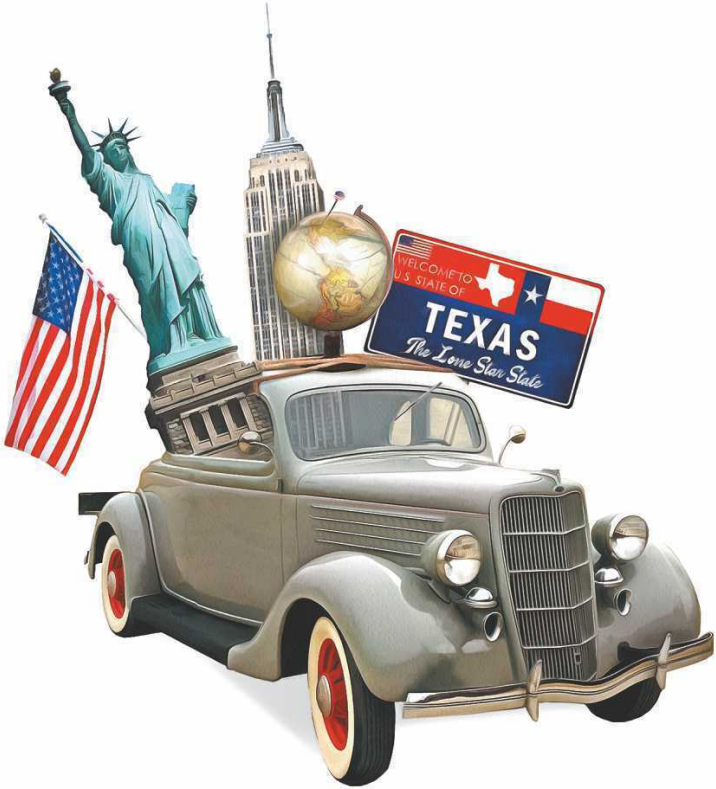
ILYA ILF & YEVGENY PETROV

LITTLE GOLDEN AMERICA



RUSSIAN MODERN PROSE

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Одноэтажная Америка / Little Golden America

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Аннотация

«Одноэтажная Америка» – произведение в жанре путевого очерка, написанное Ильей Ильфом и Евгением Петровым. Это добрая и умная книга, рассказывающая о жизни и быте американцев, о встречах авторов с самыми разными людьми, полная интересных историй и наблюдений. Читателям предлагается неадаптированный перевод произведения на английский язык, выполненный Чарльзом Маламутом. Пособие рассчитано на широкий круг читателей, изучающих английский язык и интересующихся творчеством И. Ильфа и Е. Петрова.

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Илья Ильф, Евгений Петров Одноэтажная Америка / Little Golden America

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Part I. From a twenty-seventh-story window

1. The *Normandie*

AT NINE o'clock a special train leaves Paris for Le Havre with passengers for the *Normandie*. This train makes no stops. Three hours after its departure it rolls into the large structure which is in the Havre maritime station. Here the passengers descend to a shut-in platform, are lifted by escalators to the upper floor of the station, walk through halls and along passageways, all completely enclosed, and finally find themselves in a large vestibule where they take their places in elevators and depart for their various decks. At last they are on the *Normandie*. They have not the slightest idea what it looks like, for throughout this journey they had not even caught a glimpse of its outer contours.

We, too, walked into an elevator. A lad in a red tunic with gold buttons gracefully lifted his arm and pressed a knob. The shining new elevator rose a little, stopped and suddenly moved down, paying no heed whatever to the uniformed operator who desperately continued to press the knob. After falling three floors instead of rising two, we heard the painfully familiar phrase – on thisoccasion pronounced in impeccable French: "The elevator is

out of order!"

We took the stairway to our cabin, a stairway covered throughout with a non-inflammable rubber carpet of bright green. The corridors and vestibules of the ship were covered with the same carpeting, which makes each footfall soft and soundless. But one does not fully appreciate the merits of rubber carpeting until the ship begins to roll in earnest. Then the carpeting seems to grip the soles. True, that does not save one from being seasick, but it does keep one from falling.

The stairway was not at all of the steamship type. It was broad, slanting, with runs and landings of dimensions generous enough for a mansion.

The cabin was likewise quite unsteamerlike. A spacious room with two ample windows, two broad wooden beds, easy-chairs, wall closets, tables, mirrors-in fact, all the blessings of a communal dwelling, even unto a telephone.

Only in a storm does the *Normandie* resemble a ship. But in good weather it is a large hotel, with a sweeping view of the ocean, which, having suddenly torn loose from its moorings in a modern seaside health resort, is floating away at the rate of thirty-odd knots an hour.

Down below, from the platforms of the various floors of the station people who were seeing the passengers off shouted their final good wishes and farewells. They shouted in French, in English, in Spanish. They also shouted in Russian. A strange chap in a black seafaring uniform with a silver anchor and a shield of

David on one sleeve, a beret on his head and a sad little beard on his chin, was shouting something in Jewish. Later we learned that he was the ship's rabbi; the General Transatlantic Company had engaged him to minister to the spiritual needs of a certain portion of its passengers. Other passengers had at their disposal Catholic and Protestant priests. Moslems, fire worshippers, and Soviet engineers travelled without benefit of clergy; on that score the General Transatlantic Company left them entirely to their own devices.

The *Normandie* has a spacious church with dim electric lights; it is designed primarily for Catholic services, but may be adjusted to suit other denominational needs. Thus, the altar and the icons may be covered with special shields designed for that purpose and the Catholic church converted automatically into a Protestant house of worship. As for the rabbi of the sad little beard, there being no available room for him, the children's nursery was assigned for the performance of his rites. Whereupon the company provided him with a *tallith* and even with special drapery for covering temporarily the mundane representations of bunnies and kittens.

The ship left the harbour. On the pier, at the mole, everywhere were crowds of people. The *Normandie* was still a novelty to the citizens of Le Havre. They forgathered from all corners of the city to greet the transatlantic titan and bid it *bon voyage*.

But the French shore was finally lost in the smoky mists of the murky day. Toward evening we saw the lights of Southampton.

For an hour and a half the *Normandie* stood in its roadstead there, taking on passengers from England, surrounded on three sides by the distant and mysterious lights of a strange city. Then again she put out to sea, and again began the seething tumult of unseen waves aroused by tempestuous winds.

In the stern, where we were located, everything trembled. The deck and the walls and the lights and the easy-chairs and the glasses on the washstand and the washstand itself trembled. The ship's vibration was so pronounced that even objects from which one did not expect any sound made a noise. For the first time we heard the sound of towels, soap, the carpet on the floor, the paper on the table, the electric bulb, the curtain, the collar thrown on the bed. Everything in the cabin resounded, and some things even thundered. If a passenger became thoughtful for a moment and relaxed his facial muscles, his teeth at once began to chatter of their own free will. All through the night it seemed to us that someone was trying to break down the door of our cabin and someone else was constantly rapping at our window-pane and laughing ominously. We discovered no less than a hundred different sounds inside our cabin.

The *Normandie* was on its tenth voyage between Europe and America. It was scheduled to go into dry dock after its eleventh trip, when its stern would be taken apart and the structural deficiencies that caused vibration eliminated.

In the morning a sailor came into our cabin and closed its windows with metal shutters. A storm was rising. A small

freighter was having a difficult time making its way to the French shore. At times it disappeared in the waves, only the tips of its masts remaining visible.

We had always expected to find the ocean roadway between the Old and New Worlds quite lively with traffic. Now and then, – we imagined, we would come across ships blaring music and waving flags. But we found the ocean a grandiosely deserted expanse. The little boat that we saw bucking the storm four hundred miles from Europe was the only ship we passed during the entire five days of our crossing. The *Normandie* rolled with slow and dignified deliberateness. It steamed ahead, never decreasing its accustomed speed, nonchalantly flinging aside the high waves that attacked it on all sides. Rarely would it dip – and then in even tenor with the ocean. Here was no unequal struggle between some miserable contraption fashioned by man's hand and the unbridled forces of nature. It was rather a contest between well-matched titans.

In a semicircular smoking saloon three famous wrestlers with cauliflower ears were sitting with their coats off, playing cards. Shirts bulged out from under their vests. They were in the throes of painful thinking. Huge cigars dangled from their mouths. At table two men played chess, every minute adjusting the chessmen that kept sliding off the board. Two others, their chins cupped in the palms of their hands, watched the chess game. Who but Soviet folk would ever think of playing the queen's gambit in such weather? We guessed it: the charming Botvinniks proved

to be Soviet engineers.

In time people met one another and formed congenial groups. A printed list of passengers was distributed. There we found a very amusing surname: Sandwich— a whole family of Sandwiches, Mr. Sandwich, Mrs. Sandwich, and young Master Sandwich.

We entered the Gulf Stream. A warm rain drizzled. In the oppressive hothouse atmosphere hung the heavy sediment of the oily smoke that the *Normandie's* smokestacks belched forth.

We set out to inspect the ship. A third-class passenger does not see much of the boat on which he travels. He is not allowed either into the first or into the tourist class. Nor does the tourist-class passenger see much more of the Normandie, for he likewise is not permitted to trespass certain limits. But the first-class passenger is the Normandie.

He occupies no less than nine-tenths of the entire ship. Everything is immense in the first class – the promenade decks, the lounges, the saloons for smoking and the saloons for playing cards, and the saloons especially for ladies, and a hothouse where fat little French swallows swing on glass branches and hundreds of orchids hang from the ceiling, and the theatre with its four hundred seats, and the swimming-pool full of water illuminated through its bottom with green electric lights, and the marketing square with its department store, and the saloons for sport where elderly bald-headed gentlemen, flat on their backs, play ball with their feet, and other saloons where the same bald-headed men,

tired of tossing balls and jumping up and down on a cinder-path platform, dream in embroidered easy-chairs; above all immense is the carpet that covers the main saloon, for surely it weighs more than half a ton.

Even the smokestacks of the Normandie, which one might think would belong to the entire ship, are reserved exclusively for the first class. In one of them the dogs of the first-class passengers are kept. Beautiful pedigree dogs, bored to the verge of madness, stand in their cages. Most of the time they are rocked to dizziness. Now and then they are led out on a leash for a walk on a special deck reserved for them. Then they bark uncertainly and regard the tossing ocean sadly.

We went into the galley. Scores of chefs were at work around a huge electric stove. Scores of others were dressing fowl, carving fish, baking bread, rearing tortes. In a special department kosher food was being prepared. Occasionally the steamship's rabbi would come down here to make sure that the gay French chefs did not throw bits of the unorthodox *trefa* into this sequestered food.

The *Normandie* is reputed to be a masterpiece of French technique and art. Its technique is indeed splendid. Admirable are its speed, its fire-fighting system, the bold and elegant lines of its body, its radio station. But as for art, surely the French have known better days. There were, of course, the faultlessly executed paintings on the glass walls; but the paintings themselves were not in any way distinguished. The same might

be said of the bas-relief, the mosaic, the sculpture, the furniture. There was a profusion of gold, of coloured leather, of beautiful metals, silks, expensive wood, fine glass. There was much wealth but little real art. As a whole, it was what French artists, helplessly shrugging their shoulders, called "stile triomphe". Not long ago in Paris, on the Champs-Elysees, was opened a Cafe" Triomphe, sumptuously upholstered in the boudoir manner. A pity! We should like to have seen as partners of the remarkable French engineers who created the *Normandie* equally remarkable French artists and architects. All the more is the pity since France has such people.

Certain defects in technique – for example, the vibration in the stern, which threw the elevator out of commission for half an hour – and other annoying trifles must be charged not against the engineers who built this first-rate ship, but rather against the impatient orders of their clients who were in a hurry to begin exploiting the ship under any circumstances in order to secure a blue ribbon for record speed.

On the eve of the ship's arrival in New York there was a gala banquet and an evening of amateur entertainment managed by the passengers themselves. The dinner was the same as ever, except that a spoonful of Russian caviare was added. Besides that, the passengers were given pirate hats of paper, rattles, badges with blue ribbons on which "Normandie" was inscribed, and wallets of artificial leather, also with the trade-mark of the company. Gifts are distributed to prevent pilfering of the ship's

property. The point is, the majority of travellers are victims of the psychosis of collecting souvenirs. During the *Normandie's* first voyage the passengers stole as mementoes a huge quantity of knives, forks, and spoons. Some even carried away plates, ash-trays, and pitchers. So, it proved more convenient to make a gift of a badge for a buttonhole rather than lose a spoon needed in the ménage. The passengers were overjoyed with these toys. A fat lady, who throughout the five days of the journey had sat in a corner of the dining saloon all alone, suddenly in a most businesslike manner put the pirate hat on her head, discharged her popgun, and attached the badge to her bosom Evidently she regarded it as her duty to take advantage conscientiously of all the blessings she was entitled to by virtue of her ticket.

The petty-bourgeois amateur entertainment began in the evening. The passengers gathered in the saloon. The lights were put out, and a spotlight was trained on a small stage. There, her entire body trembling appeared a haggard young woman in a silver dress. The orchestra, made up of professional musicians, regarded her with pity. The audience applauded encouragingly. The young lady opened her mouth convulsively and shut it at once. The orchestra patiently repeated the introduction. Sensing forebodings of something frightful, the audience tried not to look at each other. Suddenly the young lady trembled and began to sing. She sang that famous song, "Parlez-moi d'amour," but she sang it so quietly and so badly that her tender call was not heard by anyone. In the middle of the song she quite unexpectedly ran

off the stage, hiding her face in her hand. Another young lady appeared, and she was even more haggard. She was in an all-black dress, yet bare-footed. Sheer fright was written all over her face. She was a bare-foot amateur dancer. The audience began to glide out of the hall stealthily. None of this was at all like our buoyant, talented, vociferous amateur entertainments.

On the fifth day the decks of the steamer were filled with suitcases and trunks unloaded out of the cabins. The passengers moved to the right side, and, holding on to their hats, avidly peered into the horizon. The shore was not yet visible, but New York's skyscrapers were already rising out of the water like calm pillars of smoke. An astounding contrast, this – after the vacant ocean, suddenly the largest city in the world. In the sunny smoke dimly gleamed the steel extremities of the hundred and two storied Empire State Building. Beyond the stern of the *Normandie* seagulls swirled. Four powerful little tugboats began to turn the enormous body of the ship, pulling it up and pushing it toward the pier. On the left side was the small green statue of liberty. Then suddenly it was on the right side. We were being turned around, and the city turned around us, showing us first one and then another of its sides. Finally, it stopped in its tracks, impossibly huge, thunderous, and quite incomprehensible as yet.

The passengers walked down covered passageways into the customs shed, went through all the formalities, and emerged into the streets of the city, without having once seen the ship on which they had come.

2. The First Evening in New York

THE CUSTOMS shed at the docks of the French Line is immense. Under the ceiling hang large iron letters of the Latin alphabet. Each passenger stops under the letter with which his surname begins. Here his luggage will be brought to him from the ship and here it will be examined.

The voices of the arrivals and of those meeting them, laughter and kisses, resounded hollowly throughout the shed, the bare structural parts of which made it seem rather like a shop where turbines were being manufactured.

We had not informed anyone of our impending arrival, and no one met us. We waited under our letters for the customs clerk. Finally he came. He was a calm and unhurried man. He was in no way affected by our having just crossed an ocean in order to show him our suitcases. He politely touched the upper layer of our belongings and did not look any further. Then he stuck out his tongue, a most ordinary, moist tongue, a tongue devoid of all gadgets whatsoever wetted the huge labels with it and pasted them on our travelling-bags.

When we finally freed ourselves it was already evening. A white taxi-cab with three gleaming lanterns on its roof, looking like an old-fashioned carriage, took us to the hotel. At first we were tormented by the thought that because of our inexperience we had got into the wrong taxi, into some antiquated vehicle, and

that we were funny and provincial. But, having fearfully looked out the window, we saw that automobiles with just as silly little lamps as ours were going in all directions back and forth. We quieted down a little. Later we were told that these little lamps are placed on the roof, so that the taxi may be more noticeable among a million other automobiles.

For the same reason taxis in America are painted in the most garish colours – orange, canary, white. Our attempt to take a look at New York from an automobile failed. We drove through quite dark and dreary streets. From time to time something rumbled hellishly under our feet or something else thundered overhead. Whenever we stopped before the traffic lights the sides of the automobiles that stood beside us hid everything from view. The chauffeur turned back several times and asked again for the address. It seemed that he was somewhat anxious about our English. Now and then he would look at us patronizingly, and his face seemed to say: "Never mind, you won't get lost! Nobody ever got lost in New York." The thirty-two brick stories of our hotel merged with the rufous nocturnal sky.

While we were filling up short registration cards, two men of the hotel service stood lovingly over our baggage. On the neck of one of them hung a shining ring with the key of the room we had selected. The elevator lifted us up to the twenty-seventh story. This was the commodious and calm elevator of a hotel that was not very old and not very new, not very expensive and, to our regret, not very cheap.

We liked the room, but we did not pause to explore it. Hurry into the street, the city, the tumult! The curtains of the windows crackled under the fresh sea wind. We threw our overcoats on the couch, ran out into the narrow corridor covered with a patterned carpet, stepped into the elevator, and the elevator, clicking softly, flew down. We looked at each other significantly. After all, this really was a great event! For the first time in our lives we were about to walk in New York.

A thin, almost transparent national flag with stars and stripes hung over the entrance to our hotel. Only a short distance away stood the polished cube of the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria. In prospectuses it is called the best hotel in the world. The windows of the "best hotel in the world" sparkled blindingly, and over its entrance hung two national flags. Right on the sidewalk, by the wall of the building, lay tomorrow's newspapers. Passers-by bent down, took a New York *Times* or *Herald Tribune* and placed two cents on the ground beside the newspapers. The newsdealer had gone somewhere. The newspapers were held down with a broken piece of brick, quite as it is done in Moscow by our old women news vendors as they sit in their plywood kiosks. Cylindrical garbage cans stood at each corner of the street crossings. A considerable flame spouted out of one of the cans. Someone had evidently thrown a lighted cigarette-end there, and so the New York refuse, which consists mostly of newspapers, caught fire. An alarming red light illumined the polished walls of the Waldorf-Astoria. Passers-by smiled and dropped remarks as

they walked by. A policeman, his face set, was already moving toward the eventful spot. Having decided that our hotel was in no danger of catching fire, we went on.

At once a slight misfortune befell us. We thought we would walk slowly, looking around attentively in order to study, to observe, to take in, and so forth. But New York is not one of those cities where people move slowly. The people who passed us did not walk, they ran. And so we, too, ran. From that moment on we could not stop. We spent a whole month in New York, and throughout that time we were constantly racing somewhere at top-speed. Simultaneously, we acquired such a businesslike and preoccupied air that John Pierpont Morgan, Jr., himself might have envied us. At our rate of speed he would have earned approximately sixty million dollars during that month. We earned somewhat less.

In a word, we started off at a trot. We sped by signs on which in lights were outlined the words: "Cafeteria" or "United Cigars" or "Drugs – Soda" or something else equally enticing yet so far utterly incomprehensible. Thus we ran to Forty-second Street, and there we stopped.

In the store windows of Forty-second Street winter was in full swing. In one window stood seven elegant wax ladies with silver faces. They all wore wonderful astrakhan fur coats, and regarded each other quizzically. In another window stood twelve ladies in sports costumes, leaning on ski poles. Their eyes were blue, their lips red, their ears pink. In other windows stood young

mannikins with grey hair, or dapper gentlemen in inexpensive, and hence suspiciously resplendent, suits. But we were really not impressed by all this store munificence. It was something else that astonished us.

In all the large cities of the world one can always find a place where people look at the moon through a telescope. Here, on Forty-second Street, we also found a telescope. But it was mounted on an automobile.The telescope pointed at the sky. In charge of it was an ordinary mortal, just like the men at the telescopes in Athens, in Naples, or in Odessa. And his was the joyless manner peculiar to all exploiters of street telescopes throughout the world.

The moon showed itself in the interstice between two sixty-storied buildings. However, the curious onlooker, applying himself to the tube, gazed not at the moon but considerably higher: he looked at the top of the Empire State Building and its hundred and two stories. In the light of the moon, the steel eminence of the Empire State seemed to be covered with snow. The heart turned cold at the sight of this chaste and noble building glistening like a sliver of artificial ice. We stood there long, silently gazing up. The skyscrapers of New York make one proud of all the people of science and of labour who build these splendid edifices.

The news vendors roared hoarsely. The earth trembled underfoot, and through the grates in the sidewalk came a sudden gust of heat as if from an engine-room. That was because down

there passed a train of the New York metro – the subway, as it is called here.

Through vents, placed in the pavement and covered with round metallic covers, steam broke out. For a long time we could not understand where that steam came from. The red lights of the advertisements cast an operatic light upon it. Almost at any moment one expected (he vents to open, Mephistopheles spring out of one of them, and, after clearing his throat, begin to sing in deep bass, right out of *Faust*: "A sword at my side, on my hat a gay feather; a cloak o'er my shoulder – and altogether, why, got up quite in the fashion!"

We again rushed forward, deafened by the cries of the news vendors. They shout with such desperation that, to use Leskov's expression, it is afterwards necessary for a whole week to dig the voice out with a shovel.

It cannot be said that the lighting of Forty-second Street was mediocre. And yet Broadway, lighted by millions and perhaps even by billions of electric lamps, filled with swirling and jumping advertisements constructed out of kilometres of coloured neon tubes, appeared before us just as unexpectedly as New York itself rears up out of the limitless vacancy of the Atlantic Ocean.

We stood at the most popular corner in the States, at the corner of Forty-second and Broadway. The "Great White Way," as Americans call Broadway, stretched before us.

Here electricity has been brought down (or brought up, if

you like) to the level of a trained circus animal. Here it has been forced to make faces, to hurdle over obstacles, to wink, to dance. Edison's sedate electricity has been converted into Durov's trained seal. It catches balls with its nose. It does sleight-of-hand tricks, plays dead, comes to life, does anything it is ordered to do. The electric parade never stops. The lights of the advertisements flare up, whirl around, go out, and then again light up: letters, large and small, white, red, and green, endlessly run away somewhere, only to return a second later and renew their frantic race.

On Broadway are concentrated the theatres, cinemas, and dance halls of the city. Tens of thousands of people move along the pavements. New York is one of the few cities of the world where the population promenades on a definite street. The approaches to the cinemas are so brightly lighted that, it seems, if anyone were to add one more little lamp the whole thing would blow up from excessive light, all of it would go to the devil. But it would be impossible to squeeze in another little lamp; there is no room for it. The newsvendors raise such a howl that digging the voice out of it would require more than a week, more likely years of persistent toil. High in the sky, on some uncounted story of the Paramount Building, flared the face of an electric clock. Neither star nor moon was visible. The light of the advertisements eclipsed everything else. In the display windows, among simple crisscross neckties, small illuminated price tags turn around and go into a balancing act. These are

the micro-organisms in the cosmos of Broadway's electricity. In the tumultuous uproar a calm beggar plays his saxophone. A gentleman in a top-hat walks into a theatre, and with him is the inevitable lady, whose evening-gown has a train. A blind man led by a dog moves like a sleep-walker. Certain young men walk without hats. That is fashionable. Their neatly combed hair glistens under the street lamps. The odour of cigars, nasty ones and expensive ones.

At that very moment, when it occurred to us that we were so far from Moscow, before us floated the lights of the Cameo motion-picture theatre. The Soviet film, *The New Gulliver*, was being exhibited there.

The surge of Broadway carried us several times back and forth, and flung us into a side street.

We knew nothing yet about the city. Therefore, we cannot mention the streets here. We remember only that we stood under the trestle of an elevated railway. An autobus passed, and without much ado we boarded it.

Even several days later, when we began to orient ourselves in the New York whirlpool, we could not remember where the autobus took us that first evening. It seems to us that it was the Chinese section, but it is quite possible that it was an Italian or a Jewish section.

We walked along narrow, smelly streets. No, the electricity here was ordinary, not like a trained animal. It shone rather dimly, and it did not indulge in any hurdles. A large policeman

stood against the wall of a house. On the cap over his broad, imperious face gleamed the silver shield of the City of New York. Having noticed the uncertainty with which we walked down the street, he came to us; but, receiving no inquiry, again returned to his vantage-point at the wall, ever the stiff and stately minion of the law.

From one shabby little house came dull singing. The man who stood at the entrance to the house told us that this was the night lodging of the Salvation Army.

"Who may sleep here?"

"Anyone. No one is asked his name. No one is asked about his occupation or his past. Here night lodgers receive bed, coffee, and bread free of charge. In the morning they also get coffee and bread. Then they are free to go away. The sole condition is that they must take part in the evening and morning prayers."

The singing that reached us from the house gave evidence of the fact that at this very moment this sole condition was being fulfilled. We went in.

Previously, about twenty-five years ago, there was a Chinese opium smoking den in this dwelling. It had been a dirty and dismal den of iniquity. Since then it had become cleaner, but, while losing its erstwhile exoticism, it did not become less dismal. The upper part of the former den of iniquity was devoted to prayer meetings, while below, the sleeping quarters consisted of bare walls, a bare stone floor, and canvas folding cots. That odour of coffee and dampness, which is always a part of hospital

and charity cleanliness, permeated all. In a word, this was an American staging of Gorky's *Lower Depths*.

In this bedraggled hall the night lodgers sat stiffly on benches that came down in an amphitheatre toward a small stage. As soon as the singing stopped, the next number on the programme began.

Between an American national flag, which stood on the stage, and Biblical texts, which hung all over the walls, a pinkish old man in a black suit jumped like a clown. He talked and gesticulated with such passion that he gave the impression of selling something. Yet he was merely telling the instructive history of his life, telling about the beneficent crisis when he turned his heart back to God.

He had been a tramp ("as frightful a tramp as you, old devils!"), he had carried on horribly, had used profane language ("remember your own habits, my friends"), he stole – yes, all of that happened, too, alas! But now it was all done with. Now he owned his own home and lived like a decent man ("Hasn't God created us in his own image, in his own manner?"). Not long ago he had even bought himself a radio receiving set. And all this he had received directly with the help of God.

The old man talked with extraordinary facility; it seemed therefore I hat he was now appearing for at least the thousandth time. He clicked his fingers, laughed hoarsely, sang religious ditties, and ended up with great enthusiasm, shouting:

"Let's sing, brothers!"

Again the dull, humdrum singing began.

The night lodgers were appalling. Almost all of them were no longer young. Unshaven, with lustreless eyes, they swayed on their crude benches. They sang submissively and lazily. Some of them could not overcome the fatigue of the day, and slept.

We vividly imagined to ourselves the wanderings through the frightful places of New York, the days passed at bridges and warehouses, in the midst of garbage, in the everlasting nebulousness of human degeneration. To sit after that in a night lodging and sing hymns was sheer torture.

Then before the audience appeared a fellow as hale and healthy as a policeman. He had a lilac-coloured vaudevillian nose and the voice of a skipper. He was as bold and jaunty as anyone could possibly be. Again began a tale about the benefits of turning to God. The skipper, it seemed, had also been quite a sinner at one time. His fantasy was not great, however, and he soon ended up with the declaration that now, thanks to God's help, he, too, had a radio receiving set.

Again they sang. The skipper waved his arms, displaying considerable experience as an orchestra leader. Two hundred men ground to powder by life again listened to this conscienceless twaddle. These poor people were not offered work, they were offered only God – a God as spiteful and exacting as the Devil.

The night lodgers did not object. Any god with a cup of coffee and a slice of bread was fairly acceptable. Let us sing then, brothers, to the glory of the coffee god!

And the throats, which for half a century had belched forth only horrible oaths, drowsily began to blare now the glory of the Lord.

We again walked through some slums and again did not know where we were. With thunder and lightning, trains raced overhead along the railroad stockades of the elevated railway. Young men in light-coloured hats crowded around drug-stores, exchanging curt phrases. Their manner was exactly like that of the young men who in Warsaw populate Krakhmalnaya Street. In Warsaw a gentleman from Krakhmalnaya is not considered exactly God's precious little ewe lamb. It is sheer luck if he turns out to be merely a thief, for he might be something much worse than that.

Late at night we returned to our hotel, not yet disappointed with New York nor elated over it, but rather disturbed by its hugeness, its wealth, and its poverty.

3. What Can Be Seen From a Hotel Window

OUR FIRST hours in New York – the walk through the city at night and then the return to the hotel – will always remain with us as a memorable event.

Yet, as a matter of fact, nothing unusual had occurred.

We walked into the very ordinary marble vestibule of the hotel. To the right, behind a smooth wooden railing, worked two young clerks. Both of them had pale, smoothly shaven cheeks and black little narrow moustaches. Beyond them sat a girl cashier at a calculating machine. On the left was located the tobacco stand. In its glass case open wooden boxes of cigars stood next to each other. On the white gleaming surface of the inside covers of the boxes were displayed old-fashioned handsome men with thick moustaches and pink cheeks, gold and silver medals, scutcheons, green palms and Negresses gathering tobacco. In the corners stood the prices: 5, 10, or 15: cents apiece, or 15 cents for two, or 10 cents for three. Even more tightly than the cigars lay small packages of cigarettes in soft covers, also wrapped in cellophane. Americansseem to smoke mostly “Lucky Strike,” a dark green package with a red circle in the middle; “Chesterfield,” a white package with a gold inscription; and “Camel,” a yellowish package bearing the picture of a brown camel.

The entire wall opposite the entrance to the vestibule was occupied by spacious elevators with gilded doors. The doors opened on the right, on the left, or in the middle, disclosing inside the elevator the Negro who held on with his hand to the iron steering-gear and who was dressed in bright coloured trousers with gold braid and in a green jacket with ornate twisted shoulder straps. Just as at the Northern Railway Station in Moscow the train announcer loudly informs people going to summer resorts that the next train is bound without stops for Mytishchi,but beyond that will make all the stops, so here the Negroes announced that the elevator was going to the sixteenth floor, or to the thirty-second floor, with the first stop likewise at the sixteenth floor, Eventually we fathomed this little ruse of the management's – on the sixteenth floor was located its restaurant and cafeteria.

We walked into the elevator, and it rushed up. On the way the elevator stopped, the Negro opened the door, cried "Up!" and the passengers called out the numbers of their floors. A woman entered. All the men removed their hats and travelled on without hats. We followed suit. That was the first American custom we learned. But acquaintance with the customs of a foreign country is not so easy and is almost always accompanied by confusion. Several days later we were going up in an elevator to our publishers. A woman entered, and with the expeditiousness of old experienced New Yorkers we took off our hats. The other men did not follow our knightly example, however, and even

regarded us with curiosity. We learned that hats should be taken off only in private and hotel elevators; whereas, in buildings where people transact business one may keep one's hat on.

At the twenty-seventh story we left the elevator and walked along a narrow corridor to our rooms. The large second-rate New York hotels in the centre of the city are built very economically. Their corridors are narrow, their rooms, although expensive, are small, and their ceilings are of standard height – that is, rather low. The client poses before the builder the problem of squeezing into a skyscraper as many rooms as possible. These small rooms, however, are clean and comfortable. They always have hot and cold water, a shower, stationery, telegraph blanks, postcards with views of the hotel, laundry bags, and printed laundry blanks on which you merely place figures indicating the number of pieces of soiled laundry being sent out. Laundering is done quickly and unusually well in America. The ironed shirts look better than new ones on display in a store window. And each one of them is placed in a paper pocket, around which is a paper ribbon with the trade-mark of the laundry, and all of it is neatly pinned together, with pins even around the sleeves. Moreover, the laundry is brought back mended and the socks darned. In America such comforts are not at all a sign of luxury. They are standardized and accessible.

Upon entering the room we began to look for the switch, and for a long time could not understand how electricity is turned on here. At first we wandered through the rooms in the dark, then

we struck matches, felt our way along the walls, investigated the doors and windows, but there was no switch anywhere. Several times in sheer desperation we would sit down to rest in the darkness. At last we found it. Near every lamp hung a short thin chain with a little ball on the end. A pull on the little chain and the electricity is lighted. Another pull and it is out. The beds had not been made up for the night, so we began to look for the button of the bell to summon the maid. But there was no button. We looked everywhere. We pulled all the likely strings, but that did us no good. Then we understood that the servants must be called by telephone. We rang for the porter and called for the maid.

In the room was furniture which subsequently we saw in all the hotels of America without exception – in the East, the West, and the South. We did not visit the North. But there is every reason to suppose that even there we would have found exactly the same furniture as in New York: a brown commode with a mirror, metal bedsteads trickily painted to look like wood, several soft easy-chairs, a rocking-chair, portable plug lamps (bridge lamps), on high thin legs with large cardboard lampshades.

On the commode we found a fat little book in a black cover. On the book was the gold trade-mark of the hotel. The book proved to be a Bible. This ancient composition had been adapted for business people whose time is limited. On the first page was a table of contents especially composed by the solicitous management of the hotel:

"For allaying spiritual doubts – page so-and-so, text so-and-so.

"For family troubles – page so-and-so, text so-and-so.

"For financial troubles – page…, text…

"For success in business – page…, text…"

That page was somewhat greasy.

We opened the windows. They had to be opened in a peculiar American way, not at all as in Europe. They had to be raised, like windows in a railway carriage.

The windows of our little rooms looked out on three sides. Below lay New York at night.

What can be more alluring than a strange city's lights thickly sown throughout that immense and foreign world which had gone to sleep on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean! From over there, from the side of the ocean, a warm wind wafted. Quite close rose several skyscrapers. It seemed as though one could touch them with one's hand. Their lighted windows could be counted. Farther away the lights became more and more dense. Among them were especially bright ones, which stretched out in straight and in bent chains (these must have been street lamps). Beyond gleamed a sheer gold dust of tiny lights, and then a dark unlighted swath. (The Hudson? Or was that the East River?) And again the gold mists of boroughs, constellations of unknown streets and squares. In that world of lights, which at first seemed stationary, one could note a certain movement. Now down the river slowly floated the red light of a cutter. A tiny automobile passed down the street. At times, suddenly, somewhere on the other shore of the river, a light as little as a tiny particle of dust would flash and

go out. Surely one of (he seven million denizens of New York had turned off the light and gone to bed! Who was he? A clerk? An employee of the elevated railroad? Perhaps a lonely girl had gone to sleep – some salesgirl (there are so many of them in New York). And at this very moment, lying under two thin blankets, stirred by the steamer whistles of the Hudson, was she seeing in her dreams a million dollars?

New York was asleep, and a million Edison lamps were guarding its slumber. Immigrants from Scotland, from Ireland, from Hamburg and Vienna, from Kovno and Bialystok, from Naples and Madrid, from Texas, Dakota, and Arizona, were asleep. Asleep were also immigrants from Latin America, from Australia, from Africa and China. Black, white, and yellow people were asleep. Looking at the scarcely trembling lights, we wanted to find out as soon as possible how these people work, how they amuse themselves, what they dream of, what they hope for, what they eat.

Finally, utterly exhausted, we, too, went to bed. We had had altogether too many impressions for the first day. New York cannot be taken in such large doses. It is a frightful, yet at the same time pleasant, experience to have one's body lie in a comfortable American bed, in a state of complete rest, while the mind continues to rock on the Normandie, to ride in a wedding-carriage taxi, to run along Broadway, to travel.

In the morning, having awakened on our twenty-seventh story and having looked out of the window, we saw New York in a

pellucid morning mist.

We beheld what might be called a peaceful pastoral scene. A few white threads of smoke rose to the sky, while to the spire of a small twenty-story hut was even attached an idyllic and all-metal cockerel. Sixty-storied skyscrapers, which yesterday evening seemed so close, were separated from us by at least ten red iron roofs and a hundred high stacks and skylights, among which laundry hung and the most ordinary cats wandered about. On the walls could be seen advertisements. The walls of the skyscrapers were full of brick dullness. Most of the buildings in New York are made of red brick.

New York opened at once on several planes. The upper plane was occupied by the tops of those skyscrapers which were higher than ours. They were crowned with spires – glass or gold cupolas gleaming in the sun, or towers with large clocks. The towers themselves were the height of a four-story house. On the next plane, open in its entirety to our gaze, in addition to stacks, skylights, and tomcats one could see flat roofs on which were small one-storied houses with gardens, skimpy trees, little brick paths, a small fountain, and even rattan chairs. Here one could pass the time of day to perfection, almost as at Klyazma, inhaling the petrol perfume of flowers, andlistening to the melodic baying of the elevated railway. That monstrosity was on the next plane of New York City. The railway lines of the elevated rest on iron poles and pass on the level of the second and third stories, and only in certain parts of the city do they rise to the fifth or sixth

story. This antiquated structure discharges from time to time a horrible clatter that numbs the brain. It causes healthy people to become nervous and the nervous to lose their minds, while the insane jump at the sound in their padded cells and roar like lions. In order to see the last and fundamental plane, the plane of the street, one had to bend out of the window and look down at a right angle. There, as in reversed binoculars, one could see a tiny crossing with tiny automobiles, pedestrians, newspapers strewn on the pavement, and even two rows of shining buttons attached to the lanes where pedestrians are allowed to cross the street.

From the other window one could see the Hudson River, which separates the State of New York from the State of New Jersey. The houses that go down to theHudson are in New York, while the houses on the other side of the river are in Jersey City. We were told that what at first glance seems a strange administrative division has its compensations. One can, for example, live in one State and work in another. One could also indulge in speculations in New York while paying taxes in Jersey. There, by the way, the taxes are not so high. This seems to add colour to the grey monotonous life of a stockbroker. Or one can get married in New York and get divorced in New Jersey, or the other way around. It all depends upon where the divorce laws are easier and where the marriage-breaking process is cheaper. We, for example, when buying the automobile for our journey through the country, insured it in New Jersey, which charges a few dollars less than New York.

4. Appetite Departs While Eating

THE NEWCOMER need have no fear about leaving his hotel and plunging into the New York jungle. Despite the amazing sameness of its streets, it is well-nigh impossible to get lost there.

Yet the secret is simple. The thoroughfares are divided into two types: the perpendicular ones, oravenues; and the horizontal, or streets. Thus the island of Manhattan has been laid out. Parallel to each other are First, Second, and Third avenues. Then parallel to them is Lexington Avenue, Fourth Avenue, a continuation of which from the central railway station bears the name of Park Avenue (that is the street of the wealthy), MadisonAvenue, beautiful (shopping district) Fifth Avenue, Sixth, Seventh, and so forth. Fifth Avenue divides the city into two parts, the East and West. All these avenues (and they are many) are crossed by streets, of which there are several hundred. And if the avenues have certain distinguishing attributes (some are wider, others are narrower; there is an elevated over Second, Third, Sixth, and Ninth; in the middle of Park Avenue is a grass plot; on FifthAvenue tower the Empire State Building and Radio City), the streets are quite indistinguishable, and even old New Yorkers cannot tell one street from another by any out-ward signs. The geometry of New York is violated only by meandering Broadway, which crosses the city diagonally on its run of a score of miles.

The main shoals of pedestrians and automobiles advance along the wide avenues. Under them like coal-mines lie the black and damp, four-track tunnels of subways. Over them is the iron thunder of the elevated. Here are all the types of transport – even several old-fashioned, double-deck autobuses and street-cars. Doubtless, in Kiev, where street-car traffic has been removed from the main street, people would be amazed to hear that down Broadway, the liveliest street in the world, a street-car still hobbles along. Woe to the man who must cross the city, not lengthwise but crosswise, and who would be stricken with the insane idea of taking a taxi-cab for that purpose! His taxi will turn into a street and head straight into a chronic cul-de-sac. While policemen drive the snorting automobile flocks down the length of the avenues, hordes of indignant schlemiehls and maniacs congregate in the dirty narrow lanes that cut the city – no, not lengthwise but crosswise. The queues stretch for several blocks, chauffeurs fidget in their seats, passengers impatiently stick their heads out of windows and, falling back in anguish, open their newspapers.

It is hard to believe, yet it is a fact that some seventy years ago on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, on the very spot where more automobiles can flock together in five minutes than there are in all of Poland, stood a wooden inn which had the following two significant notices posted for the benefit of American travellers:

IT IS FORBIDDEN TO GO TO BED IN BOOTS

and

IT IS FORBIDDEN FOR MORE THAN SIX GUESTS
TO SLEEP IN ONE BED

We left the hotel to lunch somewhere, and soon found ourselves on Forty-second Street. During our first days in New York, no matter where we were bound for, we invariably landed on Forty-second Street.

In the crowd, which carried us along, we heard shreds of that quick New York speech which surely must be as strange to the ear of a Londoner as it is to the ear of a Muscovite. Along the walls sat boys-bootblacks, who drummed their brushes on their crudely fashioned wooden boxes, touting for customers. Street photographers aimed their cameras at the passers-by, choosing usually ladies with escorts or tourists from the sticks. After clicking his camera, the photographer would approach the object of his attack and press on him the printed address of his studio. For twenty-five cents the photographed pedestrian may have a candid photograph of himself, a splendid photograph, in the uninhibited act of raising his leg.

Under the sooty spans of a bridge, in the shadow of which gleamed mud left over from last night's rain, a man with hat aslant and an open shirt was delivering a speech. About a score of the curious gathered around him. He was a propagandist for the ideas of the recently assassinated United States senator from Louisiana, Huey P. Long. He spoke on distribution of wealth. His listeners asked him questions. He replied. His chief task seemed

to be to amuse his audience. Not far from him, on the sunflecked sidewalk stopped a fat Negress of the Salvation Army. She wore an old-fashioned bonnet and run-down shoes. She took a bell out of her suitcase and rang it loudly. The suitcase she placed on the sidewalk at her feet. After waiting for a few disciples of the late-lamented senator to desert to her side, squinting against the sun, she began to bellow something, rolling her eyes and banging her own fat bosom. We went several blocks, but the shouting of the Negress was still distinctly heard in the component noise of this restless city.

In front of a ready-to-wear store a man walked calmly back and forth. On his back and on his chest he carried two identical placards: "This Place Is On Strike". In the next street were a few more pickets. Over the large show window of a corner store, despite the sunny morning, gleamed the blue letters "Cafeteria" in electric lights. The cafeteria was large, bright, and clean. Along the walls were glass cases filled with beautiful, appetizing edibles. To the left of the entrance was the cashier's booth. Onhe right was a metal stand with small slot athwart as in a coin bank. From the opening emerged the end of a blue pasteboard stub. Those who entered tugged at this end. We also tugged. The melodic clang of a bell resounded. One stub was in our hand, and through the slot of the coin bank another blue stub popped out. Then we did what all New Yorkers do when they dash into a cafeteria for a hurried bite. From a special table we each took a light brown tray, placed on it forks, spoons, knives, and paper

napkins; and, feeling extremely awkward in our heavy overcoats and hats, went to the right end of a glass-enclosed counter. Down the entire length of this counter ran three rows of nickelled pipes on which we conveniently placed our trays and slid them along after placing each dish upon them. The counter itself was a tremendous camouflaged electric plate. Soups, chunks of roast, sausages of various lengths and thicknesses, legs of pork and lamb, meat loaves and roulades, mashed, fried, baked, and boiled potatoes and potatoes curiously shaped in pellets, globules of Brussels sprouts, spinach, carrots, and numerous other side dishes were kept warm here. White chefs in starched nightcaps, aided by neat but heavily rouged and marcelled girls in pink headdresses, were busy placing on the glass cover of the counter plates of food and punching that figure on the stub which indicated the cost of each dish. Then came salads and vinaigrettes, various hors d'oeuvres, fish in cream sauces and fish in jellied sauces. Then came bread, rolls, and traditional round pies with apple, strawberry, and pineapple fillings. Here coffee and milk were issued. We moved down the counter, pushing our trays. On the thick layer of chipped ice were plates of compotes and ice-cream, oranges and grapefruit cut in half, large and small glasses with various juices. Persistent advertising has taught Americans to drink juices before break-fast and lunch. In the juices are vitamins which are presumably beneficial to the customers, while the sale of juices is indubitably of benefit to fruit merchants. We soon succumbed to this American custom.

At first we drank the thick yellow orange juice. Then we passed to the translucent green juice of the grapefruit. Then before eating we began to take the grapefruit itself (it is covered with sugar and is eaten with a spoon; its taste reminds one somewhat of the taste of an orange with a dash of lemon in it, although it is juicier than both these fruits). Finally, with some trepidation and not all at once, we began to imbibe the mundane tomato juice, peppering it a bit beforehand. That proved to be the tastiest of all and the most refreshing, and it best suited our South Russian stomachs. The one thing we did not learn to do in America was to eat melon before dinner. Yet that takes the place of honour among American hors d'oeuvres.

In the middle of the cafeteria stood polished wooden tables without tablecloths, and beside them coat-racks. Those who wished could put their hats under their chairs, where there was a special shelf for that purpose. On the tables were stands with bottles of oil, vinegar, catsup, and various other condiments. There was also granulated sugar in a glass flagon wrought in the manner of a pepper-shaker with holes in its metal stopper.

The settling of accounts with the customers was simple. No one could leave the cafeteria without sooner or later passing the cashier's booth and presenting the stub with the total punched in it. Here also cigarettes were sold and one was free to take a toothpick.

The process of eating was just as superbly rationalized as the production of automobiles or of typewriters.

The automats have progressed farther along this road than the cafeterias. Although they have approximately the same outward appearance as the cafeterias, they differ from the latter in that they have carried the process of pushing food into American stomachs to the point of virtuosity. The walls of the automats are occupied throughout with little glass closets. Near each one of them is a slit for dropping a "nickel" (a five-cent coin). Behind the glass stands a dour sandwich or a glass of juice or a piece of pie. Despite the shining glass and metal, the sausages and cutlets deprived of liberty somehow produce a strange impression. One pities them, like cats at a show. A man drops a nickel, acquires the right to open the little door, takes out his sandwich, carries it to his table and there eats it, again putting his hat under his chair on the special shelf. Then the man goes up to a tap, drops his "nickel," and out of the tap into the glass drips exactly as much coffee and milk as is supposed to drip. One feels something humiliating, something insulting to man in that. One begins to suspect that the owner of the automat has outfitted his establishment, not in order to present society with a pleasant surprise, but in order to discharge from service poor marcelled girls with pink headdresses and thereby earn a few more dollars.

But automats are not over popular in America. Evidently the bosses themselves feel that there must be some limit to rationalization. Hence, the normal little restaurants, for people of modest means, belonging to mighty trusts are always full. The most popular of these – Childs – has become in America

a standard for inexpensive food of good quality. “He dines at Childs”: that means that the man earns $30 a week. In any part of New York one can say: “Let’s have dinner at Childs,” and it would not take him more than ten minutes to reach Childs. At Childs one receives the same clean handsome food as in a cafeteria or an automat. Only there one is not deprived of the small satisfaction of looking at a menu, saying “H’m,” asking the waitress whether the veal is good, and receiving the answer: “Yes, sir!”

Generally speaking, New York is remarkable because it has everything. There you can find the representatives of any nation, secure any dish, any object from an embroidered Ukrainian shirt to a Chinese stick with a bone handle in the shape of a hand, which is used for back-scratching, from Russian caviare and vodka to Chilean soup and Italian macaroni. There are no delicacies in the world that New York cannot offer. But for all of it one must pay in dollars. And we want to talk about the preponderant majority of Americans who can pay only cents and for whom exist Childs, cafeterias, and automats. When describing the latter establishments, we can boldly declare that this is how the average American is fed. Under this concept of the average American is presupposed a man who has a decent job and a decent salary and who from the point of view of capitalism is an example of the healthy prospering American, happy and optimistic, who receives all the blessings of life at a comparatively low price.

The splendid organization of the restaurant business seems

to confirm that. Model cleanliness, good quality of produce, an extensive choice of dishes, a minimum of time lost in dining. All that is so. But here is the trouble. All this beautifully prepared food is quite tasteless— colourless in taste. It is not injurious to the stomach. It is most likely even of benefit to it. But it does not present man with any delights, any gustatory satisfaction. When you select in the closets of the automat or on the counter of the cafeteria an attractive piece of roast, and then eat it at your table, having shoved your hat under your chair, you feel like a buyer of shoes which proved to be more handsome than substantial. Americans are used to it. They eat fast, without wasting a single extra minute at the table. They do not eat; they fill up on food, just as an automobile is filled with petrol. The French gourmet who can sit four hours at a dinner, chewing each piece of meat in exultation, washing it down with wine and then smacking every mouthful of coffee with cognac – he is, of course, no model man. But the cold American eater, bereft of the natural human desire to get some satisfaction out of food, evokes amazement.

For a long time we could not understand why American dishes, so appetizing in appearance, are so unappealing in taste. At first we thought the Americans simply do not know how to cook. But then we learned that that alone is not the point: the crux of the matter is in the organization itself, in the very essence of the American economic system. Americans eat a blindingly white but utterly tasteless bread, frozen meat, salty butter, unripe tomatoes, and canned goods.

How does it happen that the richest country in the world, a country of grain growers and cattle raisers, of gold and remarkable industry, a country which has sufficient resources to create a paradise, cannot give the people tasty bread, fresh meat, real butter, and ripe tomatoes?

Near New York we saw waste places overgrown with weeds, forsaken plots of earth. No one sowed grain there, no one raised cattle there. We saw there neither setting hens with chicks nor truck gardens.

"You see," we were told, "it simply would not pay. We cannot compete here with the monopolists from the West."

Somewhere in Chicago, in the slaughter-houses, they kill cattle and transport the meat throughout the country in frozen form. From somewhere in California they ship frozen chickens, and green tomatoes which are supposed to ripen in transit. And no one dares to challenge the mighty monopolists to a fight.

Sitting in a cafeteria, we read Mikoyan's speech, which said that food in a socialist country must be palatable – that it must bring joy to people – and it sounded like poetry to us.

While in America the business of feeding people, as any other business, is built on this single consideration: does it pay or does it not pay? It does not pay to raise cattle and to have truck gardens in New York. Therefore, people eat frozen meat, salty butter, and unripe tomatoes. Some business man discovers that it pays to sell chewing gum, so people are taught to chew this cud. Cinema pays better than theatre; therefore, cinema develops

while the theatre is neglected, although from a cultural standpoint the American theatre is much more important than the cinema. The elevated brings an income to certain companies; therefore, New Yorkers become martyrs. Along Broadway, through all the crowded traffic, with a hellish screeching, a street-car hobbles along-only because it pays one man, the owner of an ancient street-car company. All the time we were there we felt an irresistible desire common to all Soviet people to complain and to offer suggestions. We wanted to write to the Soviet control and to the party control and to the Central Committee and to *Pravda*, but there was no one to complain to, and there is no such thing in America as “a book of suggestions”.

5. We Seek an Angel Without Wings

TIME PASSED. We were still in New York and did not know when or whither we should proceed. Yet, our plan included a journey across the entire continent, from ocean to ocean.

That was a fine, but essentially a quite indefinite, plan. We had made it up in Moscow and had discussed it ardently all the way to America.

We paced scores of kilometres over the decks of the Normandie damp with ocean spray, arguing about the details of that journey and dousing each other with geographic nomenclature. At dinner, drinking the pure but weak wine from the cellars of the General Transatlantic Company, we muttered almost senselessly, "Kahleeforneeya," "Tyekhas," or something equally beautiful and enticing.

The plan was astounding because of its simplicity. We were to arrive in New York, buy an automobile, and ride, ride, ride until we arrived in California. Then we would turn around and ride, ride, ride until we arrived in New York. It was all simple and wonderful, like an Andersen fairy-tale. "Tra-ta-ta" sounds the klaxon, "tru-tu-tu" sounds the motor, we ride across the prairie, we swing over mountain chains, we quench the thirst of our trusty machine with the icy water of the Cordilleras, and the great Pacific sun casts its blinding brilliance on our tanned faces.

In short, you can see for yourself that we were a bit "touched,"

and roared at each other like chained dogs: “Sierra Nevada,” “Rocky Mountains,” and the like.

But when we stepped on American soil everything proved not so simple and not so romantic.

In the first place, Tyekhas is not called Tyekas, but Texas. But that was only half the trouble.

None of our new friends in New York offered any objections to our purchasing an automobile. Travel in one’s own automobile is the cheapest and most interesting means of transportation in the States. Railroad travel would cost several times as much. Besides, you cannot see America from a train window. It is not a writer’s business to do anything of the kind. So, as for the automobile idea, our suppositions met with approval. The difficulty was in finding a man who could go with us. We could not go by ourselves. We knew the English language well enough to engage a room in a hotel, to order a dinner in a restaurant, to go to a cinema and understand the meaning of a picture – knew it even to the extent of conversing about this or that or the other thing with some indulgent person who was not in a hurry to go anywhere— but we knew no more. Yet more was precisely what we needed. Besides there was one other consideration. The American automobile highway is the kind of place where, as the winged word of the chauffeur has it, you ride straight into the open grave. Here you need an experienced guide.

And so, quite unexpectedly, there opened before us an abyss. And we stood on its very edge. We actually needed a man, who:

could drive a machine to perfection;
knew America to perfection, in order to show it to us properly;
spoke English well;
spoke Russian well;
had sufficient cultural background;
had a good character, otherwise he would spoil the journey;
and
did not like to make money.

The last point was obligatory, because we did not have much money. We lacked it to such an extent that, to tell the truth, we had very little of it.

Thus, as a matter of fact, we needed an ideal creature, a rose without thorns, an angel without wings. We needed a complex hybrid: a guide-chauffeur-interpreter-altruist. Michurin himself would have given up. It would have taken scores of years to breed this hybrid.

There was no sense in buying an automobile until we found the appropriate hybrid, yet the longer we stayed in New York the less money we had left for an automobile. We solved this complex problem daily, and yet we could not solve it. Besides, there was almost no time for thinking about it.

On the way to America we did not take into consideration one thing: hospitality, American hospitality. It is limitless and far outstrips everything possible or conceivable of its kind, including

Russian, Siberian, and Georgianhospitality. The first American you meet will not fail to invite you to his house or to a restaurant to drink a cocktail with him. At each cocktail party you will find ten friends of your new acquaintance. Each one of them will not fail to invite you to a cocktail party of his own, and each one of these will have ten or fifteen friends. in two days you suddenly acquire a hundred new acquaintances, and within a week several thousand. It is simply dangerous to spend a year in America, because you will be a confirmed drunkard and a kind of Gleb Uspensky tramp.

All the several thousands of our new friends were filled with one desire: to show us everything that we would want to see, to go with us wherever we'd like to go, to explain everything to us that we did not understand. Remarkable people are these Americans. It is pleasant to be friends with them, and it is easy to do business with them.

We were almost never alone. The telephone of our hotel began to ring in the morning, and it rang as regularly as that in an information bureau. In the rare and brief intervals between meetings with necessary and interesting people we dreamed of this ideal creature still out of our reach. Even our amusements were most businesslike, spurred on by such advice as:

"You must see it; otherwise, you will never know America!"

"What? You haven't been in a burlesque? Well, but then you haven't seen America! Why, that is the most vulgar spectacle in the world! You can see it only in America!"

"What? You haven't been to the automobile races? Excuse me, but you don't know what America is!"

It was on a bright October morning that we made our way by automobile out of New York to an agricultural exhibit in the little town of Danbury, in the state of Connecticut.

We will say nothing here about the roads on which we travelled. That would take time, inspiration, a special chapter.

The red autumnal landscape stretched on both sides of the road. The leafage was red-hot, and when it. seemed that nothing in the world could be redder there appeared another grove of maddeningly Indian colour. That was not the design of the forest around Moscow, to which our eyes were accustomed, where you will find red and bright yellow and soft brown. Here everything flamed as in a sunset, and this amazing conflagration around New York, this Indian sylvan gorgeousness, continued all through October.

A roar and a clatter was heard as we approached Danbury. The flock of automobiles rested on the slopes of a little valley that was still green. There the exhibit was laid out. Policemen stretched out their arms forbiddingly, chasing us from one place to another. We finally found a place for the automobile and went to the stadium.

At the round tribune the roar was heart-rending, and over the high walls of the stadium flew small stones and hot sand, thrown up by machines around the sharp turn. It would have been easy to lose an eye or a tooth. We hastened our footsteps, shielded

ourselves with our arms, just as the Pompeians must have done when their native city was perishing in a volcanic eruption.

We had to wait in a small queue to buy tickets. Around us was the clatter of a drab, provincial fair. The vendors, who have been described more than once by O. Henry, loudly praised their wares: strange aluminium whistles, carved swagger sticks, sticks crowned with dolls, all the trash found at a fair. A cow with beautiful eyes and long eyelashes was being led away. The beauty swung her udder enticingly. The owner of the mechanical organ danced to the tune of the deafening music of his contraption. A swing in the shape of a boat attached to a green metallic rigging made a complete circle. When those who were swinging were high in the sky, their heads down, the pure-hearted and hysterical feminine scream that broke forth carried us at once from the state of Connecticut to the state of Moscow, to the Park of Culture and Rest. The vendors of salted nuts and cheese-cracker sandwiches yelled at the top of their voices.

An automobile race is an empty spectacle, dreary and morbid. Red, white, and yellow racing machines with straddling wheels and numbers painted on the sides, shooting out like rocket volleys, flew past us. One round was succeeded by the next. Five, six, sometimes ten,machines competed at the same time. The audience roared. It was frightfully boring. The only thing that could possibly amuse the public would be an automobile accident. As a matter of fact, that is what people came here for. At last it occurred. Suddenly, alarm signals were heard. Everyone

jumped from his seat. One of the automobiles flew off the track while going full-speed. We were still pushing our way through the crowd which surrounded the stadium when we heard the frightful baying of the ambulance. Through its window-panes we managed to see the injured driver. He no longer wore his leather helmet. He sat there, holding on to his blue skull with both hands. He had an angry look. He had lost the prize for which he had risked his life.

In the intervals between heats, on a wooden platform inside the circle, circus comedians were playing a scene which portrayed four clumsy fellows building a house. Naturally, bricks fell on the four fools. They smeared each other with the cement mixture. They beat each other with hammers by mistake, and in sheer self-forgetfulness sawed off their own legs. All this concoction of tricks, which had its origin in the distant antiquity of Greece and Rome and is still brilliantly carried on by such great master clowns as Fratellini, was excellently done by the clowns of the Danbury fair. It is always pleasant to watch good circus work, and its ways, polished through ages, are never boresome.

The fair came to an end. The visitors in the wooden pavilions were few in number. On long tables in the pavilions lay large lacquered vegetables that seemed inedible. The orchestras performed farewell marches, and all the visitors *en masse*, raising clouds of dust over the clean dark yellow sand, made their way to their automobiles. Here were demonstrated (and sold, of course)

trailers for automobiles.

Pairs of Americans, in most cases composed of man and wife, would go inside and exclaim for a long time, impressed by the trailers. They examined the enticing inside of the trailer, the comfortable beds, the lace curtains on the windows, the couch, the convenient and simple metal stove. What could be better? You attach a trailer like that to an automobile, drive out of the thundering city, and drive and drive to wherever your eyes may lead you. That is, you know where you are driving. The eyes "look into the forest," and they see the Great Lakes, the beaches of the Pacific Ocean, the canyons, and the broad rivers.

Groaning, man and wife would crawl out of a trailer. It was too expensive. Here in Danbury were trailers at $350 and some at $700. But where can you get $700? Where can you get the time for a long trip?

The long columns of machines flew soundlessly back to New York, and after an hour and a half at a good clip we saw the flaming sky. Skyscrapers shone from top to bottom. Over the earth gleamed the flowing lights of the cinemas and the theatres?

Carried away by the storm of life, we decided to devote the evening to acquaintanceship with entertainment for common people.

A "nickel" is what Americans call a small nickel coin of five cents. With all its appearance nocturnal New York tells the pleasure-seeker:

"Give me your nickel! Drop your nickel! Part with your nickel

and you will be happy!"

The clicking noise comes out of the large amusement stores. Here stand scores of pinball tables of all kinds. You drop a nickel in the proper slot; automatically a cue is liberated by a spring, and the pleasure-seeker, having decided to spend the evening in revelry, can shoot a steel ball five times. For a certain number of points won he receives a card-board certificate from the master of the establishment. A half-year spent at regular play and, in consequence of the regular dropping of nickels, the reveller has the necessary number of points to receive his prize – one of those beautiful prizes that stand on the shelf. That may be a glass vase or an aluminium cocktail-shaker, or a table clock, or a cheap fountain pen or safety razor. In brief, here are all the treasures at the mere sight of which the heart of a housewife, a child, or a gangster contracts with sweetness. Americans spend hours in such lonely entertainment, in a concentrated, indifferent manner, without anger and without exultation.

Having finished with the pinball, one may go to an automatic soothsayer. She sits in a glass case, yellow-faced and thin. Before her in semicircle lies cards. It is taken for granted that you must drop a nickel. Then the soothsayer comes to life. Her head begins to bob, her chest to heave, and a wax arm glides over the cards. This is no spectacle for impressionable people. It is all so stupid and so horrible that one is in danger of losing one's mind. A half-minute later the fortune-teller freezes into her previous position. Now you must pull a handle. From the crack falls the prophecy

of your fate. It is in most cases a portrait of your future wife and a short description of her attributes.

The stores of these idiotic wonders are disgusting even when they are located in the centre of a city full of tinsel and noise. But somewhere on the East Side, in the dark alleys, where the sidewalks and pavements are littered with the refuse of the daytime trade, among signboards which testify to the extreme poverty (here you can get a shave for five cents, lodging for fifteen), such a store, dimly lighted, dirty, where two or three figures silently and joylessly click at pinball, where by comparison an ordinary game of billiards becomes a genuine triumph of culture and intellect – there it is mortal boredom.

The head can ache from work. But it can also ache from amusement.

After the amusement stores we found ourselves in another strange amusement establishment.

The clatter of jazz imitates so far as possible the clatter of the elevated railway. People crowd around a glass booth in which sits a live cashier girl with a set, waxy smile on her face. This is a theatre called "Burlesque". This is a variety show for thirty-five cents.

The hall was full, and the young, determined ushers placed people anywhere at all. Some did not find seats. They stood in the aisles without taking their eyes off the stage.

On the stage a woman sang. She did not know how to sing. She bad the kind of voice that did not entitle her to hold forth

even at birthday parties for the most indulgent relatives. She also danced. One did not have to be a balletomane to realize that this person would never become a ballerina. Yet the public smiled approvingly. Apparently in this audience there were no fanatics of singing and no balletomanes. The audience had come here for something else.

The "something else" was explained when this singer of songs and dancer of dances suddenly began to tittup across the stage, casting off her clothes as she cut her capers. She cast them off quite slowly so that the audience might examine this artistic mise en scene in all its detail. Suddenly the jazz cackled, the music stopped, and with a bedroom scream the girl ran into the wings. The young men who filled the hall applauded enthusiastically. A master of ceremonies, a man of athletic appearance dressed in a dinner jacket, came out on the stage and made a businesslike proposition:

"If you applaud harder she will take off something else."

Such an explosion of applause broke loose then as even Mattia Battistini or Anna Pavlova or Keane himself, the greatest of the great, could never expect in a lifetime from any audience. No! Mere talent cannot win such a public!

The performer again passed across the stage, sacrificing what little was left of her garments. To satisfy the theatre censorship, she held a bit of clothing before her with one hand.

After the first dancer and singer another came out and repeated exactly what her predecessor had done. The third one

did what the second had done. The fourth, fifth, and sixth did not make any new contributions. They sang without voice and without ear, and they danced with the grace of a kangaroo. But they disrobed. The other ten girls took their turns in faithfully repeating the same performance.

The only difference between them was that some were brunettes (these were fewer in number), while others were light-haired lambs (there were more of these).

This Zulu solemnity continued for several hours. It is pornography mechanized to such an extent that it acquires a kind of industrial and factory character. There is as little eroticism in this spectacle as in a serial production of vacuum cleaners or adding machines.

A small soundless rain fell on the street. But had there been a storm with thunder and lightning it would not have been heard.

New York itself thunders and gleams much more thoroughly than any storm. It is an excruciating city. It constantly rivets all attention to itself. It makes your eyes ache.

Yet it is impossible not to look upon it.

6. Papa and Mamma

BEFORE DEPartING from Moscow we had collected numerous letters of introduction. It was explained to us that America was the land of letters of introduction. Without them you could not turn around.

Americans of our acquaintance whom we visited before departure at once and in silence sat down at their typewriters and began to pound out:

"Dear Sir: My friends, whom I commend to your attention…"

And so on and so forth. "Regards to your wife"—and in brief all that is proper to write on such occasions. They knew beforehand what we had come for.

The correspondent of the New York *Times*, Walter Duranty, wrote with incredible speed, taking the cigarette out of his mouth only in order to swallow some Crimean Madeira. We carried away from him a dozen letters. In farewell he told us:

"Go, go to America! It is much more interesting there now than here in your Russia. With you everything goes up." He indicated with his hand the rising steps of a stairway. "With you here everything is clear. But with us everything is not yet clear. And no one knows what may happen."

A colossal catch awaited us at Louis Fischer's, a journalist well known in American left-wing circles. He spent at least half of his working day on us.

"You are threatened in America," he said, "with the danger of finding yourself at once in radical and intellectual circles, getting lost there, seeing nothing, and returning home with the conviction that all Americans are very progressive and intellectual people. Yet it is far from the truth. You must see as many different kinds of people as possible. Try to see rich people, the unemployed, officials, farmers. Look for average people, because it is they who make up America."

He regarded us with his black and kindly eyes and wished us a happy and fruitful journey.

We were in the throes of greed. Although our suitcases were bulging with letters, it seemed to us that we did not have enough of them. We recalled that Eisenstein had at one time been in America, so we went to see him at Potylikha.

This famous cinema village is laid out on the picturesque shores of the Moskva River.

Eisenstein lived in a small apartment in the midst of chandeliers and huge Mexican hats. In his workroom was a good grand piano and the skeleton of a child under a bell glass. In the reception-rooms of famous physicians bronze clocks usually stand under such bell glasses. Eisenstein greeted us in his green-striped pajamas. He spent the whole evening writing letters, told us about America, regarded us with his childlike, crystal-clear eyes, and treated us to jam.

After a week of hard labour we were the possessors of hundreds of letters addressed to governors, actors, editors,

senators, a woman photographer, and simply kind people, including a Negro minister and a dentist from Proskurov.

When we showed all this harvest, garnered after arduous labour, to Jean Lvovich Arens, our consul-general in New York, he turned pale.

"In order to see every one of these people separately… you will need two years."

"What shall we do, then?"

"The best thing you could do would be to put all these letters back into the suitcase and go back to Moscow. But since you are already here, we'll have to think up something for you."

Subsequently we convinced ourselves more than once that the consul could always think up something whenever it was necessary. On this occasion he thought up something grandiose: to send all these letters to their proper addresses and to arrange a reception for all at once.

Three days later, on the corner of Sixty-first Street and Fifth Avenue, in the salons of the consulate, a reception was held. We stood on the landing of the stairway at the second floor. Its walls were hung with immense photographs of the Dnieper Hydro-electric Station, the harvesting of grain with combines, and children's creches. We stood beside the consul and with undisguised fear looked at the ladies and gentlemen who were walking up from below. They moved in an uninterrupted flow for two hours. These were the spirits called forth by the united efforts of Duranty, Fischer, Eisenstein, and a score of other of

our benefactors. The spirits came with their wives – and were in excellent spirits. They were full of eagerness to do everything they had been asked to do in the letters, and to help us learn what the United States was like.

The guests greeted us, exchanged a few remarks, and passed into the salons, where there were bowls of claret cup and small diplomatic sandwiches.

In the simplicity of our souls we thought that when all would come together we, the reason for the occasion, if one may so, would follow into the salon and also raise cups and eat small diplomatic sandwiches. But that is not what happened. We learned that we were supposed to stand on the landing until the last guest departed.

From the salons came gay laughter and noisy exclamations, while we stood endlessly, greeting the late-comers, seeing off those who were departing, and in every other way fulfilling the function of hosts. More than a hundred and fifty guests had gathered, and in the end we did not even manage to find out which of them was a governor and which the native of Proskurov. It was a notable company of grey-haired ladies in spectacles, pink-cheeked gentlemen, broad-shouldered young men, and tall thin young ladies. Since every one of the spirits conjured out of our envelopes represented an indubitable point of interest, we deeply regretted the impossibility of talking at length with each and every one of them.

Three hours later the stream of guests was directed down the

stairway.

A fat little man with a clean-shaven head on which glistened large beads of icy sweat came up to us. He regarded us through the magnifying lenses of his spectacles, shook his head, and with much feeling said in fairly good Russian:

"Oh, yes, yes! That's all right! Mr. Ilf and Mr. Petrov, I have received a letter from Fischer. No, no, don't tell me anything. You don't understand. I know what you need. We'll meet again."

He disappeared, small, compact, with a remarkably strong, almost an iron body. In the confusion of bidding farewell to guests we could not talk with him and puzzle out the meaning of his words.

Several days later, when we were still lounging in our beds, thinking about where at least we would find the ideal creature so indispensable to us, the telephone rang and the voice of a stranger told us that Mr. Adams was speaking and that he wanted to come right up to see us. We dressed quickly, wondering who Mr. Adams was and what he wanted of us.

Into our hotel room entered the same fat little man with the iron body whom we had seen at the reception in our consulate.

"Gentlemen," he said, without any preliminaries, "I want to help you. No, no, no! You don't understand. I regard it as my duty to help every Soviet person who comes to America."

We asked him to sit down, but he refused. He ran through our small hotel rooms, pushing us now and then with his hard, protruding stomach. The three lower buttons of his vest were

unbuttoned and the tail of his necktie stuck out.

Suddenly he cried:

"I am beholden for much to the Soviet Union. Yes, yes, very much! No, don't talk; you don't even understand what you are doing there in your country!"

He became so excited that by mistake he jumped out through the open door and found himself in the hall. We had quite a time of it, dragging him back into our room.

"Were you ever in the Soviet Union?"

"Surely!" cried Mr. Adams. "Of course! No, no, no! Don't say, "Were you ever in the Soviet Union!" I lived there a long time. Yes, yes, yes! I worked in your country for seven years. You spoiled me in Russia. No, no, no! You cannot understand that!"

Several minutes of association with Mr. Adams made it clear to us that we do not understand America at all, that we do not understand the Soviet Union at all, and that in general we understand nothing of anything at all, like newborn calves.

But it was quite impossible to be annoyed with Mr. Adams. When informed of our intention to undertake an automobile journey through the States, he cried: "Surely!" and attained such a state of excitement that he suddenly opened the umbrella which he carried under his arm and for some time stood under it, as if protecting himself from rain.

"Surely!" he repeated. "Of course! It would be foolish to think

that you could find out anything about America by sitting in New York. Isn't it true, Mr. Ilf and Mr. Petrov?"

Much later, when our friendship had deepened considerably, we noticed that Mr. Adams, after expressing any thought, always demanded confirmation of its correctness and would not rest until he received that confirmation.

"No, no, gentlemen! You don't understand anything! We need a plan! A plan for the journey! That's the main thing! And I will make that plan for you. No, no, don't talk! You cannot possibly know anything about it!"

He suddenly took off his coat, pulled off his spectacles, flung them on the couch (later he looked for them in his pockets for about ten minutes), spread an automobile road map of America on his lap, and began to trace curious lines on it.

Right there before our eyes he was transformed from a wild eccentric into a businesslike American. We exchanged glances. Was this not perchance the ideal creature of whom we had dreamed? Was this not the luxuriant hybrid which even Michurin and Burbank together could not have brought forth?

In the course of two hours we travelled over the map of America. What an exhilarating occupation that was!

For some time we discussed the advisability ofdriving into Milwaukee, in the state of Wisconsin. There you find at once two La Follettes, one a governor and one a senator, and it was possible to get letters of introduction to both of them. An enviable situation! Two Muscovites sit in New York and decide the question of a journey to Milwaukee. If they like, they'll go there; if not, they won't!

Old man Adams sat there, calm, clean, self-contained. No, he did not recommend that we go to the Pacific Ocean by the northern route through Salt Lake City, the city of the salt lake. By the time we arrived there, the mountain passes might be in snow.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Adams. "This is very, very dangerous. It would be foolish to risk your lives. No, no, no! You cannot imagine what an automobile journey is."

"But the Mormons?" we moaned.

"No, no! Mormons – that is very interesting. Yes, yes, Mormons are the same Americans as others. But snow – that is very dangerous!"

How delightful it was to talk of dangers, of mountain passes, of prairies! But even more delightful was it to calculate, pencil in hand, the extent to which an automobile was cheaper than going by railway, the number of gallons of petrol needed for a thousand miles, the cost of dinners, of a modest dinner for a tourist. For the first time we heard the words "camp" and "tourist-room". Although we had not yet begun the journey we were already concerned about keeping expenses down, and although we had no automobile we were already concerned about greasing it. We began to regard New York as a dark hole from which we must forthwith escape.

When our elated discussion passed into the stage of incomprehensible shouts, Mr. Adams suddenly jumped off the couch, caught his head in his hands, squinted in dumb desperation, and stood like that for a full minute.

We were frightened.

Without opening his eyes, Mr. Adams began to knead his head in his hands and to mutter:

"Gentlemen, everything is lost! You don't understand anything!"

And then what we did not understand became clear. Mr. Adams had come here with his wife and, having left her in their automobile, had run up to see us for just a second in order to ask us to his house for lunch. He had run in for just a second!

We raced down the corridor, frightening the old ladies who always populate American hotels. In the elevator Mr. Adams jumped with impatience, so eager was he to reach the protective wing of his wife.

Around the corner from Lexington Avenue, on Forty-eighth Street, in a neat but no longer new Chrysler sat a young lady who wore the same kind of protruding spectacles as did Mr. Adams.

"Becky!" groaned our new friend, stretching forth his fat little arms toward the Chrysler.

In the confusion his hat flew off and his round head glistened in the reflected light of New York's autumn sun.

"And where is the umbrella?" asked the lady, smiling wanly.

The sun went out on the head of Mr. Adams. He forgot the umbrella in our room, he forgot his wife in the street, the umbrella was upstairs. Under such circumstances occurred our meeting with Mrs. Rebecca Adams.

With bitterness we noticed that it was not Mr. Adams, but his

wife, who took the wheel. We again exchanged glances.

"No, evidently this is not the hybrid we need. Our hybrid must know how to drive an automobile."

Mr. Adams regained his calm and normal state and talked about things as if nothing untoward had happened. On the entire trip to Central Park West, where his apartment was located, old man Adams assured us that the most important thing for us is our future travelling companion.

"No, no, no, you don't understand! This is very, very important!"

We became sad. We ourselves knew how important that was.

The door of the Adams's apartment was opened to us by a Negress to whose skirts clung a two-year-old girl. The little girl had a firmly moulded little body. She was a little Adams without spectacles.

She looked at her parents, and said in her thin little voice:

"Papa and Mamma."

Papa and Mamma groaned from sheer satisfaction and happiness.

We exchanged glances for the third time.

"Besides, he has a child! No, this is most decidedly not the hybrid!"

7. The Electric Chair

THE AMERICAN, Ernest Hemingway, author of the recently published Fiesta, which evoked much discussion in Soviet literary circles, happened to be in New York while we were there.

And another American writer, John Dos Passos, who is even better known among us and who provoked even more discussions in connection with the polemics on formalism in art, came in to see us and introduced us to Hemingway.

Incidentally, whenever mention was made some years ago of a soulless formalist, he was always understood to be some house manager by the name of Nezabudkin who had insulted an old lady for no good reason or who did not provide needed information on time. Nowadays no one thinks of house managers, and the words "a soulless formalist" do not fail to call forth in memory the figure of some writer or composer or of some other hairy votary of the Muses.

The round-headed, broad-nosed Dos Passos stutters a little. He begins every sentence with a laugh, but he ends it seriously. He looked at us benevolently and said:

"I am writing a new book. It is called *Big Money*. I wonder how it will fare. Every one of my succeeding books has had a smaller circulation than its predecessor: *42nd Parallelled* a circulation of twenty thousand copies; 1919, fifteen thousand; this one will probably have ten thousand."

When we told Dos Passos that ten thousand copies of his 1919 disappeared from Soviet book counters in several hours, he replied:

"In your country people have been taught to read books, but with us here… Listen, we'll have to get together some time and have dinner in the Hollywood Restaurant on Broadway. There you will see what occupies the average American while in your country people read books. You will see the happiness of a New York counter-jumper."

Hemingway came to New York for a week. His permanent home is at Key West, a small town at the extreme southern tip of Florida. He proved to be a large man with moustaches and a peeling sunburnt nose. He wore flannel trousers, a woollen vest which did not come together on his mighty chest, and his bare feet were in house slippers.

We stood together, in the middle of one of the hotel rooms in which Hemingway lived, engaged in the usual American occupation. In our hands were high and wide glasses of highballs – whisky mixed with water. So far as we have been able to observe, everything in America begins with a drink. Even when we came on literary business to our publishers, Farrar and Rinehart, the gay, red-headed Mr. Farrar, publisher and poet, at once led us into their library. He had many books there, but also a large icebox. From that box the publisher took various bottles and cubes of ice, asked us whether we preferred Manhattan,Bacardi or Martini cocktails, and at once began to

mix with such skill, as if he had never in his life published books, had never written verse, but had always worked as a barman. Americans enjoy mixing cocktails.

We happened to talk of Florida, when Hemingway at once passed to what seemed to be his favourite theme:

"During your automobile journey, don't fail to visit me at Key West. We'll go fishing there."

And with his arms he showed us the size of fish one can catch at Key West. That is, like every fisherman he spread his arms as far apart as he could. The fish must have been about the size of a sperm whale.

We looked at each other in alarm and promised, come what might, to drop in on him at Key West so that we might go fishing and have a really serious talk on literature. But we were unreasoning optimists. If we were to carry out everything we had promised during our meetings and interviews, we could not have returned toMoscow before 1940. We wanted very much to go fishing with Hemingway. We were not even embarrassed by the problem of managing spinning and other involved tackle, especially since Dos Passos declared that by the time we arrived in Florida he would also be living in Key West.

Then we talked of what we had seen in New York and what else we wanted to see before going west. We happened to mention Sing Sing. Sing Sing is the prison of the state of New York. We had heard of it since childhood, having been then ardently interested in the adventures of two famous detectives,

Nat Pinkerton and Nick. Carter. Suddenly Hemingway said:

"Do you know, my father-in-law happens to be here with me. He is acquainted with the warden of Sing Sing. Maybe he can arrange it for you to visit the prison."

He went to the adjoining room and returned with a neat little old man whose thin neck was encased in a very high and old-fashioned starched collar. Our wish was explained to the old man while he impatiently chewed his lips and at last said vaguely that he would see what he could do. Then we returned to our previous conversation about fishing, journeys, and other excellent things; Hemingway and Dos Passos wanted to go to the Soviet Union, to the Altai. While we tried to find out why they had chosen the Altai and praised also other parts of the Union, we quite forgot the promise about Sing Sing. People are likely to say anything in the course of a pleasant conversation, highballs in hand.

But a day later we learned that Americans are no idle talkers. We received two letters. One of them was addressed to us. Hemingway's father-in-law informed us respectfully that he had discussed the matter with the warden of the prison, Mr. Lewis E. Lawes, and that we might examine Sing Sing any day we chose. In the second letter the old man recommended us to Mr. Lewis E. Lawes.

We noted this American characteristic and more than once had convincing confirmation that Americans never say anything they do not mean. Not even once did we run across what we know as "idle chatter" or more crudely as "talking through your hat".

One of our New York friends once suggested to us that we might go on a fruit company ship to Cuba, Jamaica,and Colombia. He said that the trip would be free of charge, and besides, we would be seated at the captain's table. There is no greater honour at sea. Of course, we consented.

"Very well," said our friend. "You go on your automobile journey, and when you return, telephone me. Everything will be arranged."

On our return trip from California to New York we recalled this promise almost every day. After all, even this promise was made during cocktails. On that occasion it was not a highball, but some complex mixture with large green leaves, sugar, and a cherry at the bottom of the glass. Finally, from the city of San Antonio, Texas, we sent a telegram of reminder and quickly received a reply. Its tone was even a little bit hurt:

Your tropical journey arranged long ago.

We did not take that tropical journey because we did not have the lime for it. But the mere recollection of American sincerity and the American ability to keep a word comfort us to this day whenever we begin to torment ourselves with the thought that we lost an opportunity to visit South America.

We asked Mr. Adams to go with us to Sing Sing. After repeatedly calling us "Gentlemen," he consented.

The next day we took our places in the Adams Chrysler; after a wretched hour with New York traffic signals we finally escaped from the city. That which is called street movement in New York

might just as well be called street standing. At any rate, there is much more standing than moving.

After travelling thirty miles we discovered that Mr. Adams had forgotten the name of the city where Sing Sing is located. We were obliged to stop. At the edge of the road a workman was unloading some neat little boxes from an automobile. We asked him the road to Sing Sing.

At once he stopped his work and walked up to us. Here is another excellent characteristic. The most preoccupied American will always find the time to explain to a traveller, briefly, to the point, and patiently, what road he should take, and while doing so he will not get things mixed up and will tell no lies. If he tells you something, he knows whereof he speaks.

Having finished his explanation, the workman smiled and said:

"Hurrying to the electric chair? Wish you luck!"

Twice again after that, more in order to clear our conscience, we verified the road, and both times Mr. Adams did not fail to add that we were hurrying to the electric chair. And in reply we heard laughter.

The prison is located on the edge of the little town of Ossining. Two rows of automobiles stood at the prison gate. Our heart contracted at once when we saw that out of the machine which had driven up simultaneously with us came a stooped, pleasant old man with two large paper bags in his hand. In those bags lay packages of food and oranges. The old man went to the entrance

carrying the "outside bundle". What kinsman of his could be sitting there? Probably a son, whom most likely the old man had thought a well-behaved, splendid boy, yet he was a bandit, or maybe even a murderer. Old men have a hard time of it.

The tremendous entrance fenced off by a grille was as large as a lion's cage. On either side of it wrought-iron lanterns were welded into the walls. In the doorway stood three policemen. Each one of them weighed no less than two hundred pounds, and these were pounds not of fat but of muscle, pounds used for suppression, for subjugation.

We did not find Mr. Lewis E. Lawes in the prison. This happened to be the day for electing representatives to the legislature of the state of New York, so the warden was away. But that made no difference we were told. They knew where he was, and would telephone him in New York. Five minutes later they received a. reply from Mr. Lawes. He was very sorry that circumstances did not permit his showing us Sing Sing personally, but he gave instructions to his assistant to do everything possible for us.

After that we were led into the anteroom, a white room with spittoons, polished and shining like samovars, and a grate was closed behind us. We had never been in prison as inmates, yet even here, in the midst of the shining cleanliness of a bank, the clang of a closing cage made us shudder.

The assistant warden of Sing Sing was a spare, strongly built man. We turned at once to the inspection.

This was visitors' day. Three visitors could call on every prisoner-provided he had no infraction of discipline charged against him. Polished barriers divide the large room into squares. In each square, facing each other, are two short benches – the kind you find in a street-car, let us say. On these benches sit the prisoner and his guests. The visit

lasts an hour. At the exit door stands a warden. The prisoners are supposed to wear the grey prison uniform. They don't have to wear all of it, but some part of it must be government issue, either the trousers or the grey sweater.

The hubbub of conversation in the room was reminiscent of a similar hubbub in the foyer of a motion-picture theatre. Children who had come to visit their fathers ran to taps to drink water. The old man we had previously seen did not take his eyes off his beloved son. A woman was weeping softly, and her husband, the prisoner, was looking sadly at his own hands.

The conditions of the visits were such that most certainly visitors could transmit forbidden objects to the prisoners. But that would be useless. Every prisoner, when returning to his cell, is searched immediately the door of the visiting hall is closed.

Because of the election, this was a prison holiday. Passing through the yards we saw small groups of prisoners who were taking a sun-bath in the autumn sun or playing a game of ball which was unfamiliar to us (our guide said that it was an Italian game, that there are many Italians in Sing Sing). However, here were few people. Most of the prisoners were at the time in the

prison motion-picture theatre.

"At present there are 2,299 people in prison," said Mr. Lawes's assistant. "Of these, eighty-five have life sentences and sixteen are to be electrocuted. And all these sixteen will undoubtedly be electrocuted, although they hope for a pardon."

The new buildings of Sing Sing are very interesting. Undoubtedly, the high general standard of American technique in building dwellings had affected its construction, especially the level of American life – what in America is called "the standard of living".

A photograph would give the best idea of an American prison, but to our regret we were not allowed to take photographs inside Sing Sing. A prison building consists of six stories of narrow cabins, like those aboard ship, standing side by side and provided with vertical lion-cage grates. Through the length of every story stretch these metal galleries, connected with each other by metal stairways. It resembles least of all a place to live in, even a prison. The utilitarianism of the construction invests it with the appearance of a factory. The resemblance to some kind of mechanism is reinforced by the fact that all this is enclosed in a brick box, the walls of which are almost entirely occupied with windows. It is through these that daylight (and to a small extent sunlight) enters the cells, because the cells themselves have no windows.

In every such cell there is a bed, a table, and a waste can topped with a lacquered cover. On a nail hang radio earphones. There

are two or three books on the table. Several photographs are on the walls— beautiful girls or baseball players or God's angels, depending upon the inclinations of the prisoner.

In the three new buildings each prisoner is lodged in a separate cell.

This is an improved prison, Americanized to the limit, and comfortable, if one may apply such an honest, good word to a prison. It is light, and the air is comparatively good.

"In the new buildings," said our escort, "are lodged eighteen hundred men. The remaining five hundred are in the old building, constructed a hundred years ago. Let's go there."

That was indeed a real Constantinople prison of the era of the sultans.

It was impossible to stand to one's full height in these cells. When you sat down on the bed your knees touched the wall opposite. The two cots were one above the other. It was dark, damp, and frightful. Here were no shining waste cans, no soothing pictures of angels.

Something of our reaction was evidently reflected in our faces, for the assistant warden hastened to distract us.

"When they send you to me," he said, "I'll place you in the new buildings. I'll even find you a cell with a view of the Hudson. We have such cells for especially deserving prisoners."

He added quite seriously:

"I hear that in your country the penitentiary system has as its object the correction of the criminal and his return to the ranks

of society. Alas, we are occupied only with the punishment of criminals."

We began to talk about life terms.

"I have a prisoner here," said our guide, "who has been here for twenty-two years. Every year he files a petition of clemency and each time his case is considered his petition is decisively turned down, so beastly was the crime which he committed. I would let him out. He is now quite a different man. As a matter of fact I would liberate about half the prisoners, for they no longer present any danger to society. But I am only a jailer, and I can't do anything about it."

We were shown the hospital, the library, the dental office, in fact, all the establishments of piety, culture, and enlightenment. We went up in elevators, we walked down beautiful corridors. Punitive cells and similar things we were not shown, of course, and out of quite comprehensible politeness we did not inquire about them.

In one of the yards we went to a one-story brick building, and the assistant warden himself opened the doors with a large key. In this house executions in the electric chair are carried out by order of the courts of the state of New York.

We noticed the chair at once.

It stands in a roomy chamber without windows, so the light comes through a glass lantern in the ceiling. We took two steps on the white marble floor and stopped. Behind the chair on the door opposite the one we entered is traced in large black letters

the word: “Silence!”

The condemned are admitted through that door.

The condemned is informed early in the morning that his petition for clemency has been rejected and that the execution will take place that day. Then he is prepared for the execution. A small circle is shaved on his head to enable the electric current to pass without impediment.

Throughout the day the condemned sits in his cell. Now that the circle had been shaved on his head, he has nothing to hope for.

The execution occurs at about eleven or twelve o’clock at night.

“The fact that throughout the entire day a man experiences the torments of expectant death is very sad indeed,” declared our guide, “but we can do nothing about it. Such is the demand of the law. The law regards this circumstance as an additional punishment. On this chair two hundred men and three women have been executed.”

Nevertheless, the chair looks quite new.

This is a yellow wooden chair with a high back and arm rests. At first glance it seems innocuous, and if it were not for the leather bracelets with which the hands and feet of the condemned are tied, it could very well stand in some highly moral family home. A deafish grandfather might well be sitting in it to read his newspapers there.

But an instant later the chair was very repellent to us, and

especially depressing were its polished arm rests. Better not to think about those who had polished them with their elbows.

A few yards from the chair stand four substantial railway station benches. These are for the witnesses. Here is a small table. A wash-stand is built into the wall. That is all there is to the furnishings in the midst of which is accomplished the transition from a worse into a better world.No doubt, young Thomas Alva Edison never dreamed that his electricity would perform such depressing duties.

The door in the left corner leads to a compartment larger than a telephone booth. On its wall is a marble switchboard, the most ordinary kind of switchboard with a heavy old-fashioned knife switch, the kind available at any mechanical shop or in the operating booth of a provincial motion-picture theatre. The knife switch is pushed in, and the current beats with great force through the helmet into the head of the condemned. That is all. That is the entire technique.

"The man who turns on the current," said our guide, "receives a hundred and fifty dollars for each such performance. There are any number of applicants for this job."

Of course, all the talk we had heard about three men switching on the current and that not one of them knows which of them actually is responsible for the execution proved to be an invention. No, it is all much simpler. The man switches on the current himself and knows all that happens, and fears only one thing – that competitors may take this profitable work away from

him.

From the room where the execution is carried out a door leads to the morgue, and beyond that is a very quiet room filled to the ceiling with simple wooden coffins.

"The coffins are made right here in prison by the prisoners them-selves," our guide informed us.

Well, we thought we had seen enough! It was time to go!

Suddenly Mr. Adams asked to be allowed to sit in the electric chair, so that he might experience the sensation of a man condemned to death.

"No, no, gentlemen!" he muttered. "It will not take very long."

He settled himself firmly on the spacious seat and looked at us triumphantly. The usual procedure was being carried out on him. He was strapped to the back of the chair with a wide leather belt, his legs were pressed with bracelets against the oaken chair legs, his hands were tied to the arm rests. Again these accursed arm rests! They did not put the helmet on Mr. Adams, but he begged them so that they finally attached the end of the electric connection to his shining pate. It all became very frightful for a minute. Mr. Adams's eyes shone with incredible curiosity. It was evident at once that he was one of those people who want to do everything, who want to touch everything with their hands, to see and hear everything themselves.

Before departing from Sing Sing we went into the church where at the time a motion-picture performance was going on. Fifteen hundred prisoners were looking at a picture entitled

Doctor Socrates. Here we saw the laudable effort of the administration to provide the imprisoned men with the very latest motion picture. As a matter of fact, outside the prison Doctor Socrates was being exhibited that very day in the city of Ossining. What utterly amazed us, however, was the fact that the picture portrayed the life of bandits, and to show it to the prisoners was tantamount to teasing an alcoholic with a vision of a bottle of vodka.

But it was already late. We thanked the administration for a pleasant visit, the lion's cage opened, and we went away. After sitting in the electric chair, Mr. Adams suddenly became melancholy; he was silent all the way back.

Returning, we saw a truck that had run off the road. Its rear part was entirely off. A crowd was discussing the accident. Another crowd, much larger, was listening to an orator who was talking about that day's election. Here all the automobiles were carrying election stickers on their rear windows. Farther on, in the groves and forests flared the mad autumn.

In the evening we went with Dos Passes to look at the happiness of a New York counter-jumper. It was seven o'clock. A marquee the size of half a house was alight over the entrance of the Hollywood Restaurant. Young men in semi-military uniform, customary among hotel, restaurant, and theatre servants, were skilfully pushing people in. In the lobby hung photographs of naked girls pining with love for the populace.

As in all restaurants where it is customary to dance, the centre

of the Hollywood was occupied by a longish platform, the floor of which was no more polished than the arm rests of the electric chair. On the sides of this platform and rising somewhat above it were the tables. Over all rose the tumultuous jazz.

Jazz may be disliked, especially in America, where it is impossible to hide from it. But, generally speaking, American jazz is well played. The jazz of the Hollywood Restaurant presented an amazingly well-composed eccentric musical intricacy altogether pleasant to the ear.

When plates of rather uninteresting and in no way inspiring American soup stood before us, from behind the orchestra suddenly ran out girls half naked, three-quarters naked, and nine-tenths naked. They began to dance zealously on their floor space, their feathers dipping occasionally into plates of soup or jars of mustard.

It must have been thus, no doubt, that the ruthless fighters of Mohammed imagined their paradise – food on the table, a warm place, and houris performing their ancient tasks.

Later the girls ran out again a number of times: in the interval between the first and the second course, before coffee, and during coffee. The proprietor of the Hollywood would not let them be idle.

This joining of primitive American cooking with the passion of service somewhat upset us.

The restaurant was full of people. The dinner cost about two dollars per person. That means that the average New Yorker can

come here about once a month or less frequently. But then his pleasure is complete. He listens to jazz, he eats a cutlet, he looks at the houris, and he himself dances.

The faces of some of the dancers were stupid, others were pathetic, still others were cruel, but all were equally weary.

Three blocks away from the restaurant a black poodle with gay eyes was watching Dos Passos' old machine.

We parted. We had become saddened by New York's happiness.

"Good-bye, until Moscow," said the nice Dos.

"Good-bye, until Moscow," we replied.

8. A New York Arena

THE MEMBERS of the Dutch Treat Club meet every Tuesday in a white salon of the New York Hotel Ambassador.

The very name of the club gives a precise conception of the rights and duties of its members. Everyone pays for himself. On this powerful economic basis quite a number of journalists and writers joined together. Yet there is an exception. Guests of honour do not pay. But they are obliged to deliver an amusing speech. It does not matter what the subject is, so long as the speech is amusing and brief. If it turns out not to be funny, then at any rate it must be short, because the meeting is at lunch-time and the entire celebration lasts only one hour.

In reward for his speech the guest receives a light lunch and a large plaster-of-Paris medal of the club on which is portrayed a reveller, in a crushed top-hat, who has fallen asleep under the club's initials.

While all applaud, the medal is hung around the neck of the guest, and all quickly depart. Tuesday is a business day. All the members of the Dutch Treat Club are business people. At the stroke of two they are already sitting in their offices and doing business. They advance culture or simply make money.

At such a gathering we met the manager of Madison Square Garden, the largest New York arena, where boxing matches of importance are held, where the very biggest meetings and the

very biggest of everything take place.

On this particular Tuesday the guests were ourselves, the newly arrived Soviet authors, a famous American motion-picture actor, and the manager of Madison Square Garden whom we have just mentioned.

We prepared a speech, emphasizing chiefly not its humour but its brevity, and we attained the latter completely. The speech was translated into English and one of us, in no way embarrassed by the fact that he found himself in such a large gathering of experts of the English language, read it from a sheet of paper.

Here it is:

"Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen:

"We have come on a great journey from Moscow to see America. Besides New York we have had time to be in Washington and in Hartford. After living a month in New York we felt the pangs of love for your great and purely American city.

"Suddenly we were doused with cold water.

"'New York is not America,' we were told by our New York friends. 'New York is only the bridge betweenEurope and America. You are still on the bridge.'

"Then we went to Washington, District of Columbia, the capital of the United States, assuming thoughtlessly that surely this city was America. By the evening of the second day we felt with satisfaction that we were beginning to discriminate a little in matters American.

"'Washington is not America,' we were told. 'It is a city of

government officials. If you really want to see America, you are wasting your time here.'

"We dutifully put our scratched suitcases into an automobile and went to Hartford, in the state of Connecticut, where the great American writer, Mark Twain, spent his mature years.

"Here we were again honestly warned:

"'Bear in mind that Hartford is not yet America.'

"When we began to ask about the location of America, the Hartfordites pointed vaguely to the side.

"Now we have come to you, Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, and ask you to show where America really is located, because we have come here in order to learn as much as we can about it."

The speech was a great success. The members of the Dutch Treat Club applauded it a long time. Only much later we learned that most of the members of the club did not understand a single word of this speech, because the strange Russo-English accent of the orator drowned out completely the profound thoughts concealed in it.

Mr. Chairman, however, who sat near us, had evidently caught the sense of the speech. Turning his thin and clever face to us, he struck his little gavel and, stopping thus the storm of applause, said in the ensuing silence:

"I regret very much that I myself cannot tell you at the moment where America is located. Come here again on the sixth of November, 1936, for it will be clear then what is America and where it is located."

This was a witty and the only correct answer to our question. On November 6th was to be held the presidential election, and Americans felt that it would determine the path along which America was to proceed.

Then the tall man whom the chairman called "Colonel" was given the floor. The colonel began to bark at once, looking ironically at those forgathered here.

"My business," he said, "consists of renting Madison Square Garden to all-comers, and anything in the world that may happen there suits me. The Communists want it for a meeting against Hitler, so I rent the hall to the Communists. The Hitlerites want a meeting against the Communists, I rent the hall to the Hitlerites. In my building the Democrats may be cursing the Republicans today, but tomorrow the Republicans contend from the same platform that Mr. Roosevelt is a Bolshevik and leads America to anarchy. My hall is for everybody. I do my business. I nevertheless do have my convictions. Not long ago the defenders of Bruno Hauptmann, who killed the Lindbergh baby, wanted to rent my hall for agitation in favour of Hauptmann. I refused to rent my hall to those people. But anybody else is welcome to come. Pay your money and take your places, no matter who you are, Bolsheviks, anarchists, reactionaries, Baptists, it's all the same to me."

Having roared this out. the manly colonel sat down and took to finishing his coffee.

In Madison Square Garden, in this "hall for all," to use the

colonel's expression, we saw a feature boxing match between the former world champion, the Italian Carnera, and a German boxer, not the best but a first-rate one.

The arena of Madison Square Garden is not a circle like the usual circus arenas, but an elongated rectangle. At a very sharp incline around the rectangle rise rows of chairs. Even before the match begins the eyes of the onlooker are presented with an inspiring spectacle – he sees twenty-five thousand chairs at once, he sees twenty-five thousand seats in one theatre. In the event of a boxing match, chairs are placed also in the arena, surrounding the entire ring.

A strong white light fell on the platform of the ring. The rest of the place was in twilight. Raucous cries of vendors in white two-horned caps resounded throughout the huge building. The vendors, making their way between the rows of chairs, offered salted nuts, salted biscuits, chewing gum, and small bottles of whisky. Americans are by their nature a chewing people: they chew gum, candy, the ends of cigars; their jaws are always moving, clicking, and snapping.

Camera appeared in the next to the last match. Amid deafening greetings he walked into the ring and looked around with that sullen and apprehensive glance which is the attribute of all extremely tall and exceedingly strong men. It is the look of a man who is constantly fearful of crushing something or of mangling it.

Carnera is not known in his native Italy by his surname. There

he has a nickname: “Il Gigante”. “Il Gigante” is an exceedingly rangy and long-armed person. If he were a conductor of a Moscow street-car, he would very easily collect fares from people all over the car while standing on the front platform. “Il Gigante” threw off a bright-coloured robe and displayed himself in all his beauty – long, bony, looking like an unfinished Gothiccathedral. His opponent was a sturdy blond German of middle height.

The signal sounded, the managers ran out of the ring, and Camera quietly began to beat up the German. And he did not so much beat him as thrash him. The peasant Camera seemed to be performing the agricultural work customary to him. His two-metre-long arms rose and fell with the regularity of flails. Most frequently they struck the air, but on those rare occasions when they fell on the German the New York public shouted: “Carnera, boo!” The inequality of strength between the opponents was altogether too evident. Camera was much taller and heavier than the German.

The audience was excited, nevertheless, and yelled as if the issue of this fight had not been predetermined. Americans make a very noisy audience. At times it seems that they come to boxing and football matches not to look on, but to yell. The roar was constant throughout the match. Whenever the fans did not like something or thought that one of the boxers was not fighting fairly, was being cowardly or dishonest, they yelled in chorus: “Boo, boo!” and the auditorium was transformed into a drove of nice bisons in soft hats. The onlookers helped the fighters

with their outcries. For the three and a half rounds of the fight between Camera and the German the fans expended so much energy, made so many motions, that had this potential been properly utilized, it would have sufficed to build a six-story house with a flat sun roof and a cafeteria on the first floor.

In the third round the German finished almost blind. His eye had been badly hurt. In the middle of the fourth round he suddenly swung out his arms like a card player who was losing and walked out of the ring, refusing to continue the fight.

A frightful "Boo! boo!" filled the vast spaces of the Garden. It was not considered sporting to walk out of the ring. Boxers must be carried out of the ring; which is exactly what the audience expects for its money.

But the German was evidently so nauseated by the prospect of being knocked out in another minute or two that he decided to stop fighting.

The onlookers booed all the time that the unfortunate boxer was making his way back-stage. They were so indignant at the behaviour of the German that they did not even bother to cheer the victor. "Il Gigante" clasped his hands overhead, then put on his beautiful silken robe, befitting a courtesan, dived under the ropes of the ring, and in a dignified manner returned to the dressing-room, walking like an old work horse returning to the stable to shove its long muzzle into a bag of oats.

The last pair presented no special interest, and soon with others we were walking out. At the exit the news vendors were

selling the night editions of *Daily News* and *Daily Mirror*, on the first pages of which in large letters was printed the news that Camera won over his opponent in the fourth round. Between the minute this event occurred and the moment we bought the newspaper containing the news about the match no more than 'half an hour had elapsed.

In the nocturnal sky flamed the electric sign "Jack Dempsey". Having finished his career in the ring, the great boxing champion opened near Madison Square Garden a bar and restaurant where sport fans gather. It would never occur to any American to blame Dempsey for turning from a sportsman into a barman. The man is making money, he is doing business. Does it make any difference how he earns his money? That money is best of which there is most!

Boxing may be liked or disliked. That is the private affair of every man. Boxing is a sport, perhaps a rough and even an unnecessary sport, but still a sport. As for the American wrestling match, that is a spectacle which is in no way sporting, however astounding it may be.

We saw such a wrestling match in the same Madison Square Garden.

According to the rules of American wrestling… As a matter of fact, why speak of rules, when the peculiarity of this combat consists precisely in that it has no rules whatever? You may do anything you like: break your opponent's arm; shove fingers into his mouth in an effort to tear it, while at the same time the

opponent tries to bite off the fingers; pull the hair; simply beat him up; tear the face with finger-nails, pull off ears; choke his throat – everything is permitted. This form of combat is called wrestling, and there are actually people who evince a genuine interest in it.

The fighters roll in the ring, pressing against each other, and lie like that for ten minutes at a stretch. They weep in anguish and anger, they snort, spit, scream, and in general carry on in a disgusting and shameless manner – like sinners in hell.

The disgust is increased when a half-hour later you begin to understand that all this is the silliest kind of sham, that it is not even a street light between two drunken hooligans. When one strong man really wants to break the arm of another he can do it at any time with a certain twist. In wrestling, however, despite all the frightful gestures, there is never any harm done to the parts of the body. But Americans, like children, believe this naive deception and are frantic with delight.

Even if wrestling were carried on seriously it would merit nothing but contempt.

Certainly, this vulgar spectacle cannot compare with the competition of the cowboys! In this same rectangular arena, sullied by wrestling, we once saw a rodeo, a competition of Western cowherds.

This time there was no ring and there were no chairs. Clean sand lay from one end to the other of the huge arena. On a stand sat musicians in cowboy hats and blew for all they were worth

into their horns and fifes. The gates opened into the wooden enclosure, and out came the parade of the participants.

On fine little horses rode the representatives of the romantic states of America, cowboys and cowgirls from Texas, Arizona, Nevada. The brims of the heroic hats swayed. The girls greeted the public by raising their arms in a mannish salute. There were already several hundred riders in the arena, yet more cowboys continued to ride in.

When the gala part of the performance was over, the artistic part began.

The cowboys took their turns in riding out of the gates atop short, but wildly jumping, steers. In all probability these steers had been hurt before and were brought into the arena because they bucked with incredible persistence. The task of the rider was to stay on the back of the animal as long as possible, without catching on with his hands and while holding his hat in his right hand. From the ceiling hung a huge stop clock which the entire hall could watch. One cowboy held on to an infuriated bull for seventeen seconds, another for twenty-five. Some riders were thrown to the ground after two or three seconds. The winner managed to hang on for something like forty seconds. The cowboys had the intent, bashful faces of country lads who did not want to disgrace themselves before their guests.

Later, one after the other, the cowboys rode out on their horses, swinging a lasso wound in a circle. In front of the horse, its little tail up, a calf hopped around in an exhilarating gallop.

Again the stop clock went into action. Unexpectedly the rope flew out from the hands of the cowboys. The loop hung in the air like something alive. For a second the calf lay on the ground, and the cowboy hurried to it in order as quickly as possible to bind it according to all the rules of the Texas science and to transform it into a well-tied, although a desperately bellowing, bundle.

The rodeo fans yelled and put down in their little books the seconds and fractions of seconds.

The most difficult feat was left to the end. Here the cowboys had something to work on. An angry, bucking cow was led out of the gates. She dashed over the arena with a speed one would never expect of any domesticated animal. The mounted cowboy pursued the cow, jumped on her neck at full gallop, and, seizing her by the horns, forced her to the ground. The most important and the most difficult part was to throw the cow to the ground. Many did not succeed in that. Having felled the cow, it was necessary to bind all her four legs and to milk a little milk into a little bottle, which the cowboy hurriedly pulled out of his pocket. He was allowed only one minute for all this. Having milked the cow, the cowboy triumphantly lifted the little bottle over his head and cheerily ran behind the barrier.

The brilliant exercises of the cowboys, their songs sung in a minor key, and their black guitars, made us forget the heavy thuds of boxing gloves, the dripping maws, and the tear-smeared faces of the wrestlers.

The colonel was right. In his arena one could see both the good

and the bad.

9. We Purchase an Automobile and Depart

ON THE way to Sing Sing and even before that, during lunch with Mr. Adams, we began urging him to join us in a great trip across America. Since we had no real arguments to offer, we repeated monotonously one and the same refrain:

"Come, come with us! It will be very interesting."

We coaxed him just as a young man coaxes a young girl to love him. There is no reason for it, but he wants someone to fall in love with him, so he presses his suit.

Mr. Adams did not say anything to it. He looked as coy as a young girl and tried to change the subject.

Then we increased the pressure. We even thought up a torture to which we subjected this good-natured elderly gentleman throughout an entire week.

"Remember, Mr. Adams, that you will be responsible if we come to a bad end. We are likely to get lost in that country filled with gangsters, petrol pumps, and ham and eggs. We shall get lousy right before your eyes in this New York, and that will be the end of us."

"No, no, gentlemen!" said Mr. Adams. "No! You mustn't press me so hard. It is most inconsiderate of you. You don't understand that, Mr. Ilf and Mr. Petrov!"

But we persisted, pitilessly egging our new friend on to the

point of wavering, and then as soon as possible we would strike this fat iron, incased in a neat grey suit, while it was hot.

Mr. Adams and his wife belonged to that sort of loving couples who understand each other from the first glance.

In Mrs. Adams's glance could be read:

"I know that you want very much to go. You are scarcely able to contain yourself from starting on a journey with the first people you meet. Such is your nature. It means nothing to you to abandon Baby and me. You are as curious as a little piccaninny, although you are already sixty-three years old. Just think of the number of times you have crossed America by automobile and by train! You know the country as well as you know your own apartment. But if you want to take another look at it, go ahead; I am ready to do anything for you. But one thing I cannot understand: which one of you will drive the car? However, do the best you can and don't bother about me at all!"

"No, no, Becky!" One could read the response in Mr. Adams's glance. "It would be unfair and presumptuous to think of me so harshly. I don't want to go anywhere at all. I merely want to help these people. Besides, I would be lost without you. You had better go with us – that would be best. You are ever so much more curious than I. Everybody knows that. Come along. Incidentally, you will drive the car."

"And the baby?" replied Mrs. Adams's glance.

"Yes, yes! The baby! That's terrible! I quite forgot!"

Whenever the wordless conversation reached that point, Mr.

Adams turned toward us and exclaimed:

"No, no! "It is quite impossible!"

"Why impossible?" we asked plaintively. "Everything is possible. It will be so nice, so very nice. We'll travel, stop to see places, stay in hotels."

"Whoever heard of anybody stopping in hotels?" Mr. Adams suddenly cried out. "We will stop in tourist houses or in camps."

"There! You see!" we caught him up. "You know everything! Come along with us! Please come with us! We beg you! Mrs. Adams, you come with us! Come with the whole family!"

"And the baby?" cried both parents.

We answered cavalierly:

"You can put the baby in a public nursery."

"No, no, gentlemen! Oh, no! You forgot; there are no nurseries here. You are not in Moscow!"

That was right. We were not in Moscow. From the windows of the Adams apartment could be seen the denuded trees of Central Park and from the Zoological Garden came the hoarse cries of parrots in imitation of automobile horns.

"Then leave her with your friends," we continued.

Husband and wife became thoughtful. At this point everything was spoiled by the baby herself entering the room in a night-suit with a Mickey Mouse embroidered on the chest. She came to say good-night before going to bed. With groans the parents ran to their little daughter. They embraced her, kissed her, and each time turned to us. Now you could read the same thing in

the glances of both of them:

"What? To exchange this beautiful little daughter of ours for these two foreigners? Never!"

The appearance of the baby threw us back to where we had started. We had to begin all over again. So we launched new attacks.

"What a fine baby! How old is she? Is she really only two years old? Why, she looks as if she were eight! What an amazingly independent child! You should really give her more freedom! Don't you think that the constant care of parents retards the development of a child?"

"Yes, yes, gentlemen!" said the happy father, pressing the child to his stomach. "You are only joking!"

When the child was put to bed we talked for about five minutes of [his and that, for the sake of appearances, and then we again began to press our suit.

We proposed a number of things about the baby, but not one of them was suitable. In utter despair we suddenly said, as if remarking, idly:

"Don't you know some respectable lady who could live with the baby during our absence?"

There was, it seemed, such a lady. We began to develop the idea, when Mr. Adams rose suddenly. The lenses of his spectacles began to gleam. He grew serious.

"Gentlemen, we need two days to decide this question."

For two days we wandered around New York, annoying

each other with questions as to what might happen in case the Adamses refused to go on the journey with us. Where will we then find our ideal creature? And we spent a long time in front of stores that sold things for the road. Scotch cloth bags with zippers, rucksacks of sailcloth, soft leather suitcases, plaids, and thermos bottles – everything reminded one of a journey and lured one to start on it.

Exactly at the appointed hour, Mr. Adams appeared in our hotel room. He was unrecognizable. He was solemn and deliberate. All the buttons of his vest were buttoned. Thus the ambassador of a neighbouring friendly power comes to call on the minister of foreign affairs and declares that the government of his excellency considers itself now in a state of war with the power the representative of which is the above-mentioned minister of foreign affairs.

"Mr. Ilf and Mr. Petrov," said the little fat man, puffing and wiping icy sweat off his bald head, "we have decided to accept your proposal."

We wanted to embrace him, but he wouldn't let us, saying:

"This is too serious an occasion, gentlemen. We cannot lose any more time. You must understand it."

In the course of those two days Mr. Adams not only made up his mind and reached a decision, but he worked out our itinerary in detail. The itinerary made our heads go around.

At first we were to cross the long and narrow state of New York throughout its length, stopping in Schenectady, the city of

the electric industry. The next important stop was to be Buffalo.

"It may seem too trivial to take a look at Niagara Falls, gentlemen, but it must be seen."

Then, along the shore of Lake Erie, we were to proceed to Detroit. There we were to examine the Ford plants. Then on to Chicago. After that the road was to take us into Kansas City. Through Oklahoma we would drive into Texas. From Texas to Santa Fe in the state of New Mexico. Here we visit the Indian territory. Beyond Albuquerque we cross the Rocky Mountains and drive into the Grand Canyon. Then Las Vegas and the famous dam on the Colorado River, Boulder Dam. Then on to California after crossing the Sierra Nevada range. Coming back from the shores of the Pacific Ocean we return along the Mexican border through El Paso, San Antonio, and Houston. Here we go along the Gulf of Mexico. We are now in the Black Belt: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama. We stop in New Orleans, and across the northern corner of Florida, through Tallahassee, Savannah, and Charleston, we move toward Washington, the capital of the United States.

Now it is easy to write about it. But then… how many shouts, arguments, attempts to persuade one another! We wanted to go everywhere, but we were limited by time. The entire automobile journey had to be made in two months, not a day longer. The Adamses declared firmly that they could part from their baby for sixty days and no more.

The difficulty now was an automobile: what kind of an

automobile to buy?

Although we knew beforehand that we would buy the cheapest automobile that we could find anywhere in the United States, we nevertheless decided to visit the automobile show of 1936. It was the month of November, 1935, and the show had just opened.

On the two stories of the exhibition building, as if by sleight-of-hand, were gathered all the fairy-tale constellations of the American automobile world. There were no orchestras, no palms, no refreshment stands – in a word, there were no additional attractions. The automobiles themselves were so beautiful that nothing else was needed. The chastity of the American technical style consists in this: that the essence of the thing is not spoiled with anything extraneous. An automobile is the object for which people came here, so only that was here. One was free to touch it, one could sit in it, turn its wheel, light its lamps, examine its motor.

The long bodies of expensive Packards, Cadillacs, and Rolls-Royces stood on mirrored stands. On special platforms were specially polished chassis and motors. Nickelled wheels, displaying the elasticity of the springs, were spun around, and gears were shifted to demonstrate their smooth meshing.

Each firm demonstrated its own technical trick, its one improvement, designed to clinch the enticement of the purchaser – upset his, but chiefly his wife's, equanimity. All the automobiles displayed by the Chrysler firm were gold coloured – there are such bugs, coffee-gold in colour. These automobiles

were surrounded by one huge moan. Thin pretty little American women with the blue eyes of vestal virgins were ready to commit murder for the sake of owning such a machine. Their husbands turned pale at the thought that that night they would have to remain alone with their wives, with nowhere to run to. Many, many are the conversations in New York at night after the opening of an automobile show! It goes ill with a man on the opening day of such an exhibit. He will wander for a long time around the marital couch where, cuddling like a kitten, the beloved creature sobs while he pleads:

"But, Mabel, our Plymouth has gone only twenty thousand miles. It's an ideal car."

But the lovely creature does not even listen to her husband. She will repeat one thing over and over:

"I want a golden Chrysler!"

And that night the marital couch will be transformed for the husband into an Indian fakir's couch covered with spikes.

But the low powerful Cords with crystal lights, which during the day are hidden in the fenders for better streamlining, compel one to forget the golden bugs. American women walk into these machines and sit in them by the hour. But they have not the strength to walk out. Their emotions are completely disturbed. They press a button, and the lamps triumphantly creep out of the fenders. They again touch the button, and the lamps hide in their nests, and again nothing is seen on the outside, except the chaste, shining fender.

But everything dims – even the gold and the crystal – before the rare and apparently old-fashioned forms of the huge Rolls-Royces. At first you want to go past these machines. At first you are even surprised that, in the midst of these slick models, hidden lights and golden colours, stand these black simple machines. But on looking closely you discover that therein precisely lies their distinctiveness. Here is a machine for the rest of your life, the machine for exceedingly wealthy old ladies, the machine for princes. Here Mabel discovers that she will never attain complete happiness, that she will never be a princess. Her Frank earns altogether too little money in his office.

Never will this automobile be out of fashion. Never will it grow old, just as diamonds and sables never grow old. Ah, it is terrible even to sit in it! You feel like the lord protector of the seal who has lost the seal and will be instantly dismissed.

We sat a while in a Rolls-Royce, but decided not to buy it. It was too luxurious for us. It would have been of hardly any use on that trying journey which was before us. Besides, it cost many thousands of dollars.

Then we moved from automobile to automobile. We sat in a blue Buick and in a small and cheap Chevrolet. We called forth Cord lights out of their hiding places by pressing a button, we passed our hands over Plymouths, Oldsmobiles, Studebakers, Hudsons, Nashes. We even pressed the horn of a Cadillac, assuming the air that on that alone depended our decision to buy or not to buy. But after evoking a truly marvellous and mighty

roar of the steppes from the nether regions of the machine, we walked away. No! We would not buy it! It was not within our means!

We visited other automobile showrooms. They were located for the most part under the open sky on vacant city lots, but all their grandeur was spoiled by a huge sign reading, "Used Automobiles".

Here also were Studebakers, Oldsmobiles, Hudsons, and Plymouths. But what time had done to them! No repair work could hide their respectable old age.

"These machines are for very wealthy people," Mr. Adams said suddenly. "I advise you to buy a new Ford. A used car costs little, but you never can tell how many times you will have to repair it on the road nor how much petrol and oil it consumes. No, no, gentlemen! It would be a foolish thing to buy second-hand stuff."

Although in every one of these markets under a special shed stood an automobile decorated with the attractive placard "Today's Bargain," and although we were insanely intent on acquiring this bargain (the price was incredibly low and it looked simply remarkable), Mr. Adams was implacable and restrained us from a dangerous purchase.

We bought a new Ford.

At first we wanted to buy a Ford with a radio set, but we were dissuaded by a terrible story. Not long ago an accident occurred. In the mountains an automobile was smashed. The

wounded people lay in it for several hours under the sound of fox-trots broadcast by the surviving radio set. After hearing that we refused to buy a radio. Incidentally, it cost only forty-two dollars.

We also declined to purchase a heater. What's the use of a heater when you have to keep a window open anyway? Otherwise the wind-shield will sweat. Besides, the heater cost a lot – twelve dollars.

An ash-tray was inexpensive, but we didn't have the time to buy one.

In a word, we bought the most ordinary Ford, without a radio, without a heater, without an ash-tray, without a rear trunk, but with an electric lighter.

It was sold to us by a dealer in the lower part of town, somewhere on Second Avenue, corner First Street – not the most aristocratic part of the city. Our new automobile, or, as they say in America, the "car," stood in an empty garage. The garage was dark and dirty, and the dealer looked like a gangster and didn't even express any special desire to sell us the machine. If we buy it, all right! If we don't, don't! Nevertheless, we saw at once that this was just what we had sought. The automobile was quite new, of a sedate mouse colour, looked expensive, yet cost little. What else can one ask in an automobile? Free cakes? – as Mayakovsky used to say. There are no such wonders in the world! We bought it at once.

We fell in love with our new car, and when all the arrangements were over, when we received the documents

entitling us to the possession of the machine, when it already had its yellow number 30-99-74, and the inscription "New York," and was insured against the possibility of our running into anyone, and also against the possibility of someone running into us, when for the first time we drove with our own machine through New York and Mrs. Adams sat at the wheel, while Mr. Adams himself sat beside her – we were very proud and did not understand why the great city did not say anything about it. To make us feel good, old man Adams said that in all his life he had never, never seen a better, more comfortable, and easier riding, and more economical, automobile than ours.

"Yes, it is remarkably comfortable, and it is easy to drive. You were very fortunate that you bought this and no other automobile," Mrs. Adams confirmed.

We, too, were puffed up with satisfaction at having managed to pick out the very best automobile out of the twenty-five million automobiles in America.

We spent the last night with the Adamses.

We decided to rise as early as possible and drive off while poor Baby was still asleep. But we failed in that. The little girl discovered us in the act of moving suitcases. It was pitiful to look at the Adamses. With lying voices they assured Baby that they would return in an hour. The Negress wept. We felt that we were utter scoundrels.

The machine glided over the damp asphalt of Central Park West. The speedometer began to register miles. We started on

our long trek.

Part II. Through the eastern states

10. On the Automobile Highway

THE PROUD towers of New York were behind us. Framed in stainless steel, the facets of the Empire State Building shone in the morning murkiness hovering over the gigantic city. A thin mist enveloped the summits of Radio City, Chrysler, Woolworth, and other skyscrapers, named and unnamed. Now we were driving through a lively and unpretentious suburb.

Muddy water ran over the pavement, which was lined with parallel strips. The green iron trestle of the elevated railway slit the street lengthwise at the height of the fifth story. The high-strung people of New York raced in their automobiles on their sundry errands. A striped barber pole flashed by; it was a revolving glass cylinder with green, red, and blue stripes. In a red-brick house toasted sandwiches were sold. As a matter of fact, all the houses here were brick and all were red. What can one like here, what can one learn to love here?

Like all the large cities of the world, New York is an appalling city. Here millions of people bravely struggle for mere existence. There is too much money in this city. Some people have too much while others have too little. And it is this that casts a tragic light on all that happens in New York.

We parted from the city for two months.

The route of the first day was clear. We were going to Schenectady along U.S. Highway No. 9, through Poughkeepsie (it actually takes twelve letters to write that word in English), the Hudson, and the capital of the state of New York, Albany.

The regimen of the journey was also clear. We had at our disposal sixty days, and we had approximately ten thousand miles to cover in that time. Even if we were to drive at the rate of two hundred and fifty miles a day, we would cover that distance in forty days. We set aside fifteen days for surveys, sightseeing, and so forth. All told, fifty-five days. That left us with five days in reserve for unforeseen developments. To this it should be added that a mile consists of one and six-tenth kilometres.

The suitcase with our belongings was placed in the baggage rack located under our back seat. In it were our shirts, handkerchiefs, and, most important of all, letters of introduction – new letters of introduction to cover the entire route. Again, the addressees were professors, people of the theatre, poets, engineers, politicians) governors, and senators.

To the numerous letters received from Dos Passos was attached a long list with the characteristics of each addressee, who he was, what was his occupation, and in what way he could be useful to us.

In brief, we had a lot of recommendational merchandise.

It is high time to keep our promise and write a separate chapter about American roads. They deserve it. Maybe they deserve even

more— a whole inspired book.

This was not our first time on an automobile road. Yet, although since then we have become used to munificent highway arrangements, our first impression remains ineradicable. We drove over a white iron and concrete plate, eleven inches thick. This ideally even surface, being slightly rough, had a large coefficient of traction. Rain did not make it slippery. We drove over it with the ease and noiselessness with which a drop of rain runs down glass. Along its length the road was marked with white, thick stripes. Four automobiles could travel down this road at once in both directions. These roads, like the roads of ancient Rome, are built practically for eternity.

Mrs. Adams looked at us appealingly from time to time, but we pretended we did not understand her glances, although we really did. Mrs. Adams wanted to drive faster. But at the time he sold us the machine, the dealer recommended that the first few days it be driven no faster than forty miles an hour. This is necessary so as not to damage the motor before it has time to get under way. Mr. Adams glanced at the speedometer and, seeing the beautiful thin arrow wavering close to the figure 50, became anxious at once:

"No, no, Becky, it's impossible! It's impossible! The car is too stiff. You must be very, very careful with it. Isn't it so, gentlemen?"

Not understanding anything yet about the treatment of automobiles, we merely nodded, without taking our eyes off the

white stripes of the road.

Oh, that road! For two months it ran to meet us – concrete, asphalt, or grained, made of gravel and permeated with heavy oil.

It is madness to think that it is possible to drive slowly down an American federal highway. It is not enough to have the desire to be careful. Side by side with your machine pass hundreds of other machines, and thousands push from behind. You meet with tens of thousands passing by, and all of them drive for all they are worth, sweeping you along with them in their satanic flight. All of America speeds somewhere, and evidently never will stop. Steel dogs and birds gleam on the noses of its machines.

Among the millions of automobiles flying from ocean to ocean, we, too, were a grain of dust chased by a petrol storm which has been raging for ever so many years over America.

Our machine raced past rows of petrol stations, each of which had six, eight, or even ten red or yellow pumps. We stopped at one of these to fill our tank.

From a small neat building, in the large glass show window of which could be seen all kinds of automobile greases and cleaning powders, came a man in a cap with a striped top and in striped overalls, the unbuttoned upper part of which revealed a striped collar with a black leather bow tie. Such is the style of mechanics – to wear leather ties. He placed a rubber spigot into the opening of the tank, and the columnlike pump began to count off automatically the number of gallons swallowed by our automobile. Simultaneously, figures jumped out on the counting

machine of the little column, indicating the cost of the petrol. With each new gallon the apparatus gave off a melodic ring. This ringing is mere mechanical smartness. One can get along without it.

The tank was filled and we were ready to drive on, but the gentleman in the striped cap and leather necktie did not consider his task completed, although he had done everything that he was supposed to do. He had sold us eleven gallons of petrol, exactly as much as we had asked for. But only then did the great American service begin.

The man from the petrol station lifts the hood of the machine and tests the level of oil in the motor with a calibrated metallic ruler. If it is necessary to add oil, he brings it at once in a handsome tin can or a tall wide-necked bottle.

Then he tests the air pressure in the tires. We carried a pressure of thirty-five pounds in the front tyres and thirty in the rear. He will let out extra air or add as much as is needed.

Then the striped gentleman turns his attention to the windshield. He wipes it with a clean soft rag. If the pane is very dirty, he rubs it with a special powder.

All of this is done quickly but without any fuss. While this work is going on, which does not cost the traveller a single cent, the man at the petrol station will tell you about the road and about the weather you may expect to encounter on your route.

After everything is in order and it seems that nothing else could be added in the way of service rendered to the automobile,

the traveller, spoiled by service, begins to imagine that the right front door of his machine does not close tightly enough. Smiling his good wishes, the striped gentleman pulls instruments from his rear pockets – and in two minutes the door is in order.

Besides that, the traveller receives an excellent map of the state printed by the oil companies that sell petrol on the roads. There are road maps published by Standard Oil, Shell, Socony, Conoco, and Esso. All these are beautifully printed on excellent paper. They are easy to read and they give absolutely accurate and the very latest information. It is impossible to receive a map which would tell about the condition of the road the year before. All the maps are up to date, and if there is any serious repair work going on on any of the roads it is indicated on the map. On the reverse side are listed the hotels and tourist homes in which one may spend the night. Even the sights along the road are enumerated.

All this service is given free of charge with the petrol you purchase. The same service is rendered even when you buy only two gallons of it. Difference in treatment is unknown here. A dilapidated Chevrolet or a shining Deusenberg that costs thousands of dollars, the wonder of the automobile show of 1936, will find here the same impartial, rapid, and unruffled service.

In farewell, the attendant of the petrol station told us that he personally would drive the new machine not at the rate of forty miles an hour but at thirty, and not only the first five hundred miles but the first thousand. That would make the motor work ideally in the future. Mrs. Adams was completely overwhelmed

by this, and, smiling wryly, held her speed at 28–29 miles.

We men, however, were occupied with calculations. How pleasant it is to be busy when one really has no business to attend to! Our sedate, mouse-coloured Ford showed that it used one gallon of petrol (three and a half litres) every sixteen miles. In the state of New York petrol costs sixteen cents a gallon. That meant that a full tank of fourteen gallons, costing two dollars and twenty-four cents, presented us with the possibility of driving two hundred and twenty-four miles. After converting the miles into kilometres, we discovered that an automobile journey is much less expensive in the United States than in Europe.

This comforting arithmetic helped us endure the insults of the automobiles that passed us. There is something insulting in being passed. In America the passion to pass each other is strongly developed and leads to a greater number of collisions and all the other kinds of road mishaps which in America bear the name of "accident". Americans travel fast. Every year they travel faster and faster. Every year the roads become better and better, and the automobile motors more and more powerful. They drive fast, daringly, and, on the whole, not too carefully. At any rate, dogs in America have a better understanding of what an automobile highway is than do the automobilists themselves. Wise American dogs never run out on the highway and never race after an automobile with an optimistic bark. They know what that leads to. They will be crushed – and that's all there is to it.

We stopped for lunch at a roadway restaurant with the sign

"Dine and Dance". We were the only ones in a large, dim room which had a square in the middle for dancing.

Out of small bowls we ate a brownish soup, accompanied by crackers, small salty rusks which justified their name by their incredible crackling when bitten. When we were attacking the large T-bone steaks – beefsteaks of frozen meat with a T-shaped bone in the middle – the owner of the restaurant and entertainment aggregate "Dine and Dance" drove up in an old Ford. He began to drag out of his machine and into the hall bundles of dried cornstalks to decorate the room with them. That evening the youth of the district was to assemble and dance. It was all very pleasant and peaceful – even patriarchal – yet we had driven only a hundred miles away from New York. Only a hundred miles behind us was the noisiest population in the world, while here was quiet, peace, heart-throbbing bucolic flirtation during dances, cornstalks, even flowers.

At the very doors of the quiet restaurant lay the dun concrete of a first-class highway. Again the wound in Mrs. Adams's heart opened the moment she took the wheel. Thirty miles an hour – and not another mile!

A foreigner, even one who has no command of English, can drive out on an American road without any apprehension. He will never get lost, no matter how strange the country is to him. Even a child, even a deaf-and-dumb person can freely make his way along these roads. They are carefully numbered, and the numbers are met so frequently that it is impossible to make a mistake of

direction.

Occasionally, two roads become one for a time. Then the roadway post contains two numbers – the number of the federal road above that of the state road. At times, five, seven, even ten roads come together. Then the quantity of numbers grows, and with it the post on which they are inscribed, so that the indicator begins to look like an ancient Indian totem pole.

There is a great variety of different signposts on the road, but-remarkable distinction! – not one among them is superfluous, not one might distract the attention of the driver. The signs are placed sufficiently low above-ground so that the driver may see them on his right without taking his eyes off the road. They are never conditional and never require any decoding. In America you will never find a mysterious blue triangle in a red square, a sign over which you may wrack your brain for hours.

Most of the road indicators are on round mirrored glasses which at night reflect the glare of automobile lights. Thus, the sign shines of itself. Black inscriptions against a yellow background (these are the most noticeable colours) warn: "Slow," "School Zone," "Stop Danger," "Narrow Bridge," "Speed Limit 30 Miles," "Railroad Crossing," or "Dip-30 Feet Away"—and precisely thirty feet away there will be a rut. However, such an inscription is met with as rarely as the dip itself. At each road crossing stand poles with thick wooden arrows. On the arrows are the names of cities and the mileage to them.

Noisily, and making a baying sound, heavy silver autotanks with milk fled past us. They carry milk for New York's seven million population. They frighten you to death – these huge milk machines which suddenly appear, approaching with the rapidity of a squall. The tanks are especially grandiose at night when, surrounded by a chain of green and red lanterns, they fly without a stop toward New York. Seven million people want to drink milk, so it must be delivered on time.

Even more imposing are the trucks with special attachments which transport at once three or four new automobiles. At a distance of approximately a thousand miles, delivery by truck costs less than by railroad – so, again a storm descends upon us, this time gleaming with lacquer and nickel. We close our eyes for a second against its unendurable glare, and drive on.

Roads are one of the most remarkable phenomena of American life – of its life and not only of its technique. The United States has hundreds of thousands of miles of so-called highways, roads of high quality, along which regular automobile communication passes. Autobuses race on schedule at the rate of sixty miles per hour, and transportation on them is twice as cheap as by rail.

At any time of day, at any time of year, in the worst possible weather, passenger autobuses race across America. When at night you see a heavy and threatening machine flying across the waste spaces and the deserts, you involuntarily remember the post diligences of Bret Harte run by desperate drivers.

An autobus travels down a gravel highway. It turns large stones over and sucks the small ones after itself. It cannot be late. Where are we? In the state of New Mexico? Faster, faster! The young chauffeur steps on the throttle, Carlsbad, Lordsburg, Las Cruces! The machine fills with noisy wind, and in it the passengers, slumbering in their easy-chairs, suddenly hear the great melody of the American continent.

America is located on a large automobile highway.

When we shut our eyes and try to resurrect in memory the country in which we spent four months, we see before us not Washington with its gardens, columns, and a full collection of monuments, not New York with its skyscrapers, its poverty and its wealth, not San Francisco, with its steep streets and suspension bridges, not hills, not factories, not canyons, but the crossing of two roads and a petrol station against the background of telegraph wires and advertising bill-boards.

11. The Small Town

WE STOPPED in a small town and dined in a drug-store.

It is necessary to explain here the nature of a small American town, and what sort of drug-store it is in which one may dine. That story might be entitled "Pharmacist Without Mysticism, or The Secret of the American Drug-store".

When America's big business men, in search of profit, directed their attention to the drug business, they were first of all curious to find out what pharmacists were really doing behind their partitions.

What were they grinding there with their pestles in those thick china mortars, while frowning importantly? Was it medicines? Well, now, how many medicines are there in the world? Let's say fifty – a hundred – well, a hundred and twenty at the most! A hundred and twenty febrifugal, stimulant, or sedative medicines! Why then prepare them in an amateurish way in drug-stores? They should be produced in mass quantity in factories.

The fact that medicines began to be prepared in factories didn't make it any easier for the sick man – the medicines were no cheaper. But the pharmacists lost their income. That was taken over by drug manufacturers.

To recoup their lost incomes the outsmarted pharmacists began to sell ice-cream, thirst-quenching waters, small notions, toys, cigarettes, kitchen utensils – in a word, they went in for

anything at all.

And so the present-day American drug-store is a large bar with a high counter and revolving grand piano stools before it. Behind the counter, back and forth, run red-headed young men with white sailor caps cocked on the sides of their heads, and coquettish young women, with permanent waves that will last for years, who look like the latest and at the moment the most fashionable movie star. At times they resemble Kay Francis, at other times Greta Garbo; before that they all looked likeGloria Swanson. The girls whip cream, open highly polished nickel taps out of which emerge noisy streams of seltzer water, roast chickens, and throw pieces of ice into a glass with a resounding tinkle.

Although the drug-store has been long ago converted into an eating establishment, its proprietor is nevertheless obliged to be a pharmacist and have a certain baggage of learning, which is insistently indispensable while serving coffee, ice-cream, toasted bread, and other drug-store merchandise.

In the most distant corner of this lively establishment is a small glass closet with little jars, boxes, and bottles. One has to spend at least a half-hour in a drug-store before one notices this little closet. In it are stored the drugs.

There is not one drug-store left in New York where the pharmacist himself prepares medicines. Oh, this remarkable establishment is wrapped in the aureole of medical mysteries! To prove that here medicines are actually prepared by hand, the

proprietor of the drug-store displays in the window a pile of old yellowed prescriptions. It all looks like the den of a medieval alchemist. This is no ordinary drug-store. In the latter you can eat, buy a pocket watch or an alarm clock, a pot or a toy; you can even buy or rent a book.

We looked sadly at the menu. Dinner #1, Dinner #2, Dinner #3, Dinner #4—Dinner Number One, Dinner Number Two, Dinner Number Three, Dinner Number Four! Dinner #4 costs twice as much as Dinner #2, but that doesn't mean that it is twice as good. No! There is simply twice as much of it. If in Dinner #2 a course called "country sausage" consists of three chopped off sausages, then in Dinner #4 there will be six chopped off sausages, but the taste will be exactly the same.

After dinner we become interested in the spiritual fare in which the drug-store traded. Here were wildly decorated picture postcards with views of local sights – very cheap, two for five cents. Black ones cost five cents apiece. The difference in price was right. The black postcards were excellent, while the coloured, ones were a lot of trash. We examined the shelf of books. They were all novels: *Sinning is Man's Game, The Flame of Burnt-Out Love, First Might, Affairs of the Married.*

"You must not be shocked, gentlemen," said Mr.Adams. "You are in a small American town."

Many people think that America is a land of skyscrapers, that day and night one hears the clatter of elevated and underground railways, the hellish roar of automobiles and the overwhelming

desperate cries of stock exchange dealers who rush among the skyscrapers, constantly waving their constantly falling stocks and bonds. This conception is firm, ancient, and customary.

Of course, it's all there – the skyscrapers, the elevated railways, and the falling stocks. But those are the attributes only of New York and Chicago. And even there the stockbrokers don't rush around sidewalks, throwing American citizens off their feet, but, entirely unnoticed by the population of America, they abide in their stock exchanges, performing all their machinations inside those monumental buildings.

New York has many skyscrapers; Chicago has a few less; but in the other large cities they are few in number – maybe two or three per city. They tower there in a lonely fashion, in the manner of a waterworks or a firehouse tower. In small towns there are no skyscrapers.

America is preponderantly a country of one-story and two-story houses. The majority of the American population lives in small cities where the population is three, five, ten, fifteen thousand.

What traveller has not experienced that first and unrepeatable feeling of excited expectation that possesses the soul upon entering a city where he has never been before? Every street and every lane open new and newer mysteries to the thirsty eyes of the traveller. Toward evening it begins to seem to him that he has fallen in love with that city. The sight of the street mob, the architecture of the buildings, the smell of the market, and finally

the colour peculiar only to that city, compose the traveller's first and truest impressions. He can live in the city a year, explore its nooks and corners, make friends, then forget the names of all those friends, forget all that he had so conscientiously learned, yet he will never forget his first impressions.

Nothing of the kind can be said about American cities. Of course, even in America there are a few cities that have their inimitable personalities – San Francisco, New York, New Orleans, Santa Fe. One can be enthusiastic about them, one can be amazed by them, love them or detest them – at any rate, they evoke some definite feeling – but almost all other American cities resemble each other like the Canadian quintuplets, whom even their tender mother mistakes for each other. This colourless and depersonalized gathering of brick, asphalt, automobiles, and bill-boards evokes in the traveller only a sense of annoyance and disappointment.

And if the traveller drives into the first small town with a feeling of excited expectation, then in the next town this feeling cools considerably, in the third it is exceeded by astonishment, in the fourth by an ironic smile, in the fifth, seventeenth, eighty-sixth, and hundred and fiftieth it is transformed into indifference – as if the speeding automobile were being met not by the new and unknown cities of an unexplored country, but rather by ordinary railroad sidings with the inevitable bell, hot-water boiler, and the watchman in the red cap.

The city's principal street passes right through the city. It is

called Main Street (which means the principal street) or State Street (the street of the state) or Broadway.

Every small town wants to be like New York. There are New Yorks of two thousand population, there are New Yorks of eighteen hundred. We even found one New York consisting of nine hundred inhabitants, and it was a real city. Its inhabitants walked on their Broadway, their noses high in the air. They weren't quite sure which Broadway was generally regarded as the more important, theirs or New York's.

The architecture of the buildings in the principal street cannot present the eye with artistic delights. It consists of brick, the frankest kind of brick, laid in two-story cubes. Here people make money, so there is no room for abstract embellishments.

The lower part of the city (downtown) is called the business centre. Here are the trading establishments, business offices, the motion-picture theatres. There are no people on the sidewalks, but the streets are full of automobiles. They occupy all the free places at the side. They are forbidden to stop only before fire hydrants or driveways, which is indicated by the sign "No Parking".

It becomes at times a task of torment to find a place where you may leave your machine or, as the Russians in America say, where you can "park" it. One evening we were in San Diego, a city on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. We had to park our machine in order to have our dinner, so we drove a full hour through the city, consumed with the desire to park. The city was

so full of machines that there wasn't room for just one additional machine.

An American small town acquires its character not from its buildings, but from its automobiles and everything that is connected with them— petrol stations, repair stations, Ford stores, or General Motors stores. These attributes apply to all American cities. You may drive a thousand miles, two thousand, three thousand, natural phenomena will change and the climate, the watch will have to be moved ahead, but the little town in which you stop for the night will be exactly the same as the one which you had seen somewhere two weeks before. Like the previous one, it will have no pedestrians, there will be as many if not more automobiles parking at the side-walk, the signs of drug-stores and garages will shine with the same neons or argons, the principal street will be called, as before, Broadway, Main Street, or State Street, the only possible difference being that some of the houses may be built of different materials.

The residential part, or the uptown, is always utterly deserted. The silence there is broken only by the rustle of the hoods of passing automobiles. While the men work in the business centre, the housewives are busy house-cleaning. In the one- or two-storied houses vacuum cleaners hiss, furniture is moved, and the gold frames of photographic portraits are dusted. There is much work, for there are six or seven rooms in each house. It is enough to be in one of them in order to know what furniture will be found in millions of other such houses, to know even how it would be

arranged. In the disposition of the rooms, of the placing of the furniture, in all those respects, there is amazing similarity.

The houses and the yards – in which there is the inevitable light garage made of boards, which is never locked – are never separated by fences. A cement strip leads from the door of the house to the sidewalk. A thick layer of fallen leaves lies on the squares of the lawns. The neat little houses shine under the light of the autumn sun.

At times that section of the residential part where well-to-do people live produces an astonishing impression. Here is such an idyllic haven of wealth that it seems as if it were possible only in a fairy-tale. Black nurses in white aprons and caps walk with little gentlemen. Red-haired girls with blue eyes roll light yellow hoops. Splendid sedans stand beside wealthy houses.

But beside this higher world, quite close, is located the severe iron and brick business centre, the ever-frightful American centre of business, where all the houses look like fire stations, where money is made in order to provide for the idyllic haven just described. There is such a cruel difference between these two parts that at first one does not believe they actually are located in the same city. Alas, they are always together! This is precisely why the business centre is so frightful – because all its strength goes to the creation of an idyllic haven for people of wealth. One can come to understand quite a lot after a sojourn in a small town. It does not matter where you see it, whether in the East, the West, or the South. It will be the same.

The machine flies down the road. Little cities flash by. What pretentious names! Syracuse, Pompeii, Batavia,Warsaw, Caledonia, Waterloo, Geneva, Moscow – a lovely little Moscow, where you can get lunch #2 in a drug-store, griddle cakes covered with maple syrup, and where for dinner you are entitled to sweet-salty pickles, where in the motion-picture theatre a film of bandit life is unreeled – a purely American Moscow.

There are several Parises, Londons, there is a Shanghai, a Harbin, and a score of Petersburgs. There is a Moscow in the state of Ohio, and there are eighteen other Moscows, in other states. One of the Petersburgs has a hundred thousand population. There are Odessas. It doesn't matter that near the Odessas there is not only no Black Sea but not any sea at all. One is located in the state of Texas. Who was the Odessaite who had wandered so far? Did he find his happiness there? No one, of course, will ever know that. There are Naples and Florence. Near Naples, instead of Vesuvius, is the smokestack of a canning factory, while in Florence it is undoubtedly quite useless to venture a conversation about frescoes and similar subjects of little interest and devoid of all possibility of producing a definite income.

But then, in all these cities you can buy the latest model automobile and electric refrigerator (the dream of the newly-weds), there is hot and cold water in all the taps of all the houses, and, if the little town is of slightly better grade, it has a decent hotel, where in your room you will have *three* kinds of water:

hot, cold, and iced.

Each city has several churches – Methodist,Congregational, Baptist. There will inevitably be a many-columned building of the Christian Science Church. But if you are not a Baptist or a Methodist and do not believe in Christian Science, then there is nothing for you to do but to go to a "movie pitcher," to look at a beautifully photographed;, beautifully sounding motion picture, the contents of which befog your senses with their foolishness.

In every small town are the excellent buildings ofelementary and middle schools. It may even be regarded as a rule that the best building in a small town will inevitably be a school building. But after school the boys go to the motion-picture theatre, where they watch the adventures of gangsters, play gangsters in the streets, and tirelessly wield revolvers and machine-guns manufactured in incredible quantities by toy factories.

Everlasting is the automobile and petrol tedium of small cities.

Many of the rebellious writers of America have come from the small towns of the Middle West. Theirs is a revolt against sameness, against the deadly and futile quest of the dollar.

Some of the towns make heroic efforts to distinguish themselves from their brethren of the same type. Signs are hung at the entrance to the town, quite, let us say, like signs over the entrance to a store, so that the customer may know what is being sold there.

"Redwood City!"

And under it in verse is written: "Climate best bygovernment

test!" Here they trade in climate.

The climate may be the best, but the life is the same as in the cities that have no splendid climate.

Main Street. In large show windows stand automobiles wrapped, for the occasion of the approaching New Year, in cellophane and tied with coloured ribbons. Behind somewhat smaller windows learned druggists squeeze the juice out of oranges, or fry eggs with bacon, and through the heart of the city, not on a mound or over a bridge, but right through the main street, a long freight train passes at full-speed. The engine bell swings and rings out sonorously.

Such is the small town, be it Paris or Moscow or Cairo or one of the innumerable American Springfields.

12. A Big Little Town

AN AUTOMOBILE journey across America is like a journey across an ocean, monotonous and magnificent. Whenever you go out on deck, in the morning or in the evening, in a storm or a calm, on Monday or on Thursday, you will always find water, of which there is no end. Whenever you look out the window of an automobile there will always be an excellent smooth road, with petrol stations, tourist houses, and billboards on the sides. You saw all this yesterday and the day before, and you know that you will see the very same thing tomorrow and the day after. And the dinner in the state of Ohio will be the same as yesterday's when you passed through the state of New York – quite as on a steamer, where the change of latitude and longitude introduces no changes in the menu of your dinner, or in the disposition of the passengers' day. It is in this consistent sameness that the colossal dimensions and the incalculable wealth of the United States are expressed. Before saying about Eastern America that this is a mountainous or a desert or a forest land, one wants to say the main thing, the most important thing, about it – it is the land of automobiles and electricity.

The journey was scarcely begun when we managed to violate the principal point of our daily itinerary as worked out by Mr. Adams.

"Gentlemen!" he had said before our departure. "Travel on

American roads is a serious and dangerous thing."

"But American roads are the best in the world," we countered.

"That is precisely why they are the most dangerous. No, no, don't contradict me! You simply do not want to understand! The better the roads, the greater the speed with which the automobiles travel over them. No, no, no, gentlemen! This is very, very dangerous! We must agree definitely that with the approach of evening we retire for the night, and that's tire end of it! Finished!"

That is exactly how we agreed to behave.

But now an evening found us on the road, and we not only did not stop as Mr. Adams demanded, but put on the lights and continued to fly across the long state of New York.

We were approaching the world centre of the electrical industry, the town of Schenectady.

It is frightful to race at night over an American highway. Darkness to the right and to the left. But the face is struck by the lightning flashes of automobile headlights coming at you. They fly past, one after the other, like small hurricanes of light, with a curt and irate feline spit. The speed is the same as in the daytime, but it seems to have doubled. In front, on a long incline, stretches the mobile prospect of display lights, which seem to put out of sight the red lights of the automobiles immediately in front of us. Through the rear window of the machine constantly penetrates the impatient light of the vehicles that are catching up with us. It is impossible to stop or to decrease speed. You must race ahead, ever ahead. The measured, blinding spurts of light cause a man

to begin yawning. The indifference of sleep possesses him. It is no longer comprehensible whither you are riding or what for, and only somewhere in the nethermost depth of the brain persists the frightful thought: any minute now some gay and drunken idiot with an optimistic grin will cut into our machine, and there will be an accident, a catastrophe.

Mr. Adams was restless in his seat beside his wife, who with true American self-assurance entered into the mad tempo of this nocturnal race.

"Why, Becky, Becky!" he muttered in desperation. "What are you doing? It's impossible!"

He turned to us. His spectacles flared with alarm.

"Gentlemen!" he pronounced in the voice of a prophet. "You do not understand the meaning of an automobile catastrophe in America!"

Finally he managed to persuade Mrs. Adams to decrease her speed considerably and to deny herself the pleasure of outracing trucks. He accustomed us to the monastic routine of genuine automobile travellers, whose aim is to study the country and not to lay down their bones in a neatly dug trench beside the road.

Only a good deal later, toward the end of the journey, did we begin to appreciate the value of his advice. During its one and a half year's participation in the World War America lost fifty thousand killed, while during the past year and a half fifty-six thousand of America's peaceful inhabitants perished as a consequence of automobile catastrophes. And there is no power

in America that can prevent this mass murder.

We were still about twenty miles from Schenectady, but the city was already demonstrating its electrical might. Street lamps appeared on the highway. Elongated, like melons, they gave off a strong, yet at the same time not a blinding, yellow light. One could see it gathering in those lamps – that which was not a light but an amazing luminous thing.

The city came upon us unnoticeably. That is a peculiarity of American cities when you approach them by automobile. The road is the same, only there are presently more bill-boards and petrol stations.

One American town hung before the entrance to its main street the placard:

THE BIGGEST SMALL TOWN IN THE UNITED STATES

This description – the biggest small town – splendidly suits Schenectady, and, as a matter of fact, also the majority of American towns that have risen around large factories, grain elevators, or oil wells. It is the same as the other small towns, with its business centre and residential part, with its Broadway or Main Street, but only bigger in length and

width. As a matter of fact, it is a large city. It has much asphalt, brick, and many electric lights, probably more than Rome, and certainly it is bound to have more electric refrigerators than Rome, and more washing machines, vacuum cleaners, baths, and automobiles. But this city is exceedingly small spiritually, and in

that regard it could very well dispose of itself in one of our little lanes.

In this city where, with amazing skill, are manufactured the smallest and the largest electrical machines that have ever existed in the world, from an egg-beater to electric generators for the Boulder Dam Hydroelectric Station on the Colorado River, the following incident happened:

A certain engineer fell in love with the wife of another engineer. It ended with her divorcing her husband and marrying the man she loved. The entire big small town knew that this was an ideally pure romance, that the wife had not been unfaithful to her husband, that she patiently waited for the divorce. The American god himself, as demanding as a new district attorney, could not have found any fault. The newly-weds began to lead a new life, happy in the thought that their tribulations were over. As a matter of fact, their tribulations were only beginning. People stopped going to their home, people ceased to invite them out. Everybody turned away from them. It was a real boycott, the more devastating because it happened in a big small town, where the principal recreation consists of calling and receiving callers for a game of bridge or poker. Essentially, all these people who drove the young couple out of their midst were in their heart of hearts quite indifferent to the problem of who lives with whom, but – a decent American must not get divorced. That is indecent. All this led to the driving out of town of the man who permitted himself to fall in love with a woman and to marry her. It was a

good thing that at that time there was no depression and he could easily find another job.

The society of a town which grew up around a large industrial enterprise and is entirely connected with its interests, or rather with the interests of the bosses of the enterprise, is invested with a terrible power. Officially a man is never dismissed because of his convictions. In America one is free to profess any views, any beliefs. He is a free citizen. However, let him try not to go to church or let him try to praise communism, and something will happen whereby he will stop working in the big little town. He himself will not even notice how it happened. The people who will get rid of him themselves do not believe in God, but they go to church. It is indecent to refrain from going to church. As for communism, that is something for dirty Mexicans, Slavs, and Negroes. It is no business for Americans.

In Schenectady we stopped at a hotel that provided three kinds of. Water – hot, cold, and iced – and went for a walk through the city. It was only about ten o'clock in the evening, yet there were almost no pedestrians. Against the kerbs stood dark automobiles. At the left of the hotel was a deserted field overgrown with grass. It was quite dark there. Beyond the field, on the roof of a six-story building, a sign lit up and went outslowly – G.E. – General Electric Company. It was like the monogram of an emperor. But never did emperors have such might at their disposal as these electrical gentlemen who have conquered Asia, Africa, who have firmly implanted their trade-mark over the Old and the New

World, for everything in the world which is in any way connected with electricity is in the end connected with General Electric.

Beyond the hotel on the principal thoroughfare wavered strips of light. There a feverish automobile life was on. But here was an excellent concrete road running around the field, which was dark and deserted. There was not even a sidewalk here. It seemed that the builders of the road thought it improbable that there could be found people in the world who would approach the office of the General Electric on foot instead of driving up in an automobile.

Opposite the office was a glass booth on wheels attached to an ancient trucklike automobile. In it sat an elderly, moustached man. He was selling popcorn, a roasted corn which bursts open in the form of white boutonnieres. On the counter glowed a gasoline flare with three bright wicks. We tried to guess what popcorn was made of.

"This is corn," the vendor said unexpectedly in Ukrainian Russian. "Can't you see? It's ordinary corn. But where are you from that you speak Russian?" "From Moscow." "No fooling?" "No."

The popcorn vendor became quite excited and walked out of his booth. "Well, now, let's see – are you here as delegates from the Soviet government," he asked, "or did you come here to work, to perfect yourselves?"

We explained that we were merely travelling.

"I see, I see. Just taking a look at how things are going in our United States?"

We stood a long time at the glass booth, eating popcorn and listening to the vendor's story, which was full of English words.

This man had come to the United States some thirty years ago from a small village in the government of Volhynia. Now this little village is in Polish territory. At first he worked in mines, digging coal. Then he was a labourer on a farm. Then workers were being hired for the locomotive works in Schenectady, so he went to work in the locomotive works.

"That's how my life passed, like one day," he said sadly. But now for six years he had been without work. He sold everything he had. He was evicted from his home.

"I have a Pole as my manager. We sell popcorn together."

"Do you earn much?"

"Why, no, hardly enough for dinner. I'm starving. My clothes – you can see for yourself what they're like. I haven't anything to wear for going out into the street."

"Why don't you go back to Volhynia?"

"It is even worse there. People write it's very bad. But tell me how is it with you, in Russia? People say different things about you. I simply don't know whom to believe and whom to disbelieve."

We found out that this man who had left Russia in the dim past attentively follows everything that is said and written in Schenectady about his former homeland.

"Various lecturers come here," he said, "and speak at the high school. Some are for the Soviet government, others are against

it. And whoever speaks for theSoviet government, they write bad things about him, very bad. “For example, Colonel Cooper spoke well about theSoviet government, so they wrote about him that he sold out. Got two million for it. A millionaire farmer returned and praised the Soviet state farms. It was said that they built a special Soviet state farm for him. Not long ago a woman school teacher from Schenectady went to Leningrad,lived there, and then came back and praised Russia. Even about her they said that she left a boy friend there, that she loves him, and that is why she doesn’t want to say anything against the Soviet government.” “But what do you think yourself?”

“What difference does it make what I think – would anybody ask me? I only know one thing – I’m going to the dogs here in Schenectady.”

He looked at the slowly glowing initials of the electric rulers of the world and added:

“They have built machines. Everything is made with machines. The working man hasn’t a chance to live.”

“What do you think – what should be done so that the working man may live an easier life?”

“Break up and destroy all machines!” replied the vendor of popcorn firmly and with conviction.

More than once in America we heard talk of destroying machines. This may seem incredible, but in a land where the building of machines has reached the point of virtuosity, where the national genius has expressed itself in the invention and

production of machines which replace completely and improve many times the labour of man – it is precisely in this country that you hear talk that would seem insane even in a madhouse.

Looking at this vendor, we involuntarily remembered a New York cafeteria on Lexington Avenue where we used to go for lunch every day. There at the entrance used to stand a pleasant girl in an orange calico apron, marcelled and rouged (she undoubtedly had to be up at six in the morning in order to have time to arrange her hair), who distributed punch tickets. Six days later, in the very same place, we saw a metal machine doing the work of the girl automatically – and at the same time it gave off pleasant chimes, which, of course, one could not very well expect from the girl We remembered also the story we heard in New York of a certain Negro who worked on a wharf as a controller, counting bales of cotton. The work suggested to him the idea of inventing a machine that would count the bales. He invented such a machine. His boss took advantage of this invention gladly, but dismissed the Negro, who henceforth was jobless.

The next day we visited the factories of the General Electric. We are not specialists; therefore, we cannot describe the factories as they deserve to be described. We don't want to give the reader an artistic ornament instead of the real thing. We ourselves would read with pleasure a description of these factories made by a Soviet engineer. We did, however, carry away from there an impression of high technical wisdom and organization.

In the laboratories we saw several of the best physicists in

the world, who sat at their work with their coats off. They are working for the General Electric Company. The company doesn't give them very much money – not more than twenty thousand dollars a year. Such salaries are received only by the most prominent scientists. There are few of these people. But there are no limits to the means necessary for experiment and investigation. If a million is needed, they'll give a million. That is why the company has managed to get the best physicists in the world. No university can give them such opportunities for research as they receive here in a factory laboratory.

But then, everything that these idealists invent remains the property of the firm. The scientists advance science. The firm makes money.

At a luncheon in a cosy and beautiful engineers' club, several of the engineers, to our great surprise, expressed thoughts that reminded us very much of what theunemployed vendor of popcorn had been saying. Naturally they were not expressed in such primitive form, but the essence remained the same.

"Too many machines! Too much technique! The machines are responsible for the difficulties that confront the country."

This was said by people who themselves produce all kinds of remarkable machines. Perhaps they were already foreseeing the moment when the machine will deprive of work not only workers but even themselves, the engineers.

Toward the end of the luncheon we were introduced to a thin and tall grey-haired gentleman on whose cheeks played a healthy

tomato-coloured flush. He proved to be an old friend of Mr. Adams's. Little fat Adams and his friend whacked each other's shoulders for a long time, as if they wanted to beat the dust out of each other's coats.

"Gentlemen," the beaming Mr. Adams told us, "I present to you Mr. Ripley. You can get a lot of good out of this man if you want to understand the meaning of American electrical industry. But, but! You must ask Mr. Ripley to show you his electric house."

We asked.

"Very well," said Mr. Ripley. "I will show you my electric house."

And Mr, Ripley asked us to follow him.

13. Mr. Ripley's Electric House

MR. RIPLEY led us to the entrance of his little house and asked us to press the button of an electric bell.

Instead of the usual bell we heard melodic sounds as if issuing from a music-box'. The door opened by itself, and we found ourselves in the anteroom.

Mr. Ripley walked up to a box hanging on the wall, opened a small door with an accustomed gesture, and showed us an electric machine.

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