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The Death Train of Siberia

This is the story of an incident in the attempt to overthrow Bolshevism in Russia, by massacre. It is the story of the deliberate and inhuman killing of men and women and children by the Czecho-Slovak and Kolchak monarchist forces in Siberia. It was first made known in this country by a brief and unrevealing dispatch which appeared in the New York Times.

The whole dreadful truth has now come to light, and the Death Train of Siberia stands revealed in its sinister magnitude as one of the most horrible outrages upon humanity, not merely of this war, but in all human history. The facts are these:

In the fall of 1918, the Bolsheviki took the city of Samara. It was captured from them a little later by the Czecho-Slovaks, who proceeded to throw into prison hundreds of Red Guards, and others suspected of Bolsheviki sympathies.

The city was soon re-taken by the Bolsheviki. And when the Czecho-Slovak forces evacuated the city, they loaded these imprisoned Red Guards and Bolsheviki sympathizers, together with all the other people then in the city prisons, on a train. Fifty car-loads of herded humanity, packed as closely as if they were already the corpses they were intended and destined to become. That was in September. . . . For six weeks the prisoners on that train did not see the light of day, except when the doors of the car were opened to throw out the dead. This assertion may seem incredible; but it needs to be amended only by the exception of a carload of women prisoners, who were expressly kept for the uses of the officers of the convoy. . . . The rest left the train only as corpses—and in that six weeks eight hundred starved and frozen and pestilence-stricken bodies were thrown from the train to rot. It had become the Death Train, known all over Siberia, as it must become known all over the world, as a symbol of the blind hatred and fiendish vengeance of the enemies of Bolshevism.

After six weeks, it was halted at Nikolsk by some American Red Cross workers, who defied the authorities, held the train against orders for six days, and rescued from this perambulating inferno some two hundred victims. And then the train resumed its dreadful progress back and forth across Siberia.

This Death Train, it should be remembered, is an incident in the rule of terror exercised in Siberia by the Czecho-Slovak and Kolchak forces, with whom the American, British, French and Japanese forces were, and are, co-operating.

It is through the correspondence of these American Red Cross workers in Siberia that the whole story has reached America at last. We quote below some portions of the diary of Mr. Rudolph Bukely, formerly an American banker in Honolulu, now with the American Red Cross in Siberia. It is the record of a six-day interruption of this prolonged massacre. . . . We have omitted certain portions of his story which deal with the heroic efforts of the Red Cross men to relieve the suffering of the victims, and we have emphasized some passages in heavy type; otherwise the narrative stands as he wrote it night by night after long days of unimaginable depths of horror. It is an extraordinary and utterly convincing story of a horrible thing which we believe the world will not soon forget.

"It is the eighteenth day of November, 1918. I am at Nikolsk-Ussurisk in Siberia. In the past two days I have seen enough misery to fill a lifetime.

"I have read many times of the Black Hole of Calcutta. I have been told of Russian prisoners returning from German prison camps wrecked by starvation and tuberculosis. Only four weeks ago, as a four-minute man, I was preaching the doctrine of 'hate.' To-day, I humbly ask forgiveness for my thoughts of hate, and pray from the depths of my soul that I may be allowed to play my part, though a small one, in trying to improve the conditions of men, whatever their nationality, so that perhaps some day this world may emerge into the great Brotherhood, and that such things as I have seen may become impossible.

"I have seen, through the windows of box cars whose dimensions were twenty-four feet by ten, forty animals who once were human men, women, and children; faces glared at me which I could not recognize as those of human beings. They were like beasts' faces, of a species unknown to man. Stark madness and terror stared from their eyes, and over all the unmistakable sign of death.

"This 'train of death,' for by that name all Eastern Siberia now knows it, left Samara approximately six weeks ago. Men of the

Russian railroad service are stationed as far west as Manchuria Station, some twelve hundred miles west of here, through the train must have passed at least three weeks ago. Since then it has passed through Hailar, Titsikar, Harbin, Moolime, going on and on like a thing accursed, through a land where its stricken passengers found little food and less pity.

"It left Samara. . . . in charge of some Russian officers. It had on board at that time twenty-one hundred prisoners of all sorts. They were apparently civil prisoners. Some were Bolshevik, others had been released from the prison at Samara. When in the course of the fighting the Czechs occupied Samara, they simply cleaned out the whole jail, packed the prisoners into this train, and sent them out west. Between that day and the day before yesterday, when we found this loathsome caravan in Nikolsk, eight hundred of these wretches had died from starvation, filth, and disease. In Siberia there is misery and death on every hand, on a scale that would appal the stoutest heart. There were, as near as we could count, thirteen hundred and twenty-five men, women, and children penned up in these awful cars yesterday. Since last night six have died. By and by they will all die if the train is permitted to go on in such conditions.

"It seems a wicked thing to say, but the thought has surely come to me that to kill these people painlessly would require perhaps three dollars' worth of poison or ten dollars' worth of ammunition; and yet for weeks this train of fifty cars has been wandering, driven on from station to station, every day a few more corpses being dragged out. Many of these people have been in box-cars for five weeks in their original clothing. There are from thirty-five to forty in a box-car, measuring say twenty-five feet by eleven, and the doors have seldom been open save to drag out the bodies of the dead, or some woman who might better be. I have been told that when they first started there were as many as sixty in many of the cars, but death has weeded them out. I have climbed into these cars at night with my flash light, I have gone into them in the early mornings and examined them. I have seen men with the death rattle in their throat, half naked, with lice and vermin visible on them; others just lying in a semi-unconscious stupor; and others with the whining grin of imbeciles, holding out their hands for a few cigarettes or kopecks, chuckling with glee like apes upon being given them.

"Of anything like sanitary provision this train has nothing, and the accumulation of filth in which these people have lived and are dying is absolutely unspeakable. The Russian officer who was in charge of the train has made inconsistent statements about the reasons why these people have been subjected to such awful deprivation and abuse. He tries to make the best story of it possible. They were supposed to have been fed regularly at the different stations along the route, but often for days at a time there has been on one to give them even bread. Were it not for the kindness of the poor villagers who, with tears running down their cheeks, men and women alike, give them what little they can afford, they would be absolutely without nourishment.

"I have talked with a woman doctor (a prisoner on the train) who was doing Red Cross work with the Red Guards. She would have done the same work for any one. A highly educated, intellectual woman, forty years old. She has been on this train for weeks. I have talked to a girl under eighteen years of age, beautiful, refined, intellectual. She was formerly a typist and bookkeeper in the mayor's office at Samara. She has been on this train for weeks, and unless the Red Cross comes to her aid she will die on this train. All the clothing she has on is a filthy blouse and skirt, a sort of petticoat, a pair of stockings and shoes. No coat, in this fierce winter weather.

"I have talked to a man who has not the brains left to know the difference between a Red Guard and one of any other color. His wife quarreled with another woman, who evidently lodged complaint. That night he was arrested in his home, accused of being a Red Guard. He has been in the box-car for five weeks. He will die within forty-eight hours. . . . I have seen them die, and the following morning I have seen their bodies dragged out of the cars like so much rubbish. The living are indifferent, for they know that their turn will come next. . . . While the prattle about liberty, justice and humanity goes on, . . . our hands are bound by 'diplomacy.'

"We are holding the train. That is the main thing. It should have begun going back toward Samara last night, but it has