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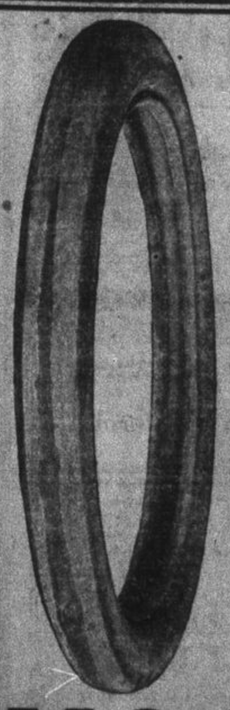

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LIFE IN CITY OF OMSK

CAPT. H. M. REYNOLDS TELLS OF TRIP THROUGH SIBERIA.

Russian Railway Services Are Greatly Disorganized—The Easter Service Is Weird and Unique.

The following extracts from letters descriptive of conditions in Siberia were written by Capt. H. Munro Reynolds, R.C.A., with the Imperial Instructional Staff. Capt. Reynolds is a son-in-law of Rev. Canon and Mrs. J. O. Crisp, Kingston.

En route to Omsk, March, 1919.

"The distance from Vladivostok to Omsk is about 3600 miles, about the same as from Halifax to Vancouver. As far as the country went, the Siberian exile was well off, and nothing is as we used to look on it in Canada. Of course the winters are very cold, but there is lots of snow, and the air is dry. The thermometer at Omsk this last winter has been as low as 59 degrees fahrenheid below zero. We used to think of Siberia as being next door to the pole, and it is hard to realize that in summer it is often 120 degrees. Canadians at home have absolutely no idea of the wonderful weather here for the sun shines every day. As far as the richness of the soil is concerned, Canada does not compare with Siberia, but the transportation is something horrible. They say that once you get away from the Trans-Siberian Railway you only have the vilest roads, and as there seems to be very little stone in this part of the country, they are feet deep in mud in the spring.

"The Railway simply turns round itself, back and forth and heavy grades and sharp bends are the order of the day. On the train we have only candles and electric lights are apparently a thing of the past in these cars. Water is the hardest thing to get here. This morning we went to a station with our washpans and brought away enough water to wash. One can almost shave, brush one's teeth and drink out of the same tin cup (without washing between drinks.) This country (Maturia) has been as flat as a billiard table, much better than our prairie. The Russian government owns 15 versts—10 miles—each side of the railway. Nearly every house has a wall or palisade built around it with loop-holes, as a protection from robbers. Windows of decent places also have shutters and every few minutes we pass villages with windowless mud houses, and thatched roofs are are quite common, while the people live as they did a thousand years ago. In fact the carts they use are generally over a hundred years old; there is one horse or ox in the shafts, and perhaps four abreast ahead.

"When we got up to-day, we had passed into a rolling country of hills We saw dozens of large herds of cattle and horses, sometimes thousands in a herd, also dozens of camels and thousands of sheep. It takes a little time to become accustomed to sitting in the same car with Tartars, shovelling their food down with their knives and fingers; apparently it is the style to keep the mouth about three inches above the food and rake it in. Another nice little feature is the brushing of the hair at the table, which I saw to-day. The scenery from Lake Baikol through the Irkutsk, on the other side of the lake, is very fine, but there are about forty-one tunnels. There is lots of snow here, several feet in fact and passing through it has delayed us. There have not been any commercial trains over the lines for some time, and it has to live absolutely on itself. There are hundreds of cars on sidings with people living in them. This part of Siberia is very much overpopulated, so that accommodation, as we know it, is impossible. Everything is terribly disorganized and telegrams, for instance, generally take days or weeks to go out. All the British Military Missions mail is passed up the line with parties going up, and there is apparently no civil mail service.

"We arrived yesterday at Omsk about 1.30, our trip being a remarkably quick one, only eight and a half days. We were met by an interpreter who brought us to the British Military Mission. The building, built by prisoners of war, is just being completed; it is four stories high, of concrete and there is not a building in Halifax or Kingston that can compare with it. We even have the luxury of a bath with hot water, an almost unheard of thing in Russia, where those who take baths parade to the central baths. Normally, Omsk has about 100,000 inhabitants, but now it has about 800,000, so things are getting quite overcrowded, whole families, or often several families being in one room, the majority sleeping on the floor. There must be several hundred thousand refugees living here, and lots of them very prominent in Russia before the revolution. At a dance I was at last night, given by the Hampshires, there was a princess and a countess. As interpreter in my office I have a young Polish Baron, who was exiled from Poland for political reasons. When a boy he travelled in England with his tutor. He is an awfully decent chap, and speaks excellent English.

"Living expenses they say, have gone up twenty-six fold in Siberia in the last four years. The value of the rouble is still falling and it is quoted at about 20 or 22 to the dollar. Imagine in peace times it used to be worth about 53 cents and now it is less than 5c. Gasoline is unobtainable, so they use a sort of mixture of benzine, alcohol, vodka, etc., and somehow manage to keep the cars going,—but oh! the smoke and smell! Sugar is $2 a pound, and an ordinary light dinner at a restaurant is $15. A rather funny incident occurred the other day. One of the cadets was fitted out with clothes but the next day he returned and wanted his jacket exchanged. This was done, and he went away happy, but in a few minutes returned, this time in a terrible state. After a while they got an interpreter who found that he had left two lumps of sugar in the pocket of his old jacket. As it was mixed up with the others, he had to search through a heap before his old jacket and his precious sugar. Rather a joke, but it shows the condition of affairs.

"The fighting is a long way up the line, and the British troops are not taking any part in it at all as England has not recognized the Kolchak Government. A little while ago they took 5,000 prisoners who wanted to come over and fight against the Bolsheviki, so now they are to be fitted out to fight for us. Thousands are only fighting against us because they are forced to do so, and are only waiting for a chance to come over to our side.

"Omsk is the head for military supplies. I have taken over the ordnance stores here, and we have perhaps fifteen trains, with about twenty-five cars each, on the way from Vladivostok, with clothing, guns and equipment, so there is lots to do. Soon we will have kit for at least 50,000 men. I get between 50 and 100 prisoners of war every day for loading and unloading trains. About five miles out we have a regular gun park and ammunition dump, where material of that kind is unloaded. Whenever possible, the idea is to let the Russians see that we are here to help them, but for them to also try to help themselves. Russia is like a large family every member of which is at odds with his brothers; but many here would not be surprised to see the end come suddenly. European Russia, is of course, in an awful state, but people think that the Bolsheviki will hang themselves with their own rope, as its every action shows how rotten the whole structure is. We see prisoners brought in every day, both men and women. Right in front of the mess there is a large bazaar, meat shops, tin shops, spinning wheels, etc. To-day several camels passed drawing sleighs. Early every morning hundreds of sleighs come in loaded with meat, hay and so on, and it is weighed on the spot. My office is in a Russian colonel's front room and he keeps a pig in a closet off the front hall, so Mr. Pig passes in and out of the front door and hall on his way out to the pen. To-day when I arrived, a rooster and his wives were waiting for someone to open the door in answer to his call.

"The service at the cathedral on Saturday (Holy Week) was most impressive and weird. For three days you are supposed to eat and drink heavily. In normal times the Russians have 180 holidays in the year, but of course there are reduced now there is a war on. On Good Friday I went to the cathedral to hear the service for the Burial of Christ. One is admitted by ticket, and it is quite a state affair; Admiral Kolchak was there with all the Ministers of State. The first ceremony was the placing of the immense head-gear on the head of the High Priest, and it happened to be a little big and kept slipping down. The singing was past description! Everyone stood the whole two hours, each with a lighted candle in his hands and the high priest holding what was apparently an effigy of Christ. The canopy was finally laid on a box, which represents the sepulchar, which was in front of an immense cross and a regular scene of the crucifiction, with beautiful flowers. The dictator of Siberia then went up and knelt, followed by the Minister of War and the other Ministers. Our padre took part in the ceremony, and it looked rather peculiar to see him in khaki among their gorgeous robes. Doubtless it will tend to draw us closer to the Russians, and was, I think, a good thing. For three days, starting on Saturday, you greet everyone on the street, men and women, with "Kristos voskres," (Christ is risen) and they reply "Christ is surely risen," and you then kiss them. During this time you have the right to kiss your girl friends three times! On Saturday night at midnight, the priests in the church announce to the congregation that Christ is risen, and they take up the refrain and have a regular kissing bee. After this service I was invited to the home of Russian Master General of Ordnance, and they had a wonderful supper laid out. They had several Easter dishes that are not made at any other time of the year. In direct contrast to this home, is the awful distress and poverty one sees everywhere. In walking along the streets one has to harden one's heart to the sights. If refugee work was ever needed anywhere it is in Siberia. The poor Czar and his family were murdered in Ekaterinburg, a few hundred miles to the northwest of Omsk. There is absolutely no doubt about the truth of it I am told.

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For Potassic Feldspar and Sodic Feldspar North of Kingston.

It is possible that extensive mining operations may be commenced in the northern part of the country and along the Rideau river in the near future if experiments which are now being made at chemical laboratories in New York are successful.

About a week ago two mining engineers from New York paid a visit to this vicinity and inspected the deposits of potassic feldspar along the C. P. R. to Renfrew and the sodic feldspar which is found along the Rideau river.

One hundred and fifty pounds of the latter was shipped to New York where chemists are now engaged experimenting to ascertain whether the sodium element can be extracted for commercial use.

If the experiments are successful and the ore is rich enough the engineers stated that they would return, and mining operations may be started when sufficient capital has been raised.

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If you want to keep your hair in good condition, be careful what you wash it with.

Don't use prepared shampoos or anything else, that contains too much alkali. This dries the scalp, makes the hair brittle, and is very harmful. Just plain mulsified cocoanut oil (which is pure and entirely greaseless), is much better than anything else you can use for shampooing, as this can't possibly injure the hair.

Simply moisten your hair with water and rub it in. One or two teaspoonfuls will make an abundance of rich, creamy lather, and cleanses the hair and scalp thoroughly. The lather rinses out easily, and removes every particle of dust, dirt, dandruff and excessive oil. The hair dries quickly and evenly, and it leaves it fine and silky, bright, fluffy and easy to manage.

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Notice

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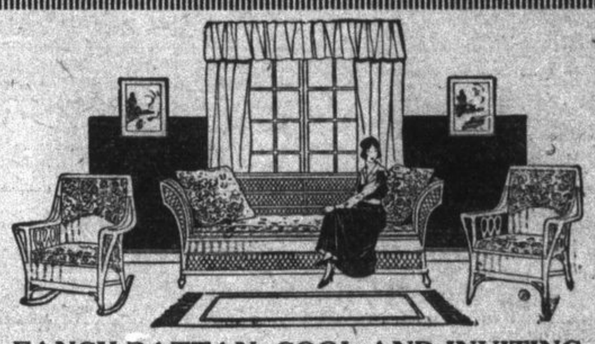

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