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# My Russian Diary—I.

Star  
22/10/30. By GARETH JONES.

*SOME of the most brilliant and realistic pen-pictures yet made of the New Russia appear in the series of extracts which "The Star" will print from the diary of a young Englishman who speaks Russian fluently and has just returned from an unescorted trip.*

**W**HAT a jumble Moscow is! As I hung like grim death on to the crowded tram on my way from the station, I saw some rickety, broken-down old houses cheek by jowl with some typical New York skyscrapers. Funny effect. One moment the tram rattles round a corner and you find yourself staring at a street that looks like some out-of-the-way village—cobble stones, people dressed like peasants. Then suddenly you are looking at a fine modernist, straight-lined building with heaps of storeys. I was so engrossed with this contrast that I forgot to buy my ticket. Somebody pinched my arm. It was a girl with bare legs, red kerchief over her hair. "Hey, you there, you haven't paid for your ticket." She was the ticket-collector.

"How much?" I asked.

"Ten kopeks" (2½d.).

I fumbled in my pocket and could not find any change.

"I haven't any change," I said. She just shrugged her shoulders and turned away. "Nobody's got change," and bothered me no more.

So I had my first tram ride in Moscow for nothing.

**A**N American professor told me next day that he had taken a droshky (horse carriage) from the station to his hotel. It was only about the distance from Charing Cross to Hyde Park, and he had paid over £2 for the ride.

**W**HAT would a barber's shop be like in a Workers' Republic? I wanted a shave badly, so I went into a small wooden building which had "wigmaker" written on it. Dropping my bag into the corner, I sat in the barber's chair. He smothered me with lather, and then bent down and asked me in Russian: "Have you a razor?" "Yes, I have a razor." He got excited, and then I heard the strangest request one would ever expect to hear from a hairdresser. "Will you sell me your razor?" he whispered in my ear. "But you are a barber. You ought to sell me a razor, not buy one from me," I said.

"Well, I want a new razor. All our razors are bad. They won't cut, and so I can't make a living. You see, I'm a private trader. I don't belong to one of those new-fangled co-operative societies, like that one across the road called 'The Way to the New Life Barber's Shop.' But please sell me your razor."

"I'm exceedingly sorry, but I've only got a safety razor," I replied.

thought, after I had shaken hands with my companion and strolled towards the Tverskaya, or the Regent-street of Moscow.

**Y**OU do not realise what a wonderful road sense Londoners have until you have been driven in a car through the streets of Moscow. Your chauffeur rushes along at a break-neck speed over the cobble stones. Men and women scatter before you like a flock of sheep. Everybody walks in the road. Nobody looks round to see if any vehicle is coming. When one does come the pedestrians fly here and fly there, shouting and screaming. It was strange that our trail was not littered with dozens of corpses.

**W**ORK as usual everywhere to-day. No Sundays here. "What day of the week is it, please?" I asked a young worker. He replied: "I am very sorry, I do not know. I know the date, but whether it is Monday or Friday, Wednesday or Saturday, I have no idea. We have got the Five Day Week now and we only reckon by dates. And, of course, our factories work all the time through."

**T**HE Communist effort to make the Mass Man will have a stubborn opponent in the force of coquetry and ornament it seems. I saw a human touch in a restaurant to-day which would have displeased me in London but which delighted me in Moscow.

I noticed a dirty little co-operative restaurant in a small street, strolled in, stood in the usual long queue, bought the usual little ticket for soup and bread and took a seat just underneath a picture of Lenin and Stalin.

From my table I had a glimpse of a mirror in the room where the waitresses left their hats and coats. As I was sipping my cabbage soup I could just see a reflection of a real Soviet girl putting rouge on her lips. Now there would have been some excuse for plastering on red in the Workers' Capital. But she even went on to make her face white with powder.

The paint and the powder were not applied with skill, the operation in England would not be greeted with any joy by one of the Puritanical upbringing, and yet here in Moscow it warmed the cockles of my heart, for it was so human, so feminine, in a country where personal adornment is not encouraged and where the machine is sometimes placed on a higher level than the

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His face fell. He went on shaving me in silence.

He was more interested in razors than in Communism.

I MET a real joker to-day. I happened to sit down on a bench beneath a tree looking at the red walls of the Kremlin, a vast and ancient fortress in the centre of the city. Next to me was a man with narrow slit sparkling eyes, very Asiatic, with black hair and a tiny round embroidered cap. We started chatting, for it seems easy to get into conversation with people in Russia. He had a great sense of humour, and as he spoke his little dark eyes twinkled.

"Oh, yes, we Russians, we've got some fine jokes. If we're hungry we make a joke about it. If we can't get clothes or boots, it doesn't stop us laughing. But our funniest jokes are from Armenia."

I gathered that stories were told about Armenians, just as they are told about Aberdonians.

The man with the Asiatic eyes continued.

The Armenians are always asking riddles.

Now here's a fine one. What is it that hangs on the walls is green and squeaks?

Now try and answer that."

It was a puzzling question and I failed.

"I give it up," I said.

"Why, a herring, of course," he said, and burst into loud laughter.

"A herring?" I asked. "But why. Why does it hang on the wall?"

"Oh, it hangs on the wall because a peasant put it on the wall."

"But why is it green?" was my question.

He replied, "Oh, it's green because the peasant put it on the wall a long time ago."

"But a herring doesn't squeak," I said.

"Oh," he spluttered in his laughter.

That's to make it harder. They've got some fine jokes, the Armenians."

No wonder the Turks massacred them, I

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