

# CONFERENCE SKETCH BOOK

MOSCOW, APRIL 1952

Joan Robinson

HEFFER—CAMBRIDGE

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L.A. 8-29-52

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*Overheard in the Lobby*

*First British Delegate* (earnestly): I am sure you agree with me on the importance of telling the exact truth about all we have seen here.

*Second ditto* (disconcerted): That's all very well, but I don't want to have people at home saying that I am a Communist.

## WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

In our naïveté we are taken aback to find ourselves in a hotel which out-Ritzes any that any of us (a widely travelled party) had ever been in. Sweeping staircases, chandeliers, malachite columns, tessellated floors in the bathrooms, the restaurant a palace ball-room. All, however, is somehow in good taste within its own sumptuous convention. Only the pictures in the bedrooms (flower pieces and landscapes), in the style we know at home as “chocolate box” (is this Socialist Realism?), lower the aesthetic standard. The rooms have every convenience. The furniture is very pleasant in design and perfectly finished. The standard of cleanliness is Swedish and the ingenuity of gadgets Swiss. Naïve again, we are surprised to see that in all this *grand lux* there are no plugs in the wash-hand basins. Those of us who are quick in the up-take realise that to wash in a puddle is considered unhygienic. The drawback is very slow service in the restaurant. (We learn later that at an almost equally grand hotel where other delegations<sup>1</sup> are staying the service is very snappy, and slip up there for lunch when time presses.) A more serious blemish is a horrid jazz band (put on I suppose to make us feel at home) that plays about midnight, just when one is having supper after the ballet.

We had not much idea how to treat servants in a socialist hotel, but they put us at our ease by their perfect manners—reserved but friendly, and breaking into smiles (sympathetic, not patronising) at our

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<sup>1</sup> I use this expression for convenience. We were at pains, in every public context, to make clear that we were not delegates from anyone, but a job lot of individuals.

fumbling efforts to make ourselves understood. The gargantuan menu is printed in four languages, so that it is only necessary to pick the dish in English and point at the Russian text opposite.

A fleet of about forty very high-class motor cars awaits our pleasure in the great clearing opposite the hotel. In the early morning you see the drivers standing in a group arguing over some point, while an old woman with a besom is sweeping the car-park clean.

### "FOLLOWED IN MOSCOW"

This is the great joke. The lady interpreters chaff the gentlemen delegates "Of course you'll be followed—by the pretty girls." The English as usual are always fussing about money. I solve the problem by borrowing a few roubles from a Chinese friend, and go off on the Metro. All the interpreters, cars and guides are not to check our movements, but for our convenience. I prefer straying around, at first with one compatriot, and as soon as I have got the hang of things a bit, quite alone. No city I have ever been in where (a) a lone female, (b) a speechless foreigner is so perfectly safe and well treated. The "Swedish" standard of public orderliness and cleanliness strikes me and astonished me more than anything else; it has none of that governessish quality that makes one feel oppressed in Sweden. It arises from civic pride. There are no "No Smoking" notices in the Metro, but it is a spontaneous popular convention not to smoke there.

The Metro, of course, is the great showpiece, like the cathedral in other cities. It is too blatantly

gorgeous for some tastes, but I find many of the stations beautiful by any standard. The long vistas of marble columns lit by chandeliers I find superb, and some of the smaller passages lined with tile work very agreeable. Each station is in its own style. Only the statues, mosaic, and garish stained glass are unacceptable. The metal work is kept polished, and the floors are miraculously clean even when the crowds of passengers have muddy wet snow on their boots.

I avoid the conducted tour, and take my Metro in the ordinary way, by using it to get about. The train service is rapid, and so frequent that it never matters if one has got out at the wrong station. The next train is in before I have finished spelling out the Russian characters to find where I am. The maps and sign posts are arranged in a helpful way. The carriages are not quite so good as in London but better than in Paris. There is a special compartment for elderly people, children and invalids, so that they can get a seat in the rush hour.

Buses, trains and trolley buses on the streets seem to be organised just as efficiently, but are painfully crowded most of the time.

My technique for getting about is to have the address written on one side of the paper in Latin script and the other side in Russian. Then I show the Russian side to a policeman, and his eloquent gestures tell me where to go. If no policeman is in sight, I pick out an intellectual by his expression and his brief case (you cannot tell anything from clothes) and he will probably have a few words at least of English, French or German. The policeman is not

only kind but intelligent. He advises me to take a trolley-bus, but when he is putting me on to it he sees a worried expression on my face and realises: "She doesn't know when to get off." So he steps on with me and explains to the conductress where she must tell me to get down.

A few days later our money-fussers are put to shame by a liberal allowance of pocket money, part of a hospitality which combines oriental lavishness with Nordic efficiency.

### NEIGHBOURLINESS

In Moscow even the pickpockets are considerate. When they have taken your wallet they post back the identity card. This courtesy is extended to members of the British Embassy staff, as well as to fellow citizens.

### PROPAGANDA

I said to an English communist resident here: "That is the sort of story you should tell to make propaganda for the Soviets." He replied (I admit with a grin): "It would not do to give away the fact that there are still pickpockets in Moscow."

### ENGLAND MY ENGLAND—

This sort of one hundred per cent. inability to admit any deficiency in one's country is found also on our side. At a hen party with a member of the highbrow set I felt myself at home and relapsed into my usual unguarded style of speech—"Compared with yours, our ballet simply doesn't exist." Mrs. John Bull was deeply shocked at my lack of patriotism.

## INTERNATIONAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The economists were invited to a splendid cocktail party at the Academy of Sciences. I stood up pretty well to the challenge of a toast in vodka. Fabulous food and interesting talk. I went straight on to the ballet, glowing with enjoyment. In the interval another English delegate and I were standing with an interpreter who is anxious to learn as he works.

Interpreter: Please tell me, who are the best known poets in England to-day?

Me (never mind whether you agree with my opinions): We have had no poet of the first rank since T. S. Eliot, and he is going off badly.

English delegate (surprised): Didn't you like the *Cocktail Party*?

Me: No, I found it most disagreeable.

Interpreter (pained): Did you not like the cocktail party?

### OUR FANS

As we drive up for the first formal meeting of the Conference the street is solid with people and we have to get out and rely on a policeman to barge a way to the door for us.

An Italian trade unionist who knows a few words of Russian is annoyed to hear the people saying to each other "Look at the Capitalists."

When we come out of the meeting, and every day afterwards, the crowd is ranged in a dense mass on the opposite pavement and our side is free. After a

few days everyone knows where we are staying, and a sprinkle of people, growing to a crowd in the evening, hangs around the hotel door. The good manners of the Muscovites always prevail—curious but never obtrusive. Sunday is the big night. Each hotel where delegations are staying and the building of the Moscow Soviet (the Mansion House, as it were) where a reception is being held, are surrounded by a throng through which the police keep a little lane open—a serious, kindly crowd, silently drinking us in with their eyes.

## IN THE COULOIRS

### RECESS

The ten-minute break in the morning session of the Conference rarely lasts less than an hour. We troop out of the elegant, gleaming white Hall of Columns (neatly fitted with simultaneous translation apparatus for six languages) relieved to stop listening to the speeches (some nations evidently have not yet learned that you cannot sail your boat with your own breath). In the couloirs 48 nations stroll and gossip and pore over the bookstalls. Little groups of earnest inter-delegation traders gather round tables. Delighted press photographers pose Professor Stumilin, a benevolent, shaggy giant, between two dapper little Burmese in sarongs. Professor Varga sits in a corner with a twinkle in his gnomish eye; if he has been in trouble for his opinions he evidently knows how to take it. Dates and arrangements are made and unmade. (Soviet officials in committee are incisive and reliable, but at lower levels we sometimes find an Irish streak in the Russian temperament—making

answers for the pleasure they will give rather than the accuracy of the information conveyed. Between this trait on the one side and the erratic behaviour of delegates on the other, confusions are always arising, but I find it a pretty safe rule that what you are told three times is true.) When the bells ring we troop in again to earn our pleasures with another hour in the headphones.

### COLOUR PREJUDICE

In England one has to be super-polite to Asians. An advantage of being in an atmosphere free from race-feeling is that you can freeze off an oriental bore just as you would an English one.

### ENTENTE OF TEA DRINKERS

Russians, Chinese and English understand each other's style—reserve, understatement, common sense. Amongst some other nations (irrespective of race, clime and social system) these qualities are not so marked.

### MANNERS

It is said that the British lost the Indian Empire because they were so rude. I think the Americans should be told that they are in a fair way to lose their allies.

## MEETING RUSSIANS

How much truth there is in the idea, prevalent at the Embassy, that Soviet people refuse to meet foreigners for fear of being compromised, I wouldn't know. But it strikes me that the main reason is a

kind of shrinking horror at the idea of shaking hands with a capitalist. In the abstract, they feel about capitalists as a mediaeval Christian must have felt about heathens, as something dangerous and unclean. After all, speculation here is a crime, and a dirty one. (Only the other day there was a batch of arrests for reselling tickets at a premium, taking advantage of the eager crowd that clusters hopefully at the theatre doors when the house is sold out.) Would you feel quite at your ease in a society where drug peddling was an honoured profession? But, however they may feel in theory, in practice they take us as they find us. The interpreters (language teachers and such seconded to our service) are guarded and wary at first behind their good manners, but we are soon on easy terms (in two days the lady allotted to Lord Boyd Orr is riposting his dry cracks in equally broad Scots). The people we meet at parties could not be more genial (I suppose only broadminded people come) and it is easy enough to pick up friends outside. I found myself at the theatre sitting next to a woman who had been brought up in England, a war widow. She asked me round to her flat and we spent a delightful day swapping my English news for the story of her life. Her schoolboy son is a great puppet fan; I was able to use my VIP status to get tickets after they were sold out to the public, and we went with another English delegate in a family party. No one seemed to find it odd from any point of view. The boy showed us round the museum of puppets in the intervals better than any professional guide. Another time I took a colleague along to call on her, a business man, but a Fabian, a friendly soul who hit it off very well with the boy. There was some chaff

about him being a capitalist. Afterwards the mother said to me: "I am so glad you brought him along, so that the boy can see that a capitalist hasn't really got horns and a tail."

## SPY MANIA?

The party that went over the Kremlin Museum noticed a certain tendency to discourage straying (would you find the same at Windsor?). But down below, three of us, missing our way to the exhibition, wandered all around the Chamber of Commerce before we were found. (The furniture is almost as shabby as at the British Embassy. An abacus lying side by side with an up-to-date calculating machine epitomised thirty years of history.) The girl who redirected us did not seem concerned to find us there so much as solicitous that we should have lost our way. On the other hand, we observed that Soviet economists have raised not quoting figures to a fine art.

## NYLONS

We are told that nylons with black heels are the rage, so that ordinary ones are a drug on the market. Sure enough, though the shop (as usual in Moscow) is horribly crowded there is no waiting at the nylon counter. The girl holds each stocking up to the light, and discards one that has a flaw invisible to me, with a sarcastic crack (my companion whispers to me in English) about the inspector at the factory who allowed it through as first grade. (I assume that that pair will be degraded and go into the box marked at half price.) I will report on the length of life of those I am wearing in due course.

## CRAZES

"We had three epidemics this winter—the flu, Tarzan and the black nylons." The Tarzan films, captured in Germany, are still being shown and drawing long queues. "A man up from the provinces gets a wire from his wife: 'I love you darling exclamation mark.' He shows his friend: 'What does this mean? Has the woman gone crazy?' 'No, don't you see, she wants you to bring her back a pair of black nylons.'" The Tarzan jokes are untranslatable puns turning on the irresistible attractiveness of Georgians.

## THE THEATRE

I will not try to tell you about the theatre because you would not credit what I said. Opera, ballet, acting, puppets, folk-dance troupes are of an excellence that can be believed only when seen (and hardly then). I did not experience films except at the stereoscopic cinema (a piece about Robinson Crusoe) which is interesting from a technical rather than an artistic point of view, though a coloured "short" of flower gardens in a park was very pretty.

About the theatre I feel like the French aristo's after the Revolution who never mentioned Versailles. What is the good of talking—you cannot possibly understand. But a word about the audience at the Bolshoi. It looks drab enough, in the white, gold and red setting. The few girls who are trying to be smart have not much idea how to set about it. Moscow is a great artistic metropolis, and draws on a continent for its supporters. There is a sprinkling of Mongolian and Tartar faces. Some of our party get the

interpreter to ask a rugged type sitting next to them who he is—a lorry driver from Tashkent spending a holiday in Moscow with his wife, who is a vet. I sit down in the crowded buffet with two dour looking men. They are Trade Union secretaries from Kharkov, up for a conference. But the bulk, of course, are Muscovites. An audience for a player to dream of.

We have the luck to come in for a first night—a new version of the *Sleeping Princess*. Each dance, and each set, is clapped according to its merits. As the Blue Bird, Farmanyants, a young dancer with a leap like Nijinski, stops the show for five minutes. From the applause one might feel that the emphasis is too much on technique for its own sake, but this is belied by the fact that Ulanova (not in this production) outstanding above all for her poetry, is everybody's darling. Afterwards the conductor, scene designer, etc., come up and embrace each other on the stage, while the house roars and claps.

At the Gala arranged especially for the Conference, half the theatre is filled with us fish-blooded foreigners, and we miss the electric feeling of intimacy across the footlights.

By now we are sufficiently in the spirit of the thing to make our own jokes. As we stand on the steps of the Bolshoi Theatre waiting for our superior motor cars, the full moon hangs in the sky directly opposite. "Of course, it was put there especially for the tourists." "Yes, to-morrow morning you will see that it has been taken down."

## MOTOR CARS

As for me, I am the woman in pre-war *Punch* who chooses a motor car by the ashtrays. On that standard, the grand ones that we go around in are ideal—comfortable, well finished and fitted with delightful gadgets. There are two makes of the grand motor cars, which officials use. (Private people do not buy them. They are expensive and run only on the best petrol, so that they are no use for touring in out-of-the-way places, where it may be unobtainable. Offices have pools of cars, and an important executive has one allotted to him personally, with a driver. There is no objection to his wife using it for shopping or visiting when he does not need it. There is a middle-sized car, Victory (costing about ten months' salary of a school teacher), and a small four-seater, Little Muscovite, at something more than half the price. Only these four models are made (but I counted 20 varieties of bicycles at the exhibition of industrial products). In January, I was told, you could buy either a Victory or a Little Muscovite the day you asked for it, but now there is a queue—for the small one delivery takes three or four months and the list for the Victory is temporarily closed. Queuing is organised at an office where the customer puts his name down. Every three weeks he calls to inquire and renew his application, until he is near the head of the queue, when he calls every day until he gets delivery. (The same system is in use for television sets and, during the rush holiday season, for railway tickets to the Caucasus and Crimea. I did not hear of any other queues.) My anglophil friend has her name down for a car, and hopes to have got it, and to have passed the severe

examination in driving, in time to go touring for her summer vacation.

The motor-car fans in our party are as much impressed by the engines as I am by the ash trays.

## SUN AND SNOW

We arrived at 5.30, just before dawn, in an iron frost and woke at ten or so to see brilliant sunshine on the snow. It *never* snows so late in Moscow, we are told. What luck—to have the illusion that we are here in the winter. It snows and thaws on and off for the next few days. We see the fantastic towers and domes of the Kremlin outlined in fresh snow, and it lies sparkling under the bare trees in the great moat. The grand streets are kept clean, and each night's snowfall is cleared by mid-day. There is a human looking machine with two arms (like a woman gathering up the washing) sweeping the snow up onto a moving band that lifts it into lorries. The margins where it freezes are cracked by an army of tough-looking women in padded coats and high rubber boots, working with crowbars. They are the concierges of the houses along the street—each responsible for her own frontage. The by-streets are not quite so meticulously charred. Little parks and gardens all about the city contain small skating rinks. A few people sit in the parks with their boots in the snow. The young trees in the great boulevards are wrapped up in sacking.

It is — 18° centigrade but we do not feel especially cold, as the air is so dry. Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in Moscow bareheaded (the Muscovites wear round fur caps or woollen scarves—the other delegates

wear Homburgs and ladylike hats). We are a good deal stared at at first and often spoken to by astonished or solicitous citizens. I was accosted by a voluble, buxom, young woman doctor who gave me quite a talking-to:—"The Russians are very strong people—the English are not stronger than the Russians—but even Russians wear hats." The ice had broken on the Moscow River sometime before we arrived, but there is still a frozen edge and boys were fooling about on floes in mid-stream on Sunday.

For some brilliant days it is cold and the air is sharp, but the sun is melting the snow. By-streets turn to rivers and open spaces to swamps. Then, after a misty morning, it is balmy as June. The parks are still white where snow is too thick to melt all at once. Hatless Muscovites appear and the drab winter uniform is sprinkled with colour in the streets.

## TOWNSCAPES

Winter or summer (we feel we have seen both) the light has a peculiar tranquil brilliance which enhances the fantasy of St. Basil's painted onion domes and gives the new pinnaced skyscrapers a radiant glow that almost excuses their indigestible silhouettes.

Our hotel is at the edge of central Moscow where Gorky Street changes its name to Leningrad Highway. Nearby is the famous Dynamo stadium, surrounded by a half-hearted park, swampy in the thaw. Beyond is an area of the old log houses with carved doorways, built, I suppose, just after Napoleon's fire. (Inconsequent patches of them survive here and there about

the city.) Gorky Street sweeps in magnificent breadth, through lines of shops with flats above—heavy undistinguished buildings—towards the fairy-tale skyline of the Kremlin. (When streets are widened, buildings of historical interest are picked up bodily, rolled back and replanted.) Agreeable yellow stucco in what we should call at home Regency style (here of later date) is neat in the centre of the city, decaying picturesquely round the corner. There is much decay, picturesque or sordid, but withal the knowledge that it will soon be rebuilt. I am converted to the reaction against Corbusier. He does not suit the atmosphere either in the literal or the figurative sense; but the reaction has run into fantastication for its own sake—Victorian in the pejorative sense. The wide vistas and the brilliant sky make the city beautiful in spite of itself.

The centre passes description. The best view is from the Kremlin Bridge: white, yellow, green, gold, clustered within the dark red battlements, reflected in the shimmering river. I gaze and gaze, and wonder if what I see is really there, and if this is really me looking at it.

## APPLIED ARTS

*When they are good, they are very very good,  
And when they are bad they are horrid.*

There is a great wealth of traditional peasant art, wood painting, carving, ceramics, weaving, embroidery—childish and gay from the Russian Republics, robustly magnificent from the east. The exhibition of modern designs contains excellent pieces, simple

and bold or successfully ornate, jumbled up with banalities and bulbous, strident horrors. The Lenin-grad section relieves the eye with its pale distinction (even patriotic Muscovites concede that Leningrad has better taste). Turkoman carpets in the correct tribal patterns, made with the old natural dyes, are hand-woven and hand-knotted on a machine-made warp; thus they are cheapened without losing their charm. The goldsmith's art is kept alive by the demand for sports trophies. Rings and brooches are exported to the east.

## AN EXCURSION INTO THE PAST

There is an ancient monastery thirty miles from Moscow where a seminary for priests is now housed—a smaller Kremlin, a great wall enclosing churches and monastic buildings, of all styles from onion domes painted dark blue with bright gold stars to an elegant rococco in stucco.

It is Palm Sunday, and the faithful are carrying branches of silver pussy willow. At a little stall in one of the churches a priest is selling painted eggs, candles and cheap pious pictures. His long shaggy hair and beard and his rough cassock suggest John the Baptist, and his face has a calm, sweet expression that puts my instinctive anti-clericalism to shame.

The museum of folk art shows, besides carvings and embroideries of the last century, fully traditional, modern subjects treated in the same style and with the same endearing naïveté. The Treasure, pearl-encrusted mitres, jewelled chalices, and gold-embroidered copes, is somewhat Indian in feeling.

In the huge old refectory, now a church, a service is going on. A priest, crowned and robed with pieces from the Treasury, is holding a jewelled cross for the faithful to kiss. The crowd jostle up to him, kiss and pass on. No one looks at the irreverent foreigners staring about. An old woman is kneeling at one side bowing her forehead on the muddy floor (it is thawing and dungy slush is trampled over the tiles). A man stands crossing himself before an icon with a rapt expression as though the world has ceased to exist for him.

Outside the great gate, in the sun and mud, the collective farmers crowd round us. A village orator whose face would have been a gift to Hogarth makes me a speech about peace and thanks me for coming. (Everyone, it seems, knows about the Conference, and sees at once that I come from it.) The crowd applaud his sentiments and his fine turn of phrase. I can only smile and shake hands.

## HYGIENE

In Moscow the windows of the food shops are filled with plaster models—hams, sausages, cheeses, pleasing decorative designs carried out in plaster loaves and rolls of various shapes and shades. These dummies do not (as with us) represent things the shop has run out of, but are intended to enable the housewife to see what is to be had, without wasting and staling food in the windows.

There is a strict rule against handling food and money at the same time. The shopper obtains clean paper coupons at the cash desk, and pays with them at the counter.

Lord Boyd Orr, studying nutrition, was standing in the grocer's gazing around with a cold pipe in his mouth. The manager, spotting a foreigner, walked up to him: "You ought to know better than to smoke in a food shop." When he learned how true he had spoken, the manager decided to stretch a point, and offered a match box, which his Lordship very properly declined to make use of.

## HOUSEKEEPING

Several of the interpreters are married women or war widows with children at home. One family is happily installed in a new flat. One has a single room and cooks in the communal kitchen. The kitchen, she tells us, becomes a club room in the evening where the women gossip over cups of tea and she tells them all about her delegates (what would I give for a verbatim report!). Another, a widow with two schoolboy sons and a housekeeper and a dog, lives in two tiny rooms and a little lobby with a wash basin that has to be filled by hand (but gas and electricity are laid on). The flat was divided during the war and they share a kitchen and lavatory with the inhabitants of the other half.

There are two kinds of domestic help, old country-women with no ambition, or young girls up from the farms who will stay a year or two and then take a

training for some job in Moscow. Crèches and nursery schools are available to all (fees graded according to family income), but some mothers prefer to give up work for a while to mind their children at home. A few employ nursemaids.

The shops are madly crowded; consequently service is slow and a busy woman cannot find time for shopping except on Sundays. She can place an order at a special bureau in the morning and pick up her parcel on the way back from work. This costs a small fee. For a larger fee she can have her order delivered.

The housekeeper with time to make a job of shopping goes to the collective farmers' market, where stuff may be more expensive than in the government shops, but is fresher and more varied. Cars drive in from as far afield as the Ukraine with a load of produce to sell in the markets. (For the restaurants, each offering the cuisine of one of the Republics, local delicacies, such as trout from Armenia, are flown up to Moscow.)

When I lunched with my anglophil friend (in a poky but well-furnished room in a dilapidated house due for demolition next year) we had Ukrainian soup, a Georgian fricasee, Caucasian wine, excellent coffee (which untravelled Muscovites have no idea of) and Rumanian brandy. She was wearing a house coat of modern Chinese brocade picked up at a Commission shop. I felt the continent stretching around me, as a Victorian diner might have felt the seaways of the world bearing provisions to his table.

## THE COMMISSION SHOP

What a good idea! You can take anything you like, and, provided it is in decent condition, leave it to be sold at your own price. When it is disposed of you receive three-quarters of what it fetches. It is a saving to be able to dispose of the children's clothes when they are growing fast. If you are a buyer of taste, it is worth while to look out for paintings, exotic rugs or old china.

## A NURSERY SCHOOL

A neat brick building in one of the old log-cabin districts. The atmosphere, the young teachers, the games and "music and movement" are very much the same as in the best Margaret Macmillan schools (but the children have caviar for breakfast). One thing is lacking—the free style of painting that produces such remarkable results with us. They have not got beyond pretty constipated little patterns in blob work. I observed an emphasis in training in accuracy. In the word game, a magic bag which opens to receive an object only when it is correctly named, it would not do to say "plate"—it had to be "soup plate"—not "book" or "paper" but "notebook."

The children have much better manners than ours, easy (not repressed), courteous and friendly. The two-foot mite sweeping us clumsy giants to a seat had a gesture that would become an archduke.

## LAW AND THE FAMILY

Several women—mothers of schoolboys and teachers—told me that there was a strong current of opinion in favour of returning to co-education, and that they hoped that it would be done. They had been to co-educational schools themselves and believed in them. One of the main arguments is that boys start "romancing" too young if they are not working with girls at school. (I forgot to canvas any men on this subject.)

No one seemed much concerned about abortion. Contraceptives are now freely available, and family allowances adequate.

There are no specific grounds for divorce. A couple can apply to the courts, whose business it is to try to reconcile them (rather as though divorce were in the hands of the Marriage Guidance Council). If you can satisfy the court that it is a hopeless case, or present them with a *fait accompli*, you get your divorce.

On homosexuality I picked up only a lewd story—when the drive against it was on, before the war, a man was exiled from Moscow until he should get married. He came back with a wife and promptly sued her for infecting him.

No tarts to be seen. No kissing in public; even a sentimental couple holding hands is an uncommon sight. And imagine how much the absence of advertisement contributes to the general atmosphere of seemliness! (I noticed only one or two hoardings

in the whole of Moscow, displaying decent posters of lemonade, sausages, and the latest opera.)

I was told that a *de facto* marriage which does not happen to have been registered counts as a formal one so far as provision for children is concerned, but there are now no affiliation orders in connection with casual affairs. The affiliation system which formerly existed broke down during the war and was abolished. Now the mother receives an allowance from the state.

Most married women have jobs. Pretty nit-wits married to high officials are not unknown (I once met one travelling in England) but are said to be rare. A woman whose husband's work carried them to a place where there is no job in her line, I was told, is expected to occupy herself with social work.

There is evidently a very strong pressure of public opinion in favour of decent and orthodox behaviour; but, having other roots than Puritanism, it is less sanctimonious and spiteful than with us.

## BOOMERANGS

What harm the press on each side does to its own cause! My prejudices were derived from Russian publications in English which depict the Soviet citizen as a dreary prig interested in nothing but output per head (I was delighted to find that in the Moscow papers this very criticism is now being made of the modern playwrights), spontaneity destroyed by propaganda, and reason choked by dogma. Correspondingly, the western press has built up in the

Russian mind a picture of bloody-minded stupid boors that it will take us a long time to live down.

## LISTENING IN

My anglophil friend listens, quite as a matter of course, to the B.B.C. in English. B.B.C. in Russian is jammed in Moscow but, she believes, easily obtainable outside. She switches off the *Voice of America* as too silly and offensive to be funny, but the B.B.C., when it gets on to subjects such as the Russian character, makes her laugh like a drain.

## PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT

### PRIVILEGE

The Lenin Mausoleum is open from three to five and there is a queue a quarter of a mile long (provincials visiting Moscow, I presume). Me (to interpreter): I cannot afford the time to stand in the line, and I hate to take advantage of our privileges to jump the queue. Interpreter: I know how you feel, but if you drive up in a car, they will know that it is someone official and they won't mind at all.

### YELLOW PRESS

Of all the causes of hurt feelings and moral indignation that poison our name with the Soviet people, the most poisonous is the abysmal caddishness (as they see it) of fabricating stories about the families of their public men. I tried to side-step the accusation

by saying that I had never seen any such thing, and they must have been in American papers. But my accuser was too hot to make distinctions.

#### WRITING TO STALIN

A country woman, in service with a family in Moscow before the war, was evacuated and given work in a factory. Later her old mistress had priority to return to Moscow and she was left behind. After trying the regular channels in vain, she wrote to Stalin (who employs, it appears, a kind of glorified Hilton Bureau to deal with such correspondence) explaining that factory work did not suit her, that all her village had been wiped out and that she had no friend in the world but her old mistress. Could she go back to Moscow to cook for her? She got a permit within three weeks.

#### PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

Of course, on such a point there is no hard evidence to offer, but I soak through every pore the conviction that the Soviets have not the smallest desire to save our souls, either by word or sword. If they could once be really assured that we will let them alone, they would be only too happy to leave us to go to the devil in our own way. If our local communists think otherwise, they are the more deceived.