

CHAPTER XII

My last interview with Kerensky at Stavka—prior to his return to Petrograd—left a very bad impression on me. The situation on the front was going from bad to worse. From every sector there was mass desertion. The soldiers' committees were expelling, persecuting and murdering all officers who tried to keep some semblance of law and order. Kerensky—the last hope—was a vacillating and bombastic weakling, who played ducks and drakes with his own party, with his supporters, and with his country.

On November 6, 1917, when the situation was already beyond repair, he declared, in the name of the Provisional Government, the outlawry of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Soviets which was controlled by the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

Lenin had organized at Petrograd a Red Guard composed of soldiers, sailors and workmen, with its headquarters at the Smolny Institute. The Military Revolutionary Committee's reply to Kerensky was to give battle. Street fighting started in the afternoon and by the following morning Petrograd was in the hands of the Bolsheviks and Kerensky in ignominious flight. The following day the Soviet Government was formed by decree. A few days later, after stubborn and sanguinary street fighting, Moscow was captured from the Whites and a Soviet régime established in that town. Meanwhile the agents of the Bolsheviks were working everywhere through the country, agitating

for the establishment of a Soviet régime. In this task they were helped by agitators in the pay of the German secret service, for Germany wished to smash the Russian army, disintegrate the country, and have in power a party whom they believed would eat out of the hands of the Wilhelmstrasse and meekly carry out the orders of the German High Command.

Following the flight of Kerensky, General Dukhonin, as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian forces, assumed the obligations of the Provisional Government. Dukhonin was a pawn of fate, thoroughly unfitted for the post he occupied. He had been used as a stop-gap by Kerensky and, although an excellent executive soldier, was unfit for administrative work and was no statesman. He always impressed me as being a very simple Russian soul; on two occasions I stood just behind him during mass at the Mohileff Cathedral, and the sincerity with which he carried out his devotions and his general humbleness convinced me that he was far too much of a fatalist to be a good fighter. He was surrounded by intrigue, which was not lacking even among the senior commanders of his personal staff. The whole of the general staff showed a lack of initiative and co-operation. Everyone was waiting for someone else to do something. Only the Soldiers', Sailors' and Peasants' Councils were active and their activity, directed by the German secret service, was the activity of destruction.

The military duty which had brought me to Stavka vanished with Kerensky's government. I tried to form the junior officers into some sort of an organization but without success. Then I decided to begin propaganda among the regimental Soldiers'

Councils, and here I was rather more successful. I found that Colonel Boyle was doing the same thing. He did not speak a word of Russian and had to employ an interpreter, but little things of that kind were not allowed to stand in the way of Klondyke Boyle. He was living in a very ornate, up-to-date saloon railway carriage which he had fitted out delightfully, and in which I spent many happy hours. Boyle and I had many interests in common. He knew the Pacific Coast from A to Z, and he was very proud of the fact that his collar and shoulder badges were made of Yukon gold. My residence in British Columbia and my own knowledge of the Yukon made a tie between us, and we were united in our view that the situation in Russia might still be turned to the advantage of the Allies.

The Allied Military Mission were doing their best to expose the Austro-German machinations by propaganda among the rank and file of the Russian army. The German agents spotted this at once and started an agitation among the members of the Soldiers', Sailors' and Peasants' Council at Stavka, to have the Allied Missions thrown out and, if necessary, murdered.

One afternoon I learned that the Council was in special session debating our fate. A few minutes later I happened to meet Boyle in the street and told him what was toward.

"I wish I had my interpreter with me," was Boyle's comment; "I would go and address the Council."

"I will interpret for you," said I.

"Done!" said Boyle.

We arrived at a packed hall. On learning our purpose in coming the President of the meeting was most unwilling that we should speak, but we pressed

him so hard that finally he agreed to put the matter to the vote of the meeting. Boyle and I were standing just inside the wings of the tiny stage when the motion was put. It was received with a howl—of ferocious intensity—the angry howl of an infuriated pack.

And in the middle of all that turmoil of wrath and hatred, and without waiting for anyone's leave, Boyle stepped on to the stage. I followed. He gazed for a moment at the audience, and then spoke. His voice was clear and musical, his sentences short and crisp. It was a terrible moment. At first the crowd was taken by surprise. Then there was a move to rush the stage. But it was too late. Boyle had got hold of his audience, while I translated sentence for sentence, though I do not mind confessing that I did not find it at all easy to keep my voice level, and my manner calm and undisturbed.

Boyle knew crowd psychology. He gripped the attention of his hearers. He began with stories about Canada. Then he switched into Russian history. The speech did not last more than fifteen minutes, and concluded with a stirring peroration in which he reminded his listeners that Russians never surrendered. They might retreat into Russia, as they did during Napoleon's invasion, but it was only to return to the attack with renewed ardour. "You are men," he concluded, "not sheep. I order you to act as men."

Thunders of applause followed. A soldier jumped up on the stage and shouted "Long live the Allies. Down with the Germans!" The ovation continued for some minutes. Finally Boyle and I were escorted by the mob to the hotel and an enthusiastic demonstra-

tion in favour of the Allied Military Mission was held which was addressed by each of the Allied Generals in turn.

After this Boyle and I decided to join forces. We both believed that co-operation with the Bolsheviks was the best means of serving the Allied cause against the Germans in Russia. Neither Boyle nor I at any time subscribed either to Bolshevik policy or doctrines, but we felt that these were things apart and would be dealt with in due course by the Russian people. Our job was to harry the Germans and Austrians and in pursuit of this end we decided to go to Petrograd and see what we could do at Bolshevik headquarters. A further reason for going was that, owing to the civil war which had been raging, the important railway junction known as Moscow Knot was hopelessly choked. Supplies going to the south-western front had been stopped, and Boyle, who had been in charge of this area, had received a telegram from the General Officer in command of the south-western army, saying that the mass desertion of his front was due to the absence of supplies. We hoped that we might be able to untie the Knot. However, we did not get to Petrograd without an attempt at revenge on the part of the German agents.

We travelled from Stavka with a huge crowd of soldiers hanging on to the open platform at the end of our carriage. The train, like all Russian trains, was packed and passengers had to travel as best they could. At Orsha, an hour out from Stavka, our carriage had to be switched from the Moscow train, to which it was attached, to the waiting Petrograd express.

It was shunted, and then deliberately smashed into

fixed buffers at high speed. The car was wrecked. Boyle and I were unhurt, but some of the soldiers on the outer platform were killed. For a moment the air was rent by terrible screams. Then there was a stupefied silence. Boyle and I scrambled out on to the line. After the crash the car had rebounded, and one poor soldier was pinned beneath a wheel of the carriage. I think he was already dead, but all our efforts to get him out were unavailing. Meantime the engine driver had fled. However, we found another and ordered him to back the wreck so that we might be able to get the body clear. But while we were working hard to free the poor wretch, the shuntsman suddenly blew his whistle and the whole car was run over the pinned body. Then Boyle rose in anger, and with a smashing blow hit the shuntsman square in the mouth. I fancy that after coming to that fellow found he would never be able to use a whistle again with any comfort.

No more was to be done. We had seen the last of our saloon car. We transferred our belongings from the wreckage to an ordinary sleeper, and in due course arrived in Petrograd.

CHAPTER XIII

OUR first task after arrival was to get possession of a new saloon carriage since, owing to the terrible congestion, travelling in ordinary carriages was almost impossible. No matter where the train was going it was not only full to suffocation inside, but also crowded outside, with men and women. People would huddle together on the roofs of the carriages and quite cheerfully travel in this way for a journey lasting three or four days.

I went down to the yards to look over available special carriages and chose one numbered 451. If not as modern or ornate as that which had been wrecked it was more solidly built, and equipped with bullet-proof walls. It had been the private car of the Empress Marie Feodorovna, and consisted of an observation dining-saloon, a combined state bedroom and sitting-room, five coupés with the usual double sleeping-berth in each, a small pantry with a stove and a plant for heating the carriage, and finally a lavatory. Moreover it was equipped with a self-generating electric-light plant. Though I expended the utmost care on the selection of this carriage I did not think at the time that I was going to live in it and make it my home for nearly seven months. Number 451 was in the care of a fierce, rather elderly, very competent conductor named Ivan, of whom more anon.

It took us a day to provision the car and

install ourselves in it, after which we had it transferred to a reserve platform on the Nicolai station with the intention of using it in preference to an hotel.

The following morning we buckled on our swords and drove off to the Smolny Institute.

The Smolny Institute had been a boarding-school for the daughters of the nobility—the female Eton of Russia. Lenin considered that both for strategic reasons and because of its large size it would be the most suitable site for his headquarters, and therefore, early one morning, one of his detachments had swept down on the place and kindly but firmly ejected from its precincts all the trembling young ladies, their governesses, teachers and the principal.

It was a low, grey, colonnaded building with a dome in the centre, and was surrounded by a fairly high brick wall, which was topped by a fence of iron railings. Its courtyard was full of men: members of the Red Guard, unmilitary-looking soldiers, civilian workmen, and a fair sprinkling of sailors. The sailors in their black leather jerkins and sailor caps caught the eye at once. They were the best-armed men in the crowd and moved as a trained body among that disorderly jumble. The workmen and soldiers were armed according to no order. Some had rifles, others just bayonets and pockets bulging with hand-grenades, and the prevailing fashion seemed to be a machine-gun belt full of cartridges wound round the body. Where this indisciplined horde crowded thickest stood a couple of armoured cars. Boyle and I fought our way through to the entrance of the building, where we found ourselves faced by the muzzles of a couple of field guns. The place was well fortified

though had those guns ever been fired, the recoil would have carried them through the wall and brought the whole entrance down on top of them.

The entrance hall was fuller, if anything, than the courtyard. Nobody seemed to be doing anything in particular, and we wandered around, poking our heads into various corridors until at last we reached one where a sentry was on duty. We were brusquely informed that we were not allowed in there. Clearly this was the entrance to the inner sanctum of the Bolshevik leaders.

"I want to see Comrade Joffe, the President of the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee," said I to the sentry.

"Well, you will find him somewhere down this corridor," answered the sentry carelessly, and let us through.

Again we wandered along the passage, looking into various rooms, all of which were almost bare of furniture but quite full of people. I called out for Comrade Joffe, and at each door was referred to another room. However, at last we traced him. We were among the very first of the Allied officers to penetrate Smolny, though I think that both the French and American representatives had forestalled us by a few hours. Joffe came forward in quite a friendly manner and apologized because there were no chairs for us to sit on.

The room was full of hangers-on. From the moment of seizing power the Bolsheviks had declared that an end had come to all secret diplomacy, that the proletariat were in duty bound to assist in the affairs of state, and that they were cordially invited to attend all Government offices and see that matters were

being conducted to their satisfaction. Hence in the early days of Smolny anyone was admitted. But this Utopian state of affairs lasted only a few weeks, and within a month it was more difficult to see Messrs. Lenin, Trotsky, or their confrères than it is to see any cabinet minister in England.

We explained to Joffe the work we had been doing with the Provisional Government, and told him that we were willing to go on with it provided that we had the support of the Bolshevik authorities. In particular, we pointed out to him how the southwestern army was starving owing to the congestion of the railway Knot at Moscow, and that it was essential to get food supplies down to it.

To this Joffe replied that it was not only the southwestern army that was being faced with starvation, but that Petrograd likewise was threatened, and that the Bolsheviks would be quite ready to give us every facility they possibly could to further our work.

Ruthless, ignorant, pig-headed, seeking to conduct affairs on a strict adherence to a few second-hand phrases, the Bolsheviks yet had a rough-and-ready system of working by rule of thumb, which is at the root of any success which they have attained.

Joffe hurried off and fetched Podvoisky who had just been appointed Minister of War by Lenin. Podvoisky was a most undetermined sort of man, being unique in that respect among all the Bolsheviks I have ever met. I think that Joffe must have sensed that the interview was not going any too well, for he bustled off again and this time brought in Karahan, a good-looking Armenian who was

very well turned out and had a rather distinguished manner.

I think it was Radek, with his very bitter tongue, who once in my hearing described Karahan as "a donkey of classical beauty." But Karahan was no fool (he is still a People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs). He saw at once the importance of our demands and went off to fetch Lenin.

Lenin ambled in, Karahan in his wake. The outward appearance of the Dictator was that of a strong and simple man of less than middle height with a Slavonic cast of countenance, piercing eyes, and a powerful forehead. He shook hands with us. His manner was not friendly, nor could it be said to be hostile; it was completely detached. He listened to what Joffe and Karahan had to say about us, and when they had finished, nodded his head two or three times and said, "Of course, they must be given full facilities for the work they are doing." Now that the Commissars had got him there, they plied him with questions concerning other matters which they had in hand, and I noticed at once how ready he was with well-reasoned advice, which he gave with disarming simplicity. In a few minutes he had polished off their questions and then bowing to us strolled away with his hands behind his back.

Meanwhile I explained to Joffe that we should require passes from him authorizing us to do the work which had been agreed upon, and he promised that we should have them without delay provided that he could find a typewriter. At once half a dozen of the hangers-on and a couple of so-called secretaries were sent scouring the building for a typewriter, and after about twenty minutes a dilapidated machine

was brought in. Then he found that there was no table on which to put it. Joffe always stood at the window-sill when he wanted to write.

Off went another messenger and returned with a school desk. Then another hitch occurred. Nobody there knew how to type. Finally one of Joffe's three or four secretaries volunteered to make an attempt.

Stationery had already been produced with the Smolny heading and the crossed sickle and hammer—the sign of the Peasants' and Workmen's Republic—embossed in the left-hand corner.

I dictated the very fullest of powers for Boyle and myself, which Joffe scribbled down on paper, agreed to without alteration and passed over to the lady who had volunteered to do the typing. It was a lengthy business as she only used one finger, and was not very adept at manipulating a rubber. Finally the document was ready. On reading it through I noticed that the typist on her own initiative had changed "Colonel Boyle and Captain Hill" into "Comrades Boyle and Hill." I was inclined to let this pass, but Boyle stood upon his dignity, insisted on our proper titles, and at the direction of Joffe the document was retyped, and once again in agony we watched that solitary finger wander over the thirty-six letters of the Russian alphabet.

Finally Joffe's signature was appended to the document, the necessary seals affixed and countersigned by a secretary and we took our leave.

I have always had a friendly feeling towards Joffe, and was sorry to hear some years ago that he had taken his own life. A queer fate has overtaken many of those Bolsheviks whom I met when they were in power in 1917-18. Volodarsky, Vorovsky, Uritsky

which was the rattle of rifle and revolver firing, then came the pat-pat-patter of machine-guns, and our horse pitched forward with a bullet through his head. We paid the driver the full fare we had bargained for and, leaving him weeping over his horse, proceeded to our destination on foot.

Before the Bolshevik revolution Boyle had been unofficially controlling the south-western railways, and was very well known to the executive boards of the Russian State Railways, by whom he was liked and trusted. The technical boards were staffed for the most part by anti-Bolsheviks and, as a counter-attack on nationalization, confiscation, and ill-treatment of the bourgeois classes by the Bolsheviks, they had commenced a system of sabotage on the railways. This, of course, was tantamount to cutting off the nose to spite the face, and our purpose was to persuade the railway board—at our direction—to put a stop to the sabotage, and assist us in untying the Moscow railway Knot. They did not require much persuading to use their authority as far as it extended, but they pointed out that they could do nothing with the personnel or with labourers in the railway yards as these were controlled by their unions who, in turn, were directed by the Soviets and the Bolsheviks. We undertook to bring the Bolsheviks into line, and went off at once to Bolshevik headquarters.

The streets were for the most part deserted, the houses pockmarked with machine-gun and rifle bullets, and in the neighbourhood of the Kremlin buildings were smashed up by shell fire. In the centre of the town there was hardly a whole shop window and the broken glass had been replaced by rough wooden

screens. An air of gloom and depression hung over the town like a pall. The Bolsheviks had their headquarters in a building of which the imposing exterior only accentuated the filth and squalor within. As at Smolny, the building was packed with unwashed soldiers, workmen, hooligans of the city, and convicts who had been indiscriminately released from the prisons by the Bolsheviks. Through the mob we fought our way to the commander of Moscow, a soldier named Muralov. Pending his arrival we were entertained by his adjutant, an overdressed dandy who had decorated himself with a couple of Mauser revolvers, three or four hand-grenades of the German pattern, on longish sticks, two whistles, and a policeman's truncheon, and drenched himself with at least a bottle of cheap scent. The effluvia wafted from his person did not improve the general stench of the ante-room, the air of which was thick with the odour of unclean humanity and cheap tobacco smoke. In a business-like way and none too gently the adjutant cleared off three or four dirty-looking individuals from a gorgeous Louis XV couch. But out of reverence for their entomological companions we declined the invitation to be seated.

Muralov was a pleasant surprise. He was a tall, dark-bearded Russian with a frank face and intelligent eyes, a hand on him like a leg of mutton and a very deep voice. We took a liking to each other at once. We showed him Joffe's document and, stating our business, explained the arrangement we had made with the Central Railway Control Board and asked for his co-operation, which he readily gave us. What was more, he gave us complete liberty of action within that area of hundreds of junction lines, loading

platforms and shunting sidings which formed the Moscow railway Knot.

It was in his room that we drew up drastic plans for the following day and explained the proposed arrangements over the telephone to the Central Railway Board, who agreed to carry out our plan. We returned to our carriage feeling that we had done a good day's work.

The following morning at the principal depot, the railway staff were ready to do their part, but the engine drivers, the lorry drivers and the working gangs had not turned up. As all these people came under the orders of the Bolsheviks we went off and complained to Muralov. Muralov summoned the men's leaders, to the number of about twenty-five, and asked why his orders had not been carried out. There was no explanation.

"If your gangs are not in place and ready to commence work to-morrow morning at seven o'clock," said Muralov, "I shall shoot six of you, and it will be decided by lot which of you are to be executed."

The Bolsheviks had been in power less than a month, but Russia already knew that they had an unpleasant way of carrying out their threats to the letter. Accordingly I was not surprised that the gangs were in place at seven o'clock on the following morning. We cleared that congested knot in two days. Whole trains were pitched over embankments, empty trucks run out along the lines and pitched into fields. Our methods were very much criticized by the technical staff; but I think that we were justified, for within three days the lines were cleared, the confusion remedied, and trains able to proceed with

much-needed food supplies to Petrograd, and rations and fodder in the opposite direction to Kieff and the south-western army. It was owing to this timely arrival of supplies that the general in command of the south-western army was able to keep three hundred thousand men in their trenches and engage the attention of an equal number of Germans.

CHAPTER XV

ABOUT this time the Bolshevik papers gave details of an armistice which Lenin and Trotsky had proposed to the German High Command with a view to negotiating an immediate peace. General Dukhonin, at Stavka, had refused to transmit these requests to the Germans. Dukhonin was dismissed by the Bolsheviks and the chief command of the Russian armies given to a subaltern officer, Ensign Krylenko. Dukhonin refused to leave his post. It was rumoured that Krylenko was moving against Stavka. Boyle and I decided that there would probably be work for us at Stavka, and we had our special car transferred from the Petrograd to the Briansk station along the Knot which we had opened.

On our way to the station we encountered the gigantic funeral procession of some four hundred of the Red Guard who had been killed in the recent street fighting. In Russia it is the custom to carry the coffin opened to the place of interment. Many of the bodies had remained in the frost for days, and owing to the immense number for burial and the hurried preparations for the interment, some of the corpses had been placed in the coffins more or less in the positions in which they had frozen. The dead were interred by the Kremlin Wall in the great Red Square, where Lenin's mausoleum now stands, with their graves on either flank.

The weather was so cold that the windows of our

carriage were covered with frost, and as we pulled out of Briansk station the setting sun lit up the frost crystals on the windows into a myriad jewels of flaming opal while the whole western horizon blazed like a fiery furnace.

At Orsha, where only a little while previously our saloon carriage had been deliberately wrecked, we ran into a detachment of Comrade Krylenko's force, consisting of Red Guards and sailors from Kronstadt. Everything was in a state of chaos. There must have been two or three hundred camp-fires alight in the station yard. For fuel they had used the spare, valuable and irreplaceable oak sleepers. The station-master was cowed by terror, and dared not protest, for his assistant had been executed as a counter-revolutionary for objecting to the use to which the sleepers had been put.

We had our carriage coupled to the train which was conveying a small detachment going to reinforce Krylenko at Stavka, and were informed that Dukhonin was a prisoner, having been treacherously surrendered by some of his own guard. At last our train drew up at Stavka station opposite a stationary one some five platforms away. The entire space between the two trains was a howling mob of armed men, who kept baying like hungry wolves, "We Want Dukhonin." Suddenly a little figure with a bearded face came out on the platform of a first-class carriage opposite our own and tried to address the mob. It was Krylenko. The mob would not listen to him, but howled him down; his courage failed him and he slunk back into the carriage, while the fury of the crowd surged up higher than ever.

Then someone else appeared on the carriage plat-

form and held out in his hands two large, heavily tasselled silver epaulettes. There was a moment's silence. "These are Dukhonin's," called out the man and flung them to the crowd. They were seized and torn into a million shreds. It was like watching a pack of wild wolves. Then the baying recommenced. "We want Dukhonin. . . . *We want Dukhonin. . . . WE WANT DUKHONIN.*" The man who had held the epaulettes vanished into the carriage, and a moment later reappeared pushing someone in front of him. I recognized Dukhonin.

For a moment he stood on the step, clutching the rail and looking down at the inhuman frenzy of the crowd. Only for a moment. His foot might have slipped or he might have been pushed from behind. I do not know. But suddenly he lurched forward, was caught by a thousand hands and hurled into the centre of the crowd. There was a scuffle. It ended. There was a pause. A circle was being formed in the middle of the crowd and then, as a man is tossed in a blanket, Dukhonin was thrown into the air. Round the circle came a crackle of musketry, and as his body fell it was caught on the waiting bayonets. For a moment longer the corpse was worried on the ground. A hush fell on the crowd. Even those hundreds of yards away knew what had happened. Someone laughed, and a voice said, "Well, he's dead!" The sadistic lust of the mob was satisfied and it started to disperse. A few curious persons pressed forward to look at the poor mangled body as it lay oozing in its pool of blood. Then the station rapidly emptied until between our carriage and that of Krylenko there was only the mutilated body of the Commander-in-Chief. A station sweeper

came forward, in a mechanical way crossed himself, and dragged the remains unassisted down the line and over a platform into a goods shed. Someone descended from Krylenko's carriage and a few minutes later I noticed that an armed guard had been placed at the door of the shed in which the body lay.

Thus was butchered Dukhonin, Commander-in-Chief of five million fighting men. *Requiescat in pace.*

We had witnessed the whole horrible affair, and had been able to do nothing. Of what had happened in Stavka itself and of the fate of the Allied Mission we knew nothing. We decided to go and investigate. The station yard was empty, and we rightly assumed that most of the crowd had gone off to loot the town. We commandeered a dilapidated Renault car which was standing there unattended and drove to the Bristol.

On our way we compared impressions of the crowd. We agreed that there had been a number of men who were neither soldiers, sailors nor workmen, but were of quite a different stamp and who had acted almost like stewards. One or two we had previously noted working in the soldiers' committees, and were pretty confident that they were part of the German Secret Service organization. Many years afterwards, through the memoirs of various German, Austrian and Hungarian generals and officials, our suspicion received confirmation.

At the Bristol Hotel we discovered that, luckily for them, the Allied Missions had left Stavka by a special train for Kieff half an hour before Krylenko's horde had occupied the station.

There was no more to do. We returned to the station only to find that our carriage had been shunted

out to the depot with orders that it was not to be moved, and that there would be no trains leaving Stavka that day.

"Who gave this order?"

"Krylenko."

"And there are to be no more trains to-day?"

"So Krylenko says."

"Then you will please put us on a special."

"I can't do that."

"Then who can?"

"Krylenko."

"Where is Krylenko?"

Our informant pointed out a heavily guarded railway carriage, and Boyle and I marched over to it and demanded to see Krylenko.

After some delay he came out of his car and descended on to the platform. He was a shorter figure than I had first of all thought him to be, a most unpleasant creature, deadly pale, with a queer head, and small shifty pig eyes. He was surrounded by his staff, personal guards and some of the actual murderers.

We produced our Joffe document and demanded that a special train should be put at our disposal to take us to Petrograd. Krylenko fawned on us and promised to put an engine at our disposal immediately. In a sheepish way he made an allusion to the regrettable incident which had just taken place and explained that it was no fault of his. When I translated this to Boyle it was too much for him.

"Tell him," he said in a loud voice, "that anyone who allows his prisoner to be taken from him and lynched in his sight is no man. What you have done is no business of mine, but I am told that you are keeping the body. If there is a shred of decency

left in you you will hand it over to the General's widow. Will you undertake to do this?" Krylenko turned scarlet, and said that the body would be given up immediately. Then he turned his back on us and swung himself up into his carriage.

Two hours later we had our special engine, and were *en route* for Petrograd.

CHAPTER XVI

OUR first visit on arrival in Petrograd was to Joffe, whom we found much impressed by what we had achieved in Moscow. We did not disguise from him our disgust at the murder of Dukhonin, nor did we mince our words in assigning the responsibility for the outrage. At first Joffe tried to make excuses, but eventually finding it of no avail he rather cleverly changed the subject and told us of the progress which the Soviet Government had made since we were last in Petrograd.

They had established a full government. Comrade Nevski had been appointed Minister of Railways. A War Affairs Collegium had also been formed and he was certain that we could be of assistance both to Nevski and the War Collegium.

So we got into touch with Nevski and the War Collegium, to whom we were able to be of considerable use, at the same time contriving that the armies in the field continued to receive their supplies.

But the Bolsheviks feared the army and were in terror that it might be organized for use against them.

They had signed a ten days' truce with Germany. It began on December 5, 1917, and under its general terms the Central Powers agreed not to transfer German or Austrian troops from the eastern to the western front, though in fact the Germans did move several divisions from the Russian front to France before the end of the year. Meantime Krylenko had returned from Stavka and was conferring with Lenin.

His return entirely changed the feeling among the members of the War Affairs Collegium, and on his advice the demobilization of the army was determined on. Boyle and I were present at most of these sessions and fought them tooth and nail. We proved to them conclusively that the demobilization of the army at this moment would culminate in an economic disaster of unparalleled magnitude. It would choke up the railways, it would add to the confusion existing in the area between the front line and the towns of Central Russia, and it would mean starvation in Moscow and Petrograd. But it was all to no purpose. They were determined to have their own way, and on December 7 a general demobilization order was circulated by wireless to all units on the front.

Subsequent events showed that Boyle and I were right, though we had not foreseen anything like the actual extent of the effects of the demobilization order which was the main origin of the successive famines which for the next three years swept through Russia.

The Railway Minister and War Collegium having rejected our advice we changed our *point d'appui*, and were preparing to visit Rumania and the south-western front to see what could be done there, when the Rumanian Ambassador, M. Diamandi, asked us to call on him.

We found him in despair, not only because of the situation in Russia and the immediate prospect of war between Rumania and the Soviets, but also because of the state of affairs in Rumania itself.

"I tell you, Colonel, the position is desperate—desperate. In Rumania there is no money. You know that when Bucharest fell we sent our gold reserve, the crown jewels, the Foreign Office archives

and our reserve of paper currency for safe keeping to the Kremlin. It is still in Moscow, and now that the Bolsheviks have seized and nationalized everything and are forcing this war upon us we will lose the very last of our resources. We have not even a printing press in Jassy capable of printing paper money. *Mon Dieu*, it is appalling."

The Colonel grunted enigmatically.

"If only a part of that treasure could be returned to Jassy, what a relief to my poor country," continued the minister.

Boyle looked at me, and I looked at Boyle. The same idea had occurred to both of us. "Well, why not?" we said.

The minister leapt to his feet. "If you gentlemen succeed you will be our saviours. If you say it can be done I know it will be done."

We explained that we did not share his confidence in the certainty of our success, but that we were prepared to do our best if he would undertake the responsibility of giving authority for the treasure to be handed over to us for transport to Jassy.

M. Diamandi was nominally in complete charge of this treasure, and he hastened to give instructions to the Rumanian authorities in Moscow that the valuables in question were to be handed over to us, if we on our part were able to persuade the Soviet authorities to allow them to go out of their charge.

M. Diamandi had not exaggerated the position of Rumania. It was, as he said, appalling. For the first few weeks after her entry into the war on the side of the Allies she seemed to be carrying all before her. And then General Mackensen with new German, Austrian, and Bulgarian armies turned on her and

inflicted defeat upon defeat. Fighting doggedly the Rumanian army retreated. Bucharest was surrendered, and gradually the gallant little army was forced back until it held only the north-eastern provinces of the country and was almost in Russian territory. Jassy, a small provincial town, had been made the new capital. The Rumanian army was reinforced by Russian divisions who had lost all discipline since the revolution and were contaminating what was left of the Rumanian army.

The previous year, when the Rumanians felt that they had reached the low-water mark of their misery, they did have the feeling that if the worst came to the worst the court and the government could withdraw into Russia. Now this great Ally of theirs had suddenly become an enemy. The Bolsheviks were determined to crush them. They were between the devil and the deep sea. Their line of retreat was cut off. They were surrounded by enemies, and their life blood was stored in the Kremlin at Moscow.

That evening we left for Moscow. I felt that it was time that I propitiated the hostility of Ivan, our conductor, for although we had now made three trips in number 451, the tall, elderly man of the white beard and venerable physiognomy remained surly and aloof. I knew that beneath that forbidding manner he must have a good character, for the *Provodnik*, as conductors are called in Russia, of the Empress's carriage would have been specially selected. I wandered along to his pantry, where I was received very ungraciously. The conductor was a Royalist, who loathed the Bolsheviks and looked down upon anyone who was not of the Blood Royal. Nor had he a very high opinion of the new foreign

tenants of his beloved 451. I tried to get into conversation with him, and he answered me in monosyllables. "No, yes, no. No, I don't drink. I am of the sect of Old Believers. We don't touch alcohol." I knew that he was wondering all the time what my little game was, but I refused to take a rebuff. Presently he asked me if he could take two pieces of sugar a day from our stores. Sugar was terribly scarce and expensive in those war days and beyond Ivan's means. Gladly I gave my permission. I had penetrated his armour—I had found his weak spot—he had a sweet tooth. Forthwith I returned to my coupé, and took out of my kit a large slab of chocolate which I carried along to the pantry.

I had always found the value of including in my kit a certain amount of good plain chocolate, half a dozen pairs of ladies' silk stockings and two or three boxes of the more expensive kind of Parisian toilet soap. My experience was that, presented at the psychological moment, they would unlock doors which neither wine nor gold would open.

Ivan's eyes gleamed. "For me?" he said.

"If you will accept it."

From that moment Ivan was my friend. He was always crotchety, but his manner hid a fiercely loyal heart of gold.

In Moscow the Rumanian authorities looked askance at M. Diamandi's order that the Rumanian treasure was to be handed over to us, and put every difficulty in our way.

"Where's the stuff?" we asked.

"The crown jewels are in the Kremlin vaults, the royal jewels in the state bank vaults, and so is the paper currency."

Rumanian jewels, the paper money, the Foreign Office archives and some Red Cross stores from Moscow to Jassy. Muralov's reply was the Russian equivalent of, "Well, I'll be damned!"

A lengthy discussion ensued, and finally Muralov said that the authority did not rest with him, but that he would give us his decision on the morrow. When we called the next day, with a twinkle in his eye he gave us written permission to take everything we asked, with the exception of certain treasures stored in the Kremlin vaults.

I do not think that Muralov had acted on his own. I imagine that he had instructions from the People's Commissars at Petrograd, to make Boyle and myself happy by this concession. Not that they supposed, for

one moment, that they would be involved in any loss, or that we would get to the frontier with skins and treasure intact. But if a couple of mad Englishmen were bent on the experiment, it was their own business.

Half a loaf is better than no bread, and we returned to the Rumanian officials in a state of considerable elation. They simply could not believe their eyes when they read Muralov's permits.

It would of course be impossible to obtain an escort which would be adequate to guard that vast treasure. Between Moscow and Jassy we must pass through a country overrun by civil war, and our journey would probably take us through five or six fighting fronts. A glance at the map will show that actually we passed through seven separate battle areas.

Through these fighting areas a certain number of trains continued to make their way, but without any regularity. Once or twice a week a post train, which stopped at every station and took anything up to ten days to do the journey, would leave Moscow for Odessa or Jassy. On one of these post trains we decided to hitch our saloon and as many trucks as would be necessary. Our one hope of success was to convey that vast treasure as casually and informally as possible.

We explained to the Rumanian officials that the archives would be packed at once in two railway trucks, the Red Cross stores in two other trucks, and that these four wagons would be hitched to our special carriage, in which we would also take the 100,000,000 lei and the jewels.

"How are the jewels packed?" we asked.

"In steel cases."

"Very well," we said; "the steel cases will be brought to the Rumanian Red Cross warehouse which

is under your charge, and the contents there be repacked into ordinary wicker baskets."

"Does untold wealth travel about in wicker baskets?" squeaked the Rumanian.

"It does not!"

"Well?"

"Well! that is why we are going to carry it that way."

The Rumanian lost his nerve.

"I must get instructions from the government at Jassy."

"Go ahead," said I—I did not speak Rumanian, so our conversation was conducted in German. "But remember, the treasure has been handed to us by the Bolsheviks and we shall do as we like."

A few hours later he informed us that the Rumanian Government had instructed him to hand everything over to us, but that they had suggested we should take with us two Rumanian Treasury officials, who were then in Moscow.

"Very well," I said; "but tell them that they won't be comfortable."

Later this timid official also asked us if we would take back to Rumania eighteen Rumanian soldiers who had been acting as guards to the Rumanian Red Cross depot. As there would be sufficient room for them if huddled close together in one of the wagons containing the Red Cross stores we naturally agreed.

Reluctantly the Rumanians repacked the contents of the steel cases into ordinary wicker baskets.

The trucks containing the Red Cross stores and the Foreign Office archives were coupled to our carriage, which was to be attached to a post train. Everything was ready.

CHAPTER XVII

THE following day I started out with sledges to collect the wicker baskets, and was to arrive back at the station twenty minutes before the train was due to depart, which would just give us time to take the treasure aboard. Boyle and his interpreter, Sandy, a charming Russian officer who spoke perfect English, remained at the station.

It was a golden afternoon, and everything worked smoothly. The sledges were loaded and I was ready to move off. "Go," said I to the leading driver, and as I spoke, behold, eighteen Rumanian soldiers with fixed bayonets distributed themselves round the sledges, and two beaming gentlemen, one tall and thin, the other short and fat, emerged from the building and joined us.

"This is ludicrous," I protested. "Why have an armed guard? The Soviets are on the eve of war with Rumania. The light green uniform of your soldiers is likely to act on the mob like a red rag to a bull."

"But monsieur has so kindly promised to take these men on their leave," blandly remarked the tall man; "they must naturally march to the station. Go ahead? Come after? *Mais mon, monsieur le capitaine*, it is impossible."

It was now clear to me that the Rumanian had lied when he asked us to take some soldiers back to Rumania—as they were no longer required. It was

nothing of the kind. It was an armed guard for the treasure.

I pictured Boyle's face if, owing to this argument, we arrived late and missed the train; I pictured our march through the mob-infested streets with our fabulous wealth and that guard simply asking for trouble. But there was nothing for it. I shrugged my shoulders, wrote a protest in my Field Book, made the senior Rumanian sign it, and off moved my cavalcade ten minutes behind scheduled time.

That walk stands out as the longest, most slippery and most anxious of my life. Three times we were stopped by Bolshevik patrols:

"Comrades, what carry you there?"

"Stores," I answered to the challenge, and the reply got us safely to the station.

Boyle, tremendously anxious, was at the entrance. I will never forget his face, nor the strength of the language which he used. It was not a habit of his.

"What the — are you doing with that — guard?"

Explanations were useless. I showed him my Field Book which the Rumanian had signed.

"You did quite right, Podge." He always called me Podge when he was excited. "I'll take charge of the baskets. Make those men put their rifles on the sledge and send them back where they came from. The soldiers can travel unarmed." Then looking at the Treasury officials with dislike, he added: "And for God's sake get rid of those two fools."

Politely I told the fat and the thin Rumanian to get into the station. Then we started to transfer the wicker baskets one by one into number 451.

"Mind my carpets," growled Ivan.

"Your carpets be damned!" said I. "Get these baskets into the coupés as quickly as possible."

The jewellery and the paper money completely filled three or four coupés from floor to ceiling, which meant that I had to turn out of mine and sleep in the dining saloon, and this fact did not add to my good humour.

The Rumanian Treasury officials, whom from the moment I first saw them I had named A. and O., proved a tremendous nuisance and wanted to count each basket as it came in, and separate the jewels from the paper money. It must be remembered that we were moving this vast treasure without any guard, since our surest way of doing so safely was by not attracting attention. Finally, in despair I locked A. and O. up, much to their annoyance, in the coupé which we had put at their disposal.

Then when everything was safely aboard an argument commenced outside the carriage.

"Our goods wagons," said Ivan, appearing from his pantry, "are being uncoupled." He spoke with relief, for he disapproved of trucks, especially of these into which the whole leave party had been dumped. "What would the excellent one"—he always gave me that title—"like me to do?"

"Send for the station-master."

Arguing with an official is always a difficult matter, and especially if the official happens to be a Russian station-master. I argued and expostulated on the platform, for naturally I did not want him in our carriage, and the usual crowd collected round us.

"Post trains never carry trucks," he said in a surly fashion.

"This one does," said I, and at that moment a

new Bolshevik Station Commissar, an unkempt Jewish ruffian, appeared.

"What's all this about?" he demanded. The matter was explained to him. He scratched his head for a moment. "The wagons are to be attached. Get the train off."

Amazed at this unexpected decision so quickly made, our interpreter caught my eye and negligently followed the Commissar and the station-master as they walked down the platform. The departure bells rang, the train jerked forward, our journey had begun.

Sandy swung aboard as we cleared the platform.

"We are to be allowed to go fifty miles down the line," he said. "The Commissar is telegraphing instructions for the wagons to be detached there. He says: 'The fools of bourgeois will be asleep by then.'"

We looked meditatively at the roof of the saloon in which we were standing.

"Hill," said Boyle, "you and I are going to have a nasty time up there," and he smiled happily.