for the entire medical and para-medical personnel employed by the Ministry of Public Health.* Every doctor, feldsher, midwife and nurse was obliged to devote at least four hours each month to mass forms of health education, i.e. lectures, talks, classes, schools for mothers both in clinics and in homes, factories, kolkhozes and schools. This was in addition to the hours devoted to person-to-person health talks given to patients and their families, thus ensuring a wide scope of health propaganda; millions of lectures and talks on health education were given annually throughout the USSR. These talks were delivered not only in institutions and establishments dealing primarily with health matters but also in cinemas, T.V. and radio programmes, palaces of culture and workers' and collective farmers' clubs.

*It was obligatory for all cinemas, radio and T.V. to display health programmes at least three or four times a month.*

Health education started in the primary school when the *child was eight years of age* and extended right through the middle school. In the former school the pupil was taught the elementary principles of health and health habits (page 235).

Special courses were in operation for workers in factories, industries, food processing plants, restaurants, etc. called "The Sanitary Minimum." *The trade unions played a prominent and active part in these courses.* Ceylon Trade Unions please note.

*The Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies* were public organisations which participated most actively in the dissemination of health knowledge not only among their 30 million members but also among the public.

Approximately five million voluntary health educators were recruited not only from the above Societies but also from factory, farm workers, school teachers and trade union delegates. To these must be added the two million medical and para-medical personnel of the *Soviet Union*; thus 1 out of every 23 adults was a Health Educator of some sort! Their activities were supervised by the Ministries of Public Health of each Republic and of the USSR and local health departments. This supervision made it possible to put health education on a planned footing thus enhancing its power and influence.



The Central Research Institute for Health Education of the USSR was the scientific and methodological centre for health education activities of the whole country. This Institute maintained directed contact with health education centres throughout the country. The chief doctor at each of these centres was responsible for the daily supervision of the local departments. *This wide network of centres for health education, the first of which was opened in 1920, was the most characteristic feature of the organisation in the USSR.*

Besides making full use of the local medical and para-medical staff at the local medical and health education centres, the Institute also called on workers from other organisations and ensured their proper direction, character and effectiveness. They were responsible for the publication of posters and papers both in Russian and in the local language. *These averaged 100 million copies a year, i.e., one copy between two persons (man, woman and child) in USSR!* No other country to my knowledge could boast of such a high proportion of health educational literature per head of population.

Each centre also had its own workshop for the preparation of materials such as slides, posters, flannelographs etc. and sponsored courses, seminars, lectures and consultations on health education methods and the review of lecture texts. These centres were the chief means of reaching the masses. They organised public lectures and question and answer sessions by prominent medical scientists, health executives and experienced medical practitioners. *They also trained the local doctors in better methods of teaching, etc.* In mass education these centres used permanent mobile exhibitions as well as the local press and wall newspapers. These centres, of which there were 373 in 1963, were well - equipped with audio-visual aids, large lecture halls, museums and film-strip libraries. In addition to those local centres, there were health education offices attached to major hospitals and clinics; these offices attended to all organisations and methodological aspects of health education in all the departments of the hospital or clinic.

*It should be emphasised that all medical and para-medical students were given special training in the theory and practice of health education. I wonder how many countries follow this excellent practice.*

The results of the research done at the Central Research Institute, Moscow, were implemented in the wide network of health education centres. Besides having several consultative committees, the Institute had an experimental manufacturing unit which included a publishing group, exhibition department, audio-visual aids, slides and photography, book-binding and carpentry shops.

The Institute prepared and published a very large amount of literature on organisation, method and content of lectures on health education for the public. It has published a guide for physicians



dealing with all the main aspects of the subject; a text book on health education for medical students, guides on its methods in different types of hospitals and clinics, schools, kindergartens and nurseries, industries, collective farms and various cultural and educational establishments. The Institute has also published an annual called "an Aid to the Health Educator." This dealt with different aspects of the organisation, content and methods of the subject. It has also published a periodical called "Exchange of Experience" which contained articles written by field workers in which they analysed their own experience in health education. A large proportion of the audio-visual aids and literature published by the Institute was reproduced at the provincial health centres not only in Russian but in the Regional and local languages.

Popular booklets and pamphlets on health were not published by the Institute. These were done by the State Medical Literature Publishing House. It however reviewed popular publications published by local centres.

*Between 12-25 health educational films were produced annually in the USSR; 1000 copies of each film were made. The Institute helped the film studios in their production. All cinemas throughout the country were obliged to show these films before the main picture. These films were also shown in children's parks, hospitals, schools and rural areas. It also provided lectures and talks on health for radio and T.V. These were broadcast over the central broadcasting system and were also published in booklets which made them available for use by the local broadcasting stations.*

Two months' refresher courses for health educators were annually held at the Institute in collaboration with the Central Institute for Post-graduate Training of Physicians. The syllabus was first approved by the Ministry of Public Health, USSR. The teaching staff at these courses consisted mainly of the research workers attached to this Institute. Beside these it also ran short 10-day refresher courses for health educators from outlying districts. They were presumably for non-medical personnel.

Further, there were (1) a special two year intern training programme to fill vacancies for chief physicians and specialists in health education in the bigger centres and (2) a three year post-graduate course for research workers; during this period the post-graduate studied the theory and practice of health education and did some research work for their degree "Candidate of Medical Science." This corresponded, as far as I could gather, to the Ph.D of western universities. Special seminars and lectures were arranged for various medical specialists like gynaecologists, paediatricians, internists, public health administrators, school doctors, etc. Several times a year the Institute sent groups of research workers to various



regions of the USSR to arrange short-term courses on the methodology of health education on the most pressing and urgent health problems. These courses were attended not only by health educators but also by medical specialists of a given republic or region—as many as 100 might attend a single course.

The research workers at the Institute regularly visited the outlying Union Republics in order to render all help, assistance and guidance to the local centres. Part of the Institute's scientific sessions and conferences was organised in these outlying districts.

The Institute also maintained and constantly expanded contacts with foreign organisations in the same field by exchange of publications, audio-visual aids, posters and other educational material.

The Institute arranged some exhibitions on Health Education in the USSR in foreign countries like India, China, Germany, Mongolia, Albania, Italy and others. Special research groups at the Institute evaluated at regular intervals the results obtained by health educational methods on particular problems. Their effectiveness was gauged for example by the following data; the rising incidence of early consultation concerning any illness, implementation of the doctor's advice, correct feeding habits not only of the sick but of the healthy population in different age groups, the observation of the rules of maternal and child care and improvement in environmental sanitation; microbiological studies of food pollution in restaurants, canteens, schools and homes and lastly the decrease in morbidity and accidents. These can all serve as fairly reliable indicators of the effectiveness of the methods and content of health education.

If one multiplied the 4 hours a month which was obligatory for the two million medical and para-medical workers in USSR, the number of hours devoted to health education becomes astronomical. Health education was considered not only a part of their medical and health activities but also an integral part of the general cultural and educational activities.

Medical schools trained para-medical personnel such as nurses. *The school doctor was expected to help the teacher and the parent with regard to health education.* In teaching various basic science subjects, like physics, chemistry etc., there were certain hygienic elements. While doing zoology the children were taught about helminths and how to avoid infection. This led on to parasitology in general. In physics, the child learnt about the dangers of air and water pollution.

It was the aim of all teachers whatever subject they taught that *no child left their care without having first imbibed some knowledge of the principles of healthful living.*

T.V. and Radio published special journals and encyclopaedias on Health. The Central Research Institute cooperated in their production. *All newspapers even at local levels were obliged to publish health educational articles at frequent and regular intervals.* The Press section of the Central Research Institute published a Bulletin 6-8 times a year. This contained popular articles on medical and health matters prepared by very eminent scientists and physicians. *The newspapers were "free" (my inverted commas!) to publish these without restraint—no comment!*

The Institute also prepared popular radio talks on the lines of the Radio Doctor, so popular when Charles Hill (Now Lord Luton) did them on the B.B.C. The subjects mentioned to me were—

- (1) "I have a little daughter who breathes through the mouth". What am I to do? (three page reply).
- (2) What am I to eat when my heart is affected?
- (3) How best may I spend my vacation?
- (4) What am I to do in a case of measles?
- (5) How can I breast feed my infant?

A Journal called "Health" was published monthly and sold at 20 kopeks (1s 7d); one million copies were sold monthly in 1962-63. These were not sufficient to meet the demand. Some of the republics published local journals on Health in the regional language.

The Blood Donor Service was worked jointly by this Central Research Institute and the Red Cross. In the smaller towns and rural areas, though there were no health education centres as such, these activities were fulfilled by the sanitary-epidemiological centres. A health education instructor was installed in many rural hospitals who was responsible for its activities in the whole district.

#### THE SOCIETY FOR KNOWLEDGE, R.F.S.S.R.

The medical section was ruled by a scientific and methodological Council on the Presidium of the Society. It consisted mainly, if not entirely, of representatives of other medical scientific societies such as the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Health Ministry, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and last but not least, the Central Research Institute of Health Education in USSR. The forty two members of the Council included representatives of similar societies in the Union Republics. The Council worked in full cooperation with the bodies mentioned above. It initiated plans for propaganda, selected and controlled subjects, recommended lectures and books for public consumption and organised



meetings, discussions and seminars. It possessed a special Hall in the capital for lectures by distinguished scientists. It had branches in all the capital cities of the Republics as well as in towns and oblasts (= regions).

2000 medical men and women at all levels from the rural practitioner to the academician professor were volunteers for the purpose of propagation of knowledge of medical science throughout the nation. They organised 1.2 million lectures every year. The subjects dealt with were prophylaxis of disease, hygiene, maternal and child health, *recent advances in medical research*, the philosophy of medicine, the prevention of accidents and, *mirabile dictu*, the cybernetics of medicine, whatever that meant!

I was particularly stuck with the education of the masses on recent research. Knowledge was not only widely acquired but quickly disseminated. Could such a result be effected adequately in any but a totalitarian set-up? How voluntary were these so-called volunteers? There must be some incentive but this was well hidden from the prying eyes of outsiders like myself.

#### THE PEOPLES' UNIVERSITIES OF HEALTH

This was a euphemistic term, as far as I could gather, for what we know as night schools or University Extension lectures. Apparently this glorified title acted as a greater incentive for the advance of the movement. They were organised in factories and industries in general. The lecture programme included a systematic course of lectures concerning factory conditions and how they affected the health of the workers. They ran their own publishing house for special booklets on medico-scientific subjects and organised conferences for doctors working in the Society for Knowledge.

Only 5% of the lecturers were paid. This payment was more in the nature of a travel grant to a distant town, for instance, than of a lecture fee. I also got the impression that a small admission fee was charged from the audience but in spite of this, I was assured that the halls were always full! I suppose a lot depended on the personality and ability of the lecturer! These so-called Peoples' Universities of Health were first established in 1959 but four years later there were 2000 of them throughout the Union (page 229). Besides those in the factories they were also established in the *kolkhozes*. Special Faculties in these Peoples' Universities were available for Youth, for nutrition of young mothers and children, for preventive paediatrics and for prevention of accidents. Each Faculty had a fixed number of students ranging from 100-400; the lectures were held usually after working hours but films or T.V. shows might be substituted for some of them. I was assured that there was no material motivation for attendance, only the intellec-



tual satisfaction one gained from them. This was too big a pill for a hardened sceptic like myself to swallow. It was probably tied-up with politics and advance in job grades for good attendances. Some of these lectures were undoubtedly intended to make them better communists; should a foreigner take umbrage at that?

I wish that we too had more lectures at home to our industrial and estate workers on the advantages and merits of our parliamentary, democratic system of government and how it could be worked more efficiently and successfully if everyone showed a greater sense of responsibility and dedication to his work. Would that someone in a high place had the guts to preach to the employers as well as to the employees, to the staff officers as well as to the minor labourers that democratic socialism was impossible to work successfully without sweat and toil and often without blood and tears, without scrupulous honesty, particularly of the intellectual variety, without discipline and an absence of absenteeism, without that sense of responsibility that made one proud to do a job just for the sake of doing it well, without any thought of material gain and finally without an intense and passionate love for one's whole country and not for a section of it. How many people could be found in the whole of Ceylon with these qualities? If the above traits are lacking in the masses as well as in the leaders, how can democracy ever succeed in Ceylon? Cheap slogans like "socialism" and battle cries based on religion, language and community are outmoded and as long as these are the rabble-rousing implements of the political self-seeker, so long will there be disunity in our ravished land and so long will there be economic stagnation and intellectual impotence.

Another interesting point was that the programme of lectures was in accordance with the wishes of the students, who suggested the subjects. Sometimes there were discussion groups led by nurses in place of lectures by doctors, e.g. on first aid, home nursing, infant care etc. Some of the students attending these, like engineers, were graduates of Technical Institutes. They therefore had a high standard of general education apart from their specialised knowledge.

Professor Petrishcheva, who was a parasitologist with an international reputation and who was also the Head of the Publishing House of the Society made a speech. She presented me with an autographed copy of her book "Forewarned in Forearmed" in English ( page 106 ). This was a fascinating story of the search for the parasites of relapsing fever and the encephalitides in the Kara-Kum desert, in the islands of the Pacific, in China and in the taiga of Siberia. I would recommend this book not only to parasitologists but to anyone interested in human adventure and endeavour. It is published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House.



In collaboration with the Institute for Health Education, the Society published twenty four new booklets annually on medicobiological subjects. Between 5000-200,000 copies of each were printed at a time. In addition to these an equal number of booklets of the programme of the Peoples' Universities of Health was also published. Further, this Publishing House also produced slides, films, film strips etc. The lectures for publication were selected by the Council from the best that had been delivered in the previous year. Apparently the author got no financial reward for all his labour. I was given a case load of these booklets in Russian to take home with me. I fortunately got Dr. C. to forward them by surface mail to Ceylon. The titles of some of these were interesting - Workers and Health; Rational Nutrition; Health Services for the People; How to keep a child healthy; Animals and Human Health; Sleep, Hypnosis and Disease; The Nervous System and Health; Hygiene of Women; Prevention of Tuberculosis; Secrets of your heart; Personal Hygiene.

#### PROPAGANDA FOR PAEDIATRICS

Each town and republic had a branch of the Paediatric Association. The programme for meetings included professional and scientific papers as well as those which served simply as propaganda for medical science.

An astronomic amount of literature on Child Health was in circulation. The Paediatric Association worked in close liaison with the Society for Knowledge and put on T.V. radio and film shows as well as lectures jointly with it.

Special booklets were published on contraception. *No special birth control or family planning* clinics were held throughout the USSR but anyone could get advice needed from a gynaecologist. No contraceptive material could be sold over the counter (except condoms) without a prescription from a gynaecologist. *There did not seem to be a concerted effort either by the State or by these so-called voluntary societies to do any propaganda regarding family planning.* None of the lecture titles given to me by numerous organisations had a single one dealing with this subject or with abortion. Abortions were still legalised and could be performed without the consent of the husband. They were often done because the mother had more children than she thought she could look after. *The father, the head of the household, had no voice in it at all.* I could not get any figures for the average number of abortions but calculating from the figures given me in Tashkent, I came to the conclusion that it could not be less than one and a half million and was possibly very much more. Uzbekistan had a Moslem tradition and abortions would be more popular among the non-Moslem sections of the USSR! But even so the total abortions were very much less than those estimated to take place in U.S.A. (page 198).



At the present time, they were in the process of publishing a huge tome in several volumes entitled "Science and Humanity". Vol. I, was already out and editions in English and other foreign languages would be out shortly, or so I was promised.

The conference with the Society for Knowledge was the one that was best organised and prepared throughout my stay in the country. Besides those already mentioned my hosts included some of the senior Professors of paediatrics, medicine and public health in Moscow.

## THE UKRAINIAN SOCIETY FOR KNOWLEDGE

I met one of the Vice-Presidents, Dr. Kusovkov, and two other officials. This Society was affiliated to the one at Moscow which made me one of its honorary members. The Ukrainian Society was however an autonomous body with 336,000 members in the Ukraine alone, nearly 0.7% of the whole population.

At the top of the Society were science teachers in schools, doctors and workers in "new methods." I took these to mean those who were experimenting on new methods of teaching, specially in adult education. There were affiliated societies to the main one in Kiev in every district (= oblast) city, factory and kolkhoz. *It was not a State Organisation*; it had its own funds collected by members' subscriptions; it published a great deal of literature which was bought by the public though some of it was distributed free; it ran two journals (1) Science and Life in Ukrainian, which was free, and (2) an anti-religious journal which was on sale. Public lectures were organised; admission to some of these had to be paid for - 7% were for payment but 93% were free. Part of these fees was paid to the lecturer and the rest was credited to the Society's funds. Lectures were also given at the request of the Trade Unions and collective farms who paid for them.

## PLANETARIA

*There were six planetaria in operation in Ukraine at present. In five years' time twenty-five planetaria would be in working order!* Admission to a planetarium cost 20 kopeks (1s 7d); half rates were charged from children and soldiers. The Society also organised excursions for the public who paid for them.

The annual income of the Society was 4-1/2 million roubles, nearly £2 million. Expenditure was about 300,000 roubles less. (£120,000). This nett profit was invested in new institutions, planetaria, lecture halls etc.

I have heard many knowledgeable people criticising the last Ceylon Government for the establishment of a planetarium in my country in 1964. It has seldom done anything more far sighted



and wiser in the whole of its career! My reply to the critics is simple—the more astronomy, the less astrology, the more science, the less anti-science.

The Society was divided into 32 sections. Some of these dealt with history, philosophy, economics, literature, theatre, cinema, music, astronomy, natural sciences, chemistry, geology, medicine, agriculture with several subsections, e.g., agronomy, mechanisation, etc.

2,500 People's Universities\* existed in this Republic alone. More than 300 of them were Universities of Health for medical or health propaganda. They hardly deserved this high sounding title. The Soviets believed in tacking on very magnified titles to microscopic organisations. It was probably good psychology for their peoples but it would not work in a more sophisticated society.

There was no Central Institute for Health Education as in Moscow but this subject was handled by (1) an Institute of Public Health and (2) an Institute in Hygiene and Labour which did propaganda mainly against social diseases like V.D. and T.B. Special Educational Sanitary Houses were established in each oblast which were solely concerned with health propaganda.

30,000 of a total of 80,000 Ukrainian doctors were members of the Society for Knowledge and each of them was obliged to give two lectures a year for propaganda. I understood these to be over and above the four hours a month that every doctor was to devote to Health Education. Some of the titles of the lectures on Health were interesting:

1. Cybernetics and medicine.
2. Radioactivity and its influence on the human medico-biological problems of space flights.
3. New anti-biotics and their action.
4. Modern data on nature of viruses.
5. Success in modern neuro-surgery.
6. Insect-borne diseases.
7. Alcoholism and neuro-psychological diseases.
8. Modern methods of treatment of psychosomatic disease.
9. Prophylaxis of cancer.
10. Achievements of Soviet medicine in prolonging life.
11. Organisation of work and rest from the medical aspect.
12. Sport.
13. Medical questions for youth.
14. History of Soviet Medicine.

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\*In Moscow I was told there were 2000 (page 225) Peoples' Universities for the whole of the USSR!

Books were published in Ukrainian; *Lenin postulated that people must be taught in their mother tongue. Medicine and all subjects through the University were taught in Ukrainian.*

This showed that local patriotism was much stronger here than in Uzbekistan. The Ukrainians were more advanced than the Uzbeks and were more jealous and envious of the predominance of the Russians. I believe that this was the reason for their intense loyalty to their own language unlike in smaller republics. The Ukraine was the second largest Republic in the Union and contained over 40 million people. The children were however taught Russian from 9 years of age in the third grade. In Russia proper I was told that they learnt English or another foreign language from the age of 5 years, two years before they entered a primary school. This was however voluntary and not obligatory. *In Ukraine there were also English Language Schools where parents had the choice to send their children.* Each block of 60,000 population had one English School where this language was taught from the first grade as a subject and was the *medium of instruction* in some subjects from the ninth grade, i.e., from 15 years of age. Some other subjects were taught in Ukrainian.

#### EDUCATION IN U.S.S.R.\*

This illustrated document claimed that for the whole of the U.S.S.R., only a 26% literacy rate had been attained by 1917. Secondary and higher education were available only for the ruling and privileged sections of the population. According to the 1959 census, the literacy rate for both sexes had risen from 26 to 98.5% and for women from 14 to 97.8%.

The number of people attending general education schools had risen from 9 to 36 million—a fourfold increase in the number of children and in the primary schools from 150,000 to over 5,000,000, a thirtyfold one in 42 years!

The number of students at higher educational establishments had increased from 127,000 to nearly 2,400,000 i.e. an eighteenfold increase and the number in technical schools from 54,000 to 2,060,000, a nearly fortyfold one.

All nationalities in the Soviet Union have schools where the medium of teaching is in their own language.

In the five Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan where the literacy rate ranged from 0-2% prior to 1917, the number of pupils in

\*These facts are culled from an official publication given me by the Ministry of Education - R.F.S.S.R.



(a) general education schools increased over thirtyfold (b) higher educational institutions from 0 to 230,000 (c) secondary specialised (technical) establishments 360-fold and (d) professional technical training institutes from 0 to 100,000!

Religion has not been taught in schools since 1918 but Communism has been!

*Pre-school Education.*—An extensive network of kindergartens caters for over two million children from 3-7 years of age. It is expected that this number will be increased to over four million by 1965, which means of course that *the total number of children of this age group has not got this privilege up to 1961.* Enrolment to these schools is apparently voluntary. The eight year middle school admittedly gives an incomplete secondary education but prepares the pupils as far as possible for the choice of a profession; with the help of their teachers and their parents they can consciously choose for themselves a path of higher education in institutions offering technical and professional subjects. This choice of profession is made more with the help and guidance of teachers at the Pioneer Palaces than with those at school. *There is, as far as I am aware, no compulsion about the choice of a career.* In forms 5-8 of the middle schools, the pupils are taught in wood and metal workshops, in domestic science kitchens and in instructional and experimental school gardens. The workshops are equipped with different sized lathes according to the age of the pupils. *Domestic science though taken chiefly by girls, is sometimes followed also by boys.* After finishing the compulsory eight year middle schools, the pupils are offered a free choice of one of four types of schools for further education:

1. A secondary polytechnic school of general education and work giving production training.
2. Technical schools or other secondary specialised educational establishments (of pedagogy, medicine, economics, trade, etc.).
3. A professional training school for those who wish to acquire a trade without secondary education.
4. A special type of school for young people and adults employed in industry, etc. These are called evening (shift) secondary general education schools.

(1) *Secondary Polytechnic Schools of General Education and Work giving Production Training.*—These schools offer pupils a three year course of full secondary education and the right to enter any higher educational establishment, as well as professional training in a branch of the national economy or culture. 30% of the time is spent in the humanities, literature, history, constitution of the U.S.S.R., economic geography and a foreign language. The



rest is divided between the sciences, mathematics, astronomy, etc. and theoretical, practical and productive professional training. This latter is done in actual factories or mills, on construction sites and in state or collective farms. Only in isolated cases may professional training be done in school workshops provided these have the required equipment. *Here is an idea that could be fruitfully copied by developing countries—use the state factories and farms, etc. for the education of the older school child.*

The professions learnt by the adolescent school children at these secondary schools are not necessarily the profession they may eventually practise. *Each one has the right to change his or her profession at will.*

A person may acquire a new profession where he is employed after an appropriate course of study—a turner or a machine operator may become a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer or a teacher. *To enter a higher educational establishment does not necessarily mean giving up one's employment.*

(2) *Technical schools and other secondary specialised educational establishments.*—Here pupils receive a general education entitling them to enter a higher educational institution, a profession or a secondary specialised education. Adolescents may enter these schools immediately on finishing their middle-school or after working for few years in a factory or some other organisation. Applicants must pass an entrance test. Studies may be followed either full or part time while working. For entrance to these evening classes, preference is given to those who have worked in professions related to the speciality chosen. Courses last four years as a rule except in medicine which continues for six years. *I must here emphasise the fact that medical, engineering and agricultural education is not the responsibility of university faculties but of Technical Institutes.* In my opinion this is certainly a disadvantage to those following these courses. A doctor at any rate must be very much more than a technical expert in order to become a first-class doctor and the physical and intellectual separation of medical and engineering students from those following other sciences or humanities is a loss to both sides.

At industrial technical schools workshops are set up which turn out production according to the ability of the learners, and in agricultural technical schools large farms are organised, the students themselves doing the main work.

(3) *Vocational Training School.*—The principal purpose of these establishments is the planned and organised preparation of qualified workers for industry, building and agriculture. They are open to those who wish to go to work immediately after their middle school training. In towns the course lasts one to three years but in the country for only one to two years.



These training schools do not give a full secondary education. After it, the pupil may enter a technical school (2, above) or they may follow the evening classes, (4, below) while being employed. After finishing their 1, 2 or 3 year courses at these vocational training schools, they may also enter higher educational establishments provided that they have passed an examination after following evening classes as mentioned above.

(4) *Evening (shift) Secondary General Educational Schools.*—These schools are intended for adolescents and adults who are employed and have not had a full secondary education. The course lasts three years and they now have over two million pupils. The incentives for attending these schools are (1) One working day less a week in town and two less in the country at half pay (2) Two more days off if desired with no pay (3) Twenty days' full-pay leave for examinations (4) Scholastic progress is taken into account by management for promotions.

Since 1956, residential schools are being set up in U.S.S.R. to which children are admitted only at the wish of the parents. These schools have become very popular and by 1965, it is expected that the number of pupils in them will reach 2½ millions. There are special schools for "arty" children, for those in poor physical health and for mentally defective ones.

The main aim of the reorganisation now being carried out in education is "to enable youth to be better prepared for life and work and for the enrichment of the *SPIRITUAL* (my capitals!) culture of the people, for abundance of *SPIRITUAL* as well as of material values is necessary for the progress and growth of Communism."

In the Soviet school special attention is devoted to moral education, the formation of high moral qualities such as *Soviet* patriotism and *proletarian* internationalism, respect for other nations, humanism and collectivism, love of work, conscious discipline, a profound sense of social duty, justice and honesty.

A very important task in education is to stimulate the urge for knowledge and the strengthening in the people of the profound conviction that in a socialist society full secondary education is indispensable for each and every one.

Until this ideal has been fulfilled one cannot expect socialism to work and what is happening today in countries like Ceylon is the tragedy of giving rights to those who are not educated to the point of understanding that there can be no rights without responsibilities. While I am writing these lines (4-10-63), I see in the "Ceylon Daily News" the day's front page news that a government sponsored sugar factory's vital machinery has been damaged allegedly by strikers. Is this or is this not a flagrant example of



demanding rights without exercising responsibility? *It is our own fault because we have not educated these workers to a full sense of civic duty and loyalty. The Trade Unions are mainly to blame because they have not undertaken any programme to better the standards of general education for their members.*

The Soviet Trade Unions devote large sums to various health measures. In 1960 about 8 million children and youth had holidays in camps, children's sanatoria and tourist excursion bases. These were paid for not only by the State but also by the Trade Unions.

More than 2,500 million books have been published for children and youth in 59 languages of the U.S.S.R. as well as in 19 foreign languages.

*Teachers.*—In 1914 there were 280,000 teachers in Tsarist Russia, today there are over 2,000,000 in U.S.S.R.; all in all over 56 million people were enrolled in educational establishments of one kind or another in 1961-62. The Soviet Government has instituted the honorary title of Merited Teacher of the Republic which is awarded for outstanding services in instructing and educating children. More than 175,000 teachers have been awarded orders and medals of the Soviet Union. The best teachers have had the title of Hero of Socialist Labour with the Lenin Order and the gold medal of the Hammer and Sickle bestowed on them. *Teachers are members of Trade Unions.* There are now in existence 212 teacher training colleges (Pedagogical Institutes) with over half a million trainees. There is an Academy of Pedagogic Sciences of the Russian Republic. More than 900 books on the teaching and education of children, more than 30 standard manuals and 60 textbooks for national schools on pedagogy and psychology have been produced by this Academy.

## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, UZBEKISTAN

I had my long awaited interview with the Ministry of Education. The first Deputy Minister, corresponding to our Junior Minister or Parliamentary Secretary, met me and apologised for the Chief Minister not seeing me as he was busy attending to the delegates for the Women's Peace Congress who were meeting in Tashkent at that time. She had with her about fifteen officials to meet me.

I told her that I had come there to discover how they had disseminated scientific knowledge so successfully among the masses.

Prior to 1917 there were only 160 schools in Turkestan of which Uzbekistan was a part and 17,000 pupils who were mainly the children of the rich as they had to pay for their education.



Today, in Uzbekistan only with a 10 million population, there were 1.8 million school-going children and 105,000 teachers.

In Ceylon with a similar population and free education we have approximately one million school-going children. (1963 figures).

In 1917, soon after the revolution one of the first measures undertaken by the Soviet Government was the eradication of illiteracy. I was told that this was done on a *voluntary* (my italics!) basis. All the educated people organised classes to help the illiterate masses. One group taught during the day and the other at night (for workers). Special emphasis was placed on the adult education of women. Female teachers organised classes in village homes. Students of technical schools and universities had classes in one building for a quarter of the whole population of Tashkent. *The students got credit marks in their examinations for this voluntary work.* Text books on the techniques of teaching adults were published by the State. After the fourth grade, by which time the pupils were fully literate, they graduated into Workers' Faculties. Here they studied all natural sciences, mathematics and literature, etc. for two or three years. They were divided into groups according to the type of education that was desired and were employed as workers at the same time as they were undertaking their studies.

In the villages rural youth over the age of 18 years worked as farmers at the same time as they studied in rural schools such subjects as chemistry, physics, mathematics and biology for two or three years.\* At the end of this period they had to sit for an examination.

"What was the incentive provided?" I asked.

"The best incentive was to make themselves useful to their country. There was no money motive. Their main aim was to get educated well as soon as possible in order to help in the building up of their country to make it happy, prosperous and great". This was too big a pill for me to swallow! There must have been either compulsion or some incentive!

The good sanitary conditions prevailing at present were the result of a general improvement of living and educational standards; *the Soviet Government has undoubtedly done its best to improve the socio-economic conditions of the masses.*

Sanitary education (Health Education) began in the elementary school. The teachers explained the value and importance of cleanliness for health; many doctors gave lectures in these primary schools to the children. If they broke the rules of health, they would suffer; if they did not wash their hands before eating or after toilet, then they were liable to get intestinal infections. If



they had a cold, they must not kiss or get too close to other members of the family, etc. Simple topics for young children but so important to "indoctrinate" them at the right time in the right way through the right people.

*Adult Education* was not undertaken by the Health Education authorities but by a Society for Knowledge (page 224) which is the successor to the Society for propagating Scientific, Political and Cultural Knowledge among the population. *Most of the lecturers were volunteers who were unpaid.* In addition to lectures, education was also extended mainly by T.V., radio and film shows.

I asked the Deputy Minister, who interviewed me in her rather ungainly and shapeless Uzbek gown, whether she could give me a list of the lecture titles. This was at first promised but later refused. Apparently they were not quite certain what use I would make of it and also they were afraid of getting into trouble with the higher echelons of authority.

However, I did get one later through unofficial sources. I had this translated and I found that about 60-70% of the lectures were on Communism, the History of Communism, the Aims of Communism, anti-religious propaganda, etc. and not on scientific and technological subjects. However, there was a significant though small number of these gems scattered amidst the dust of politics. In the Technical Institutes and Universities the pupils were given stipends by the State to buy their books which were priced so low as to make them purchasable by these poor students. How different to the plight of our poor students in Ceylon where very few indeed could afford to buy textbooks.

There were no residential schools in Uzbekistan but later in Moscow I was told that these had now been started in other parts of the Soviet Union. All the schools were mixed ones for both sexes; no free transport was provided for school children, except in mountainous districts where certain communities lived in isolated pockets.

School lunches and other meals were supplied at one-quarter the cost but not free. Orphans however were given free text books and lunches by the Ministry of Education. They were also provided with special hostel accommodation where board and lodging were entirely free.

#### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, R.F.S.S.R.

I had been informed that either the Minister or his deputy would interview me; actually she turned out to be the Deputy Director of Education of the Russian Republic, Dr. Chehoeva. She was dowdy, middle-aged, and matronly with a round chubby



face and dark hair combed straight back and tied in a bun at the nape of the neck. She was very keen to give me all the information I desired and her answers were quick and lengthy in Russian, but Dr. L's efforts at translation were crippled and at times annoyingly slow. I had often to repeat the question two or three times before he got the sense of it.

What applied to Russia, also applied to the whole of the U.S.S.R. No child went to a school before his seventh birthday. He was in a nursery, which was equivalent to a creche in other countries, from the age of 3 months to 3 years and in a kindergarten, which corresponded to a nursery school from 3-7 years.

The *Primary School* was attended from 7 to 10 or 11 years.

*First Grade* 7-8 years. The subjects were—

- (1) The mother tongue—i.e., the Regional language.
- (2) Arithmetic.
- (3) Nature study which was a part and parcel of (1) above.
- (4) Music.
- (5) Drawing.
- (6) Physical culture.
- (7) Handcraft.

*Second Grade* 8-9 years of age. Continuation of the above subjects in greater detail in addition to *Hygiene*. This is related to the child's person and environment, e.g., Brushing of teeth, washing of hands and face; bathing; toilet habits; dangers of soil pollution, overcrowding, etc.

*Third Grade* 9-10 years of age. Same subjects are taught at a more advanced level. In no other country to the best of my knowledge is hygiene taught so early in school life.

*Fourth Grade* 10-11 years. In the above subjects, the study of natural science commenced, including biology, geography and the history of U.S.S.R. The interesting point was that these three disciplines were not taught as special subjects but as part and parcel of natural science! I believe in U.K., the latter commences at 11 plus years.

At the end of that year the child graduated to the Middle School. He was now in his twelfth year. Education became more differentiated and specialised, i.e. arithmetic was more complex, the study of language was divided into grammar and literature; biology was still restricted to a study only of botany; geography earned the privilege of a special subject and history too graduated to the same level beginning with the prehistoric world. Each of these subjects consumed two hours a week.

*A foreign language was also taught but the choice was left to the parents. English was the most popular with German a close second. Before the war, the position had been reversed. There were only two foreign languages taught in any single school. If a child wished to study a language not taught in his school, he could go to a neighbouring one where it was in the routine curriculum.*

*Another important point was that if the parents so desired the child could be taught a foreign language even from the age of five years in a kindergarten. He would study this for  $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours a week even at so early an age.*

Here in Ceylon the National Education Commission which completed its labours in 1962 has recommended that English should not be made compulsory and should be commenced in the 3rd Grade at the 7th-8th year. *I believe most sincerely that that is a retrograde step. Every Ceylonese child should have the right to learn a world language from the age of five or six years of age. It should be made compulsory for every single child to learn Sinhalese and Tamil, whatever community he springs from. That is the only way by which unity could ever be attained in an embittered and heterogenous country. Many of the students now arriving at the University of Ceylon know only their mother tongue. This is a tragedy and spells doom for the intellectual progress of the country. To know no Tamil and less English does not make for a better but a worse Sinhalese. The sooner our leaders and so-called educationists realise the truth of that simple fact, the better for Sri Lanka. As Nehru has said English is our window to the modern world and unless we deliberately want to be out-of-step with the rest of the world as some petty-minded and schizophrenic politicians wish, it would be intellectual and national suicide for us to shut this window.*

Most time in the first grade of the Middle School (11-12 years) in U.S.S.R. was devoted to the study of the mother tongue and arithmetic. Boys also had to devote three hours a week during this time to a workshop where they were taught carpentry, etc. Girls similarly did needlework during this period.

12-13 years — (Second grade of Middle School). Physics, algebra, geometry and history of the middle ages were introduced for the first time and zoology was substituted for botany. Each subject was taught for two hours a week but *foreign languages for three and a half hours!*

13-14 years — (Third grade of Middle School). Chemistry, physics, zoology for two hours a week, Russian, foreign languages and mathematics for three to three and a half hours each.

14-15 years — (Fourth grade of Middle School). Same subjects, same periods as in previous year but at a more advanced level.



15-18 years — Middle Professional School. There was an entrance examination to this school. If the student failed the test, he might still continue his studies in the *Middle Technical School* or seek employment and continue his studies in evening classes. The curriculum was the same as in the Professional School but probably at a different level. These Technical Schools were specialised and trained personnel for jobs like laboratory and field technical assistants or technicians. The course of training lasted for four-five years and at the end of it they were awarded a certificate or diploma on the results of an examination. If they failed this test, they could repeat the course and take the same examination after one year.

The course in the Middle Professional School lasted for three years from 15-18 years of age. Foreign languages were taught for three hours a week. When the pupils finished this course and passed the final examination, they could get jobs as computer supervisors or if they wished it as laboratory assistants. The curriculum was wider but less specialised than in the middle Technical Schools but if graduates from both schools sought jobs, the technicians got higher salaries than the professionals. This was extraordinary! Further, the technicians could continue their education in evening classes but they could not go to a University. They could however enter a Technical Institute such as for medicine or engineering. I believe this unexpected and surprising order of things was due to the following reaction. Over 80% of the middle professional graduates would progress to a university in the humanities, pure science or mathematics etc. It was only the mediocrity who broke off his studies and sought employment at that stage. Further, the course in the Middle Professional School lasted only three years, while that in the corresponding Technical School lasted four or five. Hence the training was much more specialised. Apparently the training in the former was deliberately down graded in order to stimulate the intelligent graduate to continue his studies further in the University or Technical Institutes.

In the languages courses at the Middle Professional School, the students pursued studies in literature but not in grammar; algebra, geometry and trigonometry were taught for five hours a week, while modern history and physics occupied three hours each but chemistry, biology, evolution, human anatomy and physiology including hygiene and sanitation, drawing, and physical culture were studied for only two hours each.

Specially selected students with supernormal I.Q.'s were given courses in electronics and mathematical physics during this period. The latter was undertaken in special schools with a mathematical bias.



What I was not told because I did not enquire inadvertently was the number of hours devoted to the teaching of Communism!

*School Health Services.*—Two neighbouring schools shared one doctor who, in addition to examining each healthy child *at least once a year*, was also obliged to deliver lectures on personal hygiene and sanitation. A full-time nurse was attached to each school, who was of a senior grade such as a Sister. All immunisations were given free at each school.

*School Meals.*—Each child was expected to pay about one quarter of the cost of the meal and it was well within the means of all the parents to pay this amount. To those who could not get their breakfast before they left home or to those who reached home very late after school, a hot meal was served before school commenced; this costs 10k (-/50 cts.). A three-course dinner including meat or fish and fruit would cost only 25k. In the country these meals were given free because the produce was obtained from the kolхозes or from school gardens which cultivated fruits and vegetables as part of the teaching programme on social work and nature study.

*Adult Science Education.*—I interviewed Dr. Balov, the chief of the Department of Evening Schools for the whole Russian Republic in the same building.

These evening classes were specially meant for those adults who did not receive a full education in schools due to various circumstances like war, sickness etc. About 50% of the factories and plants had special buildings for these evening classes. 70% of all the workers attended these classes. *I was assured that they were all voluntary.* I have checked this over and over again and have received the same answers so I have no reason but only scepticism to doubt it! These classes were held at all times of the day, not in the evenings. The workers did not get special time off to attend these classes but those who attended them had only a five day working week. *They only got half pay for the day they left off work* but when they sat for an examination, they obtained their full pay. Those who did not attend classes got a full six day pay. *Hence one was penalised financially for attending classes!*

I therefore asked why they attended these classes. After passing their examinations, they could study in the Middle Professional or Technical Schools, depending on the marks scored. Further, for higher skilled jobs with better pay, workers who had undergone this schooling had a better chance than those who had not: that therefore was the motivation.

These classes consumed 18 hours on 3-4 days a week plus 2 hours weekly for special interviews with the teachers. The latter



however was not obligatory. The teachers were not specially trained for this work but had only the usual training course which was undertaken by all school teachers.

There were however special courses in the Pedagogical (teacher trainee) Institutes for Training in Adult Education. This included practice in ordinary schools as well as in adult schools. This course lasted for 36 weeks throughout the winter months.

These adult school teachers followed their vocation during the whole of their active professional lives in town, but in the country they might change from adult to children's schools after a few years. The laboratory facilities available for these adults were the same as in the Middle Technical or Professional Schools. After passing their examinations, the graduates could enter either the university or the technical institutes. *These adults were given preference over school children for entry into these institutions.* These courses could also be followed at home by anyone who wished to do so without attendance at factory classes. They might and did usually have special consultations at regular and frequent intervals with their teachers before they dared to sit for the examination.

A factory worker in the USSR had a 42 hour week while a miner had a 36. If he had to devote 18-20 hours a week to study over and above this, there was not much time left for leisure and play! Does this account for the intensiveness apparent on many Soviet countenances?

## CHAPTER 12

### **"Home My Footsteps I Have Turned"**

ALMOST the first question I was asked by a medical friend on my return was, "If you had to decide between taking a job in U.K. and one in U.S.S.R. on the same terms, which would you choose?" That was a rather loaded question. My only son and his wife and my grandchild were living in London; my professional education had been mainly concentrated in that city; many of my valued and sincere friends were British.

"If I had a contract for three to five years, I would go to U.S.S.R. If I had one for life, I would on the other hand choose U.K."

"Why?" he asked.

"Well, at present the U.S.S.R. is probably the most fascinating country in the world. Its government is generous, its leadership enlightened and liberal and being a foreigner I would have no wish to criticise it. On the other hand this government, its leaders and its policy might conceivably change in the future for the worse. There might, God forbid it, be a reversal to Stalinism.

"What then?" he asked.

"I would certainly not wish to live in a country under such a rule. In England one could be quite certain of an absence of gross cruelty, whatever difficulties one might have to experience owing to one's colour. I know from my frequent visits to Great Britain that colour prejudice is getting less and less obnoxious, at least among the educated classes, though it is probably more so among the workers due mainly to economic reasons".

It must be said to Russia's credit that not for a single moment in that vast country was I made to feel conscious of my colour and this could not be said of any other European or North American land that I have visited so far. I must in fairness state however that in Australia too I was never conscious of my colour though I spent twice as long there as in U.S.S.R. and travelled widely from Perth to Brisbane via Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney.

The U.S.S.R. is no Paradise but one must give praise where praise is due. No other country in the world has done so much, in spite of war, famine and internal strife, for so many of her peoples in so short a time as U.S.S.R. When I suggested that the conversion of a 75% illiterate to a 98% literate population in less than two generations was a miracle, a cousin remarked that



Japan had done the same; but it took much longer and Japan did not have the setbacks, invasion and destruction that the Soviet Union suffered from. No other country has raised the health standards of her peoples at the rate at which the U.S.S.R. had done. *The increase in the survival period and the rate of decrease in the mortality and morbidity figures have been unprecedented.* Whether these results could have been achieved under any other system of government in that country during the same period of time might be extremely doubtful. Undoubtedly many of her people think that the end has justified the means; that does not necessarily mean that there may not be as many people who may also doubt it. I would not know and it is extremely difficult for any foreigner to elicit the truth because for historical reasons the Soviet people are suspicious of outlanders. They would probably trust an Asian more than a European but a knowledge of the Russian language is absolutely essential before one tried to seek the truth.

This statement also does not mean that I think that Communism is the only system of government under which another country like Ceylon could reach the same standards. This surely is refuted by countries like Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Holland and many others where there has been a happy blending of socialism with capitalism and where there is an absence of that hit-you-in-the-face disparity between the very rich and the very poor.

People who make this sharp distinction between the two systems are living in a world of blacks and whites; there seem to be no greys in their fields of thought and action. *There must be co-existence or else co-extinction.*

I also believe that a country like Ceylon needs at the moment a far greater sense of responsibility and discipline and I cannot see how this can be achieved except through a "strong government". Socialism cannot, in my opinion, work successfully except in a highly disciplined and educated community. *We lack both qualities.* One cannot instil discipline into an undisciplined community except through harsh means for at least a short time. That is ineluctable. It is not my intention to etiolate the dangers of totalitarianism and I believe that they may be serious but one has to make a choice now between letting Ceylon follow a policy either of blundering on with almost no one in power knowing what he wants and where he is going or a line of firm action. If this present *laissez faire* policy is continued for long with the present rate of population expansion in a community which has become, en masse, intensely but narrowly politically conscious, it is not difficult to foresee the inevitable consequences. I believe in all sincerity that our country has come to such a pass and that unless very firm measures are taken and taken soon, there will be a holocaust which will make the French Revolution look like a Sunday school picnic!

Socialism cannot work in a country divided by internecine disputes on matters of secondary importance from the point of view of economic and technological development. Unless and until the government of my country can convince Citizen Benedict and Citizen Tambiah that they and their children have the same chances for jobs and advancement, for praise and blame for the things that cheer and those that depress, for life and love, even for death and destruction as Citizen Ran Banda and his children, there can be no hope for unity and progress, prosperity and peace. One cannot continue to treat one-seventh or one-eighth of the population as second-rate citizens and appeal to them to co-operate loyally and to render devoted service to a country that does not in their view given them a square deal. The government must not only render impartial justice to each and every citizen, but must also appear to do so. *No frustrated minority group in any country can be patriotic except in these circumstances.*

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