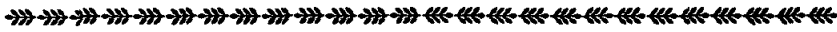


Chapter Thirty-six

FAITH IS A FINE INVENTION

*"There is a great difference between traveling to see countries
and to see people"*

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU



“TOVARISH — wishes to see you,” came a call from the hotel desk. For a moment I could not place the name, and the face had changed so completely that I could but faintly trace a resemblance to the boy I had seen before. He reminded me I had known him in Seattle as one who had assisted in getting up birth control meetings. When the Wobblies were being arrested in the United States he had hired out as a stoker on a boat, and gradually made his way to Russia, where he thought he could help to usher in the new society.

Here was one person who had not had the best of the bargain. He was shabbily dressed and looked dilapidated, evidently having seen hard times, and had a beaten expression in his eyes. Yet, disillusioned as he was, he had not come to complain. Since it was four in the afternoon, the lunch hour in Russia, I asked him to join me in the dining room, conducted like a large commons. The waiters seemed disgruntled, unhappy, inept and knew very little about service, they glanced scornfully at the man who sat down beside me. The one lively note was the orchestra, which threw itself into marches and wild and spirited Caucasian or Slavic folk dances while we ate.

My guest said this was the best meal he had had since leaving America. “Why don’t you come back?” I asked.

“I couldn’t get in.”

“Would you if you could?”

"Just give me a chance!"

I suppose it was inevitable that in such a social upheaval many suffered. I called upon Dr. Peter Tutyshkin, who had tried to attend our 1925 Conference in New York, but had arrived too late. As was the case with most professional men of his years, he had been of the old aristocracy. He and his wife and two daughters, both physicians, had owned a beautiful home. Now the thousands of volumes of what had formerly comprised his fine medical and scientific library had been taken away, and he and his wife slept and ate in the room which had contained them. He was margined and rationed to the last degree, and I could feel his humiliation at having so little food that he could not offer us a cup of tea.

While we were in Moscow, the Eddy party and the select six whom Louis Fischer was piloting, crossed our path. Fischer, a Russian living in Moscow and writing for the *Nation*, published in the United States, invited Grant and me to go along with them to meet the Secretary of the Commissariat of Public Health, Dr. Kaminsky. We went up a wide open stairway like that of a courthouse and into a spacious room with high windows running from floor to ceiling in French fashion and a huge banquet table laden with the invariable afternoon tea.

Dr. Kaminsky addressed us: "Our worst heritage from the Old Regime was in the field of medicine. The main task before us is to unite science and practice. Our medicine is a form of social insurance, our medical policy based on prevention. We are not interested in profit, only service."

The Russians had been kind and had grasped very quickly any improvement suggested to them, even accepting criticism with great tolerance. Aware of this, when Dr. Kaminsky paused for questions, Grant inquired about doctors entering private practice.

"As Russia builds up public health work," was the answer, "more doctors will be able to find room for private practice if they so desire."

Sherwood Eddy slipped me a note: "Here's your opportunity to bring up birth control."

I took my cue: "Has Russia a population policy? Has she formulated any program for the rate of increase of her people?"

The audience stirred as though I had hurled a grenade. The interpreter leaped to his feet and shrieked, "Malthusianism! We will not have Malthusianism here! We do not need it. Do you think or imply that Soviet Russia has to advance Malthusian ideas? We can have all the children we want and Russia can do with twice the population she now has." He went on and on.

After waiting a few moments for the air to clear, I continued, "I have asked Dr. Kaminsky a simple question which I will repeat. I said nothing about Malthusianism. But I should like to know whether Russia has a population policy. She has had five- and even ten-year plans for agriculture and manufacture and everything she is making. But what has she done about the most important issue today—population, its growth and distribution?"

Fischer was whispering to Dr. Kaminsky, evidently telling him what I wanted to know. The doctor replied, "If I understood correctly, you are asking if there is any policy from the biological or economic point of view."

"I am asking whether Russia, in planning her industries, has any plan also as to the eventual control of families. I know you have much freedom for women and a fine technique for abortions. To us that is extremely significant, because after a woman has been aborted she returns to the same conditions and becomes pregnant again. Four hundred thousand abortions a year indicate women do not want to have so many children, in my opinion it is a cruel method of dealing with the problem because abortion, no matter how well done, is a terrific nervous strain and an exhausting physical hardship."

Dr. Kaminsky's answer was not encouraging. "There is no question as to the increase of population. There is no policy as to the question of biological restrictions, on the contrary there is a policy of increasing the population. For six years we have had a great shortage, not only of skilled workers, but of labor in general."

Obviously, I was not a particularly welcome visitor.

By chance I was fortunate enough to encounter again Dr. Marthe Ruben-Wolf, who with her husband and children had escaped from Nazi Germany and was then at the head of a Moscow abortorium. Because of her wide experience in Germany, where clinics had been under municipal guidance, she was one of the few Communists who

was sane on the subject of population. She very kindly helped me with some of my interviews.

Any woman in Russia who requested it was entitled to abortion on application to a doctor. She was told of the dangers, warned it might result in sterility, charged about two dollars and a half. We talked to about fifty patients who had already been there three days. None had temperatures. They were very jolly and going home that afternoon to rest for another week or two. Then they would go back to work with no deduction in wages. Though some of these women had had five abortions in two years and one had had eight, they could not sing too highly the praises of their country for allowing the operations. When I asked whether they would not prefer to have some information as to how to avoid further ones by protecting themselves from pregnancy, each and all replied, "We have no such thing. We hear of it, but we have nothing. Russia is too poor. We hope she will soon get it."

In only one place did I see a clinic in the sense that we use the word here, and that was in Moscow where Dr. Kabanova had sixty women the afternoon we viewed it. Great credit is also due Madame Lebedova who organized the original establishment of the Institutes for the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood, laid down the principles to be followed, and persisted until they had been embodied in a definite program.

Dr. Abram B. Gens, assistant director, was in charge of contraceptive supplies and the administration of birth control, such as it was. He was antagonistic, disagreeable, unpleasant, shouting "Malthusianism" into my ears more times in one hour than I had heard it before in twenty years. The methods in the Moscow clinic were antiquated, and I suggested sending a physician to instruct them, but my proposal was not acceptable.

I considered Russia's situation very serious. Her population was a matter of mathematics, it had increased some fifty million since the downfall of the Empire. Unless she looked ahead and educated her people in the problems which arose out of population, within two generations she would find herself with the same differential birth rate then existing in England and the United States. It would, however, have much more tragic consequences since it would lower

the augmentation of the capable, skilled, shock troops of industry, the idealists and active, selfless workers, and would multiply from the bottom unskilled, ignorant, dull-witted workers, the superstitious element which even the greatest efforts of a Soviet dictatorship running at top speed could not pull up and out of their evolutionary environment

I really began to see Russia under another guise after we stepped on the train from Moscow to Gorky, the former Nizhni Novgorod. Around the big, city hotels vendors had been trying to dispose of soft, warm sables and gold-embroidered altar pieces evidently reft from churches, asking good prices for them. But now the peasant women offered tea cozies, wooden boxes, carved and painted, dolls, leather, brass, knickknacks for the tourist, quite unlike anything obtainable elsewhere in Europe, and always, of course, Russian blouses.

The side-wheel steamer *Kommunistka*, small but comfortable, was waiting to carry us down the Volga to Stalingrad. Our party occupied practically all available cabins, but hundreds of Russians were jammed on the decks. At some points the river was a mile wide as it slid between flat landscapes, limitless as far as the eye could reach. Often we overtook rafts of logs, some at least a quarter of a mile long, each bearing a diminutive house where the captain and his family lived. You could see the children scampering back and forth and the crew pushing it leisurely into the current.

We were four days in transit, passing many villages and a few towns—Kazan, Samara, and Saratov. I do not remember the cities clearly. Some places are indelible in your mind, others amount to very little. If you are searching for something and do not find it, the scene vanishes.

At every stop men and women accompanied by children and baskets of belongings were collected in hundreds. They had come a week or more early to make sure of catching the boat, spending the nights on the ground, subsisting on a loaf of bread, a tomato, or a cucumber. Their children were taken care of in the station creche, bathed, dressed in fresh clothing, taught, directed in play, delivered to the parents just before the *Kommunistka* landed.

Then came the mad scramble. It was like the old days on Ellis Island when the peasants from Europe arrived, thousands of them,

carrying huge bundles on their heads, shoving and rushing and jabbering in strange tongues, attempting to squeeze in. You wondered how so many people could ever get on board. They had no comforts, no room to sleep such as we. They appeared stark and hungry, while we had marvelous food, in fact too much of it. Any American planning to lose weight in Russia was badly disappointed.

Stalingrad, near the mouth of the Volga, was Russia's greatest industrial city. Here I saw a hotel which was going up in front and falling down behind with about equal rapidity, the building material was lying in the streets. In the one in which we lodged we had to dodge spigots. Plumbing had been laid on all over the country, but the stream from any tap never by any chance landed where it was intended to. You approached cautiously, not knowing whether it would get you in the eye, in the nose, or shoot over your shoulder and hit your suitcase. The bathroom had no lock, and the attendant insisted it was his job to help patrons take a bath. I pushed on one side of the door, he on the other. I won.

At Stalingrad, as everywhere I had been before, I was looking for Russian contraceptive methods, but having been discouraged both by Dr. Kaminsky and Dr. Genss, I went at it rather carefully. When I visited the impressive new hospital I asked the superintendent, who was a gynecologist and spoke good English, whether he gave contraceptive advice.

"I do not, but we have a department of consultation."

"May I see it?" I had already surveyed about fifteen such, where I had found nothing save exhibits on the wall.

"It's just across the road."

"Will you go with me?" I asked. "Elsewhere it's been hard to get information."

He agreed readily. As we entered, an attendant was displaying lengthy diagrams to some tourists being shepherded through, and telling them birth control was taught in hospitals throughout Russia. Someone I knew came up to me. "This is wonderful, Mrs. Sanger, the people are being taught birth control by the Government."

The posters were there to prove this, but the consultation room itself was locked. "Who is in charge here?" demanded the superin-

tendent "I've been sending patients over Who takes care of them?"

"I do sometimes," a woman assistant volunteered She let us into the room There were the same cases I had seen everywhere, probably untouched since 1925, the articles within moldy and cracked

"What do you use?" I asked

"We have nothing We've asked and asked Moscow, but we get nothing"

The superintendent was much embarrassed, he inquired how long it had been since supplies had come

"Two years"

"Why?"

"We don't know"

"Well, what about the patients I send over here?"

"We just tell them to go home and wait We have nothing for them"

From Stalingrad we took the train to Ordzonikidze, the beginning of the Georgian Military Highway through the Caucasus to Tiflis After the usual breakfast of Russian tea, black bread, and fresh caviar, which I found delicious, we climbed into four open-topped char-a-bancs, filling them to capacity Enormous trucks came behind with our luggage For about two hours we rolled along by the side of the river Terek, which was running dark and going so fast that the only thing I could think of was the streams from Swiss glaciers, but instead of being ice-green, this was muddy, splashing up on the road The guides told us there had been a two-day, torrential rain, the worst the Caucasus had ever known

About ten we stopped to stretch our legs at a village Groups of lusty mountaineers stared at us, grinning good-humoredly as though we were as odd as any freaks in a circus They gave us cheese and bread, some of us bought wine and tea, not knowing when we might leave After three hours we were still at the village when finally men with great high hats and military-looking, astrakhan capes rode up on horseback and spoke to our guides who, not being Georgian, had difficulty divining they were trying to say our cars could not pass

We thought it was just like the Russians to fuss about a few little obstacles, and said there must be some way to get through Off we

went, and our drivers were magnificent. With the stubbornness of tractors we plunged across streams and over rocks, when trees blocked the road, they lifted the trunks, branches and all. We drove on and on, slowly, and at last, towards five o'clock, came to a spot where there was nothing before us—nothing but the mountain side sheer to the swirling water.

Out clambered the eighty tourists, youthful and aged, tall and short, thin and fat. We could see the road begin about a quarter of a mile beyond, a sultry sun smiling on the peaks of the mountains. The river was still rising. One of our guides waded in to test whether we could ford it, and was soon practically up to his middle in the turbid flood. Grant began ferrying old ladies over the deep places and a couple of boys carried the two-hundred-and-ten-pound Professor Ross. The current was terrific, and people kept falling.

After nearly three hours everybody was across. Our leader found a horse, galloped off to secure new buses, which arrived and took us to the town where we were supposed to have lunch. But it was now dark and lunch became supper. More conversations, more consultations, more delay, more mystery. Why did we not start? The answer was that three strange men were sitting in one of our cars—Russians who wanted to get to Tiflis. They were going to have their rights. When pleading, arguing, reasoning could not move them, the G P U had to be invoked, still no results. Not until they had been promised that a bus would leave immediately did they descend and make room for the three of our group whose seats they had usurped.

We rattled off again, only to be turned back. Another long halt and more conversation. Ultimately, since buses had been dispatched from Tiflis to meet us and were waiting about six miles away, it was decided to push on.

Then began the real drive through Godaur Pass, up and over rocks and embankments, roots of trees, sand and water, precarious detours in a night as jet as any I have ever seen. The militia had been ordered by Moscow to keep the route open—green skyrockets for us to come ahead, red ones to stop, and swinging lanterns in front of the worst danger spots—great drops down into ravines. At last we reached the end and mounted a new set of buses, but only three of them.

Grant was among those who stayed behind. We arrived at Tiflis at two in the morning. Dinner was ready as well as clean beds, and we slept until the humid sun stirred us out for breakfast, just as the rest came straggling in.

It was Sunday morning. Lining the steps of the old Georgian cathedral were beggar women—lame, blind, filthy—never had I seen any others in Russia. Children were curiously looking on at the Mass, but we were told parents were forbidden to make them go to church. The few elderly women attending were carrying flowers and had twined them also around the frames of the saints' pictures. We tourists presented an incongruous contrast to the priests with their long beards and splendid robes.

Tiflis had slipped the yoke of Moscow. Here among the mosques and the camels and the bazaars, which gave it a definitely Oriental tinge, we finally saw signs of private enterprise. Back in the mountains were tribes the Soviet was trying to civilize—warlike, uncultured, barbaric. Stalin, sentimental for the country of his origin perhaps, was choosing as many Georgians as he could for high places and sending in teachers and moving pictures to educate the others, but the task was herculean.

It was hot, torrid noon when we arrived at Batum on the Black Sea. The sun was pouring down, we wanted to go swimming to cool off, and were directed to a stony beach. The water was darkened by the heavy, rich deposit which coated the bottom, and the sand, of the same color, was strewn with masses of people just like Coney Island, thousands of them on the seaweed-covered rocks. It did not look pleasant and we walked further. A partition of slats through which there was perfect visibility was supposed to divide the women from the men, but despite having heard so much about the nude bathing there, we discovered everyone had on suits—astounding, old-fashioned garments.

Mrs. Clyde declined to go in, but sat watching in her hat and glasses. Tanya kept on pink panties and a brassiere. The rest of us determined to throw off our inhibitions. Once you did this you were freed from them for the time being, it was the doing that was so hard. Most surprising were the New England schoolteachers, who

had certainly never before removed their clothes in public. They dashed their long, lean bodies boldly into the water as though to say, "Russia, here we come!"

The steamer on which we left Batum was dirty, loaded with passengers who had to be stepped over as they slept on deck. If you left your stateroom even a few moments somebody grabbed it and took your bed.

But the scenery of the Russian Riviera was very lovely. The spurs of the Caucasus along the coast glittered with marble palaces. I shall always remember the mighty, sable cypress trees, slender columns silhouetted against the creamy white walls, they were not funereal to me, but more like sentinels.

Only the chosen of the chosen, the executives and the intelligentsia, could stay at Yalta for holidays. Many individuals, Agnes Smedley, for one, had reason to be grateful to the Soviet for their rest periods. Although not a Communist she had written sympathetic articles, and the Russian Health Department, hearing she was ill in China, had sent her an invitation to come and recuperate, and here she had stayed a year without cost, recovering from a strained heart.

I spent a day in the majestic Byzantine summer palace of Nicholas II at near-by Livadia. It was perfectly landscaped with statues, fountains, terraces. As we drove up multitudinous shaved heads popped out open windows. In the marvelous ballroom were a hundred and fifty enamel cots, side by side, the sleeping quarters of the men on vacation. We saw the room belonging to the former Tsarina, with fragile, brocaded walls and delicate panels. In the center of the parquet floor, bare of any covering, stood a deal table with checked gingham cloth.

Now and then you caught a glimpse of people in the palace, but mostly they were reclining in the gardens. As we wandered round and round we came upon a cluster of twenty-five asleep, pale, and not too well-fed. They did not twitch an eyelid as we approached. I asked Tanya, "Who are these?"

Touching one of them on the shoulder, she said, "Tovarish, these tovarishes want to know who you are."

At that not only he but all of them jumped to their feet, as

though at military drill One after the other gave his name, each with a "vich" or a "ski" on the end of it, stating also his occupation As he finished he turned his head to the next, who took up the recital The little woman with bobbed black hair and a curious bodice of blue proudly said she wore the Cross of Lenin on her dress because with him she had fought for Russia This was the highest honor any woman in Russia could be paid, only a hundred had it

Then the first man bowed politely to Tanya and with dignity said something to her She interpreted to us, "They want to know who *you* are"

"Tell them we're Americans"

"North Americans?" with great enthusiasm

"Yes"

Then question after question spattered like a machine gun "Are you from Seattle? Portland? How did you get here? What way did you come? How long did it take you? How much did it cost? What has happened to Dillinger? What's the latest news of the seamen's strike on the Pacific Coast? How soon comes the Revolution?"

We were rather dazed at the degree of current information they had gleaned—chiefly from posters in the parks Their bombardment continued "Do women in America have as much freedom as men?" We all disagreed on that "Can married women work for the Government? Can they teach school?" Some of us answered "No," others, "Yes" On every inquiry of theirs we were divided, but on whatever we asked them they were united

"Who is your favorite American author?"

I answered, "I like Sinclair Lewis"

The woman looked at me accusingly, "Not Theodore Dreiser?"

"Oh, yes," I agreed, "he's good"

A man suggested, "Not Upton Sinclair?"

They were apparently sadly disappointed in us

At last one of them, making a sweeping gesture, said to me, "Your American Government has never built anything like this for its workers, has it?"

"No," I replied, "we never had a Tsar," which was very tactless of me

He answered something to the effect, "You people have opinions but no convictions We have been to prison for ours"

Tanya volunteered, pointing to me, "This lady has been to prison eight times for hers"

Astonishment was registered, and one man spoke hurriedly to Tanya who translated, "He wants to know who you are Shall I tell him?" She then explained I was advocating birth control

"Well, we have that Haven't you visited any of our hospitals? Thousands of women have it"

"No, that's abortion We don't want that Birth control is different"

The conversation had shifted to something concrete and real, we had struck up an *entente* that was very *cordiale* The group gathered closer "Come on Come on This is important" They had never heard of contraception How could anyone have put me in jail for that? What a crazy government! Worse than they had thought!

The woman said, "We need you over here Come and work with us Don't waste your life in America"

From the impatient bus came horns, whistles, bells, summoning us away The whole twenty-five followed us to the char-a-banc, waving farewell

Tanya was a most discerning little person, ordinarily impassive but springing up animatedly the moment music started One of our party invited her, "Come on to America You'll have pretty clothes, and for anyone who can dance like you, fame is waiting"

"Pretty clothes? I have two dresses, which answer their purpose And as for fame—this is my people I enjoy dancing, and they enjoy me Why should I go to America?"

Before I left I wanted to do something for her, give her some sort of gift in return for her many services She was going to be married and, because her mother was old-fashioned, have a registered ceremony, call in all her friends, and even don special raiment I had some new stockings with me and presented them to her She looked at them, handled them as though treasuring some lovely thing she longed for but could not possess

"I wouldn't dare wear them I would be ashamed because my friends could not have the same"

Tanya was willing to go without until silk stockings were to be had by all. It was necessary to grasp this attitude to understand Sovietism. It gave you slight personal freedom, and you had to ask yourself honestly whether exploitation by government or by individual was basically different. But what you did have was security for your old age and the hope that when the rewards came you would have your share.

The Russians were a mass of contradictions. One moment I was irritated enough to tear them limb from limb, the next prostrate before their sincerity and zeal. The more than one hundred and fifty races and forty-five languages made for problems that challenged man's intelligence. Perhaps no other nation had had a lower order of serfdom to arouse from lethargy and put to work on a new civilization. Nothing but admiration could be accorded their attempts and achievements.

But most of the time they were entranced by their own drug of idealism. They had swallowed so much of it that they were self-hypnotized, and bumped into reality without understanding it. Like the Spanish, it was enough for them to say, "It will be," without taking sufficient thought as to how to bring it about.

At Odessa we boarded what then seemed to us by contrast the most beautiful ship in the world, the Italian liner *Campidoglio*, entering into another domain. A neat, white cloth was spread for you, yourself, no longer did you have a soiled napkin folded for indefinite use, spotless coats adorned the waiters, our chairs were pulled out, everybody had a proper bed and cabin. It was only a simple ship, but it signified Western refinement, and I must say I welcomed it. No matter how much proletarian sympathy you might have, you appreciated clean tables, dishes, sheets, towels, and a bathroom that worked.

In order to hurry back to school Grant separated from me in Rumania and my husband joined me in Naples to go to Marienbad. I had barely reached there when Grant cabled that Stuart was ill again, I left for home the same day. On arrival I found the doctors contemplating a radical operation, but I refused to let him have another. As an alternative Tucson, Arizona, was suggested for its dry, warm climate. His wound was still unhealed when we started.

Being stowed away in Stuart's small Ford coupe for days on end gave us the best possible opportunity to catch up in our talks and experiences and place trivial and unimportant events in the pockets of memory where they belonged. The joy of thus familiarizing myself with my grown-up son made me envy mothers who had leisure to grow along with their children or, at least, to watch them develop. But it is possible we are all the better friends in adult life, at least we adhere to the rights of individuality for ourselves and for each other.

It was nearing the close of October when one bright morning we left El Paso and came across miles and miles of brown and yellow desert, up to the hills and mountains. Through the heat waves we saw mirages, we were positive they were lakes. Arizona was so unlike any place I had been before, you either had to be enthralled by it or hate and dread it. Not being quick to come to conclusions I was not at first sure. But I knew there was a delight in the cool nights and the translucent, sunny days with a lovely tang in the air. In the beginning it was the people who won me, particularly Mrs. Robert P. Bass, daughter of Mrs. Charles Sumner Bird, one of our early pioneers. We stayed with her for a short time, and then took a pink adobe house out where the desert met the foothills. Stuart grew better. In the spring we packed our bags once more in the little car and drove away, looking back regretfully at the indescribable Catalinas, on which light and clouds played in never-ending change of pattern.