RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

One's Company

Peter Fleming

CONTENTS

About the Book

Catching all the fascination and humour of travel in out-of-the-way places, *One's Company* is Peter Fleming's account of his journey through Russia and Manchuria to China when he was Special Correspondent to *The Times* in the 1930s.

Fleming spent seven months with the 'object of investigating the Communist situation in South China' at a time when, as far as he knew, 'no previous journey had been made to the anti-communist front by a foreigner', and on its publication in 1934, *One's Company* won widespread critical acclaim.

Packed with classic incidents – brake-failure on the Trans-Siberian Express, the Eton Boating Song singing lesson in Manchuria – *One's Company* was among the forerunners of a whole new approach to travel writing.

About the Author

Peter Fleming was born in 1907 and educated at Eton and Oxford, where he gained a First in English Literature and was Editor of *Isis*. In 1935, he married Celia Johnson, the distinguished actress, and they had a son and two daughters. He worked briefly in New York before joining an expedition to look for a lost captain in Brazil. This resulted in his first book, *Brazilian Adventure*, which has been translated into many languages. As a Special Correspondent of *The Times*, Fleming travelled widely in Eastern and Central Asia. He served in the Grenadier Guards during the war and later commanded the 4th Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (T.A.). He received the O.B.E. in 1945 and was High Sheriff of Oxfordshire in 1952. His other books, chiefly on travel and war history, include *News from Tartary* (1936), *The Forgotten Journey* (1952), *The Siege at Peking* (1959), *Invasion 1940* (1957), *Bayonets to Lhasa* (1961) and *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak* (1963). He died in August 1971.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


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To the memory of R.F.

ONE'S COMPANY

A Journey to China in 1933

PETER FLEMING

PIMLICO

WARNING TO THE READER

The recorded history of Chinese civilization covers a period of four thousand years. The population of China is estimated at 450 millions. China is larger than Europe

The author of this book is twenty-six years old. He has spent, altogether, about seven months in China. He does not speak Chinese

FOREWORD

THIS BOOK IS a superficial account of an unsensational journey. My Warning to the Reader justifies, I think, its superficiality. It is easy to be dogmatic at a distance, and I dare say I could have made my half-baked conclusions on the major issues of the Far Eastern situation sound convincing. But it is one thing to bore your readers, another to mislead them; I did not like to run the risk of doing both. I have therefore kept the major issues in the background.

The book describes in some detail what I saw and what I did, and in considerably less detail what most other travellers have also seen and done. If it has any value at all, it is the light which it throws on the processes of travel – amateur travel – in parts of the interior, which, though not remote, are seldom visited.

On two occasions, I admit, I have attempted seriously to assess a politico-military situation, but only (*a*) because I thought I knew more about those particular situations than anyone else, and (*b*) because if they had not been explained certain sections of the book would have made nonsense. For the rest, I make no claim to be directly instructive. One cannot, it is true, travel through a country without finding out something about it; and the reader, following vicariously in my footsteps, may perhaps learn a little. But not much.

I owe debts of gratitude to more people than can conveniently be named, people of all degrees and many nationalities. He who befriends a traveller is not easily forgotten, and I am very grateful indeed to everyone who helped me on a long journey.

PETER FLEMING

London,
May 1934

NOTE. – Some of the material contained in this book has appeared in the columns of the *Times*, the *Spectator* and *Life and Letters*. My thanks are due to the editors of these journals for permission to reproduce it here in a different form.

PART ONE : MANCHUKUO

CHAPTER I

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

I ALWAYS READ (I know I have said this before) the Agony Column of the *Times*.

I was reading it now. It was June 2nd, 1933: a lovely day. English fields, bright, friendly, and chequered, streamed past the window of the Harwich boat-train. Above each cottage smoke rose in a slim pillar which wriggled slightly before vanishing into a hot blue sky. Cattle were converging on the shade of trees, swinging their tails against the early summer flies with a dreamy and elegant motion. Beside a stream an elderly man was putting up his rod in an atmosphere of consecration. Open cars ran cheerfully along the roads, full of golf-clubs and tennis-rackets and picnic-hampers. Gipsies were camped in a chalk-pit. A green woodpecker, its laughter inaudible to me, flew diagonally across a field. Two children played with puppies on a tiny lawn. Downs rose hazily in the distance. England was looking her best.

I, on the threshold of exile, found it expedient to ignore her. I turned to the Agony Column.

The Agony Column was apropos but not very encouraging, like the sermon on the last Sunday of term.

'*Because it is so uncertain as well as expensive, I must wait and trust.*' The advertiser was anonymous.

I put the paper down. Normally I would have speculated at some length on the circumstances which evoked this *cri du cœur*; to-day I was content to accept it merely as oracular guidance. We were in the same boat, the

advertiser and I; as he (or possibly she) pointed out, we must wait and trust.

From my typewriter, on the rack opposite, a label dangled, swinging gently to and fro in a deprecating way. ‘‘PASSENGER TO MANCHULI’ said the label. I wished it would keep still. There was something pointed in such suave and regular oscillation; the legend acquired an ironical lilt. ‘Well, well!’ said the label, sceptical and patronizing. ‘Boys will be boys. …’

‘PASSENGER TO MANCHULI.’ Had there been anyone else in the carriage, and had he been able to decipher my block-capitals, and had he in addition been fairly good at geography and at international politics in the Far East, that label alone would have been enough (for he is clearly an exceptional chap) to assure him that my immediate future looked like being uncertain as well as expensive. For Manchuli is the junction, on the frontier between Russia and Manchuria, on the Trans-Siberian and the Chinese Eastern Railways; and the latter line had recently been announced as closed to traffic, its ownership being in dispute between Moscow and the Japanese-controlled government of Manchukuo. In short, on the evidence to hand my hypothetical fellow-passenger would have been warranted in assuming that I was either up to, or would come to, no good; or both.

With the possible exception of the Equator, everything begins somewhere. Too many of those too many who write about their travels plunge straight *in medias res*; their opening sentence informs us bluntly and dramatically that the prow (or bow) of the dhow grated on the sand, and they stepped lightly ashore.

No doubt they did. But why? With what excuse? What other and anterior steps had they taken? Was it boredom, business, or a broken heart that drove them so far afield? We have a right to know.

But they seldom tell us. They may vouchsafe a few complacent references to what they call their Wanderlust. But chiefly they trade on an air of predestination; they are lordly, inscrutable, mysterious. Without so much as a Hey Presto! or a Houp La! they whisk us from their native land to their exotic destination; so that for the first few chapters the reader's mind is full of extraneous and distracting surmises, as a proctor's must be when he sees a chamber-pot crowning some ancient monument of the university. He overlooks the situation's intrinsic interest, because he is passionately wondering how the situation was arrived at at all.

In this respect, if in no other, I intend to give the reader a square deal. As my label suggested, I had in my pocket a ticket to Manchuli. The reader will wonder why I had bought it.

Not, I can assure him, from any love of the place. Manchuli is a small, wind-swept village, lying in a vast, but naturally not less wind-swept plain. The population is Chinese, Mongolian, and Russian (Red and White). In the autumn of 1931 I was held up there for a day, and during that day I saw all that I wanted to see of Manchuli and of the network of shallow ditches which surrounds it, whether for the purpose of irrigation, sanitation, or defence I neither know nor care. In Manchuli, too, I read the greater part of *The Pickwick Papers*; but that, after all, one can do almost anywhere. Besides – as I say – I had done it. No; it would be idle and dishonest to pretend that Manchuli aroused in me any of the emotions that (for instance) Kentucky arouses in the saxophonist or Bognor Regis in the poster-artist. The 'Come to Manchuli' movement could count me out.

What was it, then, if not nostalgia? Simply this: that since the railway east of Manchuli was thought to be closed, to buy a ticket to, say, Harbin might well prove to be waste of money. With the minimum of luck – and I had

the maximum[1] – one could get to Manchuli; and there, after all, one would find oneself on a frontier separating two nations whose citizens are neither universally efficient nor universally incorruptible. So it would be surprising indeed, however serious the railway situation, if one did not manage to penetrate further east.

But why penetrate further east? We come at last to the point.

I had in my pocket – or, to be strictly accurate, I thought I had in my pocket – a document addressed ‘To All Whom It May Concern’. (Luckily, for I had left it behind, it concerned nobody.) This document went on to say that I had been authorized to act as Special Correspondent to the *Times* in the Far East. I had acquired it in the following manner:

Two months before, I had gone to the Editor of the *Times* and informed him that the situation in China during the coming summer would be fraught with every conceivable kind of interest. (This was a howling lie; the situation in China during the summer of 1933 was as dull as ditchwater.) I was the man, I shamelessly implied, to tell the world about it; had I not been there before, and for nearly three months?

The Editor of the *Times* is a humane man. His first thought was for his colleagues. ‘If I turn him down,’ he said to himself, ‘he’ll go round pestering them. Then, when he finds that no reputable newspaper will give him an excuse for going to China, he’ll come back to me with some cock and bull theory about Ecuador being the Country of the Future. Much better get him out of the country at once.’

He did. I was duly commissioned to write a series of articles on China, each one more portentous and comprehensive than the last; they would be paid for at a generous rate. The *Spectator* advanced me £50. My publisher, a curiously gullible man, made good the necessary rest. To all these people who made it possible for me to pay my way I am very grateful.

That, then, is how I came to be on the Harwich boat-train, *en route* for Manchuli. I have presented my credentials. If the reader wants any further motivation, he can invent it for himself.

[1]See the photograph facing page *66*.

CHAPTER II

INTO RUSSIA

HOLLAND. ON THE Flushing platform tail draught-horses, rather like the draught-horses you see in Japan, help the porters with the luggage. The train pulls out and runs through the evening sunlight across a flat country partitioned with a symmetry so emphatic as to be rather charming. But the flatness is overdone; privacy and surprise – surely the two prime qualities in a civilized landscape – are almost wholly excluded. Holland looks rather dull to me.

But not to the two little Cockney girls in the next compartment, unaccountably bound for Berlin. In an exercise book they write down feverishly the name of each successive station. ‘Oo, look!’ cries one. ‘There’s a reel Dutchwoman!’ And by God she is right.

I dine with a pleasant young Englishman. He claims to know Warsaw, and we embark on a markedly one-sided discussion of the Upper Silesian Plebiscite of ’21. My mission, when revealed, awes him. ‘Manchuria!’ he exclaims. ‘But can you speak Russian, or Chinese, or Japanese?’ Alas, I cannot. ‘Then how will you manage?’ I say I do not know. He eyes me with respect; a desperate fellow, this, he is thinking. It is clear that he finds me Ouidan. I wish now that I had not told him where I am going.

I wish that I had not told him, because the false values which other people put upon one’s activities are disconcerting. My own sense of proportion I regard as impregnably established. In the light of it, a journey to

Manchuria is a perfectly normal undertaking: nothing to get excited about. But the world at large persists in maintaining a set of values which the simplification of travel, and the general standardization of most forms of external experience, have long rendered obsolete. The far cry has still an embarrassingly romantic lilt, and distance lends an enchantment which is in fact no longer hers to lend.

When we said good night, the young man wished me luck on My Adventures. I was afraid he would.

An atmosphere, congenial to me, of racketeering pervaded Berlin. Dark stories of the concentration camps, rumours of plots and feuds among the great ones, and an inexhaustible supply of jokes at the expense of Hitler were exchanged: but only when the waiter had withdrawn out of ear-shot. One looked instinctively for swastikas on the pats of butter.

I lunched with Wheeler-Bennett, Knickerbocker, and Duranty (on his way back to Moscow after a holiday), and concealed with only a partial success my ignorance of all European and most other politics. There was also present an American film-star, full of the ardours and endurances of Greenland, where he had been making a picture in a climate so unkind that two imported polar bears had died of exposure, martyrs to their art. He will linger in the memory by virtue of having told me the longest story about an operation that I have ever heard.

After an abortive attempt to get myself inoculated, I left for Moscow on the night train.

A legend, blazoned in Russian across an arch through which the train passes to cross the Polish frontier, informs you that ‘The Revolution Breaks Down All Barriers’. The truth of this is not immediately apparent.

The Customs House at Niegoreloje is decorated with large mural paintings, in which the devotees of agriculture and industry, curiously combining a tubular physique with

an air of ecstasy, are portrayed in the discharge of their varied and onerous duties. ‘Workers of the World, Unite!’ is inscribed in gold letters and four languages round the walls. The second sentence of this now immortal exhortation – ‘You Have Nothing To Lose But Your Chains’ – is omitted; it would represent, my 1931 diary notes, ‘a highly conservative estimate of one’s potential losses in that place’.

However, I got my scanty luggage through the customs without loss, if not without delay. The officials moved about their business, as they had moved two years ago, with a mystic and inconsequent air. Russia has never, I imagine, been very good at bureaucracy. To-day her functionaries, gravely inconvenienced by a newly acquired civic conscience, fall unhappily between two stools; on the one hand their fatalistic instincts bid them muddle through and cook the accounts at the end of the month, on the other the ideals of an exact and Prussian efficiency, forcefully inculcated from above, spur them on to higher things. By nature introspective and self-critical, the average Russian official is painfully aware that he was not born to fill up forms – or not, at any rate, to fill them up correctly. He is a kind of Hamlet, and in his relations with the traveller will veer unpredictably from the dogmatic to the perplexed, from the apologetic to the menacing. He is often likeable, but never, in any circumstances, expeditious.

My brother Ian, recently returned from Moscow where he had been acting as Reuter’s Special Correspondent during the trial of the Metro-Vickers engineers, had given me, by way of a talisman, a photostat copy of a letter he had received from Stalin. Stalin corresponds seldom with foreigners, and the sight of his signature, negligently disposed on top of a suitcase otherwise undistinguished in its contents, aroused in the officials a child-like wonder. Their awe was turned to glee when they found an album containing photographs of an aboriginal tribe in Central

Brazil. Had I really taken them? Indeed? They were really very good, most interesting. … Even the Bolsheviks, it seemed, were travel-snobs.

I parted with the officials on the most friendly terms, but with a slightly uneasy conscience, for I had 200 roubles in my pocket. They came, like Stalin's letter, from my brother Ian, and they were contraband.

Now here we come to the question of what is called The Exchange. It is a question which I shall never understand. I yearn to do so. I would give anything to be able to write, or even to read, an article on 'The Future of the Franc' or 'The Peseta: Whither?' But I know I never shall.

In Russia the Exchange is a particularly unreal and complex bogey, and I will not here attempt to explain the difference between gold roubles and black roubles, for I do not know what it is, nor why it should exist. The only thing I am quite sure about is that if you are caught importing roubles into the country you are arrested; and that, on the other hand, if you change your foreign money at the official rate you don't get anything like as many roubles as you ought to. (The ten shillings which I changed at Niegoreloje, to allay suspicion, would not have covered the tip to my porter, had I employed a porter.) So the most economical, if not the most prudent policy is to smuggle roubles in. Ian's 200 saw me across Russia.

There exists, of course, a most exact and comprehensive set of regulations designed to prevent this sort of thing. You have to declare all the money you have with you when you enter Russia, and when you leave it you are supposed to show up receipts proving that you have spent a certain sum (it used to be twenty roubles) every day. It sounds fairly water-tight on paper. But the Russians, as I say, have never been very good at bureaucracy, and on neither of my journeys across their country have I seen these regulations effectively enforced. Rouble-running would appear to be a

likely career for a young man, with few risks and plenty of room at the top.

CHAPTER III

THE MIRAGE OF MOSCOW

'L'EUROPE EST FINIE', the little attendant had said when we crossed the Polish frontier into Russia; and so, it seemed, was June. Grey skies and a cold wind did nothing to enhance the attractions of Moscow.

Moscow is a depressing place. To me its atmosphere is somehow suggestive of servants' bedrooms. The analogy, however, is not one which I am qualified to pursue.

Public opinion in England is sharply divided on the subject of Russia. On the one hand you have the crusty majority, who believe it to be a hell on earth; on the other you have the half-baked minority who believe it to be a terrestrial paradise in the making. Both cling to their opinions with the tenacity, respectively, of the die-hard and the fanatic. Both are hopelessly wrong.

And who shall blame them? You cannot give a just verdict without considering all the evidence; and in Great Britain, unfortunately, there is only a tithe of evidence to hand. Our leading newspaper[1] continues to report the affairs of the largest country in the world through a correspondent posted outside its frontiers, so that its Russian news has much the same degree of interest and reliability as would distinguish a running commentary on a prize-fight at the Albert Hall if it were broadcast from the steps of the Albert Memorial. America, however (sometimes) misty with sentiment in her eyes, gets a fuller and less distorted picture of Russia than we do, because American newspapers print more and better Russian news than ours; it may be that their attitude would be less

commendably detached if the Pacific Ocean were not so conveniently wide, but at least they have not made themselves ridiculous by first prejudging, and then to all intents and purposes ignoring, a political, cultural, and economic experiment launched on an unprecedented scale.

In England authorities on Russia are about as numerous as authorities on Mars, and the knowledge of the former is about as exact and as comprehensive as the knowledge of the latter. Funnily enough, it is much the same in Russia. Outside the Kremlin, where a handful of men, presumably able and partly Jewish, control (on paper) the destinies of the far-flung Soviet Republics, hardly anyone in Russia knows what is going on there, or why. They know, of course, what is supposed to be going on there. Education and propaganda – in Russia, as elsewhere, the two are becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate – are at their disposal in large quantities; they are stuffed with information, but starved of the truth. They can study history, but only history as Lenin would have liked it to have happened. They can learn about the present, but only as much about it as Stalin thinks advisable. Their home news, as a matter of fact, is concerned almost as much with the future as with the present; their newspapers announce ten projects to every one achievement. It is remarkable what a great deal is perpetually on the point of being done in Russia.

I have no wish to mock the Five Year Plan, or any of its progeny. All human endeavour is in some degree laughable, and the most gallant enterprises are often also, in their inception, the most comic. To the hasty and hot-blooded critics of Soviet Russia – to that monstrous regiment of clubmen for whom all Muscovy is peopled by a race of bullies (whom they call ‘Bolos’) equipped by Mr. Punch’s cartoonist with knouts and bombs – I would recommend a ‘Let the dog see the rabbit’ attitude as being both wise and

fair. To the Russians I would suggest that it is about time they produced the rabbit.

No one can travel, however perfunctorily, in Russia without appreciating the magnitude of the task she has taken on. That portentous experiment is not, as is widely supposed, primarily political and economic; it is primarily psychological. Here you have a people almost none of whose national characteristics can be held likely to contribute in any way towards the success of a project like the Five Year Plan. Most of them are by nature inefficient, irresponsible, and feckless. The enormous practical difficulties involved in rationalizing and industrializing Russia – the backwardness of the people, the country's lack of communications and capital – are minor obstacles compared with the fundamental components of the national character and outlook. Can the Russian peasant be galvanized into something approaching robot-hood? Can he, on the crest of a wave of enthusiasm or at the point of a G.P.U. pistol, slough off his native apathy, his charming but hopeless inconsequence, and turn go-getter?

It appears that, for a time and partially, he can. Prusso-American ideals of drive and efficiency have proved infectious. Progress has been made. A nation proverbially composed of dreamers has shown itself capable of toeing the line, biting the bullet, and punching the clock. Too often, alas, it has been the wrong line, the wrong bullet, the wrong clock. But the intention behind the gesture was sound, even if the gesture went astray.

Will the gesture survive as a habit? Will the Russians transform themselves into robots? The visitor to Moscow wonders. But he wonders less and less. The bath in his hotel is out of commission. The lavatory is under repair. The lift does not work. The service is awful. The telephone exchange is impossible. Only one match in three strikes. …

Eventually he stops wondering altogether.

I regret to say that I am extremely bad at sight-seeing. My regret, I would add, is sincere. This is not often the case.

To glory in – even to admit – a proficiency at sightseeing is, to-day, to court the charge not so much of eccentricity as of affectation. In a world which is being sucked inexorably into the maelstrom of standardization – in a concentric labyrinth of which all the paths are beaten – the sophisticated traveller is at pains to parade his independence of the herd. 'Of course,' he says, in a deprecating tone which underlines his latent arrogance, 'it's very obscure – it's not at all the sort of place that foreigners go to', or 'I'm afraid we didn't do any of the *right* things; we just poked about on our own, in the native quarter. It's so much less tiring …' In his feverish anxiety to be different, he eschews the temples and the tombs, the cathedrals and the palaces – all the honourable and enduring landmarks for which the place is justly famous. He would not be seen dead on the Bridge of Sighs; to gaze on the Pyramids seems to him as unpardonable as to blow on his tea.

But I am not like him. I have an honest, conscientious desire to do those right things; right up to the moment of my departure I go on fully intending to do them. But I am lazy – lazy, and also wholly lacking in either an historical sense or the ability to appreciate architecture. The eyes of Boswell, that man of feeling, once filled with tears of spontaneous emotion at the mere mention of the Great Wall of China. I am not like that. The sight of any edifice, however imposing, however drenched (as they say in Stratford-on-Avon) with historical associations, merely embarrasses me. It stimulates my powers of self-criticism. Why does that even flow of dates and names which the guide is reeling off mean nothing at all to me? How comes it that I am still, after all these years, unable to distinguish with certainty between an ogive and a reredos? And who the hell was Henry the Fowler?

I gape dutifully, but without pleasure, without profit.

So in Moscow, though I stayed there four days, or nearly twice the length of time considered necessary by those intending to write a book on Modern Russia, I saw none of the things that I should have seen. I can only tell you what Moscow looks like to the uninitiated.

The reality falls midway between the pictures drawn by the *Morning Post* on the one hand and the Intourist travel agency on the other. Moscow is a drab, but not a desolate city. At first you are surprised by its ramshackle and untidy air; then you realize that this is a symptom not so much of decay as of reconstruction. A great many buildings are half pulled down, a great many others half put up. Of the completed new ones there are probably fewer than you had supposed. Those futuristic, those tortuously embattled blocks of flats which photograph so well, are rare exceptions to an architecturally unimpressive rule. The streets are dull and forbidding, and their surfaces are bad. There is an atmosphere of rather ill-co-ordinated and precarious improvisation, such as pervades the wings of a theatre.

The people you will find oddly colourless and oddly likeable. Their curiosities are limited by their fatalism, and the stranger discovers with gratitude that he is not stared at. That agonizing sense of singularity which afflicts (for instance) the Englishman who carries gloves and a rolled-up umbrella through the streets of New York does not attend his wanderings in Moscow. He is far better dressed than anyone he meets; he is clearly that rarity, a bourgeois. But nobody takes much notice of him; he is not made to feel a freak and an intruder.

The people of Moscow are neither well nor picturesquely dressed. Apart from the blouse, which is quite often worn by the men, their clothes are conventionally, though ineptly, cut in the standard European style. In the centre of the town at any rate, there are no rags, no bare feet, no human

skeletons. The streets are perpetually crowded, but the crowd is nondescript and unexciting. It drifts, chattering in a subdued way, and forms readily into patient queues at the tram-halts and outside the co-operative stores. In its eyes you can read no very explicit hope, and only occasionally despair. It is a phlegmatic, philosophical crowd. No doubt it needs to be.

One of the most curious things about modern Russia is the startling and universal ugliness of the women. Bolshevism appears to be incompatible with beauty. Across the frontier you will find the night-clubs of Harbin and Shanghai packed with the most ravishing creatures, all Russian, and mostly (by their own account) Romanoff. But in Moscow you search for a pretty, for even a passable face in vain. It is impossible not to admire the sagacity of their rulers, who have decreed that among Soviet citizens the married state is not to be looked on as a permanence. I do not see how it could be.

Even in the theatres you will draw blank. The Russian actress takes her art seriously. Years of intensive training are considered necessary to qualify her for a leading role, and our *ingénues*, who are in electric lights before they are out of their teens, have no counterpart in Russia. Moscow salutes no stars under the age of thirty; most of them are much more.

There is another curious thing about Soviet Russia, and that is how bad she is at window-dressing. I use the words figuratively, for the fault goes deeper than the Moscow shop windows.

One has always imagined that the Russians, though never much good at putting things through, always had a talent for carrying things off. A talent for carrying things off implies a capacity for making a good impression on the superficial observer, and that capacity underlies the great and increasingly important art of salesmanship. Now the rulers of Russia to-day – the men of real power – have

almost all got Jewish blood in them, and who make good salesmen if it is not the Jews? It is, I repeat, a curious thing that the Russians should be so bad at window-dressing.

For they are bad. It requires an effort to look into the Moscow shop-windows. Those piles of wooden cheeses, that dummy ham, the cake on which the icing is enamel – surely they might be displayed to better advantage round the inevitable bust of Lenin? Surely that imposing frontage of plate glass, disfigured though it is by a long crack clumsily patched with plaster, need not reveal an array of goods quite so fly-blown, quite so unprepossessing? …

Across the street a big new building is nearing completion. Above its roof a huge red banner floats proudly on the breeze: or did so float a month ago, when they first hoisted it. Alas, it was made of inferior material; the winds have eroded the stuff, and the flag is now a shoddy and a listless fringe upon the naked pole. One more gesture has missed fire. …

The Kremlin, castellated and cupolaed with dentifricial abandon, has the splendid, compelling assurance of a strong place which is also a beautiful one. From the river bank opposite one admires its crouching outlines unreservedly. But why, oh why, does the clock which crowns a central tower announce the time as 12.15 when it is really half-past five? Why do they *never* carry things off?

I do not know the answer to that question.

[1]Its policy, I should add, is in part dictated by the attitude of the Soviet authorities, who, though not hostile, are high-handed.