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THE BOOKSHELF

INCREDIBLE SIBERIA

By *Julius B. Wood*

Mr. Wood paints us a far different picture of the steppes and the open spaces of Siberia than did Jules Verne in his *Michael Strogoff*. Verne's book antedated the trans-Siberian railway and did more than anything else to make Siberia the supposed hide-out of the bogey-man and associated horrors of the morbid mind.

Siberia has always been associated with such things. Of course, the practice of exiling naughty Russians to the salt mines accounts for much of the morbidity associated with that land. We think that Siberia just had a bad start and acquired a bad reputation for no good reason at all.

Russia's downfall, that is, the downfall of the Romanoffs, is accredited sometimes to the inability of her rulers to weld numerous people into a homogeneous whole. The "numerous peoples" means Siberia. This land is inhabited by Slavs, Mongolians, Esquimaux, and several lesser breeds. They care not for each other and respect only the authority of their tribal chieftain. They are, generally speaking, an itinerant group, and therefore have no respect for property, real or otherwise.

The formation of the U. S. S. R. (for your information, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) made the old Russian Empire a group of some six republics, with Siberia ranking high in size as well as importance. Today, the Soviets point to the apparent homogeneity of the Union and compare it with Romanoff Russia. Siberia is today evidently peaceful and contented. This is not due to superior statesmanship on the part of the Soviets but to their better judgment. Good reason for Siberia to be free from internal disturbances and turmoil; the big men at Moscow follow the simple plan of leaving them alone! In spite of all this, it is interesting to read that the Russian today refers to the Romanoff days as "in peace times."

Whereas the Romanoffs attempted to subdue the savage tribes, the Soviets let them run wild.

Take the case of the Oyrot (one of the lesser breeds) chieftain who, hearing of the mysterious electric lights that burned in the trees without giving off any heat or burning the tree down, swore by the Beard of the Prophet that he himself would go to town and corroborate the statement of his eldest son. If the son had lied, he would be disinherited forthwith. However, if he had told the truth, forty white horses were to be his. Now the chieftain, less forty white horses (although they remain in the clan) is a Soviet, tried and true.

Siberia's lack of communication with the outside world has resulted in such a state that there are towns of 60,000 people and over with no automobiles in their limits. This would indeed prove a paradise for General Motors and Ford if they could succeed in persuading the wily Russians that they are not capitalists. Siberia has no roads. In fact, the author refers to the main street of Novo-

sibirsk, the capital of west Siberia, as the "municipal morass."

A peculiar delicacy of the wild and woolly Siberian is horse milk. The author was not particularly fascinated by the thought of drinking it, but after galloping about the plains for several hours in a *kerabok* and under a hot sun, he claims that he drank some and found solace and refreshment in same. We are rather skeptical about horse milk. It reminds us of the wild pigeon milk tale we heard some years ago. Our mentor insisted that varsity oarsmen of the Big Three crews use wild pigeon milk to lubricate their oarlocks. However, the author of this book is a correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News*, and we would never think of doubting the veracity of a newspaper man.

The keynote of Siberia, including sovietism, seems to be red tape, documents, passports, balloon-filler, and more red tape.

This book never fails to entertain. There is no dry economic discourse or acres of figures and "vital" statistics. If it does anything, it will teach the reader the Russian equivalent of "comrade."

—M. L. A.

THE TAKEN CHILD

George Agnew Chamberlin

The story opens with *Harry Logan's* running away from the orphanage for the fourth time. Each of the three times before he had been betrayed by the uniform which he detested. His record in the orphanage was exceptionally clean aside from this; but his penchant for escape threw such a dark cloud on the page as to blind his custodians to his good marks.

Somehow he got the name of being queer, although he was just like the other boys in his daily habits. It seemed that his obsession for running away branded him as different from the ordinary boy and as an incorrigible rebel.

He had lost his mother, father, and three sisters in a fire when he was between seven and eight years of age, and had been confined in the orphanage, except for the brief periods of his attempted escapades, since then.

His fourth escape being successful, he joined up with a showman in a traveling animal show, his first job being to feed the animals and to water them.

After spending some time with this show he is adopted by *John Galloway*, a trainer of horses, and here he gets his education in the care and training of race horses. Here, also, he meets the girl who is later to become his wife. Shortly after they realize the vital part each plays in the other's life, Harry discovers the startling secret of his birth—a secret which for chivalry's sake must be kept until death.

There are people in this book that the reader cannot forget. In *Harry Logan* there is a kind of strange, lonely loveliness that reminds us of *Huckleberry Finn*. He starts out with the meagerest of opportunities but develops into a fine man.

Cap the old showman, is a character quaint and

(Continued on Page 24)

BOOKSHELF

(Continued from Page 12)

likable, and he plays a part in the molding of *Harry's* character.

John Galloway and his wife are a lovable old couple who, having lost their own boy, adopt *Harry* in an attempt to fill the gap.

The other characters are all interesting and natural. Each plays his part against a background that is fascinating in its originality and swiftness of action.

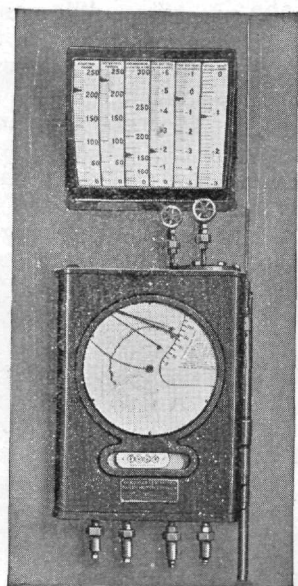
The book is a wonderful character study, one of the most penetrating that George Agnew Chamberlin has ever written. It is full of action, has deep human interest, the author showing a knowledge of human nature far beyond the ordinary. It is a book everyone would enjoy, and I recommend it heartily.—R. M. E.

“Waiter, what kind of meat is this?”

“Spring lamb, sir.”

“I thought so; I’ve been chewing on one of the springs for an hour.”

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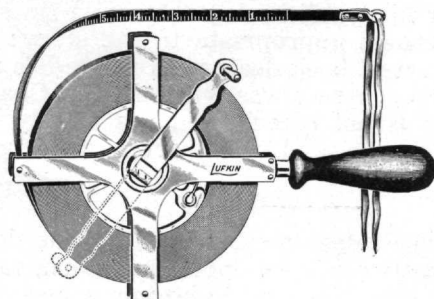
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