CHAPTER XVIII

Our train crawled along slowly. It was heavy and long, the engine was old and dilapidated and was burning damp wood. We estimated that it would take us about three hours to reach the spot where the wily Commissar proposed to unhitch our wagons.

In the middle of that cold and dark night, when we judged the time to be ripe, Boyle and I stepped out on the running board and then scrambled to the carriage top, and lying flat on our stomachs awaited events.

At last we pulled up at a tiny wayside station, where we were halted for some minutes. Just as the train was starting a ruffianly figure, unshaven, unkempt and filthy, stole along and uncoupled the wagons. We dropped quietly to the ground and crept up one on each side; then in the darkness of the night the Colonel's fist crashed out and the man went down like a log. Hastily we recoupled the trucks and the train moved forward, dragging our four wagons along with it.

Throughout the night we watched lest a further attempt at uncoupling should be made. But whether it was that the people at the station which we had left imagined that the trucks were still standing in the darkness there, or that it was too much trouble to telephone the next station, no other attempt was made to molest us that night.

The train went ambling on through the snow-covered countryside at about ten miles an hour. This speed does not indicate our real rate of progress however, for we sometimes spent hours at small stations waiting for engines, waiting for fuel, waiting for engine-drivers. Whenever we did stop at a station it was the signal for a free fight. The carriages were packed with travellers as tight as they could be and humanity swarmed on the top of every car except our own, from which we ejected all invaders, sometimes not without force. This work had to be done by Boyle and myself. The two Rumanians were useless, and we could not call on Sandy to help us as, the murder of Russian officers being a national pastime, we did not dare to let anyone catch sight of him. For ten days Boyle and I never removed our clothes. We took turns for sleeping, but we were both always up at every station or stop.

At Briansk we ran into a battle which was being fought between the troops of the Soviet Republic and those of the Ukrainian Rada.

The Soviet troops were trying to capture Briansk station, which was being defended by the Ukrainians with machine-guns, reinforced by a couple of armoured cars. Both sides fired indiscriminately at the train. There were no killed, but about forty people were wounded. For the first time our train moved like an express, and we shot past that station and did not pull up until we had passed it by three or four miles. Two of our windows had been smashed and the side of the car marked by bullets, but thanks to the steel walls we had been comparatively safe.

That night, when I was on duty, I observed a glare in the sky and judged that there was trouble ahead. The country into which we had now passed was in the hands of the Soviets. As we approached nearer to the glare I found that it was caused by a vodka factory which had been accidentally set on fire by looters during a debauch. Our train lurched to a halt, and instantly a swarm of people emerged from the carriages and made for the factory.

It was a weird sight, the blazing factory, the snow-covered fields and the hundreds of people rushing across from our train to get a little vodka for themselves. The crowd burst open the warehouse, and men came staggering out from its doors carrying six or seven bottles of vodka. Many of them could not wait until they got back to the train, but knocked off the head of a bottle and drank as they came. When after an hour we moved forward we had hundreds of drunken men aboard.

The following morning, when we pulled into one of the larger stations, a grey, old wooden ramshackle building, the train was surrounded by a detachment of Bolshevik troops, while a Commissar at the head of a search party and an armed guard began a systematic search of the train. Stepping on to the platform I walked up to the end of the train at which he had begun and noted that he was doing his work very thoroughly, and that he was an aggressive type of bully. I went back to report to the Colonel and we ordered Sandy and A. and O. to go to their bunks and to remain there without talking or even daring to cough. I took the further precaution of locking their coupé doors with my pass-key.

By the time the Commissar, at the head of his

party, had arrived at our carriage, I had decided that a good bluff represented our only hope of safety, and I gave the Commissar the best salute I could muster, and gravely shook hands with him.

"You cannot bring your party into our carriage. We are a Foreign Mission and are not subject to search. By doing so you would violate the exterritoriality convention which exists between our country and the Soviet Republic." A bit of me inside chuckled, for I knew that our government was most unlikely to recognize the Soviet Government for many years to come, and for us to claim exterritoriality in our position was really the height of impudence.

The Commissar hesitated for a moment. Then his jaw set. He felt very strongly that it was his duty to search our carriage.

"My friend," I said, "you will be doing a great wrong if you do come in, and our country will never forgive the insult."

"What is your country?" he asked.

To say that we were English would not help us, for at that time our country was neither popular nor very much respected in Russia, so I replied, "We are the Canadian Mission."

"Canadian—Canadian. Is that the American Republic?" asked the simple Commissar.

"Yes, rather!" I replied. "Now look here, come in and see Colonel Boyle, the head of the Mission. I know that he will be very glad to make your acquaintance, but you must leave your detachment here on the platform and I will send them some Canadian cigarettes." The Commissar stepped in, while I distributed packets of Gold Flake among the soldiers,

who apparently found "Canadian" cigarettes very much to their taste.

I introduced the Commissar to Boyle, produced brandy, bread, ham, sausage and butter and we had, much to Ivan's anger, an informal meal. I was afraid that Ivan might let his feelings get the better of him, and went along and explained that what we were doing was absolutely necessary. He shook his head and said in a low tone, "If only the Commissar would touch the Colonel I would be glad, for the Colonel would kill him with a blow, and that would be good, except if the pig bled on my carpets." The Colonel and I had let Ivan into the secret of what we were carrying, for we knew that was the safest way of securing his help and co-operation; indeed, once he realized that we were carrying royal treasure back to the King and Queen of Rumania he ranked us with peers of the realm at least. Ivan knew the pedigrees of the royal families of Europe backwards—their names, their marriages and their relationships. He knew infinitely more about the royal house of Windsor than I did, and spoke of King George, the Royal Family and their relations as if they were personally known to him.

Our conduct, supplemented by the effects of brandy, food and cigarettes, finally allayed the Commissar's suspicions and he rose to depart and took leave of Boyle with much clicking of heels. But when we had passed into the corridor of the carriage he turned to me and said, "And you have this beautiful carriage all to yourselves? May I just look in at this coupé?" putting his hand on the door of one which contained the baskets of treasure.

"Of course," said I. He opened the door.

"What is this?"

"Baskets," I replied.

"Baskets?" said he, with suspicion in his voice.

"Yes," I said; "with decorations."

"Decorations?" he queried.

"From the President of the American Republic for Russian and Rumanian soldiers." I made my voice as impressive as possible.

The Commissar positively beamed at me, and naïvely asked whether I thought that I could get him an American decoration as he would very much like to have one. I said that I could not possibly promise, but that I would telegraph to the President from Kieff. He shook me warmly by the hand. "Please, please do."

At last he was out of our carriage, and a few minutes later the train moved on.

It had been a very narrow escape. Once the true character of our cargo was known it was a hundred to one that we should be held up and robbed of it. Even in a law-abiding country that treasure would have been a fine prize and an irresistible temptation for a gang of enterprising thieves.

Early next morning, when we were about 120 miles from Kieff, our train stopped in the middle of a forest. There was nothing unusual in this, for it had the habit of stopping at all sorts of queer places, but when at the end of an hour we showed no signs of moving I went along to investigate. The snow around the railway track was five and six feet deep, and it was no easy task to get through to the engine, where I learned from the driver that the engine had broken down, but that he was confident that in two

or three hours he would be able to make the necessary repairs.

I think I should explain here that there was no traffic on the lines, as communications had almost entirely broken down by this time. Thus we ran little risk of trains running into us, but at the same time we could not hope that a train might come along from Kieff to take messages to the nearest station or assist us in repairing our damaged engine. We had to do the best we could ourselves.

I was anxious. The black clouds were threatening snow. I had no desire to be snowed up. Indeed, it was by the merest chance that two days before we had come through this part of the country a snow plough engine had cleared the tracks for a Bolshevik troop train.

A few hours later I returned to the engine. The repairs were going along famously, and a little later the engine-driver was satisfied that we could go on. But now the stoker had his little difficulty. He had kept steam up as long as he could, but had run completely out of fuel and the steam pressure was rapidly falling in the boilers.

"What can we do?" I asked.

"Nothing," replied the engine-driver and stoker together.

Somewhere and somehow we must find fuel. Was there anything in the neighbourhood which could be used as such? Boyle and I climbed on to the cab of the engine and surveyed the country around us. About three-quarters of a mile away we saw that there had been a clearing made in the forest, and we told the engine-driver to do his best to get us as far as that. He did his best, but when the train

came to a stop again it was still some hundreds of yards short of it. Boyle and I went along and reconnoitred. Luck was with us, for the crust of snow was hard enough to bear our weight, and at the very edge of the forest in the clearing we found that there were some stacks of sawn and split logs. Back we went to the train and called a meeting of passengers, to whom we explained that as the steam-heating could not be kept up they would all be frozen during the night and that somehow or other the timber would have to be fetched. The passengers saw the point at once, and we organized a living chain party which started to pass logs back to the engine tender. Some of the men were almost up to their armpits in the soft snow as they passed logs for all they were worth. I suppose the chain consisted of some four hundred men and it was rather an inspiring sight. Soon the tender was piled high with wooden logs. Snow was used to replenish the water supplies, and sufficient pressure raised in the boilers to enable us to resume our journey to Kieff.

Three hours later, firing told us that we had reached the Ukrainian outpost, we pulled up with a jar. The stoker had been hit, and the engine-driver badly frightened. A Ukrainian detachment in picturesque scarlet caps with magnificent golden tassels came to investigate our train. They had thought we were a Bolshevik military detachment, and were considerably relieved to find that it was just an ordinary passenger train which also contained a Foreign Mission. But when I reprimanded the commander of the detachment for firing at a train without finding out whether it was friend or enemy, he merely

shrugged his shoulders and said he was sorry but gave us to understand that he was taking no chances.

When we arrived the following night at Kieff it had taken us just over five days to do the trip from Moscow which ordinarily should have taken twenty-eight hours.

CHAPTER XIX

Kieff is a picturesque town with hundreds of churches, and was the ancient capital of the Russian Empire. It is situated between the rich metal and coal mining area of the Donetz basin and the fertile black-earthed region of the Steppes.

The Ukrainians—who used to be known as Little Russians—are wide-headed, tall, long-limbed and broad-shouldered. They are dark haired, and have dark eyes, bright complexions and straight noses. The women are small, more often than not beautiful, and nearly always vivacious, and I hoped that we would be able to rest for two or three days at Kieff.

All thoughts of this vanished after I had had a talk with the station-master, who said: "I hear you are carrying a great treasure with you. Why are you doing so without an armed guard?"

I assured him that we were doing nothing of the kind, and at the same time learned that there would be a train leaving for the Bessarabian frontier that night.

I discussed the station-master's words with Boyle, and we decided that it was essential to leave that evening, and gave the necessary instructions to have our carriage and wagons attached to the out-going train.

At the end of November the Rada (parliament) proclaimed Ukrainia to be a Republic and entered into separate peace negotiations with the Central Powers at Brest Litovsk. This Ukrainian Government

was composed chiefly of youthful idealists, and it was a simple matter even then to predict that its life would be of a very short duration.

The streets of Kieff presented a most animated spectacle. The military tailors of the town must have made a fortune, for all the officers were in a hurry to exchange their Russian uniforms for the new Ukrainian ones, though out of economy the old grey military great-coats were retained. They had also revived the cockades and fantastically shaped, brightly-coloured head-dress of the ancient 15th and 16th century national costume of the Ukrainians. Everywhere were tall men who looked splendid, wearing red, green and blue velvet or plush head-gear lavishly decorated with gold and silver braid, and set off with tassels or other decorations.

I spent some time driving round the town, and then wallowed for a couple of hours in a hot bath at the Continental Hotel. While at the hotel I met an old friend who was in the Chevalier Guard, and who spoke English perfectly. He had distinguished himself by conspicuous bravery on various occasions in the early days of the war, and now wished to go to Bessarabia. I saw the value of having one more reliable man with us in case of danger, which became more likely as our journey advanced, and so offered to take him with us. Colonel Boyle approved of this and Captain Y. arranged to join us.

In the afternoon Boyle went off to interview the railway authorities at the headquarters of the South-Western Railway, after which he intended to have a bath before rejoining us. He went alone, for the people at the railway headquarters and the hall porter at the Continental Hotel spoke English, and he would

not need an interpreter. Accordingly Sandy remained with me to guard the train, while A. and O. went to see their Consul.

About seven o'clock our carriage and wagons were attached to the train which was due to leave for Bessarabia at eight o'clock.

At half-past seven the first bell announced the impending departure of the train. There was no sign of Boyle. The minutes went by as I waited there. The second bell clanged out. Ten minutes to go. Still no sign of Boyle. I began to be anxious. What could have happened to the Colonel? It could only be something really serious which would detain him at a time like this. I took a turn down the platform. It was eight o'clock. The third and final bell clanged out and Boyle had not arrived. More than anxious over his absence I asked the station-master to delay the departure of the train for fifteen minutes. It was rather reluctantly that he agreed to do so, for although there were only two or three trains per day leaving Kieff in any direction he was trying to re-establish law, order, and punctuality in the Ukrainian Republic.

The fifteen minutes sped by and still there was no sign of Boyle. I would have had our carriage and wagons disconnected, but as it was very doubtful when another train would be leaving for the Bessarabian frontier, I determined to hang on as long as I possibly could. I engaged the good station-master in conversation, presented him with a cigar, and insisted on him smoking it there and then, but nothing I could do would make him take his eyes off the clock. At half-past eight he arose and said firmly: "The train is now going," and I went back discon-

solately to see that our carriages were disconnected and to tell Sandy what had happened.

But Sandy had observed something in my absence. "The Colonel may still arrive at any moment," said he. "Tell them that our carriage is going, but there is no safety communication cord attached to our wagon. If the station-master is working strictly to regulations he will have to have the wagon in front of us and our wagon linked to the engine by cord."

Russian trains were connected to the engine by means of a rope which was looped along the outside of the carriages on keys and hung down almost level with the tops of the carriage windows. The rule was that it should be an unknotted cord leading from the engine to the last carriage.

Sandy's idea was splendid. It meant that it would be necessary to relink the whole train: the cord obviously was not long enough to reach as far as the last two wagons and the rule was that it must not have a knot in it.

The station-master was a stickler for regulations, and when I pointed out the difficulty of the communication cord he gave the order that the train was to be restrung. It took over half an hour in the doing. I knew that the station-master would send the train off the moment the work was finished, and stood by with Sandy and Captain Y. to unhook our carriages from the train.

But it was not necessary. At the very last moment Boyle turned up clutching a very large parcel. He explained that his business had taken him much longer than he expected, but that he should have got back in time had he not been caught in a street raid and knocked nearly senseless by the explosion of a

large bomb, the percussion of which had thrown him into a provision shop. The people in the shop had been very kind to him, had brought him round with brandy and insisted on his lying down, and when he tried to get up they had forcibly prevented him from doing so. They could not speak a word of English, and he could not make them understand that it was important for him to get down to the station. He had to think of some other way. From the temporary couch where he lay he could see a magnificent turkey already cooked. It was only a few days to Christmas. Boyle raised himself on his elbow and by signs intimated his desire to buy the bird. The good Samaritans I suppose took this as a sign of his complete recovery, wrapped up the bird for him and let him go.

After supper, when we were well under way once more, I persuaded Captain Y. to bring out his balalaika. He had a beautiful voice and sang gipsy songs exquisitely. We finished the evening with choruses, and Ivan brought in long glasses of hot tea and lemon, not without a good allowance of rum. It was a perfectly delightful entertainment, and the train for a change was doing the regular ten miles an hour. We passed through the territory of the Ukrainian Republic without hindrance, and even crossed the frontier which led into Soviet territory without being stopped, for the guards on both sides were fast asleep. And so at last we reached Jamerinka some forty miles away from the Bessarabian frontier.

All the troubles we had so far encountered had been fortuitous. Now that we had reached the last stage of our journey we might expect to encounter organized opposition and a serious attempt to take the treasure from us.

Sandy and Captain Y. had got out a large-scale map and were ticking off the miles and working out the hour at which we should arrive at Jassy, where they planned a reunion lunch at the house of Captain Y's friends.

"Don't you be so sure that we shall ever get to Jassy," said the Colonel. "Our real troubles are ahead of us." And so it proved to be.

At Jamerinka we were not visited by a Commissar, an event so unusual as to fill me with deep suspicion. We were being left alone. To a man who knew Russia that was not a good sign. Our train moved on and reached Vapnyarka. At Vapnyarka a nervous station-master entered our carriage.

"Orders have been given that no train is to leave for Bessarabia, and that your carriages are to be shunted to a siding," and without more ado he proceeded to carry out the orders in question.

After a short time the passengers came to the conclusion that the Bolsheviks had meant what they said and that there would be no train for Bessarabia, and accordingly took themselves off to the village either to put up there or to hire horses and sledges which would take them on their way.

Meanwhile I went to the station-master's office, where I adopted a high-handed manner and demanded an engine. And at that very moment a Bolshevik general turned up accompanied by his staff.

"You are under arrest," he said.

"You must be mistaken," I replied. "We have a mandate from Joffe," and produced the document.

He merely glanced at it and returned it with a contemptuous raise of the shoulders.

"We have no desire to examine your carriage or your trucks," he told me. "But you will not be allowed to continue your journey. Your Mission is covered by two batteries of guns eight hundred yards away, and if you attempt to move they will open fire."

"When will we be allowed to go?" I demanded.

"I don't know, perhaps never," replied the rabid general. "We know you are stealing something from Russia to give to Rumania."

"Come and have some tea," said I, but he refused and repeated that he would carry out his orders if we tried to move.

I went back to our coupé. We decided that for the moment we could do nothing, and that we must play for time. So Captain Y., Sandy, and I passed the time with picquet and drank hot tea.

The minutes seemed to creep by like hours. We were on the verge of something portentous. My mind went to zero hour at Ypres or on the Somme. Captain Y. must have been thinking along the same lines for he said, "I feel just as I always feel on the eve of battle." A. and O. as usual were troublesome. They fidgeted nervously and asked inane questions as to what we were going to do.

Then we heard the noise of an engine exhaust. Somewhere in the station yard there was an engine with steam up, and out I went to investigate. It appeared that under the old régime a shunting engine had been kept on duty at this station throughout the twenty-four hours, and as no one had ever countermanded the order, despite the fact that there was really nothing to shunt, there the engine had always remained with steam up. I made friends with the

driver and fireman, gave them cigarettes, and took some food along to them from our carriage. They proved friendly, and utterly tired of the conditions under which they were living, and they had many tales to tell of their hardships. Boyle and I decided that some time that night we would commandeer the shunting engine and make an attempt at escape.

Our first step was to send Sandy along to the station-master's office to create a row and to demand further interviews with the authorities. He was also told to find out where the station telephone and telegraph lines were connected on the station. While he was doing this Captain Y. and I went off to reconnoitre the position of the batteries, and found them with their guns trained on the station sure enough. Some of the gun crews were standing by, while the remainder were huddled round a miserable camp-fire. When we reached the station again we found that a small detachment of infantry had arrived to watch us, who for their comfort had commandeered the tiny waiting-room and left just one sentry outside the door to watch our carriage.

We had supper, which was not a very cheerful meal. Boyle then conceived the idea of a concert to show that we did not care, and at the same time to dispel any notion that we were conspiring to escape.

The concert was a great success and the soldiers, muffled up in their great sheepskin coats, gathered round our carriage to listen. I told Ivan to put on our largest samovar, a great copper tea urn. When it was ready I made a strong brew of tea, poured it into the largest copper cooking pot which the pantry possessed, and added sugar and the contents of a

whole bottle of rum and about half a bottle of brandy.

When all was ready I took it out to the soldiers, and in a friendly manner suggested that they should drink it with our good wishes in the station room. Gladly, they carried off the pot, and even the sentry followed them into the waiting-room to make sure that he had his share.

What a beastly night it was! Clear enough, but a howling wind swept that ill-lit station. Just a few flickering oil lamps guttered here and there. Once the soldiers had gone in to have the drink I had brewed for them there was not a sign of life on the station.

A piece of semi-detached iron roofing was flapping monotonously in the darkness. Somewhere a dog howled.

CHAPTER XX

AGAINST that eerie background we were working out our plan of campaign. At midnight we were to turn out all the lights in the carriage, at one o'clock action was to commence. Sandy was to cut the telephone and telegraph wires which we had marked, and then with his revolver to cover the door of the waiting-room in which the guard was gathered. If anyone were to come out and give the alarm he was to shoot and keep the door covered at all costs. For this purpose we gave him two extra automatics and an ample supply of ammunition.

Captain Y. was to stand by the carriage and act as a support to Sandy if anything happened to him.

Boyle and I were to capture the shunting engine, force the crew to back it on to our carriage and compel them to take us over the frontier.

In the meantime Sandy and I went out to collect two or three strands of long rope which Boyle wanted for some purpose of his own.

By one o'clock a gale was raging. The howling wind caught up the snow on the ground and drove particles of frozen ice into our faces and eyes. We waited until Sandy had cut the wires and taken up his post opposite the waiting-room door, then with drawn revolvers Boyle and I boarded the engine from opposite sides simultaneously. The stoker was raking the fire and so had his back to us. The driver was dozing, his head resting between a pressure-

gauge and a box. He awoke with a start. The stoker spun round. They found themselves looking into the muzzles of our revolvers. We told them what was required of them. We promised to pay them a substantial sum of money and obtain permission for them to live in Rumania. And at last they agreed to run the engine for us.

The fireman went off to set the points, and Boyle went with him revolver in hand. I remained with the engine-driver and told him that at the slightest sign of treachery I would fill him with lead.

The points were set. Very slowly and silently we ran down the line, but to me it seemed as if we were making a terrible clatter. The howling wind was, however, our ally. The engine-driver backed gently—very gently—on to faithful 451. The coupling took three or four minutes, as the irons and the brake attachments had become frozen, and we had to pour boiling water over them in order to loosen them without making any noise. At last we were hitched on.

A low whistle from Boyle and Sandy ran up.

"All correct, sir."

"Thank you," said Boyle. "Get aboard."

I remained on the engine. I had been carefully watching the driver during the manœuvre and knew that if it came to a pinch I would be able to take control. We were off. Would the batteries fire?

Over on the left I could see the glow of the camp-fires round the batteries; but not a shot was fired.

As we cleared the station I saw the waiting-room door open and two or three men come out and run along the platform. It was bitterly cold, but it was excitement and not the frost which caused my teeth

to chatter. Boyle had ordered that we should stop when we had covered ten miles, and we pulled up at a spot even more desolate and windswept than the station itself.

"I am not going to take a chance," said Boyle. "We must destroy the telegraph wires. That is why I wanted the rope."

In the wind we found it no easy task to throw the rope over the telegraph wires which were suspended some thirty feet high on their wooden posts. Finally however, by tying weights to the ends of the rope we managed to get three or four strands over, only to find that all our combined efforts could not snap the wires. Then the stoker came to the rescue with the suggestion that we should tie the rope to the engine tender. The wires parted with a clang and we were on our way again.

But we had taken too long, and the people at the station had managed to get a message through. Twenty minutes later we saw ahead of us red lights being frantically waved in the darkness, and as we slowed down we made out that the gates at the level crossing had been closed to bar our way.

"Go through them," I said to the engine-driver.

"I dare not, sir; it is too risky!"

I gently prodded his ribs with my revolver. "Go on," I said.

"Even if you shoot me I won't do it. I am responsible for the lives in the train as well as myself."

I knew that he was right and I knew that I was right. I turned towards him and brought my knee sharply into the pit of his stomach. He rolled on the floor of the engine in agony.

I grabbed hold of the lever, pushed it forward

and opened the throttle to its full. Wind, particles of snow and flying cinders stung my eyes and made them water. Gaining speed with every second we charged straight at the gates, and smashed into them with a crash. There was a horrible jerk, while I wondered whether we were going to keep the line, and then the good old shunting engine carried everything before it in its stride. On through the night we rushed.

Presently the engine-driver recovered.

"You are driving too fast," he said; "we are nearing a dangerous curve. Let me take charge," and my short career as an engine-driver was over.

"We must be near the Rumanian outposts now," muttered the engine-driver, and almost as the words left his lips there was a terrific grinding, the engine rocked and swayed and after a moment came to a standstill against a mound which the Rumanian outpost had piled over the line as protection. Ahead of us the outpost opened fire. I crouched down in the engine cab until the fire ceased and yelled, "We are friends," and explained to a Rumanian officer that we were an Allied Mission.

Our nine days' journey was over. The treasure was safe. On Christmas Eve we arrived at Jassy. From the frontier A. and O. had telegraphed the news to the Treasury that they and the treasure were in our care. As we pulled into the station two hundred and fifty railway gendarmes closed round the small train of four wagons and our special saloon. A detachment of cavalry surrounded the gendarmes in order to safeguard in Rumanian territory the national treasure which without escort had been brought all the way from Moscow through a lawless countryside

overrun by civil war. A. and O. were very happy. They felt that at last their priceless charge was being treated with the respect due to it. Boyle looked at me sardonically and smiled.

The Rumanian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Railway Minister were on the station to welcome us. Half an hour later we were receiving the congratulations and thanks of the Prime Minister, M. Bratiano.

That evening we returned to 451 and made a good supper of the cold turkey Boyle had brought from Kieff. Then at last we were able to take off our clothes for the first time for ten days, and fall into an untroubled sleep.

In recognition of this service H.M. the King of Rumania conferred on Colonel Boyle the Grand Cross of the Crown of Rumania, and on me the Order of the Star of Rumania. For a subsequent service Boyle received the Grand Cross of the Star of Rumania while I received the Order of the Crown of Rumania. It was not until a year after the conclusion of hostilities that I actually received these decorations, when on a visit to Bukarest I was publicly invested with the Crown. But H.M. Queen Marie, with a kindness which I immensely appreciated, summoned me to the Kotrechinie Palace and in the course of a personal and informal audience decorated me with the Order of the Star.

CHAPTER XXI

The situation in Jassy was terrible. A small provincial town had been turned overnight into a capital and had to house not only the court, the government and the thousands of refugees, but also the Rumanian general staff and the administrative branches of the army together with the Foreign Missions and Embassies. The result was chaotic. In 451 we lived in comparative comfort, but we felt it necessary to take our midday meal at the General Staff mess in order to keep in touch with the heads of the various branches.

I cannot describe the misery of these midday meals. Jassy was on starvation diet and the menu never varied. It consisted of soup with shreds of horseflesh and cabbage, followed by boiled, baked or fried maize with one small piece of black bread and was washed down by a pale pink, vinegar-like wine, while coffee made from dried acorns, bitter and beastly, ended this apology for a meal.

In the town people died every day of starvation, and the mortality among children was terrible. Nor were the beasts of the field spared. There was no fodder for the horses, mules and oxen. It was revolting to see their bones almost breaking through their hides. One morning I witnessed a driver trying to get one of two buffaloes yoked to a cart to rise from the ground where it had settled from exhaustion. He pulled and tugged, whipped and kicked at the beast who simply refused to stir. Finally he picked up in the road a small handful of wood shavings and after

forcing them under the poor beast's tail, set them on fire; in agony the beast rose. Tears were streaming down the driver's face. The cart crawled along for about forty yards, then the buffalo collapsed again. In desperation the driver unspanned the buffalo and left it in the road to die.

The Russian army in Rumania was giving trouble. Some of the divisions had gone Bolshevik, and there was an agitation on foot to depose the King and Queen of Rumania.

One corps in particular had been attacked by German agents, and systematically starved by the Bolsheviks in charge of its supply column, with the purpose of making the men revolt and start looting the impoverished countryside. At the request of General Prezan, the Rumanian Chief of Staff, and General Tcharbatcheff, the harassed Russian Commander, Boyle and I went off to inspect the corps and see what could be done. We found it in a really bad way. The tales of starvation had not been exaggerated. But we found an easy means of immediately improving conditions. We had half the horses of the corps shot, and the soldiers and civil population received rations of horse-meat. As it was winter the meat that was not immediately used was frozen and kept as reserve rations. The remainder of the horses now had sufficient fodder until such time as we could get at the root of the sabotage in the supply column. We removed the people responsible by the simple expedient of telling their comrades what they had been doing, and the comrades remembering the dreadful days of starvation were ready to lynch the offenders.

The Rumanian army was surrounded on three

sides and was expecting daily to be stabbed in the back by Russia. One of the coolest and bravest of men was General Bertelot, the head of the French military mission of some four hundred picked French officers. Bertelot planned to meet every situation and was determined to fight the Germans as long as it was possible. His scheme of defence was known as "the triangle of death," for he was prepared to take on the Germans, Austrians, Hungarians, Bulgarians and Bolsheviks simultaneously, and fight until the supplies and ammunition had given out; this plan had the support of the King and Queen of Rumania and the general staff. It was hard to conquer depression, for everyone knew that it was only a question of time before the enemy would overrun the last corner of Rumanian territory and sweep on into the mining areas of the Donetz basin, where they could get the supplies of coal and petrol they so badly wanted from the Caucasus. But before they did this Bertelot was determined to stand and make the enemy pay dearly for their victory.

The situation was indeed something more than desperate, and at all costs Russia had to be called off. One evening, the Prime Minister, M. Bratiano, called on us in company with M. Také Jonesco. We had accomplished what seemed impossible in bringing the Rumanian treasure safely from Moscow. Would we now attempt a task even more hopeless of achievement, and try to prevent the Bolsheviks from carrying out their threat of declaring war on Rumania? Také Jonesco expressed the opinion that Rumania was going to pay very dearly for her refusal to take part in the Peace negotiations at Brest Litovsk. The Bolsheviks were determined to wipe out the Rumanian

Royal Family and establish a Soviet régime. Hence they were doing everything to pick a quarrel. Both Bratiano and Také Jonesco thought that, though they might deal with German enmity or Bolshevik intrigue if they could take them on separately, they had no chance if they were to be subject to the attack of both at once.

M. Bratiano also explained that Rumanian troops were moving into Bessarabia where they would occupy strategic points along the River Dniester, not with the purpose of occupying the country, but solely to protect the Rumanian war supplies and grain. Like all the other larger governments of Russia, Bessarabia had declared herself an autonomous republic. She was ruled by a council named the Sfatul Tzerie, which was being courted by both Rumania and Soviet Russia each for their own ends. While the Rumanian decision to take up strategic points on the Dniester was quite understandable, we knew that it would probably be the final pretext for the Bolshevik declaration of war. Bratiano as well as ourselves realized this danger, but in the position felt that he had chosen the lesser of two evils.

M. Bratiano asked us to explain Rumania's position to Trotsky and laid stress on the following points:

1. That they could not and would not allow Russian troops to leave their positions on the front, march armed through Rumania and pillage the country as they had been doing. All Russian troops would be allowed to leave Rumania as soon as transport was available for systematic evacuation, but they must leave their arms which would be returned as soon as transport could be arranged.

2. The Rumanian troops would be withdrawn from Bessarabia as soon as Rumanian property and stores had been transported into Rumania. The Rumanian Government had no territorial designs on Bessarabia.
3. The Rumanian Government had not arrested any of the Soviet delegates and if any arrests had been made it was at the orders of the Russian Commander-in-Chief, General Tcherbatcheff.
4. They could not in future allow agitation by Bolsheviks in the Rumanian army without taking steps against the agitators.

Boyle and I had begun to feel that it was time for us to return to Petrograd and accordingly we consented to act as legates for the Rumanian Government. We travelled by another route as far as Kieff so as to avoid Vapnyarka, where we felt that we might not have a good reception. Before we left I bought a large oxidized silver Ingersol watch and had it engraved, "In gratitude from the President of Canada," in case we ran into the Commissar who wanted a decoration. A watch I felt, would do as well. It was a very happy inspiration. We did meet him on our return journey. A rumour had reached him that he had let a great treasure slip through his hands, and he was none too friendly. But the gift of the watch changed his attitude completely.

Petrograd looked a little shabbier, a little more dilapidated, a little more squalid than when we were last there. In the streets there was no semblance of law and order. Fighting between the Red Guards and the anti-Bolsheviks was constant, and executions in the streets were quite common.

At this time the Cheka had only just been established, and an important part of its work consisted in the suppression of looting.

At the outbreak of war the Tsar had decreed that Russia should go dry, and while prohibition was not very strictly observed it had been difficult to get vodka and wine. But now the last vestiges of the restraint imposed by the Tsar and enforced by his myrmidons had gone. The great idea of the rabble was to get alcohol, and alcohol was ready to their hand. In all quarters, in the cellars of hotels, in government warehouses, in private residences, there were stores of the precious liquid, and the undisciplined mob had started raiding such places.

It was a terrible sight. Down would go the doors, and barrels of wine would be rolled into the street and opened on the pavement. Bottles would be carried out by the case, the necks knocked off against a wall and the contents drunk there and then. Within a few minutes would collect a great mob of workmen, soldiers, sailors, cab-drivers and men and women of every class. The gutters would run with wine, and the streets be full of reeling drunkards before the military guard could turn out.

On arrival in Petrograd I found it necessary to make the acquaintance of the famous Jacob Peters, who was head of the Cheka in that city. He was a quiet, sad-faced Lett, who had been a revolutionary all his life. He really hated the work he was doing, but felt that it was necessary. He had lived for many years in exile in London, where his English wife was still living with their daughter. He was extremely fond of them both and very distressed that, owing to the complete breakdown of the postal

service, it was impossible to get letters to them, and he asked me as a favour to have a letter carried to his wife by an English courier. He wrote the letter before me and handed it to me in an unsealed envelope and I was glad to be able to transmit it for him.

President Wilson's "Fourteen Point" speech had just been made. An American secret service agent, Mr. Sissons, who worked under the cover of the American Press Bureau, had the speech translated into German and Russian in record time, and I think something like a hundred thousand bills were posted up all over Petrograd. It was a very smart piece of propaganda work, as was the way in which Sissons managed to distribute the "Fourteen Point" speech to the German army on the Russian front.

Intellectual Russia had not a very high opinion of the "Fourteen Points." I was discussing them one day with a well-informed Russian, who summed up the Russian attitude when he shook his head gravely and said, "The dear Lord God Himself could only think of ten commandments in His interview with Moses, but Wilson—true, it is five thousand years later—has managed to think of fourteen."

I do not think anyone realized at the time what a part that "Fourteen Point" speech of President Wilson was going to play. It was certainly not very popular in England or France, but during the next nine months it had tremendous influence in Germany. For, when she discovered that she was being worn down, she commenced to build her hopes on a peace based on the Fourteen Points. Perhaps it would have been better for the world to-day if the Fourteen Points had been more closely followed and the Treaty of Versailles never signed.

It did not appear that we had come at the most propitious time for delivering M. Bratiano's message to the Soviet Foreign Office. That very day the Bolsheviks had thrown M. Diamandi, the Rumanian Ambassador, into the fortress of St. Peter and Paul. This last effort to precipitate a quarrel between the two countries was a gross violation of the principle of diplomatic immunity and contributed a challenge to every ambassador in Petrograd, each one of whom realized that unless something was done he might very shortly be sharing the fate of M. Diamandi.

The Diplomatic Corps therefore made a united *démarche* against the incarceration of Diamandi. At the time Trotsky, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was absent at Brest Litovsk for the negotiations, and so it was Lenin and Zalkind who received the deputation at the Smolny Institute.

Within an hour Boyle and I were at the Foreign Office, whither Zalkind had moved from Smolny.

M. Zalkind was Deputy Foreign Commissar, a most unpleasant hunchback with the viciousness of a rat. He loathed England and despised Rumania, and was as rude to us as he could possibly be. Both Boyle and I had the greatest difficulty in refraining from personal violence, and only kept our tempers by a miracle, but naturally the interview came to nothing.

Late that night M. Diamandi was released and diplomatic relations between the Soviet and Rumania were broken off. M. Diamandi received his passport and promise of safe conduct to the Finnish frontier. He was to leave on the following day. Before going to Rumania I had started a little private bureau of information and during the evening one

of my agents told me that orders had been given by the Bolshevik secret service for M. Diamandi to be murdered, and that a similar fate was to befall the two deputies of the Constitutional Assembly and late Ministers of the Kerensky Governments, Kokoshken and Shingarev. We hurried round to the Rumanian Embassy at once and warned M. Diamandi not to leave his house unnecessarily and when he did start for the frontier to see that he was properly guarded. I am glad to say that he reached Finland in safety and as far as I know is still alive. But K. and S. met the fate which had been designed for them. They had originally been imprisoned in a damp, filthy cell in the St. Peter and Paul fortress whence, having contracted pneumonia, on the strong representations of brother Socialists they were moved to the Marinsky Hospital. But this failed to save them. Within a day or two they were brutally assassinated in their sick beds at the hospital. The official Bolshevik papers declared that this killing was the work of *agents provocateurs*, but all our evidence was to the contrary.

Though we failed to avert war between Soviet Russia and Rumania we entertained hopes that we might be able to stop hostilities. But to do so we must get at the man who was conducting the operations—Christian Rakovsky, who was far away in South Russia.

To have suggested to the Soviet authorities that Boyle and I should act as mediators between Russia and Rumania would, of course, have been tactless in the highest degree. But there are more ways than one of killing a cat, and fortune smiled on us again. Commissar Nevski implored us to go to South

Russia to get train-loads of crude oil and petrol into Petrograd. The machine of State was going to wrack and ruin for lack of all the essentials of modern civilization. Hundreds of railway wagons were ruined because there had been no crude oil to smear round their axles.

Anywhere in a southerly direction suited our purpose and we joyfully accepted the task. We had made up our minds that we would get to Rakovsky somehow or other. It was no light task which we had set ourselves. For weeks now the King's Messengers had been unable to travel between Petrograd and Jassy, and there was a great accumulation of bags containing mail, parcels, etc., for the British Embassy in the temporary Rumanian capital. But we were so confident of our ultimate success that we offered to take these bags and Mr. Lindley (now Sir Francis Lindley, Ambassador Extraordinary, and Minister Plenipotentiary at Lisbon) who was then chargé d'affaires at Petrograd, was very glad to hand them over to us.

I think that Ivan must have thought that the bags contained further royal treasure, for he did not once mention his carpets when they were taken aboard 451. A Russian friend of ours, whom I will call the Major, joined us on this trip. Our plan was to go first to Kharkov, and from there work our way down to the Black Sea. All went well until we were about a hundred miles from Kharkov when, just outside Orel, there was a head-on collision between our train and another. I was thrown to the floor out of my bunk, but picked myself up, pulled on a pair of gum boots, and slipping a coat over my pyjamas went out to investigate the damage. As a result of the

collision our train had caught fire and was burning furiously, while the wind was carrying the flames along the train. However, we organized parties and manhandled the carriages which had not yet caught fire away from the area of the conflagration.

Poor old 451 was badly damaged, our buffers smashed and the lavatory and pantry telescoped into one. In the morning she was towed back to Orel, where we offered the repair shop a huge sum to mend our car in twenty-four hours. Inspired by this inducement, they worked like Trojans and completed the repairs in record time.

To while away the time the Major took us to friends of his who had a delightful house on an estate not far from the town. Our host and hostess were living with their children in fear of their lives, and everything, with the exception of the house itself, had been confiscated and taken away from them. Food was practically unobtainable; but the house had a cellar marvellously stocked with old wine, champagne and Napoleon brandy, which were used more or less in its place.

The family owed their lives and the possession of their house to an elderly, small, grey-haired English governess who had been with them for many years. She had been born in Finsbury Park, and was the eldest of ten daughters of a doctor who practised in North London. When the revolution broke out she marched down to the local Soviet and bullied them into handing the house and her employers over to her care. She had, I was told, a bitter tongue, knew all the scallywags who were in the Soviet, and whenever she was displeased would go down and lash them for all she was worth. She was adored by the family,

and to meet her at table one would imagine that she could not say boo to a goose.

As soon as our car was ready we proceeded to Kharkov, which was in the hands of the Bolsheviks. The commander of the garrison had given himself the title of Admiral and had at his disposal a detachment of sailors who terrorized a town considerably larger than Manchester.

The commander himself, as a young man, had nursed a rancorous hatred for his own father and, one day, when a more bitter quarrel than usual had broken out between them, he had killed the old man with a chopper. There was no capital punishment for passionate crimes in Imperial Russia, and the young man, sentenced to imprisonment for life, had been sent to the island of Sakhalin. He had escaped from there at the outbreak of the revolution, and had been very active in the capture of Petrograd by the Bolsheviks. There could be no doubt that the man was a homicidal maniac and I had one or two very unpleasant interviews with him. "Off with his head," was his formula for anyone who displeased him or stood in his way, and the pirates round him were not slow to carry out his instructions.

One day I saw two black-coated sailors empty a crowded station platform by a wave of the hand. The Western world has learned to think of the Cossacks as the terror of Russia, but they never inspired one thousandth part of the fear which, in less than three months, the sailors of the Baltic and the Black Sea managed to instil into the hearts of the people.

There was no hope of doing anything in Kharkov with this maniac at the head of affairs, and so off we

went to Kupyansa—a day's journey south, to interview the Bolshevik Commander-in-Chief who was conducting a very skilful campaign against the White troops in Southern Russia. It was this White Army which later, under the command of General Denikin, very nearly swept the Soviet power out of Russia.

Commissar Antonov, though only about thirty-five years old, was a veteran revolutionary who had spent many years in prison for political offences.

For his activities in the 1905 revolution he had been condemned to death, but the sentence had been commuted to twenty years' imprisonment, during which he had been confined on the terrible island of Sakhalin. He was a thin, emaciated figure of a man and wore dark blue spectacles which gave him a most sinister appearance. He was a brilliant strategist, a man of action and had the heart of a lion.

The innate honesty and courage of the man are exemplified by the following. Some weeks before we met him he had been captured when the Whites seized the Central telegraph and telephone office during one of the risings in Petrograd. The coup had been badly planned. The building had been seized by cadets—boys of fifteen, sixteen and seventeen years old—who, when they saw that the position was hopeless, took Antonov from the cellar in which they had imprisoned him and promised to release him if he would negotiate a truce and secure them a free pardon.

Antonov gave his word and was greeted with thunderous cheers by the Red Guard when they saw him come out of the building unharmed. For the Red Guard who surrounded the building loved Antonov and thirsted to wipe out the Whites who

had captured him. At once he was surrounded by delighted crowds, who crowded round, embracing him and shaking him by the hand. "Now we will go in and wipe out those White dogs."

Then Antonov made himself heard above the din. He said that a truce was to be made and the defenders allowed to leave the building unmolested.

For a time it was uncertain which way the fortunes of the day would go. The Red Guards were stubborn. They insisted on the massacre they had promised themselves. "Very well," said Antonov, walking back to the building. "I will fire myself on the Red Guard, and you will have to pass over my dead body before you can get at the defenders."

We explained to Antonov our mission in the matter of oil and supplies and added that nothing could really be done while a maniac was in charge of Kharkov.

Antonov, who had known the man at Sakhalin and, although he admired him as a fighter, realized that he was quite unfitted for his present position, at once had him transferred to a fighting detachment. On our suggestion Antonov then reinstated many of the old traffic experts and within twelve days the supplies going north to Moscow and Petrograd were increased by forty-seven per cent.

Meantime the Soviet delegates were not prospering at Brest Litovsk and the German army had commenced a systematic invasion of fresh Russian territory. This gave us our cue. We pointed out to Antonov that the campaign which had been waged by the Soviet troops against Rumania was only putting Germany in a stronger and stronger position. He agreed with us. He was powerless to do anything

himself, but suggested that we should repeat what we had told him to the Supreme Council at Sevastopol, which was conducting the operations against Rumania.

At Sevastopol there had just been a terrible massacre of the officers of the Black Sea Fleet by their men. The news had spread throughout Russia, and the Soviets had put the whole of the Crimea under martial law. Nevertheless Antonov gave us a permit to travel there.

Two days later we had left the icy Steppes behind us and entered a southern land basking in the sunshine of spring. However, the German secret service had word of our enterprise and was determined to stop us at all costs. We learned of their activities from the honorary British consul, who was still in residence at Kherson. They had thrown off all disguise and were openly saying that in a few weeks the Crimea would be occupied by the German army. To this news they now added further information and in honour of ourselves were circulating more disquieting rumours. They said that seventy-nine British warships had forced the Dardanelles and that a flotilla was even now on its way to Sevastopol with the avowed intention of smashing the Russian fleet and punishing the men who had murdered their officers. The advance guard of this punitive expedition was coming by train in the shape of two British officers, who were to have everything ready in Sevastopol for the arrival of the fleet. The Germans had bought a Sevastopol newspaper and, in the issue of the very morning of our visit, their tale was set out at length.

As we drew into Sevastopol, our eyes lighted on a mob surging round the station, swarming over the

platform, crowding the tracks, a mob frenzied with the blood lust and baying for our lives. I thought of Dukhonin and shuddered. It was a crowd precisely similar to that of Mohileff, and this time we were the quarry.

A villainous-looking specimen with a club-foot boarded our carriage, and behind him came two sailors with drawn revolvers. The club-footed man had come with the most belligerent intentions, and as he spoke we could see that he was full of the rumours circulated by the Germans. Then Boyle spoke, and when Boyle spoke men listened.

After two long hours of debate we succeeded in allaying the suspicions of Commissar Spiro, for such was the name of the club-footed man, and at last he was convinced that we were not the advance party of a British squadron. Meanwhile the crowd outside was getting tired of waiting. There came frenzied cries as its fury surged up once more. Spiro admitted that we were in a tight corner, as it was the popular intention to lynch us. However, Spiro was no coward. He went on the platform of our car and harangued the crowd into quiescence. Finally a deputation of eight men came to our saloon to hear our story. We went through it all again from the beginning, and at the end of another hour we had convinced them.

It was already getting dark when Boyle and I, Spiro and the deputation stepped out of our railway carriage. Boyle made a speech in English which I translated, and at the head of the crowd we marched up to the office of the German-owned newspaper which was incontinently wrecked by the mob.

The next day we learned that after the massacre of

the officers, Rakovsky and the Supreme Council had moved from Sevastopol to Odessa.

At Sevastopol this new war against Rumania was far from popular. The sailors wanted to be finished with fighting, and here they were being organized into detachments and sent by sea to Odessa to fight a new foe. At our suggestions they passed resolutions demanding that the war should be stopped and asked us to take their resolutions to the Supreme Council.

Our stay at Sevastopol was very short, but it was certainly full of achievement. Our popularity soared. From being the quarry of human bloodhounds we had suddenly become popular idols. Before we left, the sailors of the Black Sea fleet organized a special reception in our honour. In the morning we were taken over the battlefields of the Crimean War. We went over to the Malakhoff Redoubt; stood on the spot from which the charge of the Light Brigade had been made; and visited the cemetery in which the bodies of British soldiers had been buried after the Crimean war.

The Bolshevik Commander-in-Chief of the Black Sea fleet was an ex-stoker and, at the luncheon which followed, the official hostess was an ex-cook who told me that she had borrowed her mistress's best dress for the occasion. To make herself look particularly beautiful she had put on a pair of black silk mittens which were an heirloom in her mistress's family.

The whole function was naïve in its simplicity, but carried out on the part of our hosts with charm and real friendliness. It was hard to believe that these people could be the wild beasts who, only a week

before, had brutally murdered hundreds of unarmed men on the sole charge of having been naval officers. But even in the midst of the celebration we could not quite forget it. These were the very men who, only a day or two before, amid the jeers of the crowd, had thrown their officers, tied at the ankles with pieces of anchor chain, from the marble quay into the sea. These were the men who had thought out methods of killing even more ghastly, surpassing the brutalities practised by the pirates of former times. We were glad to leave Sevastopol for Odessa.